

NATURE WITHOUT BALANCE:
IDEOLOGY IN TIMES OF ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis critically analyses the connection between ideology and nature, and in particular, aims to reflect on the dominant discourses on the topic of ecological crisis. The ecological thought framework that I adhere to rests on a combination of Frankfurt School and Žižekian theories. This combination is not without serious tensions and deviations; however, central to this project are the ways in which their respective works extensively critique ideology, and propose subversive alternatives to and new meanings of how we can conceptualize nature without domination. Dominant ideas and critiques of nature and natural history emerged during the Enlightenment era, and as Adorno argues, fell victim to a “*reduction ad hominem*,” or the claim that in order to free oneself, one must dominate, appropriate, and master nature. I claim that the extreme choices in environmental politics today - namely organic populism on one hand and increased technological intervention on the other - fail to account for the ways ‘nature’ is a socio-historical construct, and moreover, is situated within a false reality wherein the ‘essence of existence’ is reduced to technological mastery. What we encounter in this cautionary armoury of paradoxical approaches to nature, then, is the ideological currents of established belief systems. By exposing the illusions within the concept nature, such as the argumentative persuasion that there exists an inherent balance, the elementary cell of ideology reveals itself alongside revolutionary possibilities.

Keywords: Theodor Adorno, Slavoj Žižek, ideology, nature, crisis, ecology, critical thought, domination, advanced capitalism, non-identity, praxis, radical political ecology.

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Introduction

Politics is about searching within a situation for a possibility
that the dominant state of things does not allow to be seen.

Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*

I do not know if it has ever been noted before that one of
the main characteristics of life is discreteness. Unless a film
of flesh envelops us, we die. Man exists only insofar as he
is separated from his surroundings.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Pnin*

Preliminary Sketch

One cannot ignore the ever-increasing ecological degradation and ruthless exploitation in the world today. If urbanization and the steady machinery of late-capitalist (re)production have successfully blinded us from the various environmental crises at hand, then, apocalyptic narratives have emerged in its place to remind us of our forthcoming doom. Curiously, this thesis does not offer instruction on how to best proceed, or proclaim that we can successfully ‘green’ capitalism. Alternatively, it seems that the most important task today is not to act urgently but think critically by returning to the ontological and epistemological site in which gave rise to our current ecological predicament and political deadlock. This return to – or descent towards – the origins of enlightenment has the potential to reveal the cultural and ideological illusions that lie beneath the concept of nature. In its quest for mastery over nature, the enlightenment epoch has failed to situate us as ecological beings, and thus, only by ‘*tarrying with the negative*’ can we begin to untangle the nexus of ideological tensions inherent in the concept of nature.¹

¹ ‘To tarry with the negative’ means to retain, critique, and attend to contradictions rather than abolish them. Žižek, Slavoj (1999). The Žižek Reader. Eds. Wright, Elizabeth and Edmund Wright. Blackwell Publishing, London, 225-250

Significant to this thesis is an enduring commitment to conditions of radical possibility insofar as we denounce the concept of nature and its perceived inherent balances and thresholds. The first chapter, *The Ideology of Nature*, traces the claim that inherent in nature is a ‘balance,’ and that our choices effectively determine whether nature is restored or derailed. This claim is persuasive insofar as it assumes we can commit to political change by making environmentally friendly choices without disrupting power relations – essentially demanding a “revolt without a revolution.”² My basic premise will therefore be that despite increased knowledge of the weakening environmental conditions there lacks an attendant will to change beyond the parameters of consumption patterns. ‘Greening’ consumption patterns sets forth the illusion that we can remain pro-capitalist while demanding an alternative choice to capitalist production. One early example of green capitalism was the ‘greening’ of England under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who in 1988, proclaimed: “The first thing we have to do is get this country really, really *tidy*.”³ The politically discursive message delivered in this example is similar to that of the later slogans adopted today; ‘out of sight, out of mind’ or ‘Not In My Backyard’; a way of setting a political agenda that projects a vision of ecology “as if ecology were about re-arranging the furniture.”⁴ Turning to the works of Adorno, I will begin to unfold some of the central ideological principles that inform the concept of nature, namely the ‘Absolute Idea.’ This idea contends that, “on their way toward modern science human beings have discarded meaning. The concept is replaced by the formula, the cause by the rules and probability.”⁵ Adorno’s claim that meaning should be reinstated in nature – rather than empirical calculability – suggests that

² Žižek, Slavoj (2007). ‘Robespierre or the ‘Divine Violence of Terror’ in *lacan.com*

³ Thatcher in Morton, Timothy (2007). *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 109-110 emphasis in original

⁴ Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, 109

⁵ Adorno, Theodor and Max Horkheimer (1987). *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Eds. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Stanford University Press, Palo Alto, 10

dominant ideologies of nature do not need to be abandoned, but rather, reformed to include a radical unknown and incalculable dimension within the concept of nature. Applying a critical Marxist lens, Adorno asserts that the emergence of liberal capitalism and free market competition has eroded meaning, and thus, a form of ‘pervasive *non*-meaning’ mediates the relationship between the natural dominated object, and human dominating subject.⁶ In an effort to trace the precarious and ubiquitous meanings ascribed to the concept of nature, I will examine the ways metaphor extends and strengthens systems of domination. Specifically, I will offer an exploration of some of the metaphorical imagery systematically deployed in Nazi Germany post-World War I, such as “blood and soil” and “illness and cure.”⁷ The systematic use of metaphors relies heavily upon early Romantic writings on nature and wilderness. Underscored by repetition and intensity, metaphors – like ‘balance’ in contemporary environmental communication – maintain and further coercive behaviour by displacing and normalizing hegemonic ideologies under the guise of ‘commonsense’ narratives. Ultimately, appeals to metaphorical traditions and ideological illusions reveal the acute potential to distance political culture from thorough reflection. More precisely, it seems that in an effort to get ‘back to nature’ we have dismissed what ‘nature’ means and assumed that ‘balance’ is natural in nature.⁸ Without the realization that critical thought precedes action, praxis results in the continued support and renewal of repression and subordination.

Throughout Chapter 2, *Ideology Without Nature*, I will continue to explore and develop Adorno’s articulation of ‘meaning’ and ‘nature’ through the works of Žižek, specifically

⁶ Eagleton, Terry (2007). *Ideology: An Introduction*. London, Verso, 37. More precisely, liberal capitalism and free market competition is correlated with the development of; the liberal state, bourgeois family, and ‘a strong superego’ in Seyla Benhabib in Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 73-74

⁷ Musolff, Andreas (2010). *Metaphor, Nation, and the Holocaust*. Routledge, New York

⁸ Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*

analyzing and interpreting his writings on ideology and ecology. Adorno's writings on ideological fixation, or *idée fixe*, suggest that thoughts - when divorced from the ongoing thinking process - develop and harbor paranoid, disillusioned, and isolated systems of meaning. Moreover, *Ideology Without Nature*, will offer a theory of ideology and (enlightened) false consciousness that is both an explication of the concept of nature and a critical reflection on why it is imperative to collapse 'nature' in order to develop a critical stance towards radical emancipatory politics. Borrowing from Hegelian dialectics, Adorno writes, "nature does not *yet* exist."⁹ The projected '*not yet*' is a way in which we can remain committed to the 'non-identical' in the natural world; the "constitutive character of the nonconceptual in the concept."¹⁰ Significantly, I will detail Adorno's proposition in relation to Žižek's claim that "Nature does not exist!" – an adapted Lacanian dictum that aims to destabilize the pedestal that the concept of nature rests upon.¹¹ Žižek calls for an insurgence of ecological thinking without nature, but, only through the denouncement of the concept itself. Arguing that the prevailing system maintain a discursive hegemonic split between the natural and unnatural world, Žižek adds that these two antagonisms are not in 'balance,' but rather, function as 'failed parts.'¹²

In a reflexive and systematic way, the final chapter, *In Times of Urgency*, argues that the concept of nature is constituted by a particular ideological mystification that compels us to refrain from committing to radical change. Here I combine Adorno's writings on reflection and praxis with Žižek's theories on cynicism and illusion. Although 'we cannot step out of ideology,' we can question, critique, and alter the ways in which particular ideologies are enforced and

⁹ Adorno, Theodor (1984). *Aesthetic Theory*. Ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann. Trans. C. Lenhardt. Routledge, London, 191

¹⁰ Adorno, Theodor (1973). *Negative Dialectics*. Trans. E.B. Ashton. Continuum, New York, 12

¹¹ Žižek, Slavoj (2012). *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. London: Verso
The original Lacanian dictum reads: "La femme n'existe pas"

¹² Žižek, Slavoj, *The Žižek Reader*, 148-174

sustained. If we reveal how, as Eagleton argues, “our language does not so much *reflect* reality as *signify* it, carve it into conceptual shape,” then, we can begin to unfold some of the ways in which nature has been carved or framed to fit within these particular ideals.¹³ My aim in this section is to formulate Žižek’s theory of ideology, and more precisely, his assertion “Don’t Act! Just Think!”¹⁴ in relation to Adorno’s critique of ‘immediacy,’ wherein he argues that the rapid deployment of instruction must originate out of an enduring commitment to critical thought and self-reflection. Without reflecting upon the ways in which societal behaviours and ideologies are cultivated by the rhythms of liberal capitalism, radical change and subversive modes of thinking are repressed. Recalling the ways that ‘common sense’ metaphors and narratives function as socio-political and discursive tools, I contend that a critique of the temporal ways in which thought merges with praxis can allow us to collapse particular ideological fixations within the concept of nature. Moreover, by unfolding and critiquing particular temporal and mediated patterns, strategies on how to radically shift towards a critical ethos can emerge.

My work hopes to untangle the thread that binds ideology and nature together. I argue that the Frankfurt School’s development of critical theory is a method for conceptualizing the ecological turbulence in the world, and eliminating the possibility of sustained domination. This thesis does not aim to be theoretically exhaustive but rather offer meaningful engagements with, and criticisms of, the post-enlightenment historical progression of the concept of nature, ideology and crisis; all terms that I will further develop in the following introduction. Moreover, my hope is to provide a deeper reflection on the need to shift beyond environmental security knowledge and ‘green’ consumerism insofar as it fails to elucidate the radical uncertainty, eventfulness, and potential destruction that ecological crises harbour. The steadily growing governmental

¹³ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 203

¹⁴ Žižek, Slavoj (2012). ‘Don’t Act! Just Think! Big Think’

apparatus aimed at the assessment, prevention, and governance on a wide range of environmental issues is, in many ways, akin to the depiction of ‘bureaucracy’ in Franz Kafka’s novels – ‘immense, superfluous machinery running blindly and provoking infinite guilt.’¹⁵ Curiously, Adorno and Horkheimer’s text, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, similarly aligns with Kafka’s fictional world. In their critique of social structures of governance, Adorno and Horkheimer write: “the more completely the machinery of thought subjugates existence, the more blindly is it satisfied by reproducing it. Enlightenment thereby regresses to the mythology it has never been able to escape.”¹⁶ The enlightenment tradition, then, in its attempt to counter mysticism and mythology with empiricism and reason, was crippled by contradiction. These contradictions manifest themselves under the guise of mere contingency, and moreover, create a universal falsity in - and cynical distance of - how we encounter and situate ourselves as ecological beings. By interrogating the unmarked, masked, and ‘common sense’ orientations of the concept nature, such as the argumentative persuasion that there exists an inherent balance, the elementary cell of ideology reveals itself alongside revolutionary possibilities.

Why the Frankfurt School?

Prior to detailing the ways the Frankfurt School heritage informs this thesis, it will be useful to point out some of the central demarcations between critical social theory and social science. Critical theory is concerned with how abstract concepts and systems of relations are developed, fragmented, and preserved and differs from the field of social science insofar as it does not approach questions from a value-free, objective standpoint. The Frankfurt School utilizes the framework of critical social theory which builds itself upon the foundational principle

¹⁵ Žižek, *The Žižek Reader*, 49

¹⁶ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, 20

of the reduction, if not complete elimination, of domination.¹⁷ Significantly, critical theory is *a living tradition*: “struggles and wishes do change from one age to the next, and the insights derived from an earlier historical context cannot be rigidly applied today.”¹⁸

Early Frankfurt School writers rejected the theory that consciousness can be reduced to matter, and moreover, undermined the dualism between ‘objective physical reality’ and subjective appearance.’ In other words, critical theory shifts away from the philosophical question of “*what kind of thing* the subject is,” towards the more epistemological and “critical question of *what it does*.”¹⁹ The non-reductive mediation between subject and object is a central crux in the task of critical theory. *Negative Dialectics* eloquently details critical theory’s rejection of dualism insofar as; “[Critical thought] must not place the object on the orphaned throne once occupied by the subject.” By resisting the potential for an object to become “an idol,” critical thought strives “to abolish the hierarchy” between subject and object.”²⁰ Given that contemporary ecological crisis narratives often rest upon an objective, external analysis of nature, I argue that critical theory allows for the debate to remain open to the varying degree in which consciousness and human history is simultaneously bound to, and distinct from, nature.

Central to the framework of critical theory employed by the Frankfurt School are ideas concerning our destructive and profoundly negative relationship to nature, and moreover, how this relationship is historicized and preserved. In 1932, long before the height of the 1960’s environmental movement, Adorno published an essay entitled “*The Idea of Natural-History*” where he argued that natural history is inextricably bound to human history. Specifically, the essay argues that nature’s historical character is conceptualized and accounted for in the growth,

¹⁷ Biro, Andrew (2011). *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto: 3-4

¹⁸ Ibid, 16-17

¹⁹ O’Connor in Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, 30

²⁰ Adorno, Theodor, *Negative Dialectics*, 181

maturation, and decline of natural things and processes. Further contextualizing and politicizing natural history, Adorno contends that human history is founded on the systematic ways that nature has been instrumentalized and integrated into the exchange capitalist marketplace. These points of intersection between history and nature demonstrate that there is no human history without nature, and more boldly, that “*nature is history*” as a result of the concretization of the concept of nature.²¹

Early Frankfurt School writings respond to questions regarding the extent to which political subjects tacitly approve of the conditions of domination. Writing under different historical circumstances Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse represented the first generation of critical theorists “who were forced to grapple with the problem of not merely a temporary setback for the forces of class struggle, but rather the possibility of their *permanent eclipse*.”²² Today, these once palpable forces of class struggle have ostensibly resigned from theories of universal political emancipation as a genuine possibility to the domain of remembrance and cynicism. The Frankfurt School retaliates against notions of yesterday’s revolutions by reigniting the demand for critical self-reflection without it necessitating immediate instruction. Adorno concedes that: “The power of the culture industry’s ideology is such that conformity has replaced consciousness...Order, however, is not good in itself.”²³ For Adorno, then, the task of acquiring a more meaningful engagement with nature entails ‘descending’ and reflecting on the ways the concept has been historically mediated and apprehended. Similarly, Žižek’s writings on how we transition from *doxa*²⁴ to truth are indebted to The Frankfurt School, and moreover, the way

²¹ Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, 21

²² Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 3

²³ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 12

²⁴ Doxa is defined as “a set of unquestioned assumptions” in Sharpe, Matthew and Geoff Boucher (2010) *Žižek and Politics: A Critical Introduction*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh: 61

negative dialectics, “the ontology of the false condition”²⁵, serves to subvert notions of progress and enlightenment. As a way to better detail and define negative dialectics and demonstrate how it provides a fundamental critique of ‘progress,’ I will briefly turn to Žižek’s analogy of a man ascending an unexplored mountain. My hope is that this analogy, along with the many others I have included throughout this thesis, will serve to ground complex theoretical concepts and approaches, as well as help navigate some of the ways that Adorno and Žižek compliment and contrast one another.

The story Žižek recalls was originally a speech given by Lenin in February 1922 when the Bolsheviks, after winning the Civil War, were forced to retreat into the New Economic Policy which allowed a much wider scope to the market economy and private property.²⁶ The story, albeit paraphrased, goes as follows:

Let us picture to ourselves a man ascending a very high, steep and hitherto unexplored mountain. Let us assume that he has overcome unprecedented difficulties and dangers and has succeeded in reaching a much higher point than any of his predecessors, but still has not reached the summit. He finds himself in a position where it is not only difficult and dangerous to proceed in the direction and along the path he has chosen, but positively impossible.

He is forced to turn back, descend, seek another path, longer, perhaps, but one that will enable him to reach the summit. The descent from the height that no one before him has reached proves, perhaps, to be more dangerous and difficult for our imaginary traveller than the ascent; one has to move at a snail’s pace, and move downwards, descend, away from the goal; and one does not know where this extremely dangerous and painful descent will end, or whether there is a fairly safe detour by which one can ascend more boldly, more quickly and more directly to the summit.

In all probability these moments would be more numerous and harder to bear if he could hear the voices of those below, who ‘through a telescope and from a safe distance, are watching his dangerous descent’: They moan and raise their eyes to heaven in sorrow, as if to say: if we so fervently censured this lunatic and warned everybody against imitating and helping him, we did so entirely because of our devotion to the great plan to scale this mountain, and in order to prevent this great plan from being generally discredited.²⁷

²⁵ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

²⁶ Žižek, Slavoj. ‘*How to Begin at the Beginning Again*’ in *New Left Review* May-June 2009

²⁷ Ibid

The lesson to be learned from this analogy is twofold; first, progress – like that of ascending a mountain – is at times, more catastrophic than slowly turning back and retracing one’s steps. The second, and perhaps more critical point for this project, is that when political action and counter-ideologies fail us, it is not simply enough to keep going for the sake of continuing the progress we have made. In other words, the extreme choices in environmental politics today - namely organic populism on one hand and increased technological intervention on the other - fail to account for the ways ‘nature’ is a socio-historical construct, and moreover, is situated within a false reality wherein the ‘essence of existence’ is reduced to technological mastery.²⁸ Emphasizing the idea of ‘progress,’ Adorno states that “our current idea of progress – the progressive domination of nature – is incompatible with a more emancipated form of progress which human beings would have to reconcile themselves with nature.”²⁹ In other words, scientific progress made during the enlightenment era is bound to ideological principles that mediate, contradict, and apprehend nature. Positioned in this way, negative dialectics works against the progressive domination of nature by critically engaging in what it means to ‘*begin from the beginning again*’ in order to strengthen – if not entirely re-build - the conceptual foundation that radical political goals are built upon.

Notable to The Frankfurt School are theories that extensively critique how the concept of nature is detached, and therefore absent, from the existence of nature itself, as I further detail in Chapter 1. Detachment from nature is significant because it leads to ideological disillusionment in conceptualizing the ways human existence is contingent upon the continual presence in—rather than absence of— the world. The binary between the unfaltering, secure concept of nature and the weakening conditions of ecological systems can be exemplified in the significant

²⁸ Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 16

²⁹ Adorno in Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, 125

advances in technological instrumentalization and wealth accumulation. The progress made by manipulating and ruthlessly exploiting natural resources continues despite unprecedented levels of inequality and degradation, such as: accessing basic necessities, cataclysmic rates of species extinction, and the rendering of former functioning communities as uninhabitable due to toxic material and atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases. Despite vast gaps in our capacity to predict and control catastrophic outcomes of human behaviour on ecological systems, the performed concept of nature remains fundamentally undisrupted. Scientific and technological questions concerning ecological crisis tend to rely heavily on a one-dimensional ideological rhetoric of choice: either we attempt to ‘get back’ to a utopic vision of nature or we mitigate our ecological footprint *vis-a-vis* technological intervention. Adorno argues that by withdrawing from the possibility of revolution, we abandon self-reflection and the potential to uncover the ‘genealogy of reason’ – a theory on the historical progression of domination that I engage with more fully in Chapter 3. In relation to Adorno’s claims concerning self-reflection and revolution, it seems that Žižek’s reading of Hegel’s concept of ‘essence’ can further reveal the thread that runs through environmental choice rhetoric. Namely, I suggest that Hegel’s notion of ‘essence’ is representative of the unstable categorization of nature, and thus, is capable of acknowledging and retaining the gap between reality and illusion; a gap wherein critical thinking and non-dominating praxis can emerge.

A central limitation and challenge within The Frankfurt School framework is how their theories account for modern day advances in technological intervention. Although first generation theorists were highly critical of technology, science, and media, their theories also remain embedded within contextual specificity. Alternatively, I argue that advances in technology do not necessarily imply that increased technological capacities and interventions are

without the potential to revolutionize ecological and social politics. In other words, there are possibilities for technological instrumentalization outside of the prevailing system of domination; however, this is so only if we first reflect on how to create a non-dominating relationship with the natural world. In order for increased technological systems to provide alternative possibilities there must be, according to Adorno, “the responsibility of thought not to accept the situation as finite.”³⁰ More precisely, prior to the utilization of technology there must be a critical thought process and meaningful theoretical engagement that ensures that repression and domination is not renewed. Highlighting this point, environmental historian, Donald Worster, contends that in order to dramatically shift how we relate to the world we must first ask: “How, in remaking nature, do we remake ourselves?”³¹ In other words, technological interventions and the ‘greening’ of social relations are not enough to radically shift how we relate to and live in the world. Echoing the dogma commonly expressed in the 1960’s and 1970’s green movement: “We cannot expect technological solutions alone to get us out of this vicious circle.”³² Ultimately, early green movements sought out an ideology of nature based on the reduction of consumption through boycotting and abstinence; two failed strategies that will be critically assessed in the section below on Ecological Thinking.

Throughout the last few years, first generation Frankfurt School theorists have gained greater prominence within environmental political theory. My interpretation and reading of Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse is guided by a combination of secondary texts, such as works by: Andrew Biro, Deborah Cook, and Seyla Benhabib, as well as primary translated texts including but not limited to: *Negative Dialectics*, *Aesthetic Theory*, *The Idea of Natural-History*,

³⁰ Adorno, Theodor (1991). *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. Eds. J.M. Bernstein. Routledge, London: 200.

³¹ Worster, Donald (1985). *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*. Oxford University Press, Oxford: 30

³² Meadows, D., D. Meadows and J. Randers (1974). *The Limits to Growth*. Pan, London: 192

and *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Arguably, today's environmental politics are saturated in a deep sense of urgency, and in many ways, the feeling of immediacy has inspired this thesis. Significantly, I have turned to the works of Adorno, and the Frankfurt School more generally, to help shed light on how we negotiate between the desperate need for timely and responsive action on the one hand, while on the other the need for contemplation and reflection.³³ While relying on many theories inspired by early Frankfurt School writers, I maintain that in order to genuinely engage with the ecological conditions in the world today we must recognize the problems that have since arisen in contemporary environmental politics. As outlined by Doug Torgerson, in order to work in and through Frankfurt School theories, we must recognize that; “to apply critical theory properly in our present day, we must rework its concepts even while using them.”³⁴

Critique of Enlightenment

One of the primary texts this thesis draws upon is Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947). Highly indebted to the works of Marx, the ‘dialectic of enlightenment’ contests the notion that enlightenment is void of mythology, and alternatively argues that a “thorough critique of enlightenment’s instinctually driven subjugation of nature may “prepare the way for a positive notion of enlightenment which will release it from entanglement in blind domination.” Genuine enlightenment would thus necessitate communication and theoretical engagement with the excluded or isolated Other, a theme I further detail below in the section *Žižek on Ideology*. The excluded Other is, for Žižek, “exactly the Other of paranoia, the one who

³³ Lipscomb, Michael in Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 15. Lipscomb also takes this question up in his work on Adorno's contributions to environmental politics. Lipscomb eloquently states: “How can we become the kind of people who are capable of realizing and sustaining the environmental future that we want to bring into being?”

³⁴ Torgerson, Doug (1999). *The Promise of Green Politics: Environmentalism in the Public Sphere*. Duke University Press, Durham

speaks through us without our knowledge, controlling our thoughts, manipulating us through the apparent spontaneity of jokes, the hidden Artist whose fantasy-creation is our reality.”³⁵ More specifically, the paranoid construction of the Other “enables us to evade the fact that ‘the Other does not exist’ as a consistent, closed order.”³⁶ Arguably, the construction of the Other is anchored in the traditional political ideology and impotence of early enlightenment ideologues. The concretization of nature as an Other, external, isolated realm is representative of both the conditions which gave rise to ecological crisis and the ways decisive intervention is forestalled. A return to ideology, then, is where we can begin to destabilize absolutisms and unveil the various kinds of ‘enlightened’ political and material realities which underlie systems of domination.

Early enlightenment philosophers, such as John Locke and Thomas Hobbes, attempted to illustrate the determinants of consciousness through scientific materiality and reason by divorcing rationality from theological struggles. In the systemic pedagogical reconstruction of ideology as rationality, enlightenment theories and absolutist approaches to human progress were able to garner political leverage and hence establish a ‘science of facts.’³⁷ Expanding on this definition of enlightenment, I turn to political theorist D. Bruce Martin who writes; “enlightenment asserts that everything of meaning is available to the reason of ‘man’ and that formal logic and mathematicization in science make the world calculable, predictable, and (most important) available for utilization by man.”³⁸ The proposition that the world is calculable propelled much of The Frankfurt School’s enterprise in negative dialectics insofar as it rejects instrumental rationality, and in turn, interrupts the foundational dialectic by which enlightenment

³⁵ Žižek, *The Žižek Reader*, 22

³⁶ Lacan in *ibid*

³⁷ Durkheim, Emile (1982). *The Rules of Sociological Method*. London, 86

³⁸ Martin, D. Bruce in Biro *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 117

fuses with myth. In formulating a historicity of ecological thought, theorist Timothy Hayward contends that its beginnings are rooted in the direct opposition to enlightenment theories on rationality in the following ways: “its methods and epistemology are not reductionist, its ontology is not dualist, and its ethics are not atomistic. In each respect, ecological thought is holistic.”³⁹ The split between ecological thought as ‘the Other’ and enlightenment theories on rationality can be further explicated through the writings of Marcuse on Hegel’s critique of philosophy. Marcuse observes:

Hegel took the view that philosophy arises from the all-embracing contradictions into which human existence has been plunged. These have shaped the history of philosophy as the history of basic contradictions, those between ‘mind and matter, soul and the body, belief and understanding, freedom and necessity,’ contradictions that has more recently appeared as those between ‘reason and sense,’ ‘intelligence and nature,’ and, in the most general form, ‘subjectivity and objectivity.’⁴⁰

For Hegel, these philosophical dichotomies represented the deeper tensions within cultural life and the ways in which nature was externalized and alienated from society. Expanding on these tensions, a number of contemporary political theorists such as; Val Plumwood, Bruno Latour, and Timothy Morton, contend that ecological crisis is also a crisis of reason insofar as increased empirical rationality and knowledge does not necessitate the kind of radical transformation needed in order to commit to an un-alienated existence of nature, or rather, instigate a full integration of ‘the paranoid Other.’ As Bruno Latour remarks: “Political philosophy... finds itself confronted with the obligation to *internalize* the environment that it has viewed up to now as another world.”⁴¹ ‘Internalizing’ or self-reflecting was central to Adorno and Horkheimer’s demand for a critical return to the concept of enlightenment itself, or rather, in working towards

³⁹ Hayward, Timothy (1994). *Ecological Thought: An Introduction*. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 23

⁴⁰ Marcuse, Herbert (1955). *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*. 2nd Edition. Routledge, London, 43

⁴¹ Latour, Bruno (2004). *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge: 58 emphasis in original

“the redemption of the hopes of the past.”⁴² Highlighting this descent or regression towards the past, Adorno remarks in *Minima Moralia: Reflections of the Damaged Life*: “So long as progress, deformed by utilitarianism, does violence to the surface of the earth, it will be impossible – in spite of all proof to the contrary – completely to counter the perception that what antedates the trend is in its backwardness better and more humane.”⁴³ For Adorno, then, empiricism and equivalence hinder us from engaging in negation or ‘tarrying with the negative.’ In other words, these coordinates of capitalist ideology act as suppressants that negate us from perceiving nature fully.⁴⁴ In order to better detail the ‘capitalist ideology’ I will now turn to some of Marx’s writings on capital, ideology and enlightenment, and more precisely, begin to unfold some of the theoretical divergences between Orthodox Marxism and The Frankfurt School.

Critical Shifts: From Marxism to the Frankfurt School and Back

A central pillar to the Frankfurt School’s critique of enlightenment is Marx’s theories on the division of labour and institutionalization of capital. Marx’s writings on the conditions of material consciousness and the inherent inequality within the pedagogical project of enlightenment ideology heavily influenced and informed Adorno’s thesis on the dynamic interaction between natural and human history. Significant to this thesis, however, are the ways Marx and later Frankfurt School theorists, seized ideas of ideology to expose the ways that hegemonic and dominating systems of relations are maintained through empirical rationality. Empirical rationality and the laws of reason portray the illusion that they can stand as autonomous entities detached from the socio-historical and material conditions which pervade

⁴² Adorno, T. and M. Horkheimer (1987). *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Trans. John Cumming. Continuum, New York: xv

⁴³ Adorno, Theodor (1997). *Minima Moralia: Reflections from the Damaged Life*. Trans. E.F.N. Jephcott. Verso, London: 157

⁴⁴ Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, 123

human and natural history.⁴⁵ Investigating the illusory coordinates of enlightenment ideology, Marxist and later Frankfurt School theorists reflected: “reason would appear able to monitor the whole of reality; but is it able to monitor itself? Or must it be the one thing which falls outside the scope of our analysis?”⁴⁶ Marxism, and critical theory at large, grapples with the contradictory nature inherent in the enlightenment tradition that seeks to legitimize the production of and historical progression towards truth and consciousness through empirical rationality. The disjunction between truth and consciousness has since been taken up by a number of philosophers and political theorists who have worked towards strengthening, problematizing, and destabilizing Marx’s argumentation of ideology and critique of the enlightenment. Notable to these theoretical developments and later interpretations of ideology and enlightenment are the divergences between Orthodox Marxism and The Frankfurt School – tensions that I will now further detail.

For Marx, “ideology does not grow out of ‘life itself,’ it comes into existence only in so far as society is regulated by state.”⁴⁷ For this precise reason, Marx and Engels examined the historical causes and functions of false consciousness and the ways particular institutions are “*estranged* from material life.”⁴⁸ The disjunction between state regulated institutions and social relations is normalized and permeated through conditions of labour and the circulation of commodities. The appearance of capitalism and how it is actualized - in Hegelian terms ‘essences’ and ‘phenomena’ - demonstrates the “structural contradiction between that system’s real contents, and the phenomenal forms in which those contents proffer themselves

⁴⁵ Žižek, Slavoj (2000). ‘The Inherent Transgression.’ *Cultural Values* 2 (1): 14.

⁴⁶ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 70

⁴⁷ Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 19

⁴⁸ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 81 emphasis in original

spontaneously to the mind.”⁴⁹ For the sake of further explication and clarity, I turn to Terry Eagleton, who contends that this disjunction can break down into three distinct moments.

Eagleton states:

First, some kind of inversion takes place in the real world: instead of living labour employing inanimate capital, for example, dead capital control live labour. *Secondly*, there is a disjunction or contradiction between this real state of affairs, and the way it ‘phenomenally’ appears: in the wage contract, the outward form rectifies the inversion, to make the relations between labour and capital seem equal and symmetrical. In a *third* moment, this phenomenal form is obediently reflected by the mind, and this is how ideological consciousness is bred.⁵⁰

For Marx and Engels, a theory of ideology and false consciousness provides a secure ground for critiquing the structural falsity inherent in bourgeois society and enlightenment ideology. Commodity production and materiality, as detailed in *The German Ideology*, offer ways of locating particular ideological and economic forms of domination and subjugation. As detailed in the first chapter of *Capital*, Marx contends that the elementary cell that sustains the ideology of commodity production is equivalence, or rather, “the equivalence of one object or activity with a heterogeneous other.”⁵¹ Borrowing from Marx’s theory of equivalence as well as Freudian theory of instincts - a theoretical marriage I discuss Chapter 1 - Adorno developed the theory of identity thinking, or rather, “a form of concept fetishism in which objects are summarily identified with concepts.”⁵² Recognizing the perverse progression of empirical and scientific rationalism, ‘equivalence’ and ‘identity thinking’ interrogate the phenomenal forms of capital and reveal its essences. By strengthening the affinity between non-identity and nature, Adorno argues that we can begin to expose the profound limitations of conceptual thought, and moreover, the necessity for leaving an unknown remainder within a given concept. Concepts, in other words, “do not simply repress and destroy the non-identical; they are also a crucial aspect

⁴⁹ Ibid: 86

⁵⁰ Ibid: 86-87

⁵¹ Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, 19

⁵² Ibid.

of its recognition and affirmation.”⁵³ Broadly, the ‘unknown remainder’ is representative of the demand within critical theory to remain philosophically engaged with the continual unfolding of the *not-yet-existing*. Material objects, for Adorno, are distinct from and not fully accessible to the concept, and moreover, emerge in particular historically situated and socially constructed conditions. The formulization of the non-identity within the concept and object propels much of Adorno’s larger philosophical pursuit in negative dialectics, namely: “dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into concepts without leaving a remainder, that they come to contradict in the traditional norm of adequacy.”⁵⁴

Returning to a more specific reading and critique of enlightenment in regards to the development of Marxist and the later Frankfurt School theories, Seyla Benhabib argues: “Whereas Marx has demystified the naturalization of the historical, critical theorists seek to demystify the historicization of the natural.”⁵⁵ Illuminating the content of norms embedded within enlightenment ideology was, for The Frankfurt School, a way to theoretically account for and shift beyond Marxism’s unfulfilled promise of emancipation. Marx’s ‘unfulfilled promise of emancipation’ is a highly contentious and ongoing debate within Marxism. Arguably, The Frankfurt School’s integration of psychology (Freud) into materialist theory was a way to critique the shortcomings in Orthodox Marxism, as well as account for the “unexpected rise of an irrationalist mass politics in fascism, which was unforeseen by Orthodox Marxists.” Moreover, critical theory sought to reveal the “psychological impediments to emancipation” that followed in the wake of Stalinism, the horrors of the Holocaust, and the totalizing sedation of capitalism and bureaucracy.⁵⁶

⁵³ Gunster, Shane in Biro *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 214

⁵⁴ Adorno, Theodor (1973). *Negative Dialectics*. Trans. E.B. Ashton. Continuum, New York: 5

⁵⁵ Benhabib, Seyla in Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 83

⁵⁶ Jay, Martin (1984). *Adorno*. Fontana, London: 85

The Frankfurt School's re-orientation in the philosophical and emancipatory potential of self-criticism deviated away from traditional Marxism in that it did not critique the social formation of capital as a whole. More precisely, Marx and Engels famously asserted that "life is not consciousness, but consciousness by life."⁵⁷ Adorno and Horkheimer rejected the notion that purely socioeconomic conditions causally determine consciousness by alternatively suggesting that it is possible to think beyond the current socioeconomic and historical conditions yet impossible to completely transcend or disassociate ourselves from our instinctual dependency on the natural world – a theory of instincts indebted to the works of Freud. Furthermore, early Frankfurt School theorists applied a theory of negative dialectics whereby the limits of a mechanical materialist theory were highly criticized on the grounds that it attempted to reduce consciousness to matter. Adorno conversely argues that "if matter were total, undifferentiated, and flatly singular, there would be no dialectics in it."⁵⁸ The shift away from material theory in Orthodox Marxism is of particular significance to the project of critical theory because it allowed for a greater integration of and emphasis on self-reflection as a way to provide a critique of enlightenment. These shifts allow us to reformulate and reflect on *HOW* we are alienated from nature by thoroughly engaging in Adorno's notion of negative dialectics, or more precisely, the call for us to denounce identity thinking in order to overcome particular forms of social organization. Adorno contends that the task of the subject is to provide ruthless and unwavering criticism on "those cracks in the totality, those fissures in the social net, those moments of disharmony and discrepancy, through which the untruth of the whole is revealed and glimmers of another life become visible."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Marx and Engels in Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, 34

⁵⁸ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 29

⁵⁹ *Ibid*: 88

Curiously, I have found that the divergences between Marxism and The Frankfurt School throughout this section are more cyclical than linear. Despite The Frankfurt School's retreat from mechanical materialism, Adorno and Horkheimer remain sufficiently Marxist in the broader critique of enlightenment and its marriage to myth. Akin to Marxism, The Frankfurt School is weary of how scientific and empirical progress produce and sustain mythological fears instead of returning to an analysis on the particular societal conditions which gave rise to fascism, tyranny, and crisis. More precisely, non-identity thinking, that is; "thought's potential to express the object's potential to be something other than what it is," is repressed through fear. In other words, it is fear that sustains the fateful dialectic of enlightenment rather than reason alone.⁶⁰ Although fear is marked by its conceptual distance and proximity to reality, it also contains and is sustained by a particular material reality that cannot be divorced from Marxist theories. The emphasis on fear as the crux of enlightenment ideology demonstrates The Frankfurt School's commitment to both the epistemological condition – or concept outside of the object - that causes fear as well as the material, social, political and economic environment in which people live. The fusion between materiality and negative dialectics allows us to be receptive to the world and critical of the prevailing ideologies within it. Moreover, the union between Marxism and The Frankfurt School entails critically reflecting upon particular socio-historical conditions in order to cultivate the subjective dimension within emancipatory politics and radical actionism. In other words, this affinity aims towards a critical theory – or education – that pauses the temporal rhythm of systematic reproduction, and alternatively, gestures towards democratic reflection and demystification. Adorno articulates this aim in *Education after Auschwitz* in the following passage: "Education must labour against this lack of reflection, must dissuade people from striking outward without reflecting upon themselves. The only education that has any sense at all

⁶⁰ Gunster, Shane in Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 209

is an education toward critical self-reflection.”⁶¹ Expanding on the aim of critical theory, I will now turn to a more specific analysis on environmental security knowledge as a way to unpack some of the structural underpinnings and ideologies that tacitly manifest in order to sustain particular hegemonic institutions and systems of domination.

Ecological Thinking

The ecological thought framework adhered to in this thesis rests on a combination of The Frankfurt School and Žižekian theories. This combination is not without serious tensions and deviations; however, central to this project are the ways in which their respective works extensively critique ideology, and propose subversive alternatives to and new meanings of how we can conceptualize nature without domination.

The historical significance of ecological thought continues to be a source of contention within political theory and environmental politics at large. The three major tenets can be summed up as followed: “The first attempts to ‘trace ecological sentiments back to the dawn of the human species, at least to the Palaeolithic or Neolithic period; the second dates the environmental movements from the 1960s and 1970s’; and the third identifies the roots of ecological ideas in the nineteenth century.”⁶² I will exclusively frame ecological thought within the most widely accepted third tenet as it suggests that ideology is a necessary component to understanding the socio-historical significance of environmental political discourses and narratives. Moreover, it attempts to move beyond isolated environmental movements by focusing on the interaction and synthesis of theories and processes ascribed to the concept of nature.

Drawing on the works of Theodor Adorno, Andrew Dobson, and Andrew Biro, I define ecological thinking as a canon within political theory that assumes a relationship between human

⁶¹ Adorno, Theodor (1998). “*Education After Auschwitz*” in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*. Trans. Henry W. Pickford. Columbia University Press, New York: 192

⁶² Vincent, A. in Andrew Dobson (1995). *Green Political Thought*. Routledge, New York: 33

beings and the environment. More specifically, ecological thinking affirms that “our political, social, and economic problems are substantially caused by our intellectual relationship with the world and the practices that stem from it.”⁶³ I have chosen to use ‘ecological thinking’ as opposed to ‘ecological thought’ as a way to illuminate the ways that ‘thinking’ entails transition, movement, and instability. Against the grain of completed thoughts, I contend that ‘thinking,’ in the case of an evolving ecology, generates a more nuanced understanding in how we bring about a radical politics of ecology through an enduring and rigorous commitment to critical thinking and self-reflection.

More specifically, the theories I present will rest on the third tenet insofar as I critique the concept of nature that emerged out of the enlightenment era. Significantly, the theory of ecological thinking that I present contests three central ideological frameworks commonly encoded within environmental politics, namely: rigid conceptual categories, urgent action, and apocalyptic thinking. As discussed in the aforementioned section on *The Critique of Enlightenment*, rigid conceptual categories are mediated and enmeshed in particular socio-historical and material conditions. In an attempt to further this claim, I have turned to the works of Žižek who argues that the meaningfulness we ascribe to nature is contentious insofar as it reaffirms a static form of identification with an evolving ecology. Drawing on the example of buying organic apples, Žižek contends that our experience is mediated through the ideological belief that we are being ethically responsible in buying the apple. Therefore meaningfulness transfers from that of the natural object (apple) to that of furthering the liberal ideology of what we presume nature is and is not.⁶⁴ These choices, which are bound to the perpetuation and progress of liberal ideology, reveal a critical paradox in the conception of nature: we cannot

⁶³ Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, 39

⁶⁴ Žižek, Slavoj. “Humanity is OK, but 99% of people are boring idiots.” In *The Guardian*, June 10, 2012

control nature and yet are fully capable of destroying its inherent balance.⁶⁵ Within these environmental choices and prescribed meanings is the demand to change our relationship with nature without disrupting dominant power relations. This appropriation of genuine, radical political change ultimately “fails to free itself from the no less obdurate particular interest of the totality” and as Adorno succinctly writes, is indicative of “a problem of the greatest possible gravity.”⁶⁶ In other words, the crisis of nature resides in the crisis or limitation of knowing how to act when the concept itself has failed us. Furthering this point, I critique the second contested claim in dominant environmental ideologies: that we must generate urgent action and responsive reaction.

In any emergency or crisis, it is important to remain calm and critical. In the event of a plane crash, you might fail to adjust your oxygen mask. Or if stranded in the desert, you may begin to run urgently towards the city only to wind up eclipsed by mirages. Often, environmental politics perpetuate empirical immediacy through the use compelling facts and apocalyptic rhetoric. The demands and instructions to restore our relationship with nature often come in two forms; ‘*the abstainer*’ and ‘*the boycotter*.’⁶⁷ These consumer-based, individualized forms of action point towards radical change, however consistently fail to actualize change. More precisely, Timothy Morton argues; “the sense that we have a “choice,” giving rise to utopian desires, indicates social deadlock as well as possibility.”⁶⁸ Confronting the social deadlock inherent in environmental politics today, I argue, is imperative to ensuring an enduring commitment to the world we wish to bring about. In other words, contemporary demands have the potential to reveal emancipatory possibilities only if we question the oppressive social and

⁶⁵ Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 5

⁶⁶ Adorno, Theodor (2006). *History and Freedoms: Lectures 1964-1965*. Trans. R. Livingstone. Polity, Cambridge: 44-45

⁶⁷ Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, 116

⁶⁸ Ibid: 117

systemic mechanisms inherent in the concept of nature. The demand for self-reflection and a return to philosophy ultimately helps us discern and move beyond the question “how the world should be changed,” to the more critical stance of “why the world – which could be paradise here and now – can become hell tomorrow?”⁶⁹ Furthering this re-orientation of urgency within environmental politics today, Žižek observes: “the true problem of revolution is not taking power; it is what you do the day after.”⁷⁰ Reflecting upon these questions and observation, we see that apocalyptic thinking – the third and final contested claim - fails to adequately respond to questions concerning how these ‘survive or perish’ narratives have forestalled changing the current state of affairs.

Arguably, apocalyptic rhetoric is emblematic of the ‘possible becoming the impossible’ insofar as it suggests that if we do not commit to change, the world we inhabit, and only existence we have known, will disappear. For Žižek, the apocalypse is not indicative of catastrophe - but rather a ‘revelation’ – or the profound social and psychological changes taking place in light of the impossible. As I further detail in Chapter 2, these fabricated musings of apocalyptic preachers are, more than ever, philosophically analogous with Marx’s famous maxim “*they do not know it, but they are doing it,*” and perhaps even more closely aligned with Peter Sloterdijk’s later adaptation on (enlightened) false consciousness: “*they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it.*”⁷¹ Alternatively, (enlightened) false consciousness extends the function of ideology to include a subject who is unpersuaded by ideological rhetoric but unwilling to change or resist political power. Building upon Marx and Sloterdijk, Žižek suggests that the new ideological subjects “*know that, in their activity, they*

⁶⁹ Adorno, ‘*Why We Still Need Philosophy*’ in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, 14

⁷⁰ Žižek, Slavoj (2007). “*Divine Violence and Liberated Territories: SOFT TARGETS talks with Slavoj Žižek.*” In *Soft Targets Journal*

⁷¹ Žižek, Slavoj (1989). *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Verso, London: 28-30

are following an illusion, but still, they are doing it.”⁷² For example, they know that their idea of Freedom is masking a particular form of exploitation, but they still continue to follow this idea of Freedom.”⁷³ Similarly, we find this form of ideological rhetoric in environmental politics, namely in that we, as individuals, commit to ‘green’ consumer choices while knowing that we have nonetheless fallen back into the trap of capitalist logic and ironic praxis. Ecological thinking denounces apocalyptic thinking by re-focusing itself on the finality of crisis and the non-existence of nature. This reconfiguration of crisis is one in which attempts to capture political impotence and introduce a regime of politics whereby passivity shifts from an inactive, inconsequential gesture towards critical engagement, reflection, debate, and radical praxis. By labouring against apocalyptic ideology, we can re-orient and revolutionize the social mechanisms which inform and situate us as ecological beings.

Žižek on Ideology

My research regarding how ecology has become “the ideal candidate for hegemonic ideology”⁷⁴ is grounded in a number of texts written on ideology by Žižek, including: *Mapping Ideology*, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, and *Tarrying with the Negative*. Žižek’s application of Marxist theory of ideology relies on an additional or combined appeal to Hegelian and Lacanian interpretations of ideology. Namely, it seems that ideologies, once adopted, are paralyzed and blinded by their own limitations and peripheries. Further detailing this process, Žižek observes that late capitalism “enables ideology to effectively penetrate every pore of the body” insofar as capitalism “performatively generates its own ideological foundation.”⁷⁵ Extrapolating from Žižek’s framework of ideology, I aim to critique the ways signifying practices adopted by or

⁷² Ibid: 33

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*

⁷⁵ Žižek, *The Žižek Reader*, 66-67

associated with dominant environmental ideology enforce and maintain particular dominating systems of social relations. Borrowing from Žižek's theories on ideology, I argue that the dominant 'common sense' orientations and practices within environmental politics continuously "lie in the guise of the truth," and, more precisely, appropriate ecology in order to naturalize the systematic and ideological mechanisms that regulate its demise.⁷⁶ As a way to better situate some of the ideological underpinnings of dominant environmental politics, this section will detail some of the critical theoretical principles within Marx and Žižek's respective work on ideology.

Marx and Engels examine the causes and functions of false consciousness as a way to reveal the ways in which subjects have become alienated from their labour. By a process of inversion and de-historization, Marx and Engels assert that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their beings but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness."⁷⁷ Writing from a specific socio-historical context, Marx and Engels further their claim by arguing that society is fragmented by a particular commodity logic that 'produces its own misperceptions.'⁷⁸ These fragmentations are no longer questions of how consciousness operates, but rather, questions concerning how both the real and imaginary simultaneously function within ideology. This theoretical extension of consciousness is, I argue, critical to locating the inherent antagonisms within environmental literature and politics. Namely, false consciousness can help unpack the paradoxical relationship between knowledge and action, or more precisely, the lack of an attendant will to change beyond the parameters of consumption (i.e., boycotting, abstaining) despite knowing these actions do not disrupt or account for the complexity of power relations. In order to provide a closer reading of false consciousness, I will now detail one of Žižek's substantial theoretical digressions from Marx's theory of ideology.

⁷⁶ Ibid; 61

⁷⁷ Marx and Engels (1962). *Selected Works: Volume 1*. New Left Books, London: 362

⁷⁸ Callinicos, Alex (1985). *Marxism and Philosophy*. Oxford Paperbacks, Oxford: 131

Specifically, Žižek diverges from traditional Marxism by asserting that the potential collapse of capitalism does not, as Marx would posit, reflect its limit, but rather incites perpetual existence. In other words, systemic collapse is not bound by its structural epistemology and materiality, but rather, the degree to which ideological illusions structure our social practices. Moreover, Žižek states that “the ruling ideology is not meant to be taken seriously or literally. It is as though the ruling ideology has already accommodated the fact that we will be sceptical of it, and reorganized its discourses accordingly.”⁷⁹ Capitalism, then, not only structures the dominant, ruling ideology within societies but also accounts for an ironic and cynical distance within its own prevailing framework and social practices. Borrowing from Žižek’s theories on ideology, Eagleton states: “the capitalist who has devoured all three volumes of *Capital* knows exactly what he is doing; but he continues to behave as though he did not, because his activity is caught up in the ‘objective’ fantasy of commodity fetishism.”⁸⁰ Žižek’s deconstructive theoretical orientation of ideology and its relationship to illusion, I argue, illuminates some of the central failures and performative contradictions within environmental politics today. It is important to emphasize the ways in which ironic gestures and contradictions are justified within environmental politics today, especially given the ubiquitous web of ideology that emphasizes apocalyptic thinking rather than the disavowal of capitalism. In many ways, environmentally-friendly consumers genuinely try to reduce the harm inflicted upon the world by boycotting or abstaining from particular consumption patterns. However thoughtful and ‘friendly’ our choices may be, these choices also rule out the possibility of a radical political program that exists beyond an instrumental rationality of nature, or rather, a natural world distinct from consumerism. The following chapter, *Ideology of Nature*, will continue to detail and investigate

⁷⁹ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 28

⁸⁰ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 40

the ways ideology operates as a deceptive and illusory force, while simultaneously genuinely describing particular realities and conditions. In particular, my aim is to critically engage in the ways the enlightenment era has successfully rationalized, masked, and legitimized capitalist political processes through a particular ideological articulation of the concept of nature.

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Chapter 1: IDEOLOGY OF NATURE

Every truth presupposes a scene of its appearance— and conceals this scene at the same time. We have neither access to the world nor to our own construction of the world. We don't know and we cannot know how we construct the world. Of course, we know, at least since Magritte, that a painted apple is not a real apple.

Boris Groys, *The insider is curious, the outsider is suspicious*

[I]t would be up to thought to see all nature, and whatever would install itself as such, as history, and all history as nature.

Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*

Within contemporary environmental politics there exists the widespread idea that nature must be urgently conserved, protected, saved, and sustained. This dominant ideology of nature is premised on the notion that nature, or the natural world, is a meaningful and balanced system that is fundamental to the wellbeing of all living things. One can argue that this idea of nature is true insofar as the natural world includes resources necessary for self-preservation and survival, such as water and air, and therefore warrants its description as meaningful. However, does this claim necessarily dictate that nature is meaningful beyond its sheer functionality and instrumentality? Or more specifically, what form of political ideology occupies the space between nature as intrinsically meaningful and it being meaningful insofar as it continues to serve as a means to our existence? Adorno and Horkheimer take up these questions in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by stressing that in order to engage with the meaning of nature, we must historically and dialectically unfold the ways that myth and mysticism have informed and manifested within empirical rationality. The following chapter reflects on some of the socio-

historical conditions that gave rise to the concept of nature. Through detailed analysis of the inherent tensions within the object-subject binary, the first section of this chapter will seek to expose the connection between ‘enlightened modes of reason’ and the prevailing techniques of political domination and legitimization of ‘mastery over nature.’⁸¹ Following a materialist line of thinking initiated by Marx, Adorno and Horkheimer I contend that the emergence of empirical and instrumental rationality has led to an inherent and insolvable dilemma within the concept of nature.

I will elaborate in the second section on how the concept of nature perpetuates domination and ‘mastery over nature’ through an appeal to the discourse of ‘natural-history’ that is, for Adorno, rooted in authoritarian impulses and myth. Within this framework of conceptualizing nature, fear emerges alongside identity politics to define a concept of nature by its objective, ontological and radical Otherness. In contrast to identity politics, this section will offer a methodology of critical theory in order to engage in the ‘non-identity’ or ‘unknown remainder’ within the concept of nature. Critical theory calls us to recast and rework the epistemological tensions that arose on our way towards progress, and in many ways, offers alternative approaches to understanding how nature has been symbolically and discursively constructed in the civilization project.

In the final section of Chapter 1, I argue that the modes of capital accumulation and production account for and exist within current ideological persuasions and practices of environmental sustainability and self-preservation frameworks. Capitalist production – “the compulsion for accumulation” – is reinforced and steered by the expansion of consumerism and the intensification of accumulation strategies.⁸² Examining and reflecting upon the social

⁸¹ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 22-23

⁸² Gorg, Christop in Biro *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 57-58

conditions in the 1940's, Adorno argues that the potential for fascism is encoded in the temporal imperatives of the rapid and uncritical development of late capitalist production.⁸³ The desire for immediate instruction and gratification is all too familiar to the environmental and political goals in place today. The sense of urgency, informed by fearful 'survive or perish' and apocalyptic ideologies has led to the selective treatment and privileging of specific environmental problems and landscapes. Drawing on metaphorical persuasions of 'blood and soil' and 'illness and cure' that permeated Germany post-World 1, it seems that 'balance' functions in political communication that generates systematic domination and vast social inequalities. Namely, I argue that environmental totalitarianism rested upon a complex system of analogies and commonsense persuasions that, when left unquestioned, made possible unimaginable horrors.

Section 1.1: Dualism, Distance and Dialectics

Dominant ideas and critiques of nature and natural history emerged during the Enlightenment era, and as Adorno argues, fell victim to a "*reduction ad hominem*,"⁸⁴ or the claim that in order for man to free himself, he must dominate, appropriate, and master nature. In the attempt to weld pragmatic approaches and technocratic forms of management to natural processes, the enlightenment era generated and naturalized particular ideologies estranged from the natural world. The dominant ideology that emerged during this period was prefaced on the perceived dualism between rational man (as subject) and irrational nature (as object). Moreover, early enlightenment philosophers offered subversive alternatives to the prevailing theological and monarchical ideologies insofar as shifting the systematic and hegemonic powers under the rule of scientific theorists and empirical philosophers. However, the construction of a 'rational'

⁸³ Lipscomb, Michael in Biro *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 282

⁸⁴ Adorno, Theodor *et al* (1976). *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*. Trans. Glyn Adley and David Frisby. Heinemann, London: 6

humanity and emergence of a new social order entailed the reduction and externalization of a complex web of interactions present within this dualism. Moreover, the conceptual imposition and historical development of the dualism between humans and nature renders legitimacy to particular hegemonic socioeconomic systems and conditions by mediating and alienating subjective experiences in the world. Socioeconomic systems are representative of how, as C.S. Lewis once noted, “what we call Man’s power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument.”⁸⁵

Further emphasizing the subject/nature dualism in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx wrote that “the *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside him*, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power of its own confronting him...”⁸⁶ For Marx, the origins of the social logic of alienation emerged out of the commodification of labour practices. As a way to defeat this logic and its effects on social relations, Marx argued that we must denounce ‘nature’ as a product of human activity, and moreover, demand a radical deconstruction of the subject/nature relationship. Furthering Marx’s theories on alienation and commodification of nature, Adorno and Horkheimer contend that radical deconstruction entails a critical engagement with the conceptual distance between humanity and nature. Commenting on the ways ‘distance’ is emphasized in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Shane Gunster writes that “distance between concept and object is *precisely* the essence of dialectical thinking – that is, thought’s potential to express the object’s potential to be something other than it is.”⁸⁷ Dialectical thinking, then, is able to confront the subsumed features

⁸⁵ C.S. Lewis (1974). *The Abolition of Man*. HarperCollins Publishing, Ltd., New York.

⁸⁶ Marx, Karl. ‘*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*’ in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd Ed. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. Norton, New York: 82 emphasis in original.

⁸⁷ Gunster in Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 214

of the concept by asserting that “each thing is what it is only by becoming what it is not.”⁸⁸ More precisely, dialectical thinking recognizes and critiques the ways that concepts, like ‘nature,’ are theoretically informed by ‘identity thinking’⁸⁹ and empirical rationality which aim to increasingly subordinate the natural world. Alternatively, Adorno and Horkheimer observe that true knowledge “does not consist in mere perception, classification, and calculation but precisely in the determining negation of whatever is directly at hand. Instead of such negation, mathematical formalism, whose medium, number, is the most abstract form of the immediate, arrests thought at mere immediacy.”⁹⁰ This argument of ‘true knowledge’ similarly highlights the ways thought - or self-reflection - has been divorced from the concept of nature, and moreover, how nature is mediated through instrumental reason. Instrumental reason signifies the socio-historical transition from pre-modernity to modernity, a period whereby abstractions were reduced to calculated and classified inert concepts. Significantly, these transitions additionally mark the shift away from symbol to concept, a shift that resulted in ‘the disenchantment of the world.’ For Adorno, these historical progressions spiraled into a trap of contradictory antagonisms and ideological illusions whereby the material basis of our existence was irrevocably tethered to the domination of nature.

In order to ground some of the contradictions and illusions inaugurated within the enlightenment tradition and as a way to further elaborate on dialectical thinking, it seems as though contemporary environmental politics is plagued with similar ideological traps and

⁸⁸ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 11

⁸⁹ Identity thinking, for Adorno and Horkheimer, lapses back into particular, historically frozen binaries by simply counter-posing ‘difference’ to ‘sameness’. Furthermore, identity thinking is contradictory insofar as there is “no necessary antagonism between conceptual thought and reality, no inevitable mutual exclusion of Knowledge and Becoming.” Thus, for Adorno, identity thinking is unable to escape its internal contradictions because there is no equilibrium or equivalence between concepts. Dews, Peter in *Mapping Ideology*, 57

⁹⁰ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 20

competing power interests that perpetuate the ‘rational legitimization of the existing order.’⁹¹

When, for example, an environmental crisis is classified into risk analysis calculations and the insurance policy plans, it’s essence – or borrowing from Adorno, its’ ‘non-identity’⁹² - becomes systematically formalized and communicatively structured. As Daniel Vetter asserts: “Every day, new risks develop and they are affecting not only the way we live, but the way we do business.”⁹³ Risk analysts effectively regulate the government or a private corporate entity’s involvement in the compensation of unexpected losses through the insurance industry. As a way to maintain ‘business-as-per-usual,’ risk analysts define and manage ‘crisis’ by classifying and profiling particular events and damages. Removed from the event itself, property insurance denotes what Adorno calls a ‘predigested culture,’ or more succinctly: “objects and practices that harmonize with existing conceptual frameworks and belief systems that minimize the cognitive effect and effective demands placed upon the audience, hereby accelerating the ease with which they can be promoted and consumed.”⁹⁴ Thus, when our houses are flooded, we can recognize – without thinking – that we have already managed unforeseeable occurrences through systematic responsive property insurance. Moreover, property insurance demonstrates the continual investment in a particular hegemonic and ideological order despite knowing that the prevailing order cannot account for – and may even contribute to – the crisis itself. Furthering this claim, Claudia Aradau writes; “insurers classify the event, name it, and simultaneously classify the types of damages and losses its occurrence could entail. Insurers need to invent knowledge of

⁹¹ Adorno in Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 13

⁹² Non-identity thinking emphasizes how critical thought must begin by asking whether “thought and its constitutive forms are *in fact* the absolute.” By discerning whether thoughts are complete and absolute, Adorno is able to dialectically determine that thought, like consciousness, is infinite. Adorno, Theodor (2001). *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*. Trans. E.F.N. Jephcott. Stanford University Press, Stanford: 99

⁹³ Vetter, David (2010) in Claudia Aradau and Rens van Munster (2011). *Politics of Catastrophe: Genealogies of the Unknown*. Routledge, London

⁹⁴ Gunster in Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 215-216

uncertainty both in the probability of an event occurring and in the damages caused.”⁹⁵ The invention of knowledge and its ensuing ideological apparatus renders the unknown ‘remainder’ as irrelevant - the immeasurable, infinite, and reflective non-identity of a concept that garners critical thinking despite its known, regulated variables. Furthermore, risk analysts substitute thought and reflection with cost-benefit calculation based upon a future that may or may not arrive. Illuminating this point, I turn to Hannah Arendt who argues that science is trapped within its own articulation. As Arendt states in the *Human Condition*:

If, therefore, present day science in its perplexity points to technical achievements to “prove” that we deal with an “authentic order” given in nature, it seems it has fallen into a vicious cycle, which can be formulated as follows: scientists formulate their hypothesis to arrange their experiments and then use these experiments to verify their hypothesis, during this whole enterprise, they obviously deal with a hypothetical nature.⁹⁶

Rather than including abstractions and unknown variables into questions concerning futurity and causation, risk analysts maintain and qualify the unknown ‘remainder’ through an appeal to scientific rhetoric and conjectural reasoning. Technical achievements and scientific formulas, as illuminated by Arendt, further alienate and externalize the natural world from its ascribed conceptual framework. Moreover, risk analysis and property insurance ascribes greater value to particular causal effects which in turn deliberately re-produce hierarchical relations; for example, we may be equally affected by unforeseen health ailments or property damage, but disproportionately unequal in our ability to access health benefits or house insurance due to financial constraints. Expanding on the hierarchal divisions within risk analysis, Francois Ewald argues that the “the idea of risk, therefore, does away with causality; what matters is not the cause, but the rule according to which reparation is decided.”⁹⁷ Disregarding reflection and critical thought on causation, the field of risk analysis communicatively re-structures and

⁹⁵ Aradau *et al*, *Politics of Catastrophe: Genealogies of the Unknown*, 55

⁹⁶ Arendt, Hannah (1998) *The Human Condition*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 287

⁹⁷ Ewald, Francois (1986). *L’etat providence*. Editions Grasset, Paris

systematically distorts the unknown ‘remainder’ to that of cold calculation and metaphysical absolutes. Epistemologically similar, the insurance industry follows rules of financial and legal reparation, and thus, a ‘predigested culture’ is perpetuated insofar as we deny the possibility of knowing the structural contradictions that fail to account for causation. The dismissal of causation – or the unknown - and privileging of reparation mark the ways in which, as Adorno states, “subjects have known themselves only as exponents of institutions.”⁹⁸

Adorno’s, *Messages in a Bottle*, contends that legal protection has led to grave contradictions in social relations, and moreover, revokes possibilities of genuine political emancipation. The dismissal of the ‘remainder’ or the ‘non-identity’ is, for Adorno, representative of the contradictory shortcomings that concepts harbor. Drawing on his particular socio-historical conditions, Adorno writes:

What the Nazi’s did to the Jews was unspeakable: language has no word for it, since even mass murder would have sounded, in face of its planned, systematic totality, like something from the good old days of a serial killer...So in English the concept of genocide was coined. But by it being codified, as set down in the International Declaration of Human Rights, the unspeakable was made, for the sake of protest, commensurable.⁹⁹

For Adorno, concepts are equated with absolute truths. But, can truth claims reveal the essence of socio-historical events and conditions? Is the weight of the concept of genocide measured by the number of gravestones? In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer remind us that conceptual truth claims reduce and eliminate difference between concept and object, and moreover set forth an ideology whereby, “the actual is validated, knowledge confines itself to repeating it, thought makes itself mere tautology.”¹⁰⁰ Fixed universal categories totalize societal conditions and relations of nature to material and biophysical functions. Conceptual totality is perhaps most revealing when applied to crisis and genocide, namely, in the ways semantics

⁹⁸ Adorno, ‘*Messages in a Bottle*’ in *Mapping Ideology*, 36

⁹⁹ Ibid: 35

¹⁰⁰ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 20

harness more attention than the questions concerning the conditions that gave rise to such possibilities becoming realizable. As Adorno reflects;

One day negotiations may take place in the forum of the United Nations on whether some new atrocity comes under the heading of genocide, whether nations have a right to intervene that they do not want to exercise in any case, and whether, in the view of the unforeseen difficulty of applying it in practice, the whole concept of genocide should be removed from the statutes. Soon afterwards there are inside-page headlines in journalese: East Turkestan genocide programming nears completion.¹⁰¹

The real social antagonism, then, is not the concept so much as, what Žižek refers to as “the non-symbolizable traumatic kernel” – or the socio-historical conditions and system of power relations inherent within the concept. Adorno’s reflection on the ‘extra-discursive’ forces of particular power interests can be applied to environmental politics today in a number of ways. For example, the legal protection of provincial and national parks is indicative of the socio-historical and cultural development of aesthetic beauty and the ways in which ‘beautiful’ or ‘pristine’ landscapes are privileged and placed within specific geographical boundaries. The advocacy for the protection of parks imposes the idea that we only experience the world, or ‘become one with nature,’ when we inhabit the places that have been systemically and bureaucratically deemed as worthy of protection. I argue that protected parks emphasize the paradox that we possess a ‘mastery over nature’ insofar as we can protect nature from particular capitalist production (e.g., damming projects, oil rigs, quartz mines). But, as is known, the causal effects of capitalist production do not adhere to geographical boundaries; we cannot simply amputate the parts of the world that we wish to keep ‘tidy.’ As Michael Lipscomb argues in *Adorno’s Historical and Temporal Consciousness*, camping is an institutionalized industry insofar as “business functionalizes, extends, and reproduces the campers’ ‘need for freedom.’”¹⁰² The commodification of camping can be additionally analyzed through Adorno’s account of ‘free

¹⁰¹ Adorno, ‘Messages in a Bottle’ in *Mapping Ideology*, 35-36

¹⁰² Lipscomb, Michael in Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 298

time' whereby the structural labour system has accounted for 'free time' outside of administered labour hours. Camping, then, is representative of how 'organized free time is compulsory'¹⁰³ in order to allow for us to "replenish ourselves so that we can be all the more productive with our labour time."¹⁰⁴ Moreover, camping – or 'being in nature' - symbolizes the way we mediate our experiences in nature through the ideological lens of scheduled 'time' and fixated 'places' that are 'outside' of our subjectivity. The ultimate effect of this experience, then, is merely the reproduction of systematic alienation of subjectivity to the natural world. Domination, then, in order to remain effective reduces self-reflection to the ideological persuasion of 'democratic progress' by impinging on it an entire discursive system of 'being in nature' that is external to the natural world.

Fixated concepts, like that of 'genocide' and 'nature,' present a number of communicative limitations that enable us to maintain a distance from the presupposed 'Other.' These inherent weaknesses suggest that, as Eagleton writes, "when we keep running up against a limit to our conceptions which stubbornly refuse to give way, then this obstruction may be *symptomatic of some 'limit' built into our social life.*"¹⁰⁵ Thus, emphasizing social practices, rather than conceptual frameworks, can effectively yield alternative ways of socio-political resistance and emancipatory possibilities. More precisely, "our social practices pose the obstacle to the very ideas which seek to explain them; if we want to advance those ideas, we will have to change our forms of life."¹⁰⁶ Instead of promoting environmental justice, human rights, or democratic progress, critical theory alternatively questions the inherent limitations – and the 'negative' spaces – as a way to illuminate the social antagonisms and illusory mechanisms within the

¹⁰³ Adorno, 'Free Time' in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, 170

¹⁰⁴ Lipscomb in Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 298

¹⁰⁵ Eagleton, 'Ideology and its Vicissitudes' in *Mapping Ideology*, 191

¹⁰⁶ Ibid; 190

conceptual frameworks.

In order to overcome the culmination of identity thinking and instrumental reason within the enlightenment tradition, there must be an acknowledgement of and return to the ‘non-identical’ through the method of negative dialectics which, as Eagleton observes, “strives, perhaps impossibly, to include within thought that which is heterogeneous to it.”¹⁰⁷ In further explicating the concept of nature in relation to negative dialectics, I will turn to a more detailed discussion on the development of ‘Natural History,’ and the critical proposition that ‘*nature is history*.’¹⁰⁸

Section 1.2: Natural History: Nature is History

Prior to the scientific discoveries made in the enlightenment era, like that of the electron, seventeenth century French mathematician, Blaise Pascal, claimed that contrary to microscopic proximity, only the distancing between unseen and seen objects can reveal the capacity to collapse the separation between the object and the subject. As argued by James Penney, contrary to scientific and mathematical rationality, Pascal insisted that:

[n]ature is both infinity large and infinity small, extending from the far reaches of a galaxy we cannot begin to conceptualize to the microscopic particles of matter which exert a similar pressure on human ideas. When we extend our conceptions “beyond all imaginable space,” according to Pascal, we “only produce atoms” which fail to comprehend “the reality of things.”¹⁰⁹

In Pascal’s view, nature is characterized by its unknowability and infinity while man is limited in his finitude and dependent on material, temporal, and spatial coordinates. Within this binary of man and nature is the paradox of man’s distance from God - a figure who supersedes man’s capacity to understand and qualify fragments of our existence within the totality of the universe. Moreover, Pascal’s writings on universal totality and human existence can be further analyzed

¹⁰⁷ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 126

¹⁰⁸ Bowie, Andrew (2013) *Adorno and the Ends of Philosophy*. Polity Press, Cambridge: 82

¹⁰⁹ Penney, James (2006). *The World of Perversion: Psychoanalysis and the Impossible Absolute of Desire*. SUNY Press, Albany: 83-84

through Althusser's reading of him, namely, the proposition that: "Act as if you believe, pray, kneel down, and you shall believe, faith will arrive by itself."¹¹⁰ Althusser's delineation from Pascal rests in his critique of the dependence and interaction of inner belief on external behavior. More precisely, Althusser argues that 'external ritual' and practice are not restricted to inner beliefs, but alternatively, generate its own ideological apparatus and foundation.¹¹¹ External rituals, as I will address in the upcoming section on enlightened false consciousness, involve a series of ideological propositions that do not necessarily correspond to inner beliefs, such as, we may genuinely believe in ecological justice, yet nonetheless maintain particular external rituals that contribute to systems of domination. Our actions, practices, and rituals are in turn normalized and conditioned under the guise of progress and 'sustainable' development.

Reflecting on Pascal's writings and applied more broadly, the enlightenment tradition came to regard scientific achievements as the overcoming of false realities, myths, and ideology.¹¹² The 'disenchantment of the world,' through the institutionalization of the enlightenment tradition, resulted in the belief that nature exists as an external and quantifiable object, thus able to distance itself from what is conceptualized as nature and its subsequent conceptualization. Through this distancing between the concept and its being, the enlightenment era was able to set forth the notion that scientific and technological systems operate outside of ideology. In doing so, the concept of ideology within the Enlightenment tradition came to represent the "[b]lurred notion of reality caused by various pathological interests (fear of death and of natural forces, power interests, etc.); [whereas] for discourse analysis, the very notion of

¹¹⁰ Althusser, in *Mapping Ideology*, 12

¹¹¹ Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 13

¹¹² Penney, *The World of Perversion: Psychoanalysis and the Impossible Absolute of Desire*, 83-84

an access to reality unbiased by any discursive devices or conjunctions with power is ideological.”¹¹³

Moreover, the materialization of the world through scientific discoveries solidified an objective and unified way of seeing the world, and thus, set forth the liberal idea that the unseen world too is calculable and can be integrated into an equivalent-exchange system, or the ‘value-logic of capitalism.’¹¹⁴ The commodification and commodity-exchange equation effectively perpetuates an ideological system whereby the relationship between things is often equated to binary associations that relinquish appeals to the transcendental; replacing traditional legitimations of power with an emphasis on scientific and technological rationality. These binary oppositions or antagonisms fail to incorporate the discursive split between them, and more importantly, perpetuate a ‘battle for hegemony’ whereby points of intersection, coexistence, and convergence are excluded from the equation.¹¹⁵ Moreover, the split, for Adorno, from ‘itself’ (nature) to ‘for-itself’ (the concept of nature) marks the passage into the enlightenment era and the beginning of a grave ‘disenchantment of the world’ whereby technological and instrumental ways of examining the world gradually replaced the intrinsic meaning of being in the world. Adorno claims that this account homogenized the unique materiality and immateriality of nature, and moreover, equated and rationalized things that are incommensurable with its own likeness and image. Countering enlightenment claims, Adorno argues that the split between nature and society fails to account for the ways in which “what is identified as natural bears historical dimensions, whilst what seems to be historical has natural foundations.”¹¹⁶ In a 1932 essay, ‘*The Idea of Natural History*,’ Adorno dialectically weaves together history and nature, and asserts

¹¹³ Žižek, *The Žižek Reader*, 64

¹¹⁴ Howard, Dick in Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 153

¹¹⁵ Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 23

¹¹⁶ Adorno, *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*

that the enlightenment project has developed a conception of the world whereby nature and history are reduced to competing epistemological and mutually exclusive forces. Critiquing the contradictions inherent within this conceptual dualism, Adorno writes:

If the question of the relation of nature and history is to be seriously posed, then it only offers any chance of solution if it is possible *to comprehend historical being in its most extreme historical determinacy, where it is most historical, as natural being, or if it were possible to comprehend nature as an historical being where it seems to rest most deeply in nature.*¹¹⁷

For Adorno, philosophical readings of nature must adopt critical theories in relation to - and inseparable from - social, cultural and intellectual practices, otherwise we will continue to “remain under the spell of blind nature.” Rather than polarizing nature as part of - or distinct from - human history, Adorno insists that nature and human history mediate one another. This mediated relationship between the natural world and human history implies that nature is not static while revealing that it carries particular fixed historical connotations that inevitably impact our relationship to the natural world. Since knowledge cannot escape mediation, the task of critical theory is thus to reflect and lay bare particular ideological contradictions and inherent forms systematic domination.

Drawing on *The German Ideology*, Adorno contends that Marx is pivotal in emphasizing how the concept of natural history serves as a means of justifying the domination of nature. Marx observes that:

We know only a single science, the science of history. History can be conceived from two different sides, divided into the history of nature and the history of humankind. Yet there is no separating the two sides; as long as human beings exist, natural and human history will qualify each other.¹¹⁸

Given this interdependent relationship, Adorno blends or likens the term ‘natural’ to ‘myth,’ and thus, claims that the natural world is bound to a mythic, transcendental force that supersedes

¹¹⁷ Adorno, Theodor (1984). ‘The Idea of Natural History.’ Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. *Telos* (60): 117 emphasis in original

¹¹⁸ Marx and Engels in Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, 8

human control and manipulation. Noting that myths are culturally and socially generated, Adorno uses this term to further his critical dialectical approach to nature by positing that science, like ‘natural history,’ is founded upon myths and remains present insofar as efforts in myth-making and prophesizing are perpetuated. In other words: “the mythic scientific respect of the peoples of the earth for the status quo, that they themselves unceasingly produce, itself finally becomes positive fact.”¹¹⁹ The crux of Adorno’s argument is that history - whether scientific, natural, or cultural - is heavily embedded in subjective experiences and conditions that perpetuate a concept of the nature far removed from the natural world. Moreover, abstract concepts have acquired historically fixated characteristics whereby they maintain contradictory dualistic categories, such as we find in the concept of nature: on the one hand, nature is seen as an object to be controlled and mastered, while on the other hand we find that it is an overwhelmingly powerful force. Enlightenment ideals are remarkably faithful to their origins in myths, and moreover, as Deborah Cook suggests, are perpetuated by “tolerating nothing outside ourselves, imprisoned within our concepts and conceptual schema, we now summarily identify nature with our concepts in order to predict its behaviors and control it for our own ends.”¹²⁰ It should be noted here that Adorno and Horkheimer’s problematizing of science results in, what Stephen Vogel refers to as, a cul-de-sac. Namely, Frankfurt School critics such as Vogel and William Leiss, argue that perhaps one of the greatest failures within *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* and critical theory at large, is its’ refusal to engage in the ‘content’ of what has been achieved in the field of science. Moreover, Adorno and Horkheimer’s demonizing and systematic oversight of discoveries in science and empiricism have misinterpreted all scientific inquiries as solely in the interest of self-preservation.

¹¹⁹ Adorno and Horkheimer (1972). *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Trans. John Cumming. Continuum, New York: 33

¹²⁰ Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, 68

Significantly, ideology works in tandem with both epistemological truths and sustained mythmaking. In this way, as argued by Cook, Adorno attempts to dismantle this ideological formulation of rational domination, “not by hypothesizing non-conceptual particulars, but by cancelling the subject’s claim to be first,” and furthermore, by emphasizing that “unfolding the concept of nature involves using this concept to reach back to the natural things from which it is derived while sustaining the difference between them, a difference that has now all but vanished in the concept.”¹²¹ Expanding on this, I have found that critical theory illuminates some of the immanent failures within environmental politics today by returning to the socio-historical site in which the concept was born.

Early enlightenment conceptions of nature, such as ‘sublime’ and ‘divine’ blend seemingly into myth, phenomena and inviolable otherness, and furthermore, are indicative of how competing epistemological priorities “impress(es) upon the subject an awareness of its own fragility and insignificance.”¹²² In this way, fragility and uncertainty are rendered as stable categories within the conception of nature, and thus, sets forth the broad social recognition that nature must be repressed, dominated, and mastered. As a way to better qualify and situate the conceptual development of nature in relation to increased domination, I turn to Andrew Biro, who writes: “there is, it seems, almost nothing we cannot do to control our non-human environment and place it at the service of human life. Yet at the same time, these transformations of our ecologies are creating feedbacks that are increasingly difficult to control.”¹²³ More precisely, these ‘feedbacks’ - such as species extinction and increased concentrations of greenhouse gasses – depict the paradoxical tensions between increased technological and industrial control and increasingly fragile ecological systems. The ‘greening of capitalism’

¹²¹ Ibid: 63

¹²² Gunster in Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 220

¹²³ Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 4-5

inherits particular enlightenment epistemologies which claim that increased power and wealth necessitates increased stability, control, and most notably, democratic human rights. However, in the wake of the industrialized agriculture, genetic manipulation, and urbanization, we have increasingly witnessed its opposing ‘feedbacks’ such as: disproportionate and extreme levels of inequality, impoverishment, and cataclysmic degrees of global warming.¹²⁴ Given these causal effects, how are we to reconcile the expansion of capitalism and democracy with increased levels of inequality and injustice?

The following section will explore how the concept of nature became the “terrain on which the battle of hegemony” in Nazi Germany took place.¹²⁵ Contra the consequent thinking that ideology is a seemingly inescapable homogenous mechanism, or, rather, Nietzsche’s postmodern account of ideology which asks, “how should a tool be able to criticize itself when it can only use itself for the critique?”¹²⁶, the next section will alternatively motion towards the concept of nature beyond ‘the true state of things.’ Having witnessed the trauma of the political and social regression into Fascist political order and belief, the Frankfurt School re-articulated a theoretical framework of consciousness whereby they discovered “the mask [spectacles of ideology] is not simply hiding in the real state of things; the ideological distortion is written into its very essence.”¹²⁷

Section 1.3: Environmental Totalitarianism

An example of the paradoxical tensions that stemmed from enlightenment ideology and later permeated throughout contemporary environmental politics was the rise of environmentalism in Nazi Germany post-World War I. Drawing on the German philosopher

¹²⁴ Ibid: 6

¹²⁵ Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 23

¹²⁶ Nietzsche, Friedrich (1968). *The Will to Power*. New York: 269

¹²⁷ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 28

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), ‘environmental totalitarianism’ was ideologically situated against the belief that ‘landscape cleansing’ would strengthen and protect the Aryan people (blood) and purify the German landscape (soil).¹²⁸ The metaphor of ‘blood and soil’ set forth the ideology that there was an intimate connection between ‘racial health’ and ‘the vitality of land,’ thus established and expanded geo-cultural linkages and national unity between peasant populations, agrarian romanticists, and party leaders. In an effort to popularize and strengthen “blood and soil” propaganda, scholar Max Wundt argued that Western influences must be denounced in order to return to the “unconscious powers of nature which embrace us in the soil of our fatherland...speaking to us in the voice of our blood.”¹²⁹ The renewal of national unity through appeals to ‘organic’ individualism, cultural vitality, and body-state narratives enabled genocidal policy and accustomed the ruthless crusade of domination. More precisely, environmental totalitarians adopted the ideology of “*Lebenswelt*,” or ‘life-world,’ in order to further espouse particular anti-Semitic campaigns and actions, and moreover, rationalize and weave corruption into a discourse of ironic truth claims.

As Andreas Musolff argues in ‘Metaphor, Nation, and The Holocaust,’ there is a manifestation of body imagery and metaphor beginning in the early 1920’s in Nazi Germany that, through repetition and coercion, became a fixture within the ideological nexus of racist rhetoric and policy. Musolff observes in her reading of *Mein Kampf*:

Hitler invokes a whole conceptual domain as a frame of reference, namely that of the *human body which*, as part of the natural world, *is born, grows up, can fall ill and die*, as well as the sub-frames of an attack by a *parasite* that *feeds on the body* until it has destroyed it, and that of a *cure*, namely the radical, complete *removal of the parasite*.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Gerhard, Gesine (2005). *How Green were the Nazis?: Nature, Environment, and Nation in the Third Reich*. Trans. Franz-Josef Bruggemeier. Ohio University Press, Ohio 131

¹²⁹ Wundt, Max in Tal, Uriel (2004). *Religion, Politics and Ideology in the Third Reich: Selected Essays*. Routledge, New York: 21

¹³⁰ Musolff, *Metaphor, Nation, and the Holocaust*, 26 emphasis in original

By emulating intensity and rigidity, Hitler was able to effectively reconstitute political order and doctrine based in overt political party membership and appeals to self-preservation. The ideological-propagandistic effectiveness of body imagery depicts “the Jew” as the “blood poisoning agent”¹³¹, and moreover, establishes the ‘hereditary’ significance of blood, that, for Hitler, “led to physical and intellectual regression” and was “the beginning of a slowly but surely progressing sickness.”¹³² Positioned in this way, Musolff argues that Hitler’s diagnosis of the ‘illness’ plaguing Germany post-World War I was “plausible *not despite* but *because of* its metaphoric character and history.” Specifically, the illness-cure metaphor provided the “conceptual and argumentative space to reason about the socio-economic and political hardships that the German public was experiencing and to trust Hitler with applying the *therapy* that would end those hardships and prevent them in the future.”¹³³ Given that, as Hitler expressed, there is an available ‘cure,’ it would be ‘rational’ to take the necessary measures in order to avert danger.

Emphasizing ‘self-preservation’ in relation to the ‘blood and soil’ and ‘illness and cure’ metaphors, I argue that, encoded in ‘self-preservation’ is an ideological trap which stabilizes fascist and totalitarian rhetoric insofar as it totalizes and washes over uneven histories. More precisely, metaphorical ‘illnesses’ became an instrument in establishing new living conditions that opposed the existing economic and social plights threatening ‘self-preservation’ in post-World I Germany. The instrumentalism of metaphor and myth signifies the marriage between institutionalized genocidal policy and new ideological formulations of self-preservation. Within the analogical argumentation of the ‘illness-cure’ metaphor scenario, the ‘removal’ of the ‘parasite’ becomes entwined within commonsense assumptions. Notable to this commonsense orientation of the illness-cure metaphor is the notion that ‘the cure’ is without alternative.

¹³¹ Ibid: 36

¹³² Hitler, Adolf (1992). *Mein Kampf*. 23rd Edition. Trans. Ralph Manheim. Pimlico: London, 260

¹³³ Musolff, *Metaphor, Nation, and the Holocaust*, 143-144

Borrowing from Adorno, I observe that ‘self-preservation’ conflates and mystifies the ways commonsense narratives increasingly reproduce destructive and false universalisms about human existence. More precisely, ‘self-preservation’ establishes the conditions in which we justify metaphorical fears on ‘rational’ grounds; ultimately leaving us no choice but to submit, adapt, repress, and externalize all ‘otherness.’¹³⁴ These fragmented mythic fears function within an economic and social totality that, when left unexamined, erodes all possibilities of exposing and renouncing the volatile ideologies and catastrophic metaphors that inspired genocidal policy. The ‘therapy’ metaphor draws attention to the function of metaphor and ideology in environmental political communication. Moreover, the marriage of ‘self-preservation’ and Nazism denotes the ways in which political institutions are not devoid of existing pervasive ideologies, and thus, cannot be reduced to archival containment and historically remote conditions. In other words, embedded in dialectics are systems of oppression and domination.

Attendant to discourses on environmental sustainability and ecological balance is the pervasive assumption and commonsense rationale that the natural world is deeply ‘ailing,’¹³⁵ This assertion, I argue, can be understood through two central ideological standpoints. The first standpoint is scientific proximity and discovery; namely, we can quantify and calculate the negative impacts of human behavior on ecological systems – what Žižek refers to as the ‘true’ objective content of a political standpoint. The second standpoint is the multitude of discourses that scientific proximity and discovery generates – referred to as the ‘illusory’ form. The mutual interdependence of these two competing ideological models can be summed up by Žižek as follows; “a political standpoint can be quite accurate (‘true’) as to its objective content, yet

¹³⁴ Gunster in Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*.

¹³⁵ Curiously, in Adorno’s *Minima Moralia*, he applies the term ‘ailing’ to the world, and in so doing, appeals to an ‘illness-cure’ political ideology. He writes: “What would happiness be that is not measured by the immeasurable grief at what is? For the world is deeply ailing.” (1974). New Left Books, London, 200

thoroughly ideological; and vice versa, the idea that a political standpoint gives of its social content can prove totally wrong, yet there is nothing ‘ideological’ about it.”¹³⁶ The latter standpoint has become increasingly enmeshed in the ideological narratives that deny and disengage in the ‘true’ ecological conditions.

More precisely, I contend that social content is rarely communicated without immediate instruction on how to best proceed. Reflecting on the ‘illness-cure’ metaphor, it seems that the ‘cure,’ then, involves a series of semantic assemblages rooted in a sustained ‘balance’ whereby ‘nature’ must be restored in order to save humanity. Significantly, I contend that ‘balance’ is contentious insofar as it demands individual choice without critical self-reflection. Common environmental rhetoric, such as the World Wildlife Foundation’s mandate that proclaims; “if the consumption of natural resources continues at the same rate, we will need two planets by 2050 to meet our needs for food energy and infrastructure. Reason enough to take action!” results in contradictory and alienated praxis.¹³⁷ Individualized consumption patterns perpetuate the idea that ‘nature’ exists as an isolated, rational, and unique process that is formalized through and maintained by capitalist choices. Calls to arms, or action driven change, is overwhelmingly paradoxical as it entails change only insofar as the existing systems and structures of commodity-exchange relations are maintained. In this way, as Terry Eagleton observes, “nature is wheeled out to adjudicate between what is fleeting and what is substantial and permanent.”¹³⁸ The reaction and mobilization against environmental degradation is nullified to an individualized whimpers for more choices because the available ones have failed.

Many of the practices assumed by totalitarian environmentalists in post-World War I Germany align with how democratic environmentalism is applied today, namely by a reaction

¹³⁶ Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 7

¹³⁷ World Wildlife Foundation, 2015

¹³⁸ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 21

against capitalist production and modernization, but also through particular methods such as; the protection of parks and wildlife sanctuaries, organic farming, vegetarianism, animal anti-slaughtering laws, and buying locally produced products.¹³⁹ Given the extent of “organic unity” practices¹⁴⁰, Gesine Gerhard argues that Nazi environmental ideology cannot simply be regarded as “anti-modern” – just as dominant environmentalism today is not anti-modern insofar as it does attempt to re-conceptualize ‘nature’ - but rather; “promotes ways to lessen the destructive impact of urbanization and industrialization on rural communities and the environment.”¹⁴¹

Furthermore, contemporary environmental politics are not exclusively anti-modern insofar as we utilize technological and scientific interventions to both sustain systemic conditions and adapt to changing ecosystems. These interventions are aimed at mitigating the negative impact of consumption and production patterns on the environment without reducing capitalist production levels. The inherent shortcomings of interventions are metaphorically consistent with suppressing an ‘illness’ with an impenetrable ‘cure.’ The ‘cure’ is premised on a conception of nature that only exists through its utopic fabrications and illusory formulations. While acknowledging the substantial gains and achievements in science and technology, I maintain that ecological domination and destruction will permeate if we do not radically shift and eradicate its very conceptual foundations. Significantly, relying on technological interventions that have yet to materialize results is perhaps the most dangerous form of hegemonic ideology today. Namely,

¹³⁹ Environmentalism is broadly referred to as “set of cultural and political responses to a crisis in humans’ relationships with their surroundings. Those responses could be scientific, activist, or artistic, or a mixture of all three. *Morton, Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 11

¹⁴⁰ Agrarian romanticists in the nineteenth century has emphasized “organic unity” of the people and the soil and had depicted peasants as the healthy “backbone” of “society” (Gerhard). Organist populism has, yet again, re-emerged in the 21st century, namely in ex-Communist countries. Žižek writes, “the new hegemonic ideology of ‘Eurasism’ preaching the organic link between community and the state as an antidote to the corrosive influence of the ‘Jewish’ principle of market and social atomism, orthodox national imperialism as an antidote to Western individualism, and so on.” *Mapping Ideology*, 3

¹⁴¹ Gerhard, *How Green were the Nazis?: Nature, Environment, and Nation in the Third Reich*, 131

how do we reconcile technological futurity with the real conditions that render air unbreathable, land infertile, and water toxic? The reality of the apocalyptic illusion is that already “disaster radiates triumphant.”¹⁴²

Furthering this claim, it seems that the ‘protection of nature’ in both cases maintains a self-interested and means-ends level of the natural world insofar as they do not interrogate the epistemological-ideological formulation of ‘nature’ or an environmental ethos beyond consumerist logic. Moreover, without ‘looking-back’ – or ‘self-reflecting’ – on the socio-historical development of nature, humanity finds itself, as Michael Lipscomb argues, “blind to our own entwinement with the natural world; indeed, we take up our estrangement as a basis for forgetting the irreducible moments of non-identity in our relationship with nature.”¹⁴³ These ideologies emphasize the desperate need for a critical theoretical intervention in what the concept of nature is and to what extent it perpetuates and legitimizes domination. More than ever, we need to a renewed critical engagement with how we ecologically situate ourselves in the world in order begin to unravel the spiral of ironies within environmental politics so that we ensure that ‘nature’ does not lead us back to Auschwitz.

Confronting ideological illusions and discerning them from epistemologically true realities in a particular society also entails reflecting upon the ways “history brings with it magnificent achievements – but only at the price of a colossal amount of wretchedness.”¹⁴⁴ Through the methodological approach of negative dialectics, The Frankfurt School engages with the shadows and wretchedness of collective histories and demands critical self-reflection and the questioning of the communicative political discourses that have guided advanced capitalist ideals. Reconsidering socio-historical questions allows us to occupy the seemingly irresolvable gap from

¹⁴² Adorno and Horkheimer (1987). *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Trans. John Cumming. Continuum, New York

¹⁴³ Lipscomb in Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 289

¹⁴⁴ Eagleton, Terry (2010). *On Evil*. Yale University Press, New Haven: 135

doxa to truth, and moreover, reveals the ways in which political institutions and ideological systems penetrate and repress individualized subjectivities. Or, drawing on Badiou's writings, only by "searching within a situation for a possibility *that the dominant state of things does not allow to be seen*" can the loop in which domination has been spun be willfully severed.¹⁴⁵

Lastly, metaphors increasingly operate and manifest as an 'invisible hand' without origins, guidance, or historical ruptures. However, there are deep methodological and cognitive implications when we do not "turn the critical gaze back upon oneself."¹⁴⁶ Environmental justice cannot be premised on buying green products and individualized guilt mechanisms; rather, it must investigate the systematic and ideological terrain that reduces an environmental ethos to consumer choices and managerial rationality. The desperate call to action in contemporary environmental politics today must question and critique its conceptual origins in order to eliminate the potential perpetuation of the very systemic forces that it is fighting against. Further explicating this claim, I turn to Adorno who writes in *Education after Auschwitz*: "one must come to know the mechanisms that render people capable of such deeds, must reveal these mechanisms to them, and strive, by awakening a general awareness of those mechanisms, to prevent people from becoming so again."¹⁴⁷ Central to critical theory is the re-formulation and search for questions that inform and exceed the boundaries of formal ideological systems. Ideology, then, remains an elusive category insofar as it is able to fluidly and deceptively generate totalizing rationalizations within any context of interpretation. Further explicating the ideological and systemic edifice that sustains the domination of nature, I will now turn to a closer reading of ideology without nature.

¹⁴⁵ Badiou, Alain (2006). *Infinite Thought*. Continuum, London: 62, emphasis in original

¹⁴⁶ Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 3

¹⁴⁷ Adorno, "Education After Auschwitz" in *Critical Models: Inventions and Catchwords*, 193

Chapter 2: IDEOLOGY WITHOUT NATURE

What's robbing a bank compared to founding one?

Bertolt Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera*

Words are never 'only words'; they matter because they define the contours of what we can do.

Slavoj Žižek, *First As Tragedy, Then As Farce*

Successful ideologies are structurally operative and theoretically lucid. The prevailing ideology of nature underscored in contemporary environmental politics tacitly shapes our experiences with the natural world through a combination of institutionalized rationalization, mysticism, cynicism, and irony. As detailed in the previous chapter, the concept of nature is wrought with established belief systems which perpetuate an idea of nature removed from the natural world. Moreover, without sincere and genuine commitment to critical analysis and self-reflection, the potential for fascism remains encoded within fresh ideological currents. Apocalyptic narratives today are similarly aligned with totalitarian environmentalism insofar as they are premised on the belief that the crisis of advanced capitalism will be met with the rigid sacrifice of the natural world. The metaphorical and discursive message is: the collapse of advanced capitalism *is* the collapse of the natural world, thus in order to 'survive,' we must retain the prevailing political order.¹⁴⁸ The following chapter will present a theory of ideology that will help map some of the political persuasions and discourses that perpetuate and promote dominant social and material conditions. Significant to the theory of ideology that I present is the

¹⁴⁸ I borrow from Žižek's interpretation of Jameson on capitalism, namely "nobody seriously considers possible alternatives to capitalism any longer...it seems easier to imagine the 'end of the world' than a far more modest change in production, as if liberal capitalism will survive under the conditions of a global ecological catastrophe." In Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 1

recognition that we remain, at all times, in ideology. Or, as Žižek observes, “there is no ideology that does not assert itself by means of delimiting itself from another ‘mere ideology,’ An individual subjected to ideology can never say for himself ‘I am in ideology,’ he always requires *another* corpus of *doxa* in order to distinguish his own ‘true’ position from it.”¹⁴⁹ Acknowledging the affinity between ideological, communicative, and discursive intersecting forces does not, as one might presume, render a hopeless spiralling into dead-ends for theory and praxis. Alternatively, I propose that by relying upon Adorno and Žižek, reflexivity and critical intervention into political order can reveal the systemic mechanisms that drive, form, and legitimate particular hegemonic ideologies. For Žižek, theoretical engagement “involves the power to abstract from our starting point in order to reconstruct it subsequently on the basis of its presuppositions...”¹⁵⁰ Abstracting on this claim, I borrow from Žižek that only by reflexively descending towards the conceptual development of ‘nature,’ can we begin to “discern the hidden necessity of what appears as a mere contingency.”¹⁵¹

Further explicating the number of ways that ideology reproduces itself within political and social terrains, I turn to the works of Terry Eagleton, who contends that contemporary political rationalizations for acting (un)justly are often plagued with performative contradictions and paradoxes. Eagleton writes: “if political practice takes place only within a context of interpretation, and if that context is notoriously ambiguous and unstable, then action itself is likely to be problematic and unpredictable.”¹⁵² Building on Eagleton’s claim that action is interpretative and therefore unpredictable, it seems that sustainable development projects similarly produce problematic effects insofar as in they do not address the paradoxical tension

¹⁴⁹ Ibid: 21 emphasis in original

¹⁵⁰ Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 2

¹⁵¹ Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 4

¹⁵² Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 40

between capitalist development and sustainable, or ‘balanced,’ environments. In the progression towards developing a sustainable future, we failed to address whether there ever was a sustainable past. Furthermore, as Andrew Biro writes, sustainable development is structurally antagonistic insofar as “development, at least as it was generally construed, was more or less inherently unsustainable.”¹⁵³ More than being ‘naïve,’ ‘ignorant,’ or ‘false,’ established ideological and political systems are maintained by knowingly *and* unknowingly obeying the equilibrium between subjectivity and objectivity, thought and praxis, nature and humanity. More precisely, I contend that Marx’s theory of ‘false consciousness’ – or “*they do not know it, but they are doing it*” - does not account for the ways in which we are aware and recognize that, often, our actions and political practices do not escape advanced capitalist ideology.

Alternatively, Žižek builds upon Marx’s initial premise with the assertion that “*we know that, in their activity, they are following an illusion, but still, they are doing it.*”¹⁵⁴ Revealing the illusion, then, may not be enough to alter activities and disrupt particular practices. However, perhaps more than revealing, we must denounce its very existence in order to genuinely commit to a radical rupture in systems of domination.

The last section in Chapter 2 will aim to explore and enrich Žižek’s proposition that “Nature does not exist!” – an adapted Lacanian dictum that confronts and moves beyond established systems of symbolic meaning. More precisely, the concept of nature has been identified, classified, and reduced to radical ‘otherness,’ and thus, perpetuating its existence only re-affirms and solidifies our alienation and distance from the natural world. For Marx, alienation arises when socially constructed ideologies and conditions appear as ‘natural.’ Significant to this claim, as Stephen Vogel argues, is that “*the appearance of nature is itself a symptom of*

¹⁵³ Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 7-8

¹⁵⁴ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 28-30

alienation.”¹⁵⁵ Moreover, we have only made nature ‘real’ insofar as we have produced, manufactured, and repressed it. In ‘thinking against thought’ or denouncing fixed concepts, I argue, we can enable new social and material conditions based on the principle that ‘nature does not *yet* exist.’¹⁵⁶ As a way to ground some of the theoretical notions of ‘thinking thoughts’ and ‘radical Otherness,’ I will provide a brief reflection on Lacan and Žižek’s writings on ‘woman,’ and thereby draw attention to the symbolic failure of identification and the way fixated concepts alienate us from our own subjectivity.

SECTION 2.1 THEORY OF IDEOLOGY

An artist, having once found his form at last, thinks he can now go on producing works in peace. Unfortunately, he usually fails to notice that from this moment of peace, he very soon begins to lose the form he has at last found.

Kandinsky, 1912

The single most widely accepted definition of ideology, theorized by John B. Thompson, states: “To study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning (or signification) serves to sustain relations of domination.”¹⁵⁷ Following this claim, it is evident that there is a necessity to understand how relations of domination interact and strengthen one another, and also, to ask whether they are capable of operating independently. More precisely, this section raises questions concerning how ideology accounts for and perpetuates the weakening of ecological conditions witnessed in the twenty-first century. Specifically, I question how we deconstruct and make sense of the ways in which nature has, as Žižek claims, become “the ideal candidate for

¹⁵⁵ Vogel, Stephen in Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 196 emphasis in original

¹⁵⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 191

¹⁵⁷ Thompson, John B. in Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 5

hegemonic ideology”¹⁵⁸ Perhaps in answering this question, and in turn determining the relations of domination within the concept of nature, we must examine ‘the question’ itself. A re-orientation of the question allows for an inquiry into the oppressive nature of global capitalism. More precisely, Žižek illuminates the root of dialectics, namely: “What if the way we perceive a problem is already part of the problem?”¹⁵⁹ Drawing on the proposition, I wonder if, on our way towards a utopic vision of ‘natural balance,’ we undermined and miscalculated its conditions for existence? This re-orientation does not aim to suggest that utopic visions or emancipatory possibilities cannot escape the ideological grip of global capitalist systems. Rather, by turning the question back on itself, or regressing towards the concept, the cracks in the totality of capitalist ideology reveals itself, and moreover, illuminates how we re-imagine a world not by burying the past, but by exposing its root.

Further reflecting on this claim, I turn to Fredric Jameson who contends that the lack of imaginative re-orientations and critical reflections on the ways ideology is encoded within normative claims is definitive of how ideologically and systematically infinite capitalism has become. Jameson writes: “Someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. We can now revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world.”¹⁶⁰ This shift is critical insofar as it keeps systemic change at bay by projecting what Marx infamously referred to as ‘the dull compulsion of the economic’ whereby material and economic benefits outweigh the possibility of dismantling the conditions of social domination inherent in the global capitalist system.¹⁶¹ Moreover, Jameson’s passage reflects the disassociation between illusions and the operative

¹⁵⁸ Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*

¹⁵⁹ Žižek, Slavoj. ‘A Permanent Economic Emergency.’ *New Left Review* (64), summer 2010

¹⁶⁰ Jameson, Fredric. ‘Future City’ *New Left Review* (21), summer 2003

¹⁶¹ Marx, Karl. *Capital: Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*. Dover Publications Inc., New York

system of social and material relations and conditions. By conflating capitalism with the world at large, hegemonic systems of domination are able to effectively exchange beliefs, myths and doctrines with a kind of anonymous yet absolute universal truth. The ceaseless visions of the impending apocalypse have fundamentally altered representations of reality by stressing a longing for a ‘back to nature’ political and social order, or alternatively, projected hopes for a world-saving technological intervention. In other words, symptoms of nostalgia and hope reign over and mystify material realities that we bear witness to in our daily lives. The emphasis on hope and nostalgia is representative of, for Althusser, the ways we are pre-reflectively bound up in social reality through ideological and discursive language that emphasize fear and delusion rather than describe the way things actually are.¹⁶² In the apocalyptic fantasy, for example, there is a masking of reality insofar as the systematic forces that drive us closer to the ‘impending collapse’ are both ironically and antagonistically the villain and the hopeful hero.

We can develop this idea further by turning to Žižek’s writing on Mother Teresa, who is representative of both the illusion of ‘saintly hope’ and of how we condition, endure, and accept systematic inequality. Žižek argues that when religious and sacrificial messages of hope are laid bare, justifications for the perpetuation of evil emerge. Highlighting Mother Teresa’s travels to Calcutta, he writes, “the ideological profit from this operation is double: in so far as one proposes to the poor and terminally ill to look for salvation in their suffering, Mother Teresa deters them from probing into the causes of their predicament – i.e., from politicizing their situation.”¹⁶³ Political action is thus reduced to charitable acts and meditative salvation in suffering through a systemic mechanism that Marx famously referred to as ‘an opiate’; a way to keep political change at bay through appeals to higher authorities.

¹⁶² Althusser, Louis (1969). *For Marx*. Verso, London: 234.

¹⁶³ Žižek, *The Žižek Reader*, 94

Considering Terry Eagleton's contention with the operative functions of ideology and its relation to authority, he writes that the dominant view amongst theorists of ideology is that: "ideology is synonymous with the attempt to provide rational, technical, 'scientific' rationales for social domination, rather than mythic, religious or metaphysical ones. On such a view, the system of capitalism can be said to operate 'all by itself,' without any need to resort to *discursive* justification."¹⁶⁴ The mystification of the driving forces of capitalism reduces and blends together the decision-making process and its respective outcomes. Moreover, by ascribing to the 'invisible hand' dogma, we sustain symptoms of malaise and spectatorship insofar as we believe in the idea that with or without us, capitalism will lag on. The lack of sufficient criticism and analysis of the operative and performative functions of global capital systems, I am arguing, is a reflection of the ways that ideology repeatedly operates as a wholly mystified and objective analysis of the world, and in turn, perpetuates the binary between what is fleeting and what is permanent in nature.¹⁶⁵

For Adorno, ideology encompasses a form of identity thinking that becomes, as Eagleton writes, "a covertly paranoid style of rationality which inexorably transmutes the uniqueness and plurality of things into a mere simulacrum of itself, or expels them, beyond its own borders in a panic-stricken act of exclusion."¹⁶⁶ Following this framework, ideology excludes questions that go against the grain of its rationale by asserting a schematic way of seeing the world, and moreover, by conflating reality with its 'aestheticized' image (for Guy Debord, rendering a 'society of the spectacle').¹⁶⁷ This definition is predicated on the ideologues ability to continually naturalize and totalize particular relations of domination while remaining resistant to objects of

¹⁶⁴ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 37 emphasis in original

¹⁶⁵ Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, 21

¹⁶⁶ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 126

¹⁶⁷ Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 15

contestation. Adorno's definition is not without its shortcomings in regards to addressing whether all – or just part of - ideology works by expunging meanings and significations that oppose identity thinking. A common criticism of Adorno's position addresses his critique of the 'tyranny of equivalence'¹⁶⁸ and how it led him to demonize and categorize global capital as a "seamless, pacified, self-regulating system" in regards to relations of domination.¹⁶⁹ Drawing heavily upon Marx, Adorno conceded that society preponderates in the "law of value that comes into force without people being aware of it."¹⁷⁰ In this way, the 'tyranny of equivalence' replaced former human conditions and interactions with a universal model of exchange based on a rational-objectivity of value. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno remarks that 'exchange relations have become the measure of all things' – a sentiment earlier expressed by Freud's theories on materialism.¹⁷¹ Although he is not an orthodox Freudian, Adorno has extensively borrowed from psychoanalysis in his efforts to observe systems of domination and the inherent violence within the conceptual development of nature. Significantly, the split between an individual and her internal nature is subject to a more vigorous analysis, specifically addressing whether this divide varies in its degrees of complexity and vastness. In an attempt to further critique the concept of ideology and unravel its subsequent divisions between appearance and reality, I will now turn to the works of Žižek, who, provides a hybrid critique and analysis of ideology through a combination of political theory and psychoanalysis. The bridging of these fields in regards to ideology has had profound impacts on establishing a cohesive understanding of ideological language, discourse, and in mapping the ways ideology operates within socio-political systems.

¹⁶⁸ The 'tyranny of equivalence,' broadly refers to the ways economic forces operate independently of the individuals who created and sustain it. Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, 14

¹⁶⁹ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 128

¹⁷⁰ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 300-301

¹⁷¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 310. Specifically, Freud observes that individuals suffer from an inability to recognize and accommodate the material conditions that define their lives and therefore are deceived about their internal subjectivity or self constitution.

SECTION 2.2. ŽIŽEK, IDEOLOGY, AND NATURAL SIMULACRA

Drawing on a combination of Hegelian dialectics, Slovenian-Lacanian psychoanalysis, Marxist theory of ideology, and Christian theology, Žižek argues that meaning and meaningfulness cannot be contained and isolated insofar as “meaning does not inhere in elements of an ideology as such – these elements, rather, function as ‘free-floating signifiers’ whose meaning is fixed by the mode of their hegemonic articulation.”¹⁷² More specifically, commodity exchange principles applied to the abstract world entail the perpetuation of ideological coordinates that, for the later Frankfurt School theorist Jürgen Habermas, come to life when language is transformed and re-shaped in order to serve particular power interests. However, the annexation of language by particular power interests is not limited to external material conditions; rather, political rhetoric is inscribed and naturalized within speech. This systematic reconfiguration of language in order to shape power interests signifies the ways it discursively operates within prevailing systems of domination which appear to be neutral, objective, and just. Like Habermas, Žižek diverges away from traditional Frankfurt School theories of language and alternatively argues that language is able to shape and re-frame the contours of power systems *via* the discursive hegemonic split. Borrowing from Žižek’s theory of ideology, Alvin Gouldner succinctly defines ideology as “the emergence of a new mode of political discourse; discourse that sought action but did not merely seek it by invoking authority or tradition, or by emotive rhetoric alone. It was discourse predicated on the idea of grounding political action in secular and rational theory.”¹⁷³ The transition from ideology as authority to ideology as logico-rationality and empiricism illuminates how appeals to ‘expertise’ are founded on particular discursive historical lineages and political frameworks. Reflecting upon this

¹⁷² Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 11-12

¹⁷³ Gouldner, Alvin (1976). *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology*. London: 30

transition, both Habermas and Žižek claim that ideology involves a separation from mythological conceptions towards scientific enlightenment, and more precisely, that ideology was born out of the bourgeois epoch. A feature of bourgeois ideology is the absence of class domination and dominative discourse through the instrumentation of modern science and objective findings.¹⁷⁴ However, Žižek maintains that ideology depends upon a false notion of ‘privileged place,’ or rather, “in every case the very denial that we are free from ideology is the proof of our subjugation, since its successful operation depends precisely upon its own concealment.”¹⁷⁵ This passage aims to highlight how ideology operates within a social order that may be socially true despite being ‘the structure of a fiction,’ Here we find the crux of Žižek’s definition of ideology that contrasts Adorno, The Frankfurt School and traditional Marxism.

Apropos of religion, or ideology *par excellence*, Žižek asserts that ideology is best conceived within Hegel’s triad of In-itself – For-itself – In-and-For-itself, or more properly, in the ways that the Hegelian triad is “centred on the repeated occurrence of the already mentioned reversal of non-ideology into ideology – that is, of the sudden awareness of how the very gesture of stepping out of ideology pulls us back into it.”¹⁷⁶ The gesture of distancing has long served as a method for placing, fixating and identifying the concept of nature along particular historical and socio-political lineages. This distance is perceived in a number of ways; however, most notably is how the reified concept of nature has only further perpetuated the idea of nature ‘over yonder’; limited to wilderness sanctuaries and unoccupied landscapes. Returning to Hegel’s triad, we find that Žižek’s reading of “In-Itself” offers insight into how the gesture of distancing is a key coordinate within theories of the ideology of nature. More precisely, ideology “In-Itself” refers to “the immanent notion of ideology as a doctrine, a composite of ideas, beliefs, concepts

¹⁷⁴ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 154

¹⁷⁵ Žižek, *The Žižek Reader*, 54

¹⁷⁶ Ibid: 63

and so on, destined to convince us of its ‘truth,’ yet actually serving some unavowed particular power interest.”¹⁷⁷ Applying this reading of ‘In-Itself’ to the concept of nature, it is apparent that writings on nature and ecology are never without disparate ideologies and political agendas.

For example, it seems that many contemporary environmental political strategies are geared towards a simulacrum of ecology insofar as they fixate on a particular portrayal of how natural landscapes, resources, and imbalances should be managed, and moreover, ultimately assume that an enduring ecology can successfully be ‘managed.’ Significant to this claim is what Timothy Morton highlights as the ‘betrayal of ecology,’ or rather, the managerial approaches in ‘preserving’ and maintaining the aesthetic qualities of a concept of nature. He notes: “In Lakewood, Colorado, residents objected to the construction of a solar array in a park in 2008, because it didn’t look “natural.” Objections to wind farms are similar – made not because of the risk to birds but because they “spoil the view.”¹⁷⁸ Another example of this ‘betrayal of ecology,’ I argue, is the recycling industry. In Peterborough, Ontario this past summer, the local government considered enforcing a city by-law that would impose costly fines on aluminium and glass blue-box scavengers. City councillor, Leslie Parnell, stated: “we’re not after the individual in the city who desperately needs that extra money to survive and eat.”¹⁷⁹ Yet, in the same breath, advised city residents to not put their recycling out until the morning of their collection day so that scavengers would not have enough time to collect any glass, aluminium, etc. The proposed by-law is targeted at “increasing the amount of high-value recyclable materials” processed by the city’s private recycling contractor.¹⁸⁰ What is revealed in this political rhetoric is the illusion that our environmental choices, such as recycling, are ‘friendly’ ‘ethical,’ and

¹⁷⁷ Ibid

¹⁷⁸ Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 9

¹⁷⁹ “Blue Box Pillagers Face Fines.” Peterborough Examiner. July 30th, 2013.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid

contribute to a maintaining a 'balanced' system. By imposing fines on the poor, 'green' consumers habitually perpetuate and normalize capitalist production and the unequal social relations and material conditions that these discourses have bred. Moreover, recalling Marx's notion of 'the dull compulsion of the economic,' we find that inherent in recycling practices are commodity-exchange principles that deem particular natural resources as 'worthy,' and in doing so, create a discourse in how we ascribe 'worthy' actions and practices. In this hierarchal and managerial approach to nature, our 'ethical' duties and choices only extend to maintaining the status quo. Illustrating this point, Marx recalls how wage labour provides workers with leisurely incentives insofar as a German worker can afford, both in her 'leisure time' or 'free time' and with the money from her labour, to enjoy her beer. In relation to this claim, I argue that environmentalism today functions in a similar fashion. In the case of recycling, by putting our recycling out we can comfortably continue to produce, consume, and dispose of products knowing that we 'did our part' on Wednesday. This managerial approach to the natural world is indicative of how distant the appearance of 'environmentalism' is from reality, or as Boris Groys eloquently states: "Of course, we know, at least since Magritte, that a painted apple is not a real apple."¹⁸¹ The streets lined neatly with blue bins instead of scattered trash illustrates the brush strokes to the kind of 'nature' we imagine, yet cannot fully bring to fruition. Expanding on this claim, Žižek argues that when technological mechanisms are considered the solution to averting ecological catastrophe, we slide back into late-capitalist ideology. Borrowing from Hegelian dialectics, Žižek observes modern media allows for an all-pervasive proximity to events around the world, and in so doing, "removes us from the authentic dimension of human existence."¹⁸² In other words, without recognition that the 'essence' of the subject cannot be reduced to

¹⁸¹ Groys, Boris (2004). 'The insider is curious, the outsider is suspicious' in Geert Lovink, *Uncanny Networks: Dialogues with the Virtual Intelligentsia*. MIT Press, Cambridge

¹⁸² Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 16

technological mechanisms and mastery, we remain within the matrix of capitalist ideology and retain the illusion that the world is calculable and controllable.

This dominant political orientation of nature and environmentalism demonstrates the ways that nature represents meaning *via* aesthetic beauty, and moreover, highlights the ways we prefer to covertly interact with and exploit ecological systems. Preference for covert exploitation, such as underground pipelines, offshore drilling, and landfill sites, sustains the illusion that ‘protected’ natural landscapes are able to remain unharmed and undisturbed by resource development and extraction. Similarly, this claim can be applied to a number of other ways we are alienated and repressed in our own subjectivity. For example, the former American “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy signifies the ways in which reality is distorted in order to project a particular ‘harmonious’ and ‘balanced’ order. Beneath the traumatic antagonism is the displacement and reduction of difference, which, for Adorno and Žižek, represents the ways in which reality is effectively masked in its promise of freedom, liberty and equality. Carried within the failed promises of liberal ideals is the historical progression and repression of particular fixated concepts, or as Plato conceded in *The Republic*, “dictatorship naturally arises out of democracy, and the most aggravated form of tyranny and slavery out of the most extreme liberty.”¹⁸³ In other words, when political goals are situated as absolute truths, we resign from an enduring commitment to the essence of the ‘non-identical,’

Subverting fixation on ideological concepts within environment politics is the radical goal - if only to collapse particular identifications. Accordingly, the concept of nature became problematic when we assigned a place and value to it, thus a rigorous and relentless ‘truth process’ is necessary in order to shift the idea that the environment surrounds us rather than encompasses us. An important divergence between Adorno and Žižek’s writings on nature and

¹⁸³ Plato (2006). *The Republic*. Eds. G.R.F. Ferrari. Trans. Tom Griffith. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

ecology should be noted here in regards to natural beauty and aesthetic rationality.¹⁸⁴ Specifically, Adorno destabilizes the hierarchies between natural beauty and artificial beauty in order to transcend the dominant equivalence-exchange system applied to nature. For Adorno, natural beauty is capable of reconciling the relations between culture and nature by bringing about ‘the remembrance of nature within the subject.’¹⁸⁵ Emphasizing natural beauty as the foundational component to understanding and interpreting artistic beauty, Adorno contends that: “It is for this reason that art requires philosophy, which interprets it in order to say what is unsayable, whereas art is only able to say it by not saying it.”¹⁸⁶ For Adorno, the combination between artistic and natural beauty symbolizes the empty place in conceptual identifications wherein critical theory and committed praxis emerges. Many critics of Adorno contend that his work privileges images as a way to provoke natural beauty, and in doing so, sets forth a particular aesthetic philosophy in order to interpret and appreciate such images. In the attempt to present a non-hierarchical relationship between natural beauty and artistic beauty in Adorno’s posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory*, a number of criticisms and questions emerge concerning how aesthetic qualities of the natural world are represented and whether they traverse their particular historical narratives. Expanding on Adorno’s claim that philosophies of art and nature share a mutual interdependence, it seems that his theory could be read as a way to continue the dialectic project against perceived dualisms, and more precisely, offer a theory of how to appreciate and engage with the ineffable. For Adorno, meaningfulness and enchantment is inscribed insofar as there remains an unknown ‘remainder’; the aesthetic dimension that resists

¹⁸⁴ ‘Aesthetic rationality’ can be defined as: “a form of rationality which governs the coherence and unity of a work of art: ‘Art is not something pre-rational or irrational...Rationality in the artwork is the unity-founding organizing element, not unrelated to the rationality that governs externally, but it does not reflect its categorizing order.”

Adorno, Theodor, *Aesthetic Theory*, 55

¹⁸⁵ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 32

¹⁸⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 72

conceptual fixation. Building on this claim, Timothy Morton suggests that Adorno's aesthetic theory represents how "art gives what is nonconceptual an illusive appearance. This is the aim of environmental literature: to encapsulate a utopian image of nature which does not really exist (we have destroyed it) and which goes beyond our conceptual grasp."¹⁸⁷ It seems to me that the contention within this framework is that by granting and maintaining aesthetic qualities to 'nature' we irrevocably reduce its essence. Significantly, a theoretical deadlock emerges insofar as we recognize that utopia *is* historical, and yet, fixate 'nature's' 'natural' qualities. Moreover, I agree with Morton that the nonconceptual image is illusive, but also, add that its illusiveness is not without particular ideological mechanisms that make 'real' oppressive conditions. Alternatively, we should not reduce images and icons - like metaphors - to utopic images of a former world, but rather, rigorously politicize 'wilderness' and 'natural' aesthetics in order to reveal their operative functions.

Further criticizing and opposing conceptions of 'natural beauty,' Žižek argues that the reification of aesthetic theory and natural beauty perpetuates a mystification of nature and ecological systems at large. Alternatively, consumer cultures must learn to 'embrace our trash' rather than turn a blind eye to toxic consumption patterns and cynicism. In formulating what Žižek calls the 'real political ecology,' garbage landfill sites and waste-water treatment plants act as central pillars in mapping and integrating ecological systems and ideas of nature. More precisely, meaning is garnered from sites of contestation that rupture ideas of 'working' global market mechanisms. Strengthening this claim, Žižek observes that, "although capitalism is global, encompassing the whole world, it sustains a *stricto sensu* "worldless" ideological constellation, depriving the vast majority of people of any meaningful cognitive orientation."¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, 24

¹⁸⁸ Žižek, Slavoj (2012). *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*. Verso, London: 55

Urban landscapes are often riddled with signs and images of nature; gardens, birds, lakes, and trees without the visible grooming efforts and products that make nature ‘natural’ to city-dwellers. In this way, the concept of nature is ‘worldless,’ insofar as it is only defined by its relationship to how we utilize it as a photo-op or space to look upon, thereby exhausting all of alternative functions.

Along the lines of this reorganization and descent towards ‘real political ecology,’ a number of questions remain concerning how the distance between the illusion of natural and the ‘real’ natural world is maintained. Curiously, the openness and flexibility of a dominant ideology renders it more powerful as it provokes and reflects a social reality while maintaining its ironic distance. Eagleton highlights this point in the following passage:

Ideology is not primarily a matter of ‘ideas’: it is a structure which imposes itself upon us without necessarily having to pass through consciousness at all. Viewed psychologically, it is less a system of articulated doctrines than a set of images, symbols and occasionally concepts which we ‘live’ at an unconscious level. Viewed sociologically, it consists in a range of material practices or rituals (voting, saluting, genuflecting and so on) which are always embedded in material institutions.¹⁸⁹

Drawing heavily on Althusser and Marx, Eagleton asserts that ideology inherits habitual behaviour rather than conscious thought and critical reflection. Furthering this articulation and separation of ideology and consciousness, Žižek claims that at its most rudimentary level ideology implies the ‘misrecognition of its own presuppositions’ insofar as it masks and distorts social reality. However, ideological distortion does not imply that because we do not see the trash we produce, it therefore does not exist within our social reality. Moreover, as I will argue in the next section, social realities not only see and recognize particular conditions, but also, re-configure reality in such a way whereby our commitment to radical change is pacified. In debunking the ‘out of sight, out of mind’ myth, or alternatively, the ‘*for what they know not what*

¹⁸⁹ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 148-9

they do' biblical dogma, I turn to Peter Sloterdijk and Žižek's critical writings on 'enlightened false consciousness' in order to argue that, although we may know that we are rapidly depleting ecological systems, we continue to do it anyway because the function of ideology has superseded any imaginative way out of the current capitalist global system.

SECTION 2.3 ENLIGHTENED FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS

In the *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Peter Sloterdijk argues that:

Cynicism is *enlightened false consciousness*. It is that modernized, unhappy consciousness, on which enlightenment has labored both successfully and unsuccessfully. It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably was not able to, put them into practice. Well-off and miserable at the same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology; its falseness is already reflexively buffered.¹⁹⁰

According to Sloterdijk, 'enlightened false consciousness' follows a particular logical paradox whereby the urge for individuals to necessitate action out of moral consciousness is nullified if not erased completely. This erasure of ethical praxis cumulates through systematic repetition of coercion, and moreover, signifies the ways 'the cynic' adjusts in order to render domination and violence as part of societal conditions. The adjustment is not simply marked by a state of 'permanent self-denial' but also the kind of malaise that Marx's discusses in his writings on the 'dull compulsion of the economic.' Our responsiveness and critical inquiry is slowly exhausted by systems of oppression and condition moral consciousness to act favorably towards the dominating system.

The conditioning of violence under the guise of 'business as per usual' is what Sloterdijk refers to as the 'new cynicism.' Specifically, 'new cynicism' refers to the distance between illusion and reality, and as Sloterdijk argues, the ways in which the cynical subject, when made aware of the illusion she is under, insists upon maintaining the illusion nonetheless. Furthermore,

¹⁹⁰ Sloterdijk, Peter (1987). *Critique of Cynical Reason*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis: 44

the cynic is not ignorant nor is she under the spell of illusion, but, rather, well aware of political interests and ideological falsehoods that guide and maintain social behaviours and narratives. The refusal to renounce political interests is, for Sloterdijk and Žižek, upheld insofar as the cynic maintains reasons or justifications for retaining the illusion. For example, it is much easier to buy into the illusion of a ‘balanced’ system than to expose the brutal reality inherent within the concept of nature. In so doing, we associate and see our ethical responsibilities through the lens of consumption patterns. We are inundated with metaphorical and ideological narratives, such as the most recent ‘keep calm and carry on’; a way to ironically and sarcastically acknowledge, yet maintain, the everyday banality of contemporary political systems. Through a network of discursive devices, political systems maintain the logic of ‘putting the blame on the circumstance’¹⁹¹, or rather, the cynical reassurance that, under any other conditions, we would not have acted so unethically, violently, greedily, etc. This ideological cynicism is skilfully illuminated in Brecht’s *Threepenny Opera* as follows; “we would be so good instead of being so rude, if only the circumstances were not of this kind?”¹⁹²

Moreover, Žižek, argues that “cynical distance is just one way – one of many ways – to blind ourselves to the structuring of power of ideological fantasy: even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironic distance, *we are still doing them.*”¹⁹³ A closer investigation of the gesture of distance reveals that irony, cynicism and ideological fantasies are accounted for not solely by the cynic, but, also within the dominant state of relations. Accordingly, Žižek contends that the ruling ideology has accommodated the fact that society will be sceptical of it, and thus, re-configures its discourses as part of pure utility and everyday practice. Recalling Pascal’s writings on internal belief and exterior behaviour, – “act as if you believe, pray, kneel

¹⁹¹ Žižek, *The Žižek Reader*, 59

¹⁹² Brecht, Bertholt (2005). *The Threepenny Opera*. Trans. Ralph Manheim and John Willett. Methuen, York

¹⁹³ Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 316

down, and you shall believe, faith will arrive by itself” – notions of ‘pure utility’ cannot be abstracted from their corresponding ideologies.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, as Žižek argues, “one should never forget that in the symbolic universe, ‘utility’ functions as a reflective notion: it always involves the assertion of utility as meaning.”¹⁹⁵ For example; recently a contractor living in a wealthy area in Westmount, Montreal, was confronted by his neighbours regarding the pick-up truck parked in his laneway. His neighbours had started a petition on the grounds that pick-up trucks do not represent the kind of image that Westmount portrays, and thus, politely demanded that he find another work vehicle more suitable to its image. In other words, meaning was not devoid of this vehicle’s utilitarian purpose, and moreover, represented a ‘working class’ image unwelcomed in the upper class neighbourhood. There are similar cases of residential ‘cleanses’ that represent the ways ideological meaning and political force intersect to re-constitute reality.

In relation to Sloterdijk’s theories on ‘new cynicism,’ Žižek argues that the irony within particular situations is often a result of the blurred relationship between power and knowledge, or what Lacan refers to as ‘University discourse’¹⁹⁶ whereby authority is exerted by ‘expert’ knowledge.¹⁹⁷ For Žižek, knowledge and power are obscured in populist political movements whereby a reactive and participatory crowd appears, but then swiftly disintegrates. Significant to the populist logic is, for Žižek, momentous outbursts that impatiently demand political action without engaging in the full complexity of systemic betrayals. For example, cries for the imprisonment of those responsible for toxic oil spills fail to necessitate the kind of armoury

¹⁹⁴ Althusser, Louis in *Mapping Ideology*, 12

¹⁹⁵ Žižek, *The Žižek Reader*, 90

¹⁹⁶ For Lacan, ‘University discourse’ entails the disjunction between knowledge and power. More precisely, Lacan illuminates the assumption between what we know, and the ‘disproportionate growth in relationship to the effects of power.’ In regards to environmental politics, one could argue that part of our predicament is the persuasion that we do not know enough about nuclear toxicity, greenhouse gases, etc. to demand change and thus, become cynical in our relation to and practice in radical political change. In Jean Claude Milner, *L’arrogance du present. Regards sur une decennia: 1965-1975*. Grasset: Paris 241

¹⁹⁷ Žižek, Slavoj (2009). *First As Tragedy, Then As Farce*. Verso, London: 61

needed to eliminate the potential of it happening again. Žižek’s central point here is: “populism is fundamentally *rē*-active, the result of a reaction to a disturbing intruder. In other words, populism remains a version of the politics of fear: it mobilizes the crowd by stroking up fear of the corrupt external agent.”¹⁹⁸ As such, populism retains the hopeful illusion that legal justice and conviction will in turn result in genuine systematic change. However, it seems that we increasingly witness its opposite effect. Even when laws are in place and convictions are ordered, systems of domination seem to prevail. Arguably, the crisis within populist movements today can be re-imagined through Adorno’s concept of the non-identical. Namely, in order to analyse systemic mechanisms that guide and legitimize violence and domination of nature, we must denounce its aesthetic and conceptual identifications. By doing so, we will not risk regressing into preconceived notions of harmony and balance, but rather, new formulations of a kind of ‘real political ecology.’

SECTION 2.4 NATURE DOES NOT EXIST...YET!

It is horrific not to know the past and yet be able to impact on the future.

Leonardo Padura, *Havana Gold*

Adorno’s late works, such as *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*, touch on many of the concerns and criticisms within environmental politics and critical thought today. For Adorno, moving beyond the ‘harmonious reconciliation’ – or ‘balance’ - between object and subject is imperative to establishing a committed and non-dominating relationship with the natural world.¹⁹⁹ Moreover, as detailed in *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno contends that the conceptual analyses of nature must fully recognize its non-identical features, and in so doing, will render such entities as enduring processes. More precisely, Adorno writes;

¹⁹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹⁹ Martin in Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 123

Every act of making art is an endless endeavour to articulate what is not makeable, namely spirit. This is where the function of art as a restorer of historically repressed nature becomes important. *Nature does not yet exist*. To the degree to which art pines after an image of nature, it represents the truth of non-being. Art becomes conscious of it in a non-identical other.²⁰⁰

Reflecting on this passage, artistic beauty comes to represent a glimpse into the natural world that does *'not yet'* exist. Acknowledging that there is a larger conversation to be had concerning Adorno's theories on artistic and natural beauty, most significant to this project is the subtle formation of the *'not yet'* in relation to truth and the non-identical. Namely, Adorno borrows from Hegelian dialectics that in order for the 'spirit' of nature to be invoked, we must recognize that within its concept is an unknown, non-identical and unstable 'remainder.' More precisely, Adorno draws on and radicalizes Hegel's theory of 'yielding,' or the process whereby "thought merely returns on itself as a reflection of the subject, not the revelation of the object."²⁰¹ Herein lies a critical divergence between Hegelian dialectical systems and The Frankfurt School. Contra Hegelian dialectics, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that 'the self' must resist identifying itself in 'the object' insofar as this identification has the potential to transpire into hierarchal ordering and domination. In his rejection of Hegel's account of 'yielding,' Adorno contends that Hegel fails to reconcile the ways in which 'the subject' is an unstable and elusive category. Moreover, the extension and projection of the 'self' onto 'the object' represents the ways uniqueness is tacitly rejected and repressed through identification. Alternatively, 'yielding' represents a momentary suspension of 'the object' in order to reveal its pervasive 'non-meaning' through a gap in its' conceptual totality or self-enclosed whole. The significance of this gap, I argue, is that it constitutes the *'not yet'*; or, the space in which a 'real political ecology' can be emerge.

²⁰⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 191

²⁰¹ Martin in Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 118

The ‘not yet’ presents a form of futurity without revealing itself. I contend that this is a central component in critical theory and ecological thinking in that it does not present existence as a closed system, but rather an enduring process. Moreover, this subtle expression indicates that only through the substantiation and acknowledgment of existing, repressive conditions (*not*), can we motion towards emancipatory possibilities (*yet*). Furthering this claim, D. Bruce Martin argues that “the exact image of the ‘reconciled’ future will be negatively permeated by past suffering; the not-yet of nature is always indebted in past domination.”²⁰² Recalling Adorno’s writings on *Education After Auschwitz*, it seems as though the ‘not yet’ reminds us that, without relentless self-reflection and interrogation of past and present conditions, we will not be able to discern and denounce the ideologies and political mechanisms which beget immense suffering. Moreover, this nuanced dialectic approach moves beyond the prevailing categories of nature and self, and in turn, recognizes an entity’s irreducible non-meaning and essence. The ‘not-yet’ similarly aligns with Žižek’s story of the descending mountain climber in his article ‘How to Begin at the Beginning Again.’ Namely, I argue that the ‘not yet’ is symbolic of how, as William Leiss observes, “we are forced to confront, squarely and explicitly, the tensions or contradictions that have been present in the entire period of development, and resolve them. Until this is done, we cannot move further forward...”²⁰³ In order to expand on the notion of the ‘not yet.’ I will now turn to Žižek’s writings on nature, and more precisely, his proposition that in order for a ‘real political ecology’ to emerge, we must proclaim that “Nature does not exist!”²⁰⁴

Žižek’s claim rests on the Lacanian formulation that “Woman does not exist,” insofar as she only appears through the ways she is idealized by man. In Elizabeth Wright’s reading of Lacan, she contends that, for Lacan, “woman as an enigma persists in the fantasy of the ‘eternal

²⁰² Ibid: 130

²⁰³ Leiss, William in Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 35

²⁰⁴ Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*

feminine,’ and this induces in woman a masquerade as her only option, beneath which lies, not the ‘true woman,’ but her insignifiable void.”²⁰⁵ This ‘void,’ for Lacan, is representative of the imbalanced and unmarked divisions between the opposing sexes, and moreover, hinges on the perpetuation of symbolic identifications that propagate woman as a ‘symptom’ of man. Examining the proposition that ‘Women does not exist’ more carefully, Žižek states that; “Far from being dismissible as a meaningless paradox, the statement ‘I don’t exist’ can acquire an authentic existential weight in so far as it signals the contraction of the subject into the empty vanishing point of enunciation that precedes every imaginary or symbolic identification.”²⁰⁶ In other words, only by denouncing conceptual, pre-formed, and symbolic identities can we begin to encompass the ‘insurmountable gap’ or ‘void’ present within subject and object. For Žižek, one of the most critical consequences in the opposition of male/female or subject/object ‘balanced’ antinomies of symbolization, is the recognition that, beyond obvious biological facts, “*there is no link*” between the particular identifications and universal concepts.²⁰⁷ Illuminating this claim, Žižek draws on Marx’s notion of ‘class struggle’ and contends that inherent in this notion is the division between the working class and the bourgeoisie. Critical to the formation of this division, Žižek argues that the ‘choosing of sides’ results in “no impartial objective standpoint enabling us to delineate class struggle.” More precisely, the absence of impartiality indicates that; “‘class struggle does not exist’ since ‘there is no element eluding it’ – we cannot apprehend it ‘as such,’ what we are dealing with are always the partial effects whose absent cause is the class struggle.”²⁰⁸ Applying Žižek’s interpretation of ‘class struggle’ to Lacan’s “‘Woman does not exist!,” one can conclude that the rejection of symbolic content is the rejection

²⁰⁵ Wright in *The Žižek Reader*, 128

²⁰⁶ Žižek, *The Žižek Reader*, 135

²⁰⁷ Ibid; 142

²⁰⁸ Ibid; 143

of the conceptual foundations in which systems of domination are built. Moreover, Žižek borrows from Lacan that “‘man’ and ‘woman’ together do not form a whole, since *each of them is already in itself a failed whole.*”²⁰⁹ In other words, sustained and fixed demarcations between ‘self’ and ‘other’ results in ideologies that totalize particular conditions under the guise of universal truth claims. Further critiquing these fundamental antagonisms, James Penney contends that the denouncement or “nonappearance of sex within the realm of signification” does not preclude or exclude its attached discursive functions. Moreover, Penney argues that; “Sex, then, can only be represented by negation within the forms or knowledge or discourse; it makes the spot of the impossibility of meaning or identity, the place where sexual knowledge encounters its own internal subversion.”²¹⁰ Alternatively, ‘non-existence’ and ‘non-identity’ seeks to collapse opposing apparatuses and mimetic practices by re-tracing lines of affinity. Through this regression, identity content appears through mediated social and historical conditions, rather than fragmented, isolated ‘failed parts.’ The task, then, is to announce and reveal the antagonism between conceptual thought and reality in order to bring about an affinity without identity.

In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno highlights how rationality compulsively translates and reduces the non-calculable or ineffable into fixed categories. This reduction of uniqueness is rooted in ontological conditions that intensify and exploit fear in order to achieve and reproduce particular forms of power, regulation, and control. Highlighting this point, Adorno writes that; “in the concentration camps it was no longer an individual who died but a specimen” – a situation whereby those outside the scope of cultural ‘sameness,’ also swiftly fell outside the

²⁰⁹ Ibid; 145

²¹⁰ Penney, *The World of Perversion: Psychoanalysis and the Impossible Absolute of Desire*, 216

scope of the law.²¹¹ Identity is not neutral; it ascribes meaning only insofar as it benefits the prevailing system. The concept of ‘nature’ and its attached qualities and markers, have not enabled a ‘balanced’ system, but rather, sacrificed it in its name. Or, as the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* posits: in the attempt to reduce the natural world to a rational, calculable concept, “human nature is calling to itself, but no longer directly by its supposed name...omnipotence, but as something blind and mutilated.”²¹² Given these divisions and displacements, how do we begin to engage in ‘real political ecology’ if we only know ‘nature’ by its ‘supposed name’?

²¹¹ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 362

²¹² Adorno and Horkheimer (1987). *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Trans. John Cumming. Continuum, New York, 31

CHAPTER 3: IN TIMES OF URGENCY

When it comes to death, we all live in a city without walls.

Epicurus, *Letters and Sayings*

The multitudes have answers to the questions which have not yet been posed, and they have the capacity to outlive the walls. The questions are not yet asked because to do so requires words and concepts which ring true, and those currently being used to name events have now been rendered meaningless: Democracy, Liberty, Productivity, etc. With new concepts the questions will soon be posed, for history involves precisely such a process of questioning. Soon? Within a generation.

John Berger, Afterword

The starting point for environmental investigations is recognizing that society and ‘nature’ are both separable and constitutively interconnected. Critically mapping the relationship between the illusory and real currents of environmental crisis allows us to re-formulate epistemological questions – or rather, the ways in which we have come to understand the world. Often, dominant environmental discourses do not address how the concept of nature is constructed, and moreover, remain ambiguous towards the ways ideological belief systems inform power relations. Dominant environmental discourses dismiss the ideological affinities between nature and society, and thus, environmental political interests and actions largely remain trapped within the conceptual limits of hegemonic structures. By failing to examine normalized interactions and ideologies, a deep sense of cynicism and passivity arises within environmental politics. Further explicating these claims, I turn to Adorno, who suggests that the temporal rhythms of sustained critical thought must precede the rapid deployment of action. More precisely, the hyper-temporal speeds of fascism and capitalism are reinforced by - and encoded

within - the expectation for immediate change and gratification. I argue that Adorno's work on prolonged critical reflectivity aligns with, and is strengthened, by Žižek's writings on radical change. Specifically, this chapter will analyse Žižek's reflections on Occupy, and draw attention to his call to "remember, carnivals come cheap. What matters is the day after, when we will have to return to our daily lives. Will there be any changes then?"²¹³ In response to this question, I propose that accelerated impulses and imperatives for action should not compete with late capitalist structures insofar as it maintains the tempo of an established order. Alternatively, a re-configuration of temporal expectation allows for the possibility of a steadfast and prolonged commitment to revolutionary visions and radical change. Drawing on a combination of Adorno and Žižek's works, I contend that they offer subversive ways of suspending the spiralling of cynicism and passivity, and moreover, suggest new theoretical orientations on radical emancipatory politics. Only by revealing the systemic and ideological mechanisms that maintain existing conditions, can we begin to work towards severing the ideological root wherein domination manifests.

The first section will detail some of the dominant forms of action within counter-ideologies that aim to resolve various contemporary environmental crises. Namely, it seems that particular rationalizations for taking action often arise out of performative contradictions and genuine self-deception. When dominant environmental discourses, such as organic populism and 'green' consumerism, lead to political intervention and action, modes of identity thinking are effectively reinforced. Specifically, I will highlight the discourse known as 'climate porn,' which, for Andrew Biro, "presents the obscene possibilities of catastrophic climate change as

²¹³ Žižek, Slavoj. 'Don't Fall in Love with Yourself' in *Occupy: Scenes from Occupied America*. Verso, London: 68

little more than a spectacle to be passively consumed.”²¹⁴ The aestheticized image has become, in many ways, a way to acknowledge the gravity of human impacts on ecological systems, while instilling a cynical and passive disengagement in how to change the existing conditions.

Reflecting on contemporary counter-ideologies and discourses, I will turn to some of Adorno’s works on critical thought and praxis. Adorno suggests that the expectation for the immediate transformation of social order, more than being ambitious, overlooks the ‘normalized’ social practices and behaviours that permeate throughout hegemonic structures. It is important to note that Adorno is not claiming we abdicate responsibility for our actions, but rather, reflect on how actions contain a constellation of antagonisms that create irreconcilable paradoxes in activist epistemology. I contend that the ecological crisis is representative of the crisis in effective action. Moreover, the second section will present Adorno’s theories on historical and temporal consciousness, and begin to respond to why environmental actions are failing us today. Through this exploration, I turn to Michael Lipscomb, who provides a number of insights on maintaining responsiveness to ‘real’ conditions, while also recognizing the need for temporal re-orientation and alternatives to the prevailing order. My aim is to acknowledge the tempos of expectation in political praxis, and consider how they often compromise the kind of prolonged political engagement that is necessary for the emergence of a ‘real political ecology.’

Lastly, this chapter will expand Adorno’s theories on temporal imperatives through Žižek’s argumentative persuasion ‘*Don’t Act, Just Think!*’²¹⁵ What at first seems counterintuitive to radical politics, I argue, is alternatively the re-ordering of action in order to respond to dominant ideologies today. By illuminating some of the environmental political rhetoric that gives rise to responsiveness, Žižek argues we “encounter the fatal weakness of our current

²¹⁴ Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 240-245

²¹⁵ Žižek, ‘*Don’t Act! Just Think! Big Think*’

protests. They express authentic rage that remains unable to transform itself into even a minimal positive program for socio-political change. They express a spirit of revolt without revolution.”²¹⁶ A resurgence in critical thought, or ‘return to philosophy’ more broadly, can reframe the demands for immediate action, and in turn, begin to theorize on how to effectively inaugurate the possibility of imagining the end of capitalism and a world wherein “nature does not (*yet*) exist!”

Section 3.1 DISCURSIVE TRAPS

In recent years, contemporary environmental politics have gained greater momentum. However, despite the heightened activity simmering in rural and urban communities alike, there remains a crisis in how to re-configure the re-occurring perceptual and prudential failures witnessed in environmental movements.²¹⁷ Reflecting upon the failures to create and sustain radical change, many political ecologists including Andrew Biro contend that, “the environmental crisis needs be understood as a cultural phenomenon as much as an ecological one.”²¹⁸ Similar sentiments were expressed nearly a decade prior by Val Plumwood, who wrote: “The problem is not primarily about knowledge or technology; it is about developing an environmental culture that values and fully acknowledges the non-human sphere and our dependency on it, and is able to make good decisions about how we live and impact on the non-human world.”²¹⁹ And, again, seven years earlier, Andrew Dobson reminded us: “it is essential that Greens take seriously the material and ideological circumstances within which the “call to education” is made, and which are surely in danger of appropriating and disfiguring the project

²¹⁶ Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, 78

²¹⁷ It should be noted that ‘failures’ does not refer to specific movements, but rather, the negative repercussions and heightened levels of inequality experienced in recent decades. Despite technological intervention and the social recognition of environmental crisis, individuals increasingly witness a world slowly becoming inhabitable (i.e., desertification, flooding, water scarcity, and toxic ‘sacrifice zones’.)

²¹⁸ Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 240-245

²¹⁹ Plumwood, Val (2002). *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*. Routledge, New York; 3

before it gets off the ground.”²²⁰ Complimentary sentiments such as these have served to remind us that, over the many decades, moments of heightened revolt have failed to bring about revolutionary ideals, or more precisely, eliminate the ruthless exploitation of natural resources. In these failures, I suggest that perhaps environmental politics has in itself become a broken record, looping over the same mistakes, and even more, now sitting at the throne of an industry that it once so fervently opposed.

Significant to the cultivation of environmental activism and rhetoric is the ways in which the ‘greening’ of capitalism has projected itself into a wide range of seemingly opposing political paradigms. This claim can be further explicated through Žižek’s writing on the ways ecology is ‘appropriated’ in order to further particular hegemonic articulations. He writes:

Ecology, for example, is never ‘ecology as such,’ it is always enchained in a specific series of equivalences...The point, of course, is that none of these enchainments is in itself ‘true,’ inscribed in the very nature of the ecological problematic: which discourse will succeed in ‘appropriating’ ecology depends on the fight for discursive hegemony, whose outcome is not guaranteed by an underlying necessity or ‘natural alliance.’²²¹

The inscription of ecology into hegemonic discourses marks the division between the ‘real’ conditions of ecology and the perceived identifications that have externalized and commodified the ‘ecological problematic’ or crisis. Given that ecology is now part of the very same ideological foundations which perpetuate its demise, how do we substantiate effective change? In other words, how do we engage in the specific content that has made, as Žižek observes, ecology “the ideal candidate for hegemonic ideology?” Examining this question more

²²⁰ Dobson, Andrew (1995). ‘Critical Theory and Green Politics’ in *Politics of Nature: Explorations in Green Political Theory*. Ed. Andrew Dobson and Paul Lucardie. Routledge, New York: 190

²²¹ Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 12

Žižek argues that the following dominant political approaches to ecology and ‘balance’ are as follows: “it can be conservation (advocating for the return to balanced rural communities and traditional ways of life), etatist (only strong state regulation can save us from the impending catastrophe), socialist (the ultimate cause of ecological problems resides in capitalist profit-oriented exploitation of natural resources), liberal-capitalist (one should include the damage to the environment in the price of the product, and thus leave the market to regulate the ecological balance), feminist (the exploitation of nature follows from the male attitude of domination), anarchic self-managerial (humanity can survive only if it reorganizes itself into small self-reliant communities that live in balance with nature), and so on.” Ibid.

thoroughly, I turn to some of the paradoxes and failures enmeshed in environmental discourse today through the works of Andrew Biro.

Biro suggests that advanced capitalism has triumphed in inoculating a politics wherein acts of opposition and revolt are accounted for, or entangled within, the prevailing social order. Specifically, Biro details two extreme ‘counter-ideologies’ that have emerged in environmental politics; the first is an appeal to organic populism and the emphasis on ‘earth wisdom’; rebuilding a transcendental or spiritual relationship with a ‘balanced’ nature. The second counter-ideology is the instrumentalization of geo-greening and technocratic approaches to understanding how to mitigate negative human impacts on the environment.²²² Both approaches are premised on the idea that urgent action is how we proceed. More precisely, in the first counter-ideology, we see that the attempt to ‘get back to nature’ hinges on preconceived ideas of nature; while the second projects nature as an instrument that can be controlled, contained, mastered, and utilized. These counter-ideologies neglect to engage in how they have become incorporated into the capitalist economy, and thus, as Biro writes, “cease to become a vehicle for the expression and transformation of lived social forms and rather, increasingly become a vehicle for the accumulation of economic value.”²²³ An example of the second counter-ideology on technocratic and managerial approaches to ecological systems is biofuel. Biofuel is a commonly promoted, yet highly contentious, strategy for mitigating climate change. Significantly, energy consumption patterns remain intact under the guise of promoting a less destructive form of energy. However, the development of biofuels “distorts food prices and are exacerbating food insecurity, and in addition are threatening forests, which are being transformed into plantations

²²² Ibid, 232

²²³ Ibid, 235

for biofuel crops.”²²⁴ The production and consumption of biofuels, then, does not simply threaten ecological systems, but does so under the guise of environmental-friendly ideologies. In respect to the former counter-ideology regarding ‘earth wisdom,’ we see a steady shift against globalization and towards localization. The erosion of global economics, however, does not interrogate the ideologies that situate ‘nature’ as a geographic localized location or ‘place.’ More specifically, Timothy Morton observes that, “our notions of place are retroactive fantasy constructs determined precisely by the corrosive effects of modernity. Place was not lost, though we posit it as something we have lost.”²²⁵ By projecting a concept of nature rooted in particular a ‘place,’ the counter-ideology re-enforces and maintains the grip of particular illusions, such as the notion that nature exists in fragmented pockets behind iron fences. Moreover, the ‘earth-wisdom’ counter-ideology fails to account for the mechanical and systematic ways that natural resources are exploited. Or, as Žižek posits, “the solution is not ‘Main Street, not Wall Street,’ but to change the system in which Main Street is dependent on Wall Street.”²²⁶

In addition to these two counter-ideologies, Biro highlights a central discourse in environmental politics, referred to as ‘climate porn.’ ‘Climate porn’ is commonly utilized in environmental campaigns, which “resort to cataclysmic images that render the viewer powerless in terms of agency.”²²⁷ Drawing on the Frankfurt School’s notion of the ‘culture industry,’ Biro argues that ‘climate porn,’ while describing the scope and complexity of a particular problem, discourages individuals from self-reflection and critical action. Rather, ‘climate porn’ responds to overwhelming and unprecedented levels of climate change by acting “as a spectacle” wherein

²²⁴ Grog, Christoph in Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 59

²²⁵ Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, 11

²²⁶ Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, 78

²²⁷ Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 242

the images “can only be passively consumed.”²²⁸ Framed in this way, ‘climate porn’ portrays a cynical image of a world beyond repair, and in so doing, precludes possibilities of change. Normalizing ‘climate porn’ through repetition, as Biro argues, effectively becomes a branding strategy, or rather, sets forth the idea that “we have to approach positive climate behaviours in the same way as marketers approach acts of buying and consuming... *It amounts to treating climate-friendly everyday activities as a brand that can be sold.*”²²⁹ The attempt to transform capitalism by instilling ‘green’ consumer habits vis-à-vis cataclysmic, apocalyptic images ultimately ignores the profound impacts it has on human subjectivity. More precisely, by distorting the real effects that climate change has on human existence through an appeal to sensationalized, emotionally laden imagery “the possibility of consciously reflecting on how this transformation might be managed will be lost.”²³⁰ In other words, ‘climate porn’ merely mimics the prevailing social order by maintaining a particular construction of nature, and in mediating it through a consumer-based lens. Through the ‘climate porn’ discourse, climate change represents, as Walter Benjamin succinctly writes, “the experience of our self-destruction as a source of aesthetic pleasure.”²³¹ Appeals to emotion offer fertile ground for premature gratification in action, and moreover, fail to transgress the inherent, destructive paradoxes within the concept of nature. In other words, intense moments of individual action do not relay the kind of enduring praxis necessary to radical transformation. Furthermore, Biro argues, “the need to change dramatically has never been more urgent; yet the political will to make such changes – and especially collective changes – is clearly most absent.”²³² Expanding on these discourses and counter-ideologies, I turn to the works of Adorno, who offers insight on how the wheels of

²²⁸ Ibid, 243

²²⁹ Ibid, emphasis in original

²³⁰ Ibid, 244

²³¹ Benjamin, Walter (2000). ‘The Work of Art’ in Stuart Ewen’s video ‘The Add and The Ego’. Parallax, London

²³² Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 6

capitalist production maintain momentum, and moreover, suggests that urgent action may only further perpetuate the ‘betrayal of ecology.’

Section 3.2 DOWNTEMPOS

Early Frankfurt School theorists increasingly emphasized the concept of nature in correlation to post-war societal transformation. For Adorno and Horkheimer, fostering a dialectical relationship between human beings and the natural world would enable greater reflection on how to abolish hierarchies, and in turn, oppose forms of oppression inherent in the established socio-political order. In ‘*Marginalia to Theory and Praxis*,’ Adorno posits that reconciliation between divisive antagonisms is possible, but, only if the ‘non-identical’ is accommodated in the pursuit of common goals. More precisely, Deborah Cook argues that, “[Adorno] aims to foster reconciliation by overcoming the tyranny of the One to reveal the astounding profusion of the Many.”²³³ Further analysing the concept of ‘reconciliation,’ I question how environmental politics moves towards Adorno’s hopeful visions of the ‘Many’ considering how critical he is of collective action and counter-ideologies.

For Adorno, activism and consensus are often corrupted by strategic manoeuvres and manipulated discussions, and furthermore, are underscored by an “authoritarian principle: the dissenter must adopt the group’s opinion.”²³⁴ Given that consensus relies on agreement and unity – which for Adorno signifies authoritarianism and identity thinking - collective practice easily falls back into mimicking existing exploitative conditions. Significantly, Adorno suggests that in order to avoid continuing the goals of oppressive ideologies, political action should be suspended as to ensure that individuals will “not threaten to turn out for the worst even when it meant for

²³³ Cook, *Adorno: On Nature*, 162

²³⁴ Adorno, ‘*Marginalia to Theory and Praxis*’ in *Critical Models: Intervention and Catchwords*, 269

the best.”²³⁵ Moreover, Adorno contends that counter-ideologies are “hardly perceived and then only so that formulaic clichés can be served up in response.” In turn, counter-ideologies become “usable by means of engineered discussion and coerced solidarity”; and also may be discredited, or “speechified out the window for the sake of publicity or self-advertisement.”²³⁶ In order to avoid endorsing capitalist technological order and practices, Adorno moves towards a prolonged vision of critical thought. However, given the rapid speeds at which environmental crisis besets us, how do we remain dialectically patient and temporally critical in these times of urgency?

Further explicating this point, Michael Lipscomb observes that Adorno’s temporal re-orientation reveals a central paradox: “in a circumstance that demands speed, that imposes it as a rule of the game, Adorno endorses a qualitatively richer slowness, a prolongation of focus and encounter that seems out of step with the culturally predominant, technologically sped-up tempo of our times.”²³⁷ Adorno resists authoritarian impulses by unpacking the logic of its expected tempo, and moreover, by critiquing all action that demands immediate reward. Alternatively, by interrupting the speed that capitalism deploys itself, normalized political ideologies are revealed as contingent conditions, rather than the means of our existence. Recalling Biro’s writings on ‘climate porn,’ I suggest that Adorno and Horkheimer’s theories on temporality allow us to engage in how images mediate experience, and moreover, in re-tracing the ways in which we have lost “the layer of experience which made words human like those who spoke them.”²³⁸ In other words, the critical intervention into temporal-historical trajectories enables us to untangle the totalizing logic and infinite horizon of advanced capitalism and the concept of nature. More precisely, Adorno’s writings can help to uncover some of the failures within environmental

²³⁵ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 245

²³⁶ Adorno. ‘*Marginalia to Theory and Praxis*’ in *Critical Models: Intervention and Catchwords*, 269

²³⁷ Lipscomb in Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 282

²³⁸ Adorno and Horkheimer (1987). *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, 135

counter-ideologies and discourses, insofar as it “recognizes the strong connection between thinking and habitual, embodied practise, and how, moreover, capitalist forms of production are mediated by logics of cultural production and consumption reaching into our bodies through the habituating repetition of our work and our play.”²³⁹ For Adorno, mapping the temporal terrains of action and gratification is necessary in order to oppose the mechanisms that sustain a means-ends level or instrumental approach to the natural world.

In order to escape looping back over historical failures, Adorno’s theories offer new ways of thinking about the epistemological-ideological level of social interactions and the concept of nature. Borrowing from Adorno and Marx, Lipscomb furthers the critique of temporal ideology by suggesting that negative dialectics and critical theory increase our understanding of how technological development and the proliferation of global markets continuously shape societal behaviours. Lipscomb writes:

In a world in which time is rationalized by both our labour and our experience of free time, and where time itself – like the entirety of nature with which it is necessarily entwined – is regularly turned into a consumable commodity, the possibilities for autonomy seem wedded to strategies for finding the contrapuntal spaces, where, and the times when, a critical thinking might still take place.²⁴⁰

In this passage, Lipscomb highlights the necessity to separate and diffuse ideological illusions from ‘real’ conditions in order to sustain critical thinking. More precisely, critical theory reflects on the prefigured and prescribed temporal rhythm of capitalism, and in doing so, draws out some of the mystifications that constitute reality. By gesturing towards a ‘pause’ in the rhythm of the seamless production of hegemonic ideology, we can glimpse into new ways of invoking and cultivating a ‘nature that does not *yet* exist.’

²³⁹ Lipscomb in Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 286

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 290

Critical to Adorno's theories on radical change is the recognition that there is an explicit relationship between the temporal capitalist order, and the subjective ethos it produces. Specifically, Adorno critiques time's existential content and subjective experience: "The irreversibility of time constitutes an objective moral criterion. But it is one intimately related to myth like abstract time itself. The exclusiveness implicit in time gives rise, by its inherent law, to the exclusive domination of hermetically sealed groups, finally to that of big business."²⁴¹ Thus, temporal order – like ideology and language – operates both externally and internally; ultimately framing our relationship to permanence, progress, risk, and immediacy. In regards to environmental politics, the temporal speeds that we repress and react to environmental crises often align with immediate gratification (e.g., disaster relief) and/or cynicism (e.g., climate porn). Furthermore, as Lipscomb argues, the increasing speeds and normalization of advanced capitalism and the "fascination with the new that this inspires, even our most intimate and seemingly organic relationships always face the risk of falling back into the logic of our prevailing social norms."²⁴² Through the critique of temporal rhythms, then, we can reflect on how normalized behaviours, ideologies, and systems are not timeless or 'natural,' but rather, part of particular socio-historical origins. By anchoring the concept of nature in cultural and economic material registers, 'counter-time' theories can suspend notions of progress, and in turn, reveal subversive ways of destabilizing the steady machinery of capitalism.

For Adorno, radical change presupposes a critical understanding of the social behaviours that derail effective action. Alternatively, critical theory suggests that radical change "requires a better understanding of our current predicament, a predicament in which the most well-meaning

²⁴¹ Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from the Damaged Life*, 78

²⁴² Lipscomb in Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 302

individuals often sustain the very system they impose, even in their resistance to it.”²⁴³ Detailed in this way, critical theory can thus be expressed as a form of political action wherein it continuously questions, reflects, and subverts the tendencies and trends that undermine effective action. Expanding on this claim, I turn to the works of Žižek, who, borrowing from Frankfurt School theories, proclaims: “Don’t Act, Just Think!”²⁴⁴ By reflecting on the ways historical imagination has been imprinted by capitalist ideology, Žižek suggests that in order to substantiate radical political change, we must learn to distinguish reality from the ‘aestheticized’ image of it.²⁴⁵

3.3 AGAINST INSTRUCTION

Central to Žižek’s theories on radical change is the idea that hegemonic ideology has removed us from knowing how to articulate and imagine alternative ways of subjective experiences. More precisely, Žižek highlights the distortion of reality through the following joke:

A guy was sent from East Germany to work in Siberia. He knew his mail would be read by censors, so he told his friends: “Let’s establish a code. If a letter you get from me is written in blue ink, it is true what I say. If it is written in red ink, it is false.” After a month, his friends get the first letter. Everything is in blue. It says, this letter: “Everything is wonderful here. Stores are full of good food. Movies theatres show good films from the West. Apartments are large and luxurious. The only thing you cannot buy is red ink.” This is how we live. We have all the freedoms we want. But what is missing is red ink: the language to articulate our non-freedom.²⁴⁶

The red ink, or the language of our ‘non-freedom,’ is a critique of how communicative structures are systematically concealed, normalized, and distorted. Thus, when we demand action, encoded within the very language is a set of particular discursive networks and competing idioms. Furthering this point, Eagleton argues that, “the besieging of language is not just an external matter: on the contrary, such dominion inscribes itself on the inside of our speech, so that

²⁴³ Cook, *Adorno: On Nature*, 130-131

²⁴⁴ Žižek, ‘Don’t Act! Just Think!’

²⁴⁵ Žižek, *The Žižek Reader*, 68

²⁴⁶ Žižek, ‘Don’t Fall in Love with Yourselves’ in *Occupy: Scenes from Occupied America*, 67-68

ideology becomes a set of effects internal to particular discourses themselves.”²⁴⁷ Often, coherent demands for change appeal to established systems and structures by mimicking the dominant pre-existing structures of freedom and identity. By articulating our needs for a ‘better’ life through a ‘higher’ wage, we fail to acknowledge the essence of subjectivity – or rather the ways in which humanity “cannot be reduced to a technological animal.”²⁴⁸ Recalling the enlightenment conception of ‘progress,’ I contend that within demands for a sustainable future, we have continued to strive towards a vision of nature that can be mastered and controlled. Reflecting on this notion, William Leiss writes; “Progress – conceived of as the progressive deepening of the idea of freedom – is a circle: when an epoch of historical development started nearing ‘fulfilment,’ the human actors arrive back where they started.”²⁴⁹ This passage can be interpreted in two ways; the first, is that progress perpetuates an idea of freedom far removed from its reality. Thus, in our pursuit towards freedom, we fall back into a spiralling web of ideology and failed actions. The second reading, is one wherein the myths that once permeated notions of ‘freedom’ have been revealed and redeemed, and thus we circle back to the socio-historical site or origin of its original meaning, or rather, ‘begin at the beginning again.’

Expanding on notions of freedom and progress, I return to Adorno, who suggests; only by working towards an articulation of ‘unfreedom,’ or non-identity, can we “open the road to the multiplicity of different things and strip dialectics of its power over them.”²⁵⁰ Moreover, Adorno’s theories on non-identity and ‘unfreedom’ aim towards a vision of utopia without the prospect of a former existence; or rather, the ways in which natural beauty “recollects a world

²⁴⁷ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 129

²⁴⁸ Žižek, *The Žižek Reader*, 69

²⁴⁹ Leiss, William in Biro, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, 35

²⁵⁰ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 6

without domination, one that probably never existed.”²⁵¹ Here, Adorno claims that natural beauty holds a ‘utopian promise’ that, despite having never been experienced, remains possible. Furthering the claim that we can remain committed to a vision of utopia without instruction, I turn to Žižek’s writings on the Occupy movement, or moment when the ‘Many’ gathered without knowing how to articulate a ‘better’ world.

For Žižek, Occupy Wall Street - a movement that was propelled without coherent demands or utopian promises – represented the fact that “there is something fundamentally wrong with the system, and the existing forms of institutionalized democracy are not strong enough to deal with problems.”²⁵² Occupy, I argue, symbolizes the ways in which action without articulation of answers serves as a strategy for pausing or interrupting the temporal rhythm of hegemonic ideology. Rather than attempting to replace the throne, we have begun to question the very ontological grounds that legitimize its function. Or, as Žižek asserts; “their basic message is: the taboo has been broken, we do not live in the best possible world; we are allowed, obliged even, to think about the alternatives.”²⁵³ Resisting the concretization of demands allows for us to move towards the seemingly impossible through critical self-reflection. The task today is to explicitly acknowledge the impossible so that, as Murray Bookchin writes, we are not “faced with the unthinkable.”²⁵⁴ Thinking about alternatives is, I argue, how we maintain an enduring, committed praxis towards a ‘real political ecology.’ Echoing similar sentiments expressed in Adorno’s writing on counter-tempos, Žižek contends that Occupy represents a ‘beginning,’ or rather; the first “formal gesture of rejection” wherein we can “open up a space for new

²⁵¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 66

²⁵² Žižek, ‘*Don’t Act! Just Think!*’

²⁵³ Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, 77

²⁵⁴ Bookchin, Murray

content.”²⁵⁵ What is central today in environmental politics is the idea that critical thought and reflection necessitates genuine, committed action – or, we must *first* critique the concepts that shape and limit political systems before we can articulate a ‘real political ecology.’ By acknowledging that we do not know how to best proceed in times of urgency, we can begin to “clear the table,” or rather, acknowledge that the temporal speeds at which we project our demands may be “trying to change the world too quickly.” Significantly, Žižek observes that, in the 21st Century, “the time is to interpret the world again.”²⁵⁶ ‘Interpreting the world’ consists of descending towards the elementary cell of capitalism, which for Žižek, is the “*inherent structural imbalance*.” Similarly, I have argued that there is a fundamental antagonism within the ideology of natural balance, namely that it distorts and limits us from ascertaining a real political ecology. For Žižek, “capitalism has no ‘normal,’ balanced state: its normal state is the permanent production of an excess, the only way for capitalism to survive is to expand.”²⁵⁷ Political constructs, like the concept of nature, thrive under the illusion of an inherited ‘balance’ aimed at reproducing and naturalizing capitalist ideals, and moreover, function as discursive tactics that limit the scope of radical change. Ideas of a ‘balanced’ world are settled in a series of pragmatic paradoxes such as: we must maintain a presupposed timeless world.

Reflecting on action, Žižek observes that “this is what a proper political act would be today: not so much to unleash a new movement, as to *interrupt* the present predominant movement.”²⁵⁸ Significantly, this interruption enables us to re-formulate historical struggles in relation to the weakening ecological conditions we witness today. More precisely, Marx’s writings aimed at uniting the proletariat through appeals to material inequality, or “nothing to

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 83

²⁵⁶ Ibid

²⁵⁷ Žižek, *Tarrying With the Negative*, 209 emphasis in original

²⁵⁸ Ibid

lose but their chains,” must be re-figured in order to capture the impact advanced capitalist systems has on ‘the commons,’ wherein we risk ‘losing everything.’²⁵⁹ By acknowledging that advanced capitalism is dependent upon the ruthless exploitation of finite resources, we also acknowledge that ‘choice’ is part of contingent conditions and not an enduring existence. Thus, there is *no choice* but to confront the inherent limit of our current social and ecological reality. This reflection, as Jean-Paul Dupuy argues, means once again that we “break out of the historical notion of temporality” in order to anticipate the future. He writes;

The catastrophic event is inscribed into the future as destiny, for sure, but also as a contingent accident: it could not have taken place, even if, in *futur anterieur*, it appears necessary...if an outstanding event takes place, it is not inevitable. It is thus the event’s actualization – the fact that it takes place – which retroactively creates its necessity.²⁶⁰

Against apocalyptic narratives that suggest that catastrophe is inevitable, Dupuy argues that we approach radical ecological politics as though it has already taken place. In doing so, we can begin to create and theorize new possibilities beyond those of ‘survive or perish.’ Moreover, for Dupuy, by inserting ourselves into the “time of a project,” we can retroactively think about how we would have acted had the event not seemed so inevitable. Similarly, Alain Badiou suggests that we must act as though the future has already arrived, rather than assuming we have a choice in it.²⁶¹ Reflecting upon these re-iterations of time and historical events, Žižek states that “if we postpone our action until we have full knowledge of the catastrophe, we will have acquired knowledge only when it is too late.”²⁶² Reflecting on Occupy, I contend that ‘crisis’ or the ‘carnival’ itself was not enough to substantiate radical change; however, these moments offer glimpses into alternative possibilities – if only to generate knowledge on what we do not want.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 92

²⁶⁰ Dupuy, Jean-Pierre (2005). *Petite metaphysique des tsunamis*. Seuil, Paris, 19

²⁶¹ Badiou, *Being and Event*

²⁶² Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then As Farce*, 151

More importantly, a crisis cannot be measured by heightened moments of action, but “by the changes the big Event leaves at the level of the everyday, the day after the insurrection.”²⁶³

The series of exacerbating environmental crises in the world today are telling us that time may not be “on our side,” but rather, part of the mechanical reproduction of exploitative conditions. Moving forward towards the “light at the end of the tunnel, that is, the happy final outcome of a long and arduous struggle” may in turn only be “that of another train approaching us at full speed.”²⁶⁴ Alternatively, we need to work towards falling out of tune with the temporal rhythms of advanced capitalism. In other words, slowing down the train - or returning to the antagonistic concepts that contour and structure ideological currents - will allow us to map emancipatory routes that can derail real catastrophic collisions.

²⁶³ Ibid, 154

²⁶⁴ Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then As Farce*, 149

EPILOGUE

Contemporary debates on how to reconcile ecological urgency with critical theory will, I argue, lead to a more nuanced understanding of how particular dominant ideologies of nature are preserved. Adorno's writing is highly critical of collective action, and at first glance, would seemingly offer a bleak view of how we can move beyond the limits of advanced capitalism. However, upon closer investigation, I have found that Adorno's theories are not without sincere commitment to political possibilities. Rather than offering instruction on how to best proceed, The Frankfurt School provides a space for self-reflection and critical engagement without falling back into essentialism or revolutionary resignation. In other words, Adorno concedes that we find ourselves "behind barricaded doors" and captive "in the prison of language." However, he also reminds us that; "when the doors are barricaded, it is doubly important that thought not be interrupted,"²⁶⁵ and moreover, insists that we can at least "recognize it as a prison."²⁶⁶ The Frankfurt School reminds us that the task at hand is not necessarily knowing how best to proceed, but rather, how to *'begin at the beginning'* again.

Borrowing from and radicalizing Frankfurt School theories, Žižek offers subversive theoretical alternatives to environmental politics today. "Don't Act, Just Think!" may appear as an anti-revolutionary approach to a radical political ecology; however, as I have argued, it suggests new ways of interrupting dominant ideologies and persuasions that beckon change before critical reflection. For Žižek, the real conditions of ecological crisis demand that we radicalize and transform social relations. In doing so, however, the 'revolutionary agent' must position herself against historical necessity and contingency. By moving against temporal rhythms, we can wilfully sever the ideological looping of domination and crisis. Moreover, Žižek

²⁶⁵ Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, 200

²⁶⁶ Adorno in Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, 10

opposes tendencies to create a revolutionary icon or ‘big Other,’ or as Lacan skilfully wrote in response to the 1968 protests in Paris: “What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a new Master. You will get one.”²⁶⁷ It seems, in contemporary environmental politics, we are at a deadlock: we need to urgently change the road we are on, and yet, we do not know of another ‘ecology’ to replace the one in crisis on the throne.

Alternatively, I have turned to both Adorno and Žižek to move against this deadlock, and alternatively purposed, that we should abolish the throne in which the concept of nature rests. Here, however, it is important to differentiate between Žižek and Adorno’s unique propositions, and namely, Adorno’s inscription of the ‘*not yet*.’ For Adorno, the ‘*not yet*’ grapples at the non-identity; a kind of hopeful pilgrimage towards the utopic promise of a natural world. For Žižek, “Nature does not exist!”; the inherent antagonisms render *no choice* but to abandon hope in diverting ecological crisis. Rather, we must retroactively respond to crisis as though it has already happened in order to substantiate genuine praxis. Only through this temporal re-ordering can we interrupt the mechanical reproduction of ‘business as usual.’ Lastly, Adorno and Žižek’s theories entail a re-mapping of the ideological coordinates that contour subjectivity. Namely, Adorno concedes that only through self-reflection can the will of the Many overcome the One. Continuing this project, Žižek – drawing on a Hopi saying – asserts that; “We are the ones we have been waiting for.”²⁶⁸ In other words, we cannot remain as we are, passively hoping for the promised messiah to be delivered, but rather, question the ideological coordinates that separate ‘humanity’ from ‘nature.’ For Žižek, these two levels are intertwined and spun within the nexus of capitalist relations of power. Yet again, we are left with no choice but return to the conceptual origin wherein ‘balance’ was forged.

²⁶⁷ Lacan, Jacques in Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, 79

²⁶⁸ Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, 154

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