Contentment and Modernity:

A Comparative Critique of

Zygmunt Bauman and Jürgen Habermas

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I certify that this work does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text

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Abstract

This thesis aims to challenge popular conceptions of the 'good life' with an analysis of contentment and happiness through the lens of social and critical theory. As an alternative to empirical and philosophical methods of understanding well-being or virtue, this project will undertake a theoretical analysis of contentment as a form of social experience. My intention here is to understand why it is that with significant technological, political and scientific advances in recent decades, individuals seem to be experiencing increasing levels of discontentment. A crucial element of this project refers to the notion of society as 'post-scarcity' in that the object of inquiry in this thesis involves the maladies of individuals who, on a global scale, are fortunate enough to experience social conditions that do not involve war, famine or poverty. This thesis will focus on individuals who are well placed to enjoy the advancements that modernity has to offer. It is not the intention of this thesis to *solve* the *problem* of discontentment, but rather to provide an analysis of the individual's relationship with society and an understanding of why this relationship is not more fulfilling. This daunting task has been scaled down to a comparative critique of Jürgen Habermas and Zygmunt Bauman, two exemplary social theorists who have wrestled with matters of meaning and knowledge for decades. Through the application of Habermas and Bauman's work, the nature of contentment will be explored through a critical evaluation of modernity, whilst at the same time showing how their unique approaches to social theory are ideally placed to engage with questions of this sort. Habermas and Bauman have been selected specifically for their critical dissections of modernity and, despite their significant differences, for their dedication to supporting the autonomy of individuals from oppressive structures.

Introduction: Contentment and Modernity

> The most esteemed personal qualities, such as independence, will to freedom, sympathy, and the sense of justice, are social as well as individual virtues. The fully developed individual is the consummation of a fully developed society (Horkheimer 1947: 135).

In its simplest form, the aim of this thesis is to develop a comparative critique of Zygmunt Bauman and Jürgen Habermas through a specific focus on the question of contentment in modernity. The topic of contentment will serve as a theme through which aspects of Bauman and Habermas's ideas can be compared and critiqued. As a result, this analysis intends to show that social and critical theory has much to contribute to a sociological understanding of contentment and happiness. There is nothing controversial about the claim that privileged societies have been fascinated by questions of the good life for hundreds, or even thousands of years. Historically, these questions tend to arise in circumstances where the basic needs of individuals have been met to such a degree that their attention can turn to questions regarding the meaning and purpose of their existence. Yet, in the modern first world, individuals seem to be experiencing two lives simultaneously; in one they are more privileged and safer from harm than ever before, whilst in the other, there are economic, environmental and political conditions that hint at the potential for substantial change to occur at any moment. The result is an intersection of tensions that turns questions of meaning, legitimation and contentment into ambiguous and problematic notions within the relationship between the individual and society. The question as to why the relationship between the individual and society is not more fulfilling is therefore highly relevant to an understanding of modernity. The allusive nature of contentment in modernity will serve as the object of analysis in this thesis. Yet I will argue that although questions of contentment and 'the good life' have traditionally drawn upon the work of

philosophers and psychologists, it will be the contributions that can be extracted from social and critical theory that are most significant at this stage.

This thesis will develop an understanding of contentment that is rooted in social experience. By employing a critical approach to constructions of the good life, this project will look to the experience of modern western social life in order to better understand why, despite radical improvements in civil rights, living standards and technological capabilities, individuals seem to be less satisfied. This is not a neat or orderly task, and so this project will endeavour to avoid oversimplifying the enormously complex nature of social life by utilising a distinctly sociological perspective. Marcuse put forward a very similar question in *An Essay on Liberation* (1969), albeit with a more radical terminology. He writes:

> …the question is no longer: how can the individual satisfy his own needs without hurting others, but rather: how can he satisfy his needs without hurting himself, without reproducing, through his aspirations and satisfactions, his dependence on an exploitative apparatus, which in satisfying his needs, perpetuates his servitude (Marcuse 1969: 4).

This could be seen as reconfiguring the question posed by Freud in *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930) regarding the nature of the good life in relation to social conditions, influences and disturbances. The point raised by these approaches is that questions such 'what is the good life?' or 'how can I live a good life?' overlook the simple fact that the good life itself, is a culturally specific ideal that functions as a social construction. Therefore, the question of 'what is the good life?' is fundamentally a question about society, or more directly, the individual's relationship with it. It is a matter of how the individual is able to positively place themselves in regard to social values and norms.

To investigate the nature of contentment in modernity, this thesis will take the form of a comparative critique of the work of Jürgen Habermas and Zygmunt Bauman within the broader scope of critical theory. The comparison of these two prolific social theorists is motivated by a number of factors regarding the

unique intersections of ideas where the two meet. Yet there is also a need to limit this analysis to the work of two theorists to manage the sprawling and ongoing nature of the subject matter. As a result, this thesis will focus upon the contributions of Habermas and Bauman with regard to an understanding of contentment. The decision to focus on these two theorists is motivated by their longstanding contributions to critical sociology and the human consequences of modernity. Arguably, Bauman has done more to capture the unique maladies of the modern individual than any other critical theorist, meanwhile, the scope and painstaking organisation of Habermas's project is unparalleled. The diverse and comprehensive range of topics covered by each author places them as ideal representatives of their disparate approaches to social theory. Although a similar project could be constructed with any number of social theorists – such as Žižek, Castoriadis, Giddens, Arendt or Benhabib – this task will simply have to wait for a project sizeable enough for such scope. For now, a comparison of Habermas and Bauman is ideally suited to show how differing approaches to social theory can broach the emotional consequences of living in modernity. Rather than forcing Habermas and Bauman into a unified perspective, this thesis will borrow from Bauman's concerns regarding ambivalence, contingency and ethics, and contrast them with Habermas's work on public sphere discourse and civic participation. Somewhere between these perspectives is a theoretical understanding of the individual's relationship with society that is both absent and desperately needed in the study of contentment, happiness and well-being.

This thesis will be divided into seven chapters that informally create two distinct sections. The first section will consist of four chapters that will set out the foundational elements of this thesis and position the key theorists with regard to their contributions to the matter of contentment. This will, in some cases, require the application of ideas in a manner that is divergent from the initial intention of the theorist. Habermas in particular has not written directly on the matter of happiness or contentment, save for a select few comments.

And so, the thesis begins with a chapter on critical theory and contentment that establishes critique as a means to understand social problems such as discontentment. Chapter one will develop the relationship between reason and contentment as well as dissecting the nature of coercion in modernity regarding the autonomy of individuals. The motivation for such an approach is – just as it was for Marx – associated with the need to understand society for the purpose of understanding and addressing social problems. Chapters two and three will serve as a detailed exegesis of Habermas and Bauman's work (respectively) and its applicability to the question of contentment. These chapters will adopt a general introduction to the work of these theorists and establish a number of perspectives to be dissected more specifically later in the thesis. Such an explanation is particularly necessary as there are instances where the work of these theorists is used in ways that differ from their original intentions. Consequently, Chapters two and three will highlight the aspects of Habermas and Bauman's work that are particularly significant in developing the concept of contentment. In the case of Habermas, this involves a discussion of meaning and legitimation concerning the need for democratic participation and public discourse. For Bauman however, the focus is directed towards the contradictions of modernity and the challenges of a fast paced and liquid modern world. Yet for both theorists, matters of ambivalence and inequality are always present. Chapter four will trace the question of discontentment, and its social origins, from Freud's *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930) through to Bauman's *Postmodernity and Its Discontents* (1998). Chapter four will consider notions of the relationship between the individual and society and the implications of a truly socialised individual.

The final three chapters will form the second half of the thesis and will seek to more succinctly develop the unique arguments of this thesis. Chapter five will focus on a comparative critique of Bauman and Habermas that directly assesses their disagreements and identifies the most applicable aspects of their work. To date, there is little published material that compares Habermas and Bauman, however this chapter will also draw on relevant critiques from other theorists.

Chapter six forms an analysis of the contributions from Bauman and Habermas on the matter of hermeneutics in order to better grasp the importance of knowledge and interpretation in the construction of meaning. The intention here is to tie together critical notions of the systematic distortion of information with the potential for a greater understanding of hermeneutical analysis. The connection between knowledge and meaning is of particular significance throughout the thesis and it is in this chapter that this notion is assessed in depth. Finally, chapter seven will contextualise and modernise this primarily theoretical project by considering the overwhelming social transformation of globalisation. This chapter will also consider the most recent contributions of Bauman and Habermas, whilst assessing the applicability of their ideas against the backdrop of fairness as an indicator of contentment. The conclusions reached in this final chapter defend the importance of democratic participation as well as political and civil autonomy, over the understanding of modern progress as economic development. The concluding summary warrants a degree of optimism that serves as a welcome change from much of the material discussed in this project.

The thesis will develop an understanding of happiness and contentment that is rooted in sociological analysis – something that is currently underdeveloped in the field. Put simply, happiness and contentment can be seen as contributors to a good life, and as a result, the analysis of contentment in this thesis must be contextualised with the bigger picture of social experience. In the sociological tradition there are several recurring aspects of the good life that are easily identifiable; such as autonomy, equality, community and polity. Yet, the intention here is to avoid making claims regarding the nature of the good life as if the findings of this analysis can unveil a picture of what contentment ought to look like. Instead, this thesis will aim to describe contentment as a socially constructed condition of the good life, and it will therefore consider the potential for problems to occur in this process. This approach is motivated by the need for *Verstehen* in the study of contentment, rather than assessing

contentment with the terminology of 'ought' statements and virtues – as is often seen in philosophical debates. As sociology has traditionally been viewed as a response to identified social problems, the matter of contentment in modernity is in many ways a topic that is ripe for sociological analysis. In particular, it will be discussed here as a means to evaluate the validity and applicability of Habermas and Bauman's social theory. Additionally, this thesis seeks to understand how a normative construction of contentment which is capable of being beneficial to individuals at a social level, may be developed.

I must be clear about the specific problem that this project hopes to address. It is widely acknowledged among social theorists (Bauman 2008; Sennett 1970, 1998; Benhabib 1992), critical theorists (Marcuse 1964, 1969; Adorno 1974), psychologists (Horwitz & Wakefield 2007; Haybron 2006), psychoanalysts (Freud 1928; Kristeva 1989; Žižek 2003), empirical social researchers (Veenhoven 2008; Easterlin 2001) and economists (Layard 2005; Peiro 2006) that there is something awry with happiness in modernity. These widely varying fields provide a range of approaches for understanding the problematic of happiness, and from these approaches come a multitude of possible solutions. Despite the differences in terminology and the variety of different forms of evidence among these perspectives, there is some agreement that people do not seem to be as happy as they *should* be, or in other words, as happy as one might expect given the advances of modernity in recent decades. If we consider the contributions of Bauman and Habermas in more detail, a set of themes become clear. For Habermas, the depoliticisation of the modern individual and the distortions in knowledge immediately come to mind. Whereas for Bauman the dangers of living in an ever changing liquid modernity, alongside the numbing ambivalence of a modernity full of contradictions are also easily identified. Meanwhile the matter of rationalisation is present in the work of both theorists, albeit in rather unique applications. The language here is already somewhat problematic and so there are certain presumptions I would prefer to avoid; such as the idea that individuals are *meant* to be happy, that society is *responsible* for breeding

happiness or that some degree of unhappiness is not a natural part of life. This project proposes a modified terminology that distinguishes happiness from contentment in order to better understand the social causes and social meaning of this rather troubling situation. An explanation of this terminology is necessary before I go any further.

There is a tendency for theorists and researchers to use the term happiness as a blanket concept to describe experiences that contribute to the 'good life'. However, in this project I would like to develop a crucial distinction between happiness and contentment as different but equally important contributors to the good life. The distinction utilised in this project recognises the difference between pleasure driven, temporary and individualised forms of happiness and socially defined and motivated forms of contentment. In this sense, contentment is a unique concept because it refers to the satisfaction one feels regarding their relationship with the social world. Therefore, contentment is not a moment of relief or joy, but a mode of self-understanding within a larger social context that contributes to an individual's sense of identity and their positive evaluation of their place in the world. Contentment in this sense means more than simply being content with material possessions – for example, "I feel content with my television because I do not desire a better one" – rather it refers to an almost Epicurean notion of being at peace with something, specifically, the relationship between the individual and society[1]. Therefore, contentment does not involve the fulfilment of needs and wants, but a reflexive evaluation of needs and wants. This is in contrast to happiness for a number of reasons, but the most important distinction in this thesis is concerning the role of *context*. To an extent, happiness is hedonistic in that it pursues pleasure with some degree of disregard to shared social values, such as the normative views on gluttony, greed or laziness. I should be clear however, that the problem is not that happiness is an essential part of the good life, but that modernity radically prioritises happiness over contentment. A distinction of this sort is not

[1] Although this can not understate the importance of conflict in the construction of notions of contentment. This matter is discussed in some detail throughout the thesis, particularly in Chapter one.

entirely new; in *Utilitarianism*, Mill describes contentment as being happiness within the context of need, meanwhile Freedman describes the unique difference between "fun, pleasure and excitement" on the one hand and "peace of mind" on the other (Lane 2000: 15). Freud described happiness as the release of the tensions that build up in everyday life, whilst he reserved the word contentment for the socially dependent notions of fulfilment (1930). Veenhoven makes a similar claim regarding what he considers to be the two 'kinds' of happiness; the affective element that contributes to the pleasure one experiences and the cognitive element which is dependent on the correlation between what an individual wants from life and what they have, which he also calls contentment (2008). I have simply applied my own specific terminology here in order to clarify a broad range of different terminologies employed by the theorists utilised in this project.

I intend to show that there is no crisis over happiness in modernity, but rather one of contentment. In fact, it seems that modern society is filled with an almost unending range of products, services and guides that will contribute to happiness. But without context, happiness struggles to provide meaning and long-term satisfaction[2]. A new flat screen television might make an individual feel happy, but it is a feeling of contentment that allows the individual to feel as though they have *enough*. And without that context, happiness is destined to leave individuals unfulfilled and their well-being incomplete. The argument behind this thesis is for a more effective social construction of contentment that is capable of fostering the legitimation of meaning in modern life. This is not to say that there are not already people who feel the contentment described here, but rather that the priorities and direction of society more generally, do not sufficiently value the importance of contentment. This should not be read as a call for the return of a bygone era, rather that sources of meaning that were

[2] The empirical studies showing the power of relativity in happiness studies is evidence of this. See Birckman & Coates (1978) and Easterlin (1994) for examples of how raised living standards paired with raised expectations resulted in no significant changes to self reported well-being. Also see Veenhoven (1991) for a critique of this approach. Yet, from all of these studies there is an under appreciation for the need to study the social rather than simply the individual.

once deemed to be fixed and objective – such as religion and tradition – are gradually being dismantled by the development of modernity. As a result, the need for meaningful and reflexive social constructions to allow for legitimation becomes indispensable. Although there is little doubt that individuals are already engaging with these dilemmas, a theoretical understanding of how this happens and how it can be understood more effectively is of crucial importance.

It is necessary to clarify that this is not a study of depression as an identified condition, but an analysis of discontent that is not limited to a diagnosed minority. I would like to take this point a step further and suggest that the recent increase in reported cases of depression and anxiety can be linked to changes in social conditions[3]. This kind of approach is deeply sociological as it calls for an analysis of more than just the individual within a significant and clear social trend toward a particular outcome. Ian Craib links the experience of living in modernity to a failure of being able to productively deal with disappointment; "This inability" he states, "involves a difficulty in accepting depression, despair and conflict …as a part of life" (1994: 158). Later in this thesis, the inability for individuals to deal with the negative aspects of modernity will be considered through the work of Zygmunt Bauman, but for now the most interesting aspect of that quote is in reference to the inevitability of depression and therefore the need to accept its position in normal and healthy social experience. The distinction made by Horwitz and Wakefield in *The Loss of Sadness* (2007) between sadness 'with cause' as opposed to sadness 'without cause' can contribute to this understanding of the way that depression is culturally and socially mediated. Horwitz and Wakefield are critical of the lack of contextual recognition in the diagnosis of depression in the United States and they link this individualistic understanding of everyday life to the dramatic rise in reported cases of depression and mood disorders. Statistically speaking, one in five people in Australia have suffered from a

[3] Despite the differing views regarding the nature of depression and happiness in modernity, the notion that depression is increasingly reported and that this can be linked to social factors is widely agreed upon. See Veenhoven (2010); Lane (2000).

mood, anxiety or substance use disorder in the last 12 months, whilst 43 per cent reported experiencing at least one of these disorders at some point in their lives (ABS 2007). Yet, in studies of increasing cases of anxiety disorders, it is rarely mentioned that we live in unprecedentedly anxious times and that the development of anxiety disorders might be a perfectly natural response to this. The same could be said for stress or low self-esteem, as there are deeply social indicators for many of the diagnosed disorders that appear to be on the rise. My argument is that there are social factors that have influenced the increasingly common feeling that something is missing from the experience of modern life. Therefore, problems such as this indicate issues that are inherently social rather than individual, and therefore society itself is arguably more deserving of analysis.

It is important to note that this project will not draw heavily from the recent influx of empirical data on happiness and well-being. At this stage, there is considerable evidence that both reported happiness and well-being are in decline in the first world, yet the nature of these studies often results in problematic explanations regarding the cause. There are a number of reasons why I will not engage significantly with these studies, and they will be mentioned briefly here. First, there are compromising inconsistencies regarding the definitions of happiness and well-being that, even when reconciled among researchers, cannot be guaranteed to be fully understood by the respondents to research programs. This leads to a second concern; there is cause for scepticism regarding the ability for individuals to accurately comment on their own happiness or well-being. This will be discussed in more detail throughout this thesis, but for now it is worth noting the influence of relativity and context in self reported data regarding happiness. Third, there are very few agreed upon correlations between aspects of one's life and their reported happiness or well-being, across the variety of available data sets. Testing for factors such as income, education level and marital status results in varied outcomes depending on the study. The question, 'Is there a correlation between wealth and well-being?' is enormously problematic in a study of social values as it is

focused on the symptoms of the problem rather than the cause or the problem itself. Studies that aim to show correlations between employment or marital status and reported well-being, are in fact saying very little about the nature of discontentment in modernity. What is more interesting are questions like 'How happy are you with your financial situation?' – the results for which have shown a consistent decline in the US, and have hit an all time low following the 2009 market crisis (Smith 2011). Questions such as this measure happiness or well-being against the expectations of the individual and are therefore more telling in regard to the social elements of the good life. As a result, this project considers the values of individuals to be more important in understanding contentment than demographics or classifications. Hyman and Patulny reach a similar conclusion in their distinction between 'generalised' and 'particularised' measurements of happiness as the subjective perceptions involved with self-reporting happiness research often lack the contextual aptitude to draw meaningful conclusions (2007). The ability for individuals to be reflexive, unpredictable and deeply emotional demands that questions regarding contentment must be approached within a social context and not reduced to simplified independent variables. Yet this is inherently sociological as it takes into account the social context of the individual and is attempting to understand the problems associated with contentment.

This thesis seeks to provide a framework within which social theory can conduct a critical analysis of modern concepts of contentment, with the intention of moving towards a greater understanding of an ambiguous problem. A core element of this argument considers perspectives from psychological, philosophical and empirical knowledge to be incomplete without the input of social theory, and therefore must be considered inadequate for providing a thorough understanding. Consequently, this project will take seriously the notion that there has been a dramatic change in the experience of social life over recent generations. For individual identity, relationships, the construction of norms and ethics, and the interpretation of meaning in modernity, there has been a radical shift that has changed the experience of living in society today.

This should not be confused with an evaluation of which generation might be luckier or more fortunate, but rather an acknowledgement that the current generation face challenges that are radically different to those of their grandparents. The most relevant change regarding this is the notion that the justification of acts, desires and goals, has become elusive. Individuals are faced with a greater number of decisions and the perceived responsibility for choosing correctly lies solely with them. In an era of constant change, individuals are struggling to grab hold of anything for long enough to find meaning and validation within it.

As previously mentioned, what I am proposing is not a picture of what the good life might look like or of what contentment really is, but an analysis of why a more effective construction of contentment has not yet been developed. This highlights my hesitation to describe discontentment as a problem – as this terminology implies that there is a solution – or that there is a response that should be applied. Accordingly, the terminology of social 'problematics' – as described by Johann Arnason (1989; 1990)[4] – provides a more accurate description as it refers to the ongoing need for evaluation and consideration. With Arnason's approach, contentment reflects the individual's perception of their relationship with society and therefore developing a sociological analysis of contentment depends upon a thorough understanding how individuals understand themselves within a social context.

In order to construct a positive self-understanding from a social context, the individual must utilise both knowledge and meaning. Knowledge that is refined and validated through a process of reason and logic is essential in order for the individual to feel as though what they know about the world is trustworthy. This is made particularly important in the process of ensuring that the

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[4] This terminology also appears in the work of Peter Wagner with the notion of *problématique* whereby problems are identified that do not necessarily have solutions (2008: 15). To think of certain issues – such as modernity in the case of Wagner and democracy in the case of Arnason – as having solutions is to overlook the complexity of social mechanisms and to project a sense of ought onto social matters.

individual is not manipulated or coerced, through ideology or myth, into becoming a means to someone else's ends. If the individual cannot believe in what they think to be true, then there is little hope for a positive construction of their relationship with society. Habermas's work on knowledge and legitimation, alongside Bauman's hermeneutics and his work on the legislators and interpreters of society, are both of significance here – as is the long-standing tradition of the unwavering dedication to reason from the key figures of the Frankfurt School.

Yet, an analysis of the social use of knowledge would be insufficient in this project without the incorporation of meaning. Habermas himself claims that information alone cannot motivate human action; it requires a theoretical element that intertwines knowledge with priorities and values (1962). Therefore, the elucidation of the connections between meaning and knowledge are essential to the formation of a meaningful self-understanding for the individual. This speaks to the inherently emotional and creative aspects of the individual in a way that allows for an ongoing and reflexive interpretation of meaning. To some degree, this entire project can be seen as a means to rethink the prospects of meaning in a liquid modern age – using Bauman's terminology – whilst insisting on a vigilantly critical pursuit of knowledge for its own sake – as discussed by Habermas. Just as knowledge without meaning fails to legitimise the experiences of individuals, meaning without reliable knowledge becomes a kind of blind faith that is vulnerable to numerous kinds of limitations for the intellectual and civil autonomy of the individual. Contentment is therefore the composite of reason and knowledge with meaning and emotion.

Arguably, the two key theorists in this thesis, Bauman and Habermas, have spent their careers working on the problems of knowledge and meaning. What I am aiming to contribute is an in-depth analysis and to some degree, a hybridisation of the two that will show how a more productive notion of contentment can be construed, and an analysis of why this hasn't happened yet.

A final word regarding the placement of this project within the broad and interdisciplinary field of happiness studies is necessary at this point. Although this thesis will intentionally pursue a theoretically focused analysis of the individual's relationship with society and the repercussions for contentment and happiness, there are contributions from more empirically driven sources that are valuable both to this project and to the field in general. The contributions of Michael Rustin (2007) and Robert Lane (2000) undertake the difficult challenge of trying to empirically study happiness and contentment; and they do so with regard to social values and norms. Yet the extent to which social and critical theory has been left out of many of these studies is alarming when we consider the vast literature on the matter. Richard Layard, a leading researcher in the field of happiness studies, presented a series of lectures in 2003 titled 'Happiness: Has Social Science a Clue?' and on the surface, I tend to agree with his premise. Unfortunately, Layard dramatically missed the point regarding the trouble with developing knowledge about happiness. I agree that it should be of great interest to social scientists, that as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has increased, the percentage of people reporting that they are 'very happy' has decreased, but Layard's methods in explaining this phenomenon radically undervalue the significance of social life. At no point in this three part lecture series, does Layard consult the theoretical literature on discontentment, and sadly this is not uncommon as the field of happiness studies is largely occupied by economists. This project intends to make clear the potential for a theoretical analysis of the problems regarding contentment and happiness in modernity without reducing the troubles of the individual to independent variables. It is my contention that many of the problems associated with empirical studies of happiness and contentment can be resolved through the application of a stronger theoretical foundation of the key concepts of the debate. Although such a task would be too ambitious for this one project, the idea of making some contribution to this cause is a key motivating factor for this study.

The ideal outcome of this project is not an answer to the question of what is contentment or the good life, but a step towards developing an understanding of how the relationship between the individual and society can be enhanced through a socially relevant application of contentment. It is more a matter of how contentment functions rather than what contentment truly *is* in some kind of objective sense. Take this Epicurean proverb as an example,

> "Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; remember that what you now have was once among the things you only hoped for."

This perspective differs significantly from the rationale of modernity whereby more is more and yesterday isn't soon enough. Accordingly, how might a society go about adopting this kind of approach to contentment, and why hasn't it been adopted yet, despite the common-sense and agreeable nature of the claim? These are the kinds of questions that will be assessed in this thesis as the ideal of democratic participation in the social construction of meaning is taken to be of the upmost importance.

Chapter One Critical Theory and Contentment: Reason, Rationality and the Challenges of a 'Broken' Society

> To this day, all happiness is a pledge of what has not yet been, and the belief in its imminence obstructs its becoming (Adorno 1966: 352)

Critical theory – as a methodology for better understanding the complex nature of modern life – will be a central theme throughout this thesis. Although a sociological analysis of contentment could draw from a variety of theoretical frameworks, critique allows for an analysis of society that considers the maladies of the individual to be understood with a more macro-sociological framework. If we are to take seriously the notion that contentment involves a satisfying relationship between the individual and society, then critical theory is ideally placed to highlight the potential for aspects of modernity to jeopardise this relationship. This chapter will consider the contributions of critical theory to a discussion of contentment that will traverse matters from reason and rationality, to the effectiveness of idealist and realist adaptations of critique. Many of the themes discussed in this chapter will continue throughout the thesis, yet the intention at this point is to focus on the early development of critical theory. As discussed in the introduction, this thesis is concerned with the significance of social life in the construction and application of notions of contentment in modernity. This approach is motivated by the perceived need to move away from individualised explanations of discontentment, and toward a better understanding of modernity as something that can greatly effect the experience of contentment as well as the meaningful construction of the self. The question here could be simplified to an analysis of why, despite the radical progress of modernity, people seem to be no happier or contented than previous generations. The knowledge necessary for actual solutions however, must be derived through a critique of society, rather than conclusions that consider social change to be an individualised phenomenon. It is important to note that critical theory is less about an ideology or a specific theory, than it is about the

methodology of constantly challenging knowledge[5]. This definition results in a variety of different approaches and perspectives within the field, such that there is no *one* critical theory, just an ongoing and unfinished form of inquiry (Jay 1973: 42).

In discussing the many forms of critical theory, it must be noted that Horkheimer's development of critique differs significantly from the definition later provided by Adorno. In the early 1930s, Horkheimer stated that critical theory was to be a new approach to the social sciences whereby an interdisciplinary materialism could develop into a more adept understanding of the problems of modernity. Central to the notion would be the acknowledgment that critical theory would consist of several lines of analysis that would be irreducible to one another and Horkheimer is remembered for his ability to bring together these ideas to create something bigger than the sum of its parts (McCole *et al.* 1993: 11). In the 1940s however, Adorno would reshape Horkheimer's original vision of critical theory as an all-encompassing meta-social science. Adorno was sceptical about Horkheimer's intention to bring philosophy and social science together due to his doubts over the pre-existing framework of the philosophy available at the time. Adorno was far more concerned with modern rationalization as a force that could distort the individual's ability to reasonably resolve problems. Whilst Horkheimer had considerably more faith in the individual's cognitive potential, Adorno saw the need for great social upheaval before any form of emancipation could be accomplished. Adorno was also far more sceptical about the accuracy and potential for empirical social research[6], which was in need of refinement for Horkheimer, but irreconcilable with philosophy according to Adorno. During the 1940s, Adorno became the dominant public voice of critical theory and the attention of its analysis became directed more towards aesthetics and culture (McCole *et al.* 1993: 11). Yet the republication of many of Horkheimer's

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[5] Or to paraphrase Bauman, it is not "a badge of allegiance or school membership", but a methodology or an activity (Tester 2004: 20).

[6] Although later in his career Adorno was increasing open to more empirical methods, particularly in *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950).

earlier works in the late 1960s and early 1970s saw a revival of his brand of critical theory, particularly through the work of Habermas. It is best to think of Horkheimer's greatest influences, in the current context, as owing more to Hegel and Schopenhauer than simply Marx.

For Adorno, the critical theory of the early Frankfurt School theorists can be distinguished from earlier forms of social analysis by acknowledging the potential for inconsistencies between the perceived functioning of society and the actual state of affairs. Adorno cites Weber and Durkheim as examples of authoritative sociological theorists, who, despite their undeniable significance to the study of society, have overlooked this aesthetic aspect of modernity (Jarvis 1998: 45). Weber described the relationship between individuals that subjectively determine an understanding of social processes, and the processes themselves. Whilst Durkheim developed notions of the systemic nature of modernity in a functional sense, neither of these thinkers sufficiently acknowledged the possibility for cultural circumstances to mislead or distort the individual's understanding of, and interaction with, culture (1998: 46). This is a crucial element of critical theory; that without an ongoing critical analysis of the social world, the development of a theory of society, as well as interaction with society, is subject to the distortion of knowledge and therefore action.

The Frankfurt School started as a primarily Marxist institute, yet Horkheimer and Adorno were more influenced by Marx's methodology than the theory itself. This places critical theory alongside the field of revisionist Marxism, and in their later years the role of Marx was significantly discredited among the school's predominant theorists. The school's journal, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (Journal for Social Research) maintained a strong Marxist perspective during the 1930s and both Horkheimer and Adorno were influenced by *Capital* in particular (Held 1980: 43). The theme of alienation was particularly strong in the critical theory of this era, yet Horkheimer and Adorno soon became sceptical of Marx's notions of an inevitable revolution to overthrow capitalism. Although there was some agreement that the technocratic

rationality caused by a capitalist economy was problematic, the school became increasingly dismissive of their Marxist influences towards the end of the 1930s. The role of ideology in theory became a contentious issue among critical theorists at it can be seen as either the enemy or the enabling element of all knowledge[7]. Stories of Horkheimer locking away the only surviving copies of *Zeitschrift* in the school's basement have now become legendary.

This chapter will develop an overview of critical theory that can contribute to an understanding of the social nature of contentment in modernity. Contentment is distinguished from happiness by interpreting it as a way in which the individual understands, and is satisfied with, their place within society. Whilst happiness can occur through instances of pleasure, they are generally individualised and lacking in social bearing. Contentment refers to an ongoing approach that can be affected or even dismantled by the social world. Therefore, there is an intimate relationship between contentment and reason as an intermediary between the individual and society. In the fundamental shift from objective forms of reason provided by religion, to the subjective construction of values now present in modernity, the task of locating reason in a manner that would allow it to refine and enhance a model for contentment, is a difficult task. Contentment, therefore, requires a critique of rationalisation through the application and re-evaluation of reason. This chapter intends to show how the critical use of reason can contribute to a more meaningful relationship between the individual and the social world, as well as clarifying the distortions that either inhibit or prohibit a better understanding of contentment in modernity. The focus will be on the first generation of Frankfurt School critical theorists in order to provide an insight to questions of reason, aesthetics and critique within the framework of the problem of contentment in modernity. To better understand the inconsistencies between the nature and the perception of contentment, it is modernity itself that must be analysed and critiqued. Therefore, a focus on critical theory is necessary both as a means of developing the notion that modernity could be to blame for individual

[7] This is discussed in far more detail in chapter 6, with the Habermas/Gadamer debate.

discontent and also as a way to eventually introduce Bauman and Habermas, two theorists who have been greatly influenced by critical theory. This chapter will trace the theoretical origins in my perspective that lead to the development of the detached self and the extent to which society is problematic for the individual.

Reason and Contentment

Eclipse of Reason (1947) may be Horkheimer's most underrated publication, often overshadowed by *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which was published the same year. It is important to note that Horkheimer's approach to reason in this text had shifted from the intentions of his earlier work. In the era of Adorno's conception of critical theory as a new materialist philosophy rather than an abridged version of the social sciences, *Eclipse of Reason* is a text that seeks to reassociate the problem of reason with a voluntary detachment of the self, from the self (Lohmann 1993: 388). Horkheimer writes, "The theme of this time is self-preservation, while there is no self to preserve" (1947: 128). This requires a more theoretical approach to understanding the individual's relationship with a social system that is broken. Yet, *Eclipse of Reason* is still dramatically more optimistic than the essay that is seen to signify the turning point in Horkheimer's approach. 'The End of Reason' (1941) displays a sincere cynicism for the hope of the human faculty for reason as being anything more than a way of enforcing conformity and political ideologies. In the context of the Second World War, this perspective is entirely understandable. Fortunately Horkheimer altered this position into something more beneficial just a few years later[8].

In *Eclipse of Reason*, Horkheimer argues that modern society has become over-rationalised in a technocratic and industrialised sense whilst simultaneously

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[8] The presence of pessimism in Horkheimer's work would eventually return later in life as he gradually lost hope in the potential for autonomy through overcoming the mechanistic rationality of modernity. Although, this is arguably linked more to nostalgia in his old age, than to a radical shift in his philosophy (Shaw 1985: 161).

lacking in processes of inquiry regarding the use of reason among individuals. Horkheimer argues that traditionally, reason has been understood as a tool or an instrument that the individual can use (or not use) in navigating the world around them. The change that has occurred in modernity involves a reversal of these roles as Horkheimer argues that reason is no longer something that individuals can use, but rather something that one must chase and therefore, it has come to dominate individuals. However, in this sense, reason is not something that is consistent or dependable, and Horkheimer considers it to have become "irrational and stultified" (1947: 128). This could be traced back to the modern obsession with order and predictability, but there is something else present in this argument. Horkheimer is claiming that this change in reason is reflective of the modern need for self-preservation, an ideal that is negated by the inevitability of death.

According to Horkheimer, reason is commonly understood in terms of means and ends, with the intention of achieving a desired goal. Reason, therefore, is rather simple. If the subject wishes to attain a particular goal, then an action that potentially leads to that goal is reasonable. This allows for degrees of reason, as some actions are more effective than others, but so long as the action can plausibly lead to the desired outcome, then there is an element of rationality to the action. Horkheimer is clear that this is how he considers reason to be utilised in modernity, rather than claiming that this is a healthy or ideal way to approach reason (1947). For Horkheimer, this approach leads to a dependence on instrumental rationality and is therefore problematic for individuals. This kind of reasoning is based upon predictable scenarios of means and ends whereby individuals can calculate the worthiness of goals by considering the sacrifices necessary to accomplish them. Consumption serves as an excellent example of this. Consider the process of buying a new television; it is essentially a game. The individual can weigh up their desire for a new television against the financial sacrifices necessary and from there, can barter for a better price or search elsewhere, much like playing a hand in a card game. Decisions regarding the means to an end are derived through a

calculative and rationalised process, whereby consistency and predictability are key. There are rules that provide certainty, for example if the television is faulty, it can be exchanged. It is, therefore, reasonable after careful consideration, to purchase a particular television from a specific store and for an agreed price and in this circumstance this kind of reason is useful. It becomes problematic when this instrumental rationality is applied to other areas of life such as relationships, art or ethics. The beauty of a piece of music cannot be justified using this kind of reason, nor can the sacrifices an individual makes for someone they care deeply for. The use of instrumental rationality reduces the decision making process to a binary code that is insufficient for coping with the complexities of human nature and emotion. Yet, according Horkheimer, this approach to reason has come to dominate modernity as increasingly decisions are based upon the calculation of means and ends.

It should be made clear that Horkheimer does not consider the individual to be fully reasonable, and this is in fact a great source of trouble for the individual in modernity. The pursuit of reason should be clarified then as being a task of using reason in order to resolve conflicts and contradictions rather than a project in becoming perfectly reasonable. To utilise reason at all times would result in predictable and one-dimensional individuals and this is not at all my intention is this project. Rather, reason can be used to negotiate a way out of the social problems of rationalisation, and therefore the problem of contentment has much to gain from it. For Horkheimer, reason is under attack from the regulation, classification and order (1947: 23) – Weber's notion of the iron cage shares some important similarities to this view. Yet the 'eclipse' that Horkheimer describes involves the formalisation of reason such that ideas and statements become ends in themselves rather than a part of an ongoing discourse of reason. The use of reason is therefore reduced to a matter of practicality and means-ends rationality. Horkheimer states,

> Such mechanization is indeed essential to the expansion of industry; but if it becomes the characteristic feature of minds, if reason itself is instrumentalized, it takes on a kind

> of materiality and blindness, becomes a fetish, a magic entity that is accepted rather than intellectually experienced (1947: 23).

And so, the relationship between contentment and reason could be constructed in a number of ways. It could be causal, as contentment requires the use of reason in order to overcome inconsistencies or contradictions. A more pragmatic view may see the reversal of this causal relationship, as what is reasonable can only be defined through the experience of what is effective in creating contentment. Finally, contentment and reason may be understood as being inseparably linked. This approach will be developed in this thesis, as I will argue that reason and contentment are deeply entwined such that contentment is made possible through an engagement with reason. The ability to know and therefore relate to circumstance in a meaningful way is dependent upon the use of reason. This could be understood as an attempt to free ourselves from repression, misinformation, rationalization and detachment, or as an attempt to overcome the sense of detachment that the individual experiences, both from themselves and from society. Contentment is the result of a society constructed by individuals, with the best interests of individuals in mind – these notions will be discussed at some length throughout this thesis. Yet, this can only be achieved through the pursuit of reason as a means of critique of modernity. Thus, the intention of this chapter is to set the scene for matters to be discussed throughout the rest of this thesis.

In contrast to the subjective or instrumental reason discussed by Horkheimer, objective reason is that which is focused on the validity of the ends rather than the means. This may take the form of religion as a source of objective truth regarding the goals that one should aspire to in life, or as one of any number of post-Enlightenment philosophies that intend to provide universalised solutions to questions about meaning and purpose. The distinction between subjective and objective reason is not a distinction between means and ends per se, but rather the view that reason is a faculty of the mind in opposition to the view that reason exists in the objective world (1947: 5). Whilst Horkheimer refuses to see objective reason as a constructive way to determine meaning in society,

he acknowledges that the decline of traditional sources of purpose has left the modern individual particularly susceptible to manipulation through what they believe to be reason (Lohmann 1993: 391). Yet, this distinction between subjective and objective reason becomes murky when the context of decisions is considered. The extent to which an action is reasonable is dependent not only on the means to an end, but also on the specific values and morals of a particular community. The reason that is utilised by the individual may be an internal decision making process, but it is always subject to the conditions of culture and normativity. Habermas bridges this divide by claiming that all individuals contain the capacity for reason, but that open discourse among a community is necessary before claims of truth can be made[9].

Following on from the critique of rationalisation in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno are not convinced that objective sources of truth, such as religion, have entirely been relinquished by modernity. Instead, the authorities that administer normative standards in society have shifted from religious to political, economic and social. In this view reason exists in the relationship between action and consequence rather than purely between the individual or the object, yet the culturally agreed upon goals of the good life are increasingly ambiguous. Bauman would argue that this rationalisation of action is a response to the increasing element of liquidity in modernity. For previous generations the goals of the individual were more strictly defined, as life narratives were typically more linear than they are today. According to Horkheimer, tradition is filled with goals that are treated as objective facts about how one ought to live. This approach can be seen in religious or traditional cultures where ideas of right and wrong or good and bad are comparatively fixed. Therefore, in more traditional cultures, acts are made satisfying through their justification within an *objective* understanding of values and priorities. Horkheimer uses the example of maintaining a neat garden in order to show how actions were given a higher meaning through the adoption of what were seen to be objective values. This can be traced back to

[9] This idea will be discussed in much greater detail in the following chapter.

ancient times where gardens were a tribute to the gods, and therefore a quasi-objective justification existed for building a garden (1947: 36). Similar justifications can be seen in life narratives that are considered to be linear in their progression, as people follow common paths of education, work, marriage and retirement. Horkheimer states:

> We cannot maintain that the pleasure a man gets from a landscape, let us say, would last long if he were convinced *a piori* that the forms and colors he sees are just forms and colors, that all structures in which they play a role are purely subjective and have no relation whatsoever to meaningful order or totality, that they simply and necessarily express nothing (1947: 37).

He argues that our preferences for values are formed early in life, and without an objective source of infallible truth they will degrade with time. This perhaps, is a suitable way to think of the generation of 'baby boomers' who were raised in a rather 'fixed' society, but are now living in a liquid modernity. What then can be said for the children of the present society, whose access to formal and regulated values is continually diminishing? Horkheimer explains:

> No walk through the landscape is necessary any longer; and thus the very concept of landscape as experienced by a pedestrian becomes meaningless and arbitrary. Landscape deteriorates altogether into landscaping (1947: 37-38).

If meaning is constructed through the relationship between the individual and society, regardless of whether the source is considered to be objective or subjective, then the task of relating meaning to events is much easier when there is structure. The connection between an act and the social context is clear and easily understood. However, the modern shift towards denying the authority of such structures results in more elusive forms of meaning, even though the structures that once restricted the individual are melting away. This also ties into Bauman's work on ambivalence and contingency, as the goals for individuals in modernity are becoming more pre-packaged with the intention of

making them more predictable, but effectively ensuring that they will not lead to any form of meaningful contentment[10].

Although this kind of mythology no longer provides a source of guidance in a post-Enlightenment society, Horkheimer argues that such values are lingering on through cultural reproduction. In Bauman's description of modernity, the individual is subject to an unprecedented amount of change and flexibility, and this can be traced back to the lack of an objective source of moral truth such as God. These paths are now far more varied and lateral, with a lack of shared direction and meaning. This is central to the concept of liquid modernity as individuals can now change and customise their goals independently of the preferences of others. This results in a unique period for the study of contentment and happiness, as reason was once defined through means and ends, whilst rarely questioning the ends, and it has now shifted to a society where no end has meaning in and of itself. The individuals of modernity are no more or less reasonable than those of previous generations, they are simply haunted by the uncertainty of the validity of their goals. The concern is now two fold; the individual must find a reasonable goal as well as a reasonable way to achieve it. This is what Bauman is referring to when he states that the troubles of the current generation are 'goal related, rather than means bound' (2004). A simplistic reading of this claim could be interpreted as meaning that happiness in modernity is a matter of setting and achieving goals; whether they are material, intellectual, romantic or any other, life is about setting goals and achieving them. This may seem unsophisticated, but in liquid modernity, it is anything but. The goals have become so unpredictable and unreliable, that the meaning ascribed to them, in an objective sense, is also being questioned. So now the individual must not only decide on a goal and a

[10] Although this may seem to oppose Bauman's claims regarding the liquid or unstructured manner in which individuals navigate their way through modern life, for Bauman, this is typical of the contradictory nature of modernity. The way in which life decisions can become pre-packaged is a response to the insecurities associated with these chaotic times. Therefore, the attempt to create security though predictability in modernity is inevitably going to fall short.

plan to achieve that goal, they must also deal with the possibility of that goal being meaningless and void of contentment.

According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the flexibility of reason in modernity is being used to order and regulate the modernity. By putting into action a subjective form of rationality, society has not transformed into a place of enlightened thought and common sense, but rather rationality has been used to justify the actions and intentions of various kinds of authorities. The application of instrumental reason is fundamentally opposed to the interests of individuals as it is implemented and sustained by authorities, in this case the economy. By reducing the complexities of life to a series of consumer goals for individuals to accomplish, instrumental reason has come to justify illogical actions. Horkheimer argues that the pursuit of material goods is something that has come to replace the role once filled by religion, and has no value in and of itself (1947: 40). Therefore, instrumental reason is not subjective reason, it is the same dogmatic approach to objective reason that the Enlightenment claimed to eradicate. It seems more likely that people act as though there is a belief that material gain leads to contentment, and that this is just as effective in creating social or cultural objectives that can replace the objective views of previous generations. This could be seen as a *subjective objectivity* as opposed to the *objective subjectivity* of previous generations. After all, the difference between people living as though religion is the source of objective truth and people living as though material acquisitions are the source of objective truth, is the lack of a spiritual 'truth' that is beyond justification. Yet, this justification is not called upon for answers in a material society. Marcuse may attribute this to a hegemonic reinforcement of consumption as a source of meaning. Whereas, Bauman refers to the attitude of instant gratification involved with the way in which individuals approach goals, yet consumption is perhaps the only facet of modern life that is consistent and predictable with regard to providing contentment. With material items, people get what they pay for and nothing is necessary for its own sake. This fundamentally differs from the contentment attained from a relationship for example, where sacrifices must be

made that seem unfair or outside of the original willingness of the individual. The instrumental rationality that was of such great concern to Horkheimer and Adorno can be seen in this reductive decision making process. Bauman is right to be concerned about the way in which this mentality can seep into other areas of life[11], and this will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter.

Horkheimer makes a sizeable shift in his approach to the problem of reason midway through *Eclipse of Reason*. To avoid the potential for a trap of circular logic regarding where fault lies in the distortion of reason[12], Horkheimer turns to the autonomous subject as the focus of the discussion. In a development that echoes Freud's conclusions in *Civilisation and its Discontents*, it is the detachment of the self from nature and inevitably from the self, that becomes the true dilemma. Horkheimer states,

> The total transformation of each and every realm of being into a field of means leads to the liquidation of the subject who is supposed to used them. This gives modern industrialist society a nihilist aspect. Subjectivization, which exalts the subject, also dooms him (1947: 93).

With the modern desire to control nature, modernity has absolved the individual of danger and suffering in the name of self-preservation. Lohmann

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[11] For Bauman, this application of rationality applies a reductive quality to the most important and fulfilling aspects of life. It could be drawn from this that at the core of the problem with modern contentment is death. Misleading notions of reason and self-preservation, that are in fact false ideals in the pursuit of contentment. This particular view of death is notably expanded upon in Bauman's *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (1992). It is the idea that the priorities, aspirations and goals of modern individuals are made meaningless by death. This is not to say that pleasurable experiences are not worthwhile for their own sake, but rather to point out the vain and shallow nature of modern happiness. Material and superficial goals are the intended targets of Bauman's bold and challenging claim. What is fascinating is that this lack of meaning in modern life has occurred after modernity pulled religion from its pedestal as the source of objective truth. It was a common aspect of religious views to consider the afterlife to be the reward for the less satisfying aspects of life, yet now that this view is being replaced with the understanding that life is all there is, individuals are less satisfied with what they have. Freedom has led to new forms of slavery and the role of religion as an objective source of truth has simply been replaced with consumption, culture and popular myth. From this perspective there is warranted scepticism of the progress of modernity. This is a hardly a new claim, aside from Horkheimer and Adorno, many earlier theorists from Nietzsche to Weber, were quick to point out that the Enlightenment had not changed a great deal about society's core beliefs.

[12] Circular Logic in this sense refers to the a theoretical dead end where the autonomy and, more importantly, the creativity of the individual are underestimated to the extent that individuals are 'trapped' in their circumstance. There is evidence throughout modern life that individuals are simultaneously limited by social regulation and constantly resisting this kind of homogenization. Therefore, Horkheimer's shift towards a focus on the potential of the individual is a radical transition from his somewhat defeated view in his earlier work.

describes this in Horkheimer's terms as "self-preservation without the self" as the deterioration of ends that are valid in and of themselves has lead to a collapse in the validity of freedom (1993: 393). Yet, this discussion suggests that there is a greater level of aimlessness present here. The shift from religion as a source of objective truth to the false prophet of materialism has resulted in an abandonment of objective meaning, and to some extent an abandonment of meaning in general. This thesis will investigate the extent to which subjective meaning can be as all encompassing and satisfying as objective meaning, or in other words, the potential for culture to fill the void of religion in modernity. The competency of culture in the construction of meaning is perhaps best explored through the work of Adorno and his critique of the hollow nature of mass culture.

Adorno and Disenchantment

For Adorno, there is an undeniable disenchantment in the relationship between the individual and society. From the definition of disenchantment provided by Bernstein, the loss of meaning resembles the Habermasian understanding of the conflict between lifeworld and system (2001: 3), yet it also highlights the Weberian influence in critical theory. Simply put, the rationality of the modernity – in both an intellectual and economic sense – has taken over legitimate avenues of meaning construction. Individuals are left with a feeling of disenchantment that makes the unique seem common, the beautiful seem vague and the significant seem underwhelming. This is the result of multiple forms of disconnection; the self from society, the self from reason, and finally the self from the self. Each of these problems is relevant to the overall subject, and they will form threads of discussion throughout this thesis. It should be made clear however that Adorno is in no way ready to abandon reason as a solution to these forms of disconnection. Despite the distorted and misused concepts of reason and rationality in modernity, the task of clarifying reason for the sake of resolving this internal conflict is still an objective of Adorno's

work. Through the development of reason for the benefit of individuals, a greater cognitive position can be reached. Therefore, reason, in its purest form, is not the reduction of individuals to non-thinking and bureaucratised beings, but rather that reason broadens the scope of thought and allows for a greater ethical theory to be developed (Bernstein 2001: 4). It is through the development of this ethical theory that there can be a fulfilling relationship between the individual and society, and this is a necessity if discontentment is to be addressed in modernity.

The relationship between ethics and notions of the good life are further developed in *Minima Moralia* (1951) where Adorno argues that reason is necessary for the further development of ethics, and that ethics are necessary for a life without disenchantment. Yet, Adorno is realistic about the paradoxical nature of modernity where ethical action is rarely a simple process. If the options available to the individual are all ethically flawed, then the individual is destined to become disconnected and disenchanted (Bernstein 2001: 41). As these ethical options are somewhat dictated by context, it is quite possible that the individual alone can do nothing to overcome this problem. Take for example, the case of global warming; individuals know that they are contributing to carbon emissions and that an attempt to cease doing this entirely would require an almost complete withdrawal from society. Whilst there are actions that can be taken to lessen the damage, it is likely that the individual's other actions are unknowingly undoing any real solution overall. A rationalised response to this would be to not bother participating in ethical action at all and therefore withdrawing from the public sphere. This alienates the individual from social and political processes whilst simultaneously disconnecting the individual from themselves through feelings of guilt and powerlessness. Solutions may only exist on a social level, despite the individual nature of this predicament. This reinforces the importance of an analysis and critique of modernity, rather than a focus on the problems of individuals.

It is in *Minima Moralia* that Adorno claims that the "Wrong life cannot be lived rightly" (1951: 18), and in doing so appears to be separating himself from Horkheimer. This is indicative of a greater split within critical theory over the adoption of idealism or realism in the application of critical responses to modernity. In this case Adorno's cynicism reflects the realist position in contrast to more idealist critical theorists such as Horkheimer or Habermas. For Adorno, ethics are essential to the good life in a Hegelian sense of being in "harmony with himself" (Adorno 1966: 352), but this is made impossible if the individual lives in a world of ethical contradictions and ambiguities. Therefore a certain degree of responsibility for the individual's contentment lies with society. Horkheimer seems to dispute this point however, as reaching an understanding of the individual's relationship with society could be based upon a dispute with that society. In fact, such a dispute could easily give the individual reason to act, and feel fulfilment from that act. Certainly for Nietzsche, and possibly Freud also, the distraction from being excessively concerned with one's own happiness is quite helpful in the process of being happy. Yet what is most interesting about Adorno's position here is that he believes that the ethical world would not aid the contentment of individuals. He states, "The chances are that every citizen of the wrong world would find the right one unbearable; he would be too impaired for it" (Adorno 1966: 352). Consequently, Adorno adopts the Hegelian approach of the individual becoming contented with the self rather than society. In this sense there is room for both perspectives; perhaps individuals must find contentment within themselves before the same can be done for their sociality. The feeling of disconnection from the self may need to be resolved before the individual can be contented with society. Yet, it seems problematic to assume that society must fit the ethical requirements of an individual in order to resolve this. Perhaps it would be more fitting to think that the individual must find contentment in their relationship with society, whilst that relationship is based upon disagreement and conflict. It seems plausible that the activist is more contented with their relationship with a society they reject, than the individual who is disenchanted, but not sufficiently to act.

For Adorno, happiness is fleeting insofar as contentment exists only in history. History can be remembered in a way that induces happiness, but this comes more from a feeling of contentment regarding the relationship between the individual and that history. If great importance is placed upon the experience of happiness, then it is unlikely to occur, as happiness exists in the memory of a time when individuals were, essentially, too busy to be thinking about happiness (1966: 353).

Perhaps the greatest danger of modernity for Adorno is comfort, or more precisely the complacency that comes with it. When the individual has time to ponder their happiness, they are destined not to have it. This is why, for Adorno, happiness exists only in the past, as in times of happiness we are too busy to notice. Therefore the individual should be constantly challenged and questioned in the public sphere[13]. Modernity is full of temptations that encourage the individual to adopt a routine of conformity and the avoidance of confrontation. This encourages a degree of compliance over individual thought and obedience over critique. Adorno has discussed this at length in regard to mass popular culture and what he has termed as the culture industry, yet in *Minima Moralia* this relates the conformity of convenience back to the ability to feel happy and contented. Adorno argues,

> [t]he state of 'satisfaction' is itself unsatisfying, because 'as soon as need and danger grant a man respite, boredom is so near that amusements become an imperative need' (1966: 175).

Adorno describes the problem of unhappiness as a result of being too comfortable as a bourgeois problem, deeply tied to the notion of the decay of the public sphere whereby people flee to their homes to avoid conflict. This should not be understood as a call to revert to some primitive time where individuals live without a society as it is known today, but rather an intellectual state where individuals seek to challenge standard modes of thought and take pleasure in difference rather than commonality. Adorno's critical realist

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[13] This somewhat echoes Nietzsche as the individual must be in a constant state of disruption in order to avoid complacency. It is also a counter point to the notions of Ataraxia or the freedom from emotional disturbance often found in Epicurean philosophy.

position is visible here as his cynicism lacks a relevant contribution in terms of a solution. This is potentially another dead end in critical theory that may be an easier position to defend, but doesn't necessarily contribute to benefiting society.

Despite their differences, Adorno seems to be discussing a concept that would later be developed into Habermas's program of rational discourse. The relationship between contentment and reason reinforces a definition of contentment that is far more than just acquiring something and feeling as though it is enough. It is through a form of ongoing rational discourse that contentment becomes not the feeling of having enough, but an understanding of what it *is* to have enough. Contentment is not the result of settling, but the process of critique and constant questioning that leads to a position of satisfied understanding regarding the individual's relationship with society.

Adorno's critique of modernity however, is also a critique of the subject. Honneth and Roberts (1986) identify two threads of critique that focus on the shortcomings of the individual, and this is a notion that must be considered at this point. First, the development of the modern individual "is interpreted as a process of repressive identity formation" whereby the potentiality of the self is stunted by our own bodily limitations (Honneth & Roberts 1986: 57). The second angle of this critique refers to the smothering nature of modernity which effectively disintegrates the strengths of the individual (1986: 57). In this rather Freudian analysis of the self, the individual is both weakened by modern civilisation and also incapable of overcoming the psychic repression that modern culture is able to administer. According to Held, Adorno identifies two key problems in the development of autonomy for the individual, which encourage rationalization and conformity; namely ego weakness and narcissism (1980: 135). These characteristics encourage the individual to place incredible trust in authorities rather than questioning sources of information, and the narcissism that would otherwise lead to a kind of determined independence becomes transformed into identification with authorities. In doing so, the individual's desire to fulfil the needs of the ego is sublimated into

a group mentality whereby the individual lives through successes of their leaders. This criticism ventures beyond Freud's original notion of repression into a more focused criticism of social pressures, yet relevance of this notion is clearly visible in Bauman's theory of ambivalence which will be discussed in some detail throughout this thesis. I do not wish to focus too heavily on the internal nature of the individual at this stage, though it is important to note that this is a point of departure from Horkheimer for Adorno. It is simply necessary to point out the extent to which social pressures can knowingly or unknowingly drive or repress the subject, and that this critique is present throughout Adorno's analysis of mass culture.

It would be negligent to provide an overview of critical theory concerning contentment without some mention of what Adorno and Horkheimer have called the 'culture industry'. David Held borrows words from Horkheimer in his description of the concept,

> Culture today is not the product of genuine demands; rather, it is the result of demands which are 'evoked and manipulated' (1980: 90).

The first generation of Frankfurt School thinkers referred to the creation of artificial desires that would eventually become needs for the common individual. This creation of false needs is capable of furthering the disenchantment felt by individuals whilst reducing the appreciation of art and inspired or original thought, to a homogenised mass culture.

Adorno's notorious critique of popular culture suggests that film, television, music and other forms of media encourage homogenisation by reducing the experience of engaging with narratives and ideas to a passive absorption of prescribed values from authorities. In regard to music and radio Adorno describes the commodification of not only the music itself, but also the experience of hearing it, and the language used to describe it. He proclaims,

> Bach in his day was considered, and considered himself, an artisan, although his music functioned as art. Today Music is considered ethereal and sublime, although it actually functions as a commodity. Today the terms ethereal and sublime have

> become trademarks. Music has become a means instead of an end, a fetish (1996 [1945] 231).

He concludes this line of argument with the damning evaluation of the individual by claiming that,

> The listener suspends all intellectual activity when dealing with music and is content with consuming and evaluating its gustatory qualities – just as if the music which tasted best were also the best music possible (1996 [1945] 231).

The mentality that Adorno identifies here is seen as a serious threat to autonomy, as the culture industry encourages individuals to uniformly accept information rather than question or critique it. It is no surprise that this notion has been met with considerable criticism as Adorno is defending what he considers to be art, but what has often been interpreted by others as high art. This distinction cannot help but appear as biased by class, and this is something that contradicts the core values of the Frankfurt School. Yet, there is certainly something that can be salvaged from this concept by giving Adorno the benefit of the doubt. What Adorno wants is for people to be challenged by, and therefore to engage with art as a means of engaging with society. Therefore music, for example, should not follow a formula of standardisation that attempts to make the listener respond in a certain way, but it should challenge the listener's expectations and predispositions (1996: 232). The listener's response should be their own, whereas popular culture encourages a homogenised response and effectively numbs the relationship that the individual has with the values and ethics of their society.

Adorno does not consider all forms of popular art to be a part of this culture industry as a piece of art that was created with honourable intentions may naturally become very popular. Adorno's concern is regarding "products that are tailored for consumption by masses, and which to a great extent determine the nature of that consumption" (1991: 85). The extent to which this alludes to some form of cultural dopes theory, whereby consumers are treated as mindless and incapable of independent thought, is a common criticism of Adorno's approach. However, this is an oversimplification of Adorno's concept (see

Adorno 1997 [1970]: 16). For Adorno, the engagement with art of any kind is essential to the development of the individual's relationship with society. Yet, because of the ceaseless commodification of virtually all aspects of social life, consumers are susceptible to contrived forms of social meaning. He argues, "the customer is not king, as the culture industry would have us believe, not its subject but its object" (1991: 85). This involves acknowledging that culture is not simply driven by the preferences of individuals, but that the options that individuals are given to choose from are a façade behind which there is little to no real difference.

This is highly relevant to the question of contentment. If it is the individual's relationship with modernity that is the source of discontent, then collectively individuals should have the ability to direct modernity toward something more suitable. A central theme in this thesis asks: Why has this not happened yet? The overarching reply from critical theorists would suggest that his is because one's will is not always one's own, yet each central figure makes their own contribution to how this occurs. This is not to say that individuals are not reflexive, creative and thoughtful creatures, but that much like Weber's iron cage, modern rationality detracts from the autonomy of individuals and reinforces particular models of knowledge.

Conclusion

At this point, there is a need to clarify the nature of contentment as the term is used in this thesis. For critical theorists, conflict is a fundamental element of all social relationships. Not only is conflict the result of authoritarian power structures that favour some and discriminate against others, but conflict is also the source of social change and therefore, essential to constructions of meaning and legitimation in society. It could be seen that contentment, as it has been described here, is an attempt to resolve this conflict, but this view would be troublesome. The disintegration of conflict would result in the end of rebellion as any attempts to remove conflict from society would be more inclined to

maintain unbalanced power structures rather than to challenge them. To possess a feeling of contentment would not imply that the individual no longer experiences conflict, but that they are able to feel comfortable in conflict. It is the urge to escape conflict, in terms of differing ethics or political views that leads to the reproduction of broken systems. Therefore, contentment is not some form of numbness that makes the individual circumvent feelings of conflict, but the development of the individual's ability to engage openly in discourse. Conflict is not something that should be avoided, but acknowledged as a deeply human as well as social trait.

The intention of this chapter has been to provide an overview of the foundational theories that will become threads of discussion throughout this thesis. These include the tensions between notions of realism and idealism within critical theory, the role of reason in the relationship between the individual and society and the potential for culture to unknowingly influence the knowledge, preferences and morality of individuals. Bauman's relationship to this era of critical theory differs greatly to that of Habermas, whilst also serving as an insightful intersection of their similarities. The development of a social theory of contentment must acknowledge the role of critical theory to adequately work towards solutions to problems of meaning and justification in modernity. From the issues discussed here, contentment can be seen as being closely tied to reason as a means of understanding and relating the individual to social context. Yet, reason is not a tool to be used in order to pursue goals, but an ongoing process of evaluation and engagement with knowledge. A social theory of contentment must also allow for an acknowledgement of individuals as emotional and even irrational beings, within which a complex web of contradictions and ironies exist. Therefore reason must not be used as a way of feeling contented, but rather a way to avoid the twisting or perverting of an individual's priorities, values and perspectives. The project of autonomy that was so persistently pursued by the Frankfurt School can then be seen as a project in allowing the individual to continue to be inconsistent and susceptible

to emotional states without the threat of either knowingly or unknowingly relying upon the false narratives of authorities.

This chapter has introduced a number of key themes that will be developed throughout this thesis. Although both Habermas and Bauman's work can be seen as a continuation of Frankfurt School critical theory, there are some significant and unique differences between the two that will be assessed in considerable detail in the following chapters. In the next chapter, the contributions of Jürgen Habermas will highlight the linguistic or communicative turn in critical theory. Despite this radical shift, the influence of Horkheimer is always present. In chapter three, an exegesis of Bauman's work will elucidate aspects of Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse, whilst reaffirming the role of critique in the discussion of contentment.

Chapter Two Jürgen Habermas: Critical Models of Contentment in Discourse Ethics

Despite Habermas's reputation for the analytic deconstruction of communication and the analysis of intersubjectivity and transcendentalism, for the purposes of this thesis his work can be seen as a study of the social construction of knowledge and meaning with the intention of enhancing the role of democracy in modernity. Habermas seeks to develop an understanding of the motivations that lead to action within the context of flexible cultural interpretations. With this in mind, in regard to the study of the current contributions as well as the potential further contributions that social theory can make in better understanding contentment, Habermas is ideally placed. The intention of this chapter is to situate the work of Jürgen Habermas within the context of contentment in modern society. Many of the themes discussed in the previous chapter on the Frankfurt School will continue through Habermas's work, yet this chapter will also show how Habermas eventually distanced himself from the first generation of critical theorists[14]. I will then traverse through his earliest works including, but not limited to, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* and *Theory and Practice* before chronologically working toward his magnum opus, *The Theory of Communicative Action*. First, I will provide a brief introduction to the work of Jürgen Habermas to make clear his relevance to the study of contentment.

Habermas has a rather unique location regarding modern critical theory. Before completing his dissertation, he spent many years working at the Frankfurt School (most notably as Adorno's assistant) yet he has also been a substantial critic of the school's celebrated first generation. Adorno considered Habermas's dissertation to be so problematic that he refused to give it a passing grade, thus resulting in his departure from the school and a resubmission elsewhere (Outhwaite 2009). That thesis would become his first major publication, *The*

[14] Adorno in particular.

Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1962). Despite his rejection of some of the key premises of Frankfurt School critical theory, Habermas is often considered to be the key figure in the second generation of the school's theorists. It is important to note however, that the use of critical theory in Habermas's work has been largely influenced by Max Horkheimer. This particular version of critical theory, where the vast range of knowledge collected by the social sciences can be construed into an understanding of modernity that is capable of improving the experience of being in the social world, reflects Habermas's use of the term quite well. Regarding Adorno's model of critical theory, which is focused upon ideas of aesthetics and critiques of mass culture, Habermas seems to show little interest. Nor does he seem concerned with Freud's work that had been so influential for the first generation of the Frankfurt School (Held 1980: 252). Meanwhile, Habermas's interpretation of Marx in the late 1960s not only challenged the tradition of his post-Marxist peers and colleagues, but also the leftist student movements of the mid to late sixties. Habermas considered the ideals of these protest groups to be misguided and lacking in a logical theoretical framework and that resulted in a rejection of his work by many as being too theoretical and insufficiently grounded.

Wellmer describes Habermas's project "as a 'struggle for the critical soul of science' and 'the scientific soul of criticism'" (Held 1980: 250). Consequently, the re-imagining of critical theory into something that Habermas believes can provide positive social change is a theme present throughout his career. Yet the purpose of critical theory must be to free individuals from forms of domination through a process of self-emancipation. Following on from the key critical theorists before him, Habermas considers individuals to be coerced and restrained by the forces of authorities both in a legal or political sense, as within a cultural, social or normative sense. This is perpetuated through the distortion of communication that prevents individuals from adequately engaging in the kind of discourse that can lead to meaningful social change and critical engagement with social, political and ethical norms. Habermas intends

to bring new life to critical theory through a more thorough investigation of concepts of truth, values and the relationship between theory and practice. Through this understanding, the project of enlightenment can continue as an ongoing process of social improvement, something that could easily be understood with the development of contentment as a socially constructed idea.

Habermas's contribution here takes many forms. These include the way in which irrational or harmful systems of thought can be sustained over time through communication, the role of truth in considering questions of contentment and the role of reason concerning contentment and happiness. In response to Horkheimer, Habermas rejects ideas of truth as a purely subjective and somewhat individual creation. Yet, to an extent, he is not wholly satisfied with the Kantian approach to universal truth. Habermas argues that through the rational and persistent discourse of informed individuals, a consensus can be met that is as close to, or as good as, truth. Knowledge therefore, requires an ongoing engagement with research and discourse, with a readiness to abandon false ideas when more accurate knowledge becomes available. There is a reflexive element to the way in which Habermas's rational consensus theory is applied in this thesis. A simple example can be seen when two individuals are debating over a disagreement and eventually one person says to the other, "I don't want to talk about it anymore" or "We'll have to agree to disagree". For Habermas, either one or both of these people are wrong and statements like these allow people to carry on with illogical beliefs in contradiction of evidence. Racism or sexism could be understood and dissected in this way, but so could ethical dilemmas such as determining concepts of basic human rights or the rights of animals.

Because of this rather unique understanding of truth, Habermas is able to make some very interesting contributions to the study of contentment, a field where the idea of truth is particularly abstract. Not only can Habermas contribute to understanding the role of truth in happiness and contentment, but his ideas of rational discourse can help in developing how, or even if, individuals can reach such a mindset. The key to this is in the process of legitimation, it is in the

development and validation of priorities and goals that allow for aspects of modern life to be fulfilling. This requires an analysis of the relationship between reason and contentment, and will follow on from a discussion regarding Habermas's work in critical theory and the reproduction of social problems.

This chapter will now traverse through the work of Habermas in a semi-chronological order, with the intention of highlighting the most relevant aspects of his work to the question of contentment in modernity. The importance of this task is amplified by the lack of direct engagement in Habermas's work with notions of contentment. There is a great deal that Habermas can contribute to the study of contentment, even if he rarely refers to the matter directly and this chapter will seek to bring these elements to the fore.

Theory and Practice (1963) and The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1962)

Despite being published almost 50 years ago, *Theory and Practice* is a book that is still very much inline with Habermas's theoretical position today. In this text, Habermas poses a rather simple question with an endlessly difficult answer. How can a theory of society adequately explain the relationship between theory and practice? From this Habermas intends to show how knowledge, philosophy and ideology can lead to action, but what results is essentially a social theory of intentions. This approach can be understood as the culmination of two distinct understandings of society; first as a "constellation of self-interests" and second as the "interconnectedness of action" (1963: 2). Although this may seem abstract, the project that Habermas undertakes in *Theory and Practice* is deeply concerned with the interaction between the individual and society as he seeks to re-imagine the agency/structure divide. If this thesis is to consider the prospect that individuals are discontented by a society that they themselves are able to interact with and eventually modify, then an understanding of the way in which individuals go about this task is

essential. Therefore, Habermas is useful in understanding why society seems to repeatedly make the same mistakes. In *Critical Hermeneutics* (1981), John Thompson explains,

> One of the residual problems arises from the fact that the social engineers of the allegedly correct order are simultaneously members of the existing faulty order, and hence both subjects and objects of scientific knowledge (1981: 77).

For Habermas, a sphere in which people can pursue reason not only for the sake of itself, but also for some form of self-emancipation, is essential to the process of enlightenment. What Habermas finds, however, is that modernity is still somewhat inflexible to the interests and demands of individuals and that the authority of the sciences and technical knowledge reinforce normative judgements that are somewhat invisible to the naked eye.

Habermas argues that there has been a decline in the role of the public sphere in modern society. By public sphere, he does not mean public life as such, but rather a forum where individuals of all backgrounds can converse over public issues in a democratic sense. Habermas argues that knowledge derived through reason can exist, not in an individual or an act, but in an ongoing discourse between individuals. The term 'rational consensus' is used to describe the conclusion of a discussion between individuals that are able to communicate freely and with accuracy of expression. Habermas argues that much of the communication between individuals is distorted and social pressures must bear some responsibility for this. These pressures include expectations regarding social norms as well as pressure from cultural, political and economic authorities to communicate and respond in a certain way. The way in which language is used depends greatly on culturally defined rules, it is not simply the expression and reflection of an individual's unique personality, rather it is a semiotic process that is streamlined into acceptable phrases, tones and definitions that are often beyond the control of the individual. Therefore, it is through the presence of public discourse and debate that a society as a whole can shift in the values and virtues relevant to modern life. This analysis of the public sphere was first discussed by Habermas in *The Structural*

Transformation of the Public Sphere (1962), where he placed a strong focus on the role of class and the imbalance of power in public discourse at the time. Here Habermas makes the argument that capitalism inevitably depoliticises the individual, even in circumstances where a given society appears to place great value on democratic principles (1963: 4).

For Habermas, the lack of a public sphere where individuals can create discourse for questions regarding politics, philosophy and economics is of great significance to modernity. For an example of what has been lost, Habermas refers specifically to 17/18th century London where countless coffee houses would be populated with people engaging in avid debate and discussion over issues that were once considered a concern only for authorities. Although these debates were generally restricted to property owning men, the discussions that occurred can be seen as a step forward in opening up a world of discourse to all people. According to Habermas, this civic participation is lacking in modernity and the task of developing social and cultural understandings of modern values regarding ethics, politics and individual happiness, have been left to economic authorities, capable of administering their perspective through mass culture. This approach resonates with a Marcusian approach regarding the ability for consumer culture to manipulate individuals, yet the focus of Habermas's arguments in his early work are an attempt to understand how ideas and philosophies can be transformed into political action. Whilst there is a possible critique in this example, as a civic debate that allows only property owning men to participate is far from democratic, Habermas pre-empts this claim. The limited access to these debates is a reflection of the social and cultural norms of the day, not a central element to the value of public discourse. Therefore, a modern version of these rigorous debates would be far less dictated by gender and class. Meanwhile, any elements of sexism or class bias could essentially be resolved through this very process of public discourse.

In order to better understand Habermas's position we must consider the influence of Kant and Hegel, as the position that Habermas eventually takes is essentially a response to them (Holub: 1991). Whilst Kant believed that the

public should be informed of philosophical debates, he held that the task of debating and eventually deciding upon such decisions should be left to professionals. Yet, he considered philosophy to be a great deal more than simply debate and discussion. For Kant, philosophical discourse is permanently tied to action and direct consequences in the world. Therefore, the Enlightenment cannot take place without the public sphere, even when the public are 'represented' by a hierarchy of more knowledgeable people. The public were understood as being capable of reason and so there is an extent to which this particular model is not trying to exclude certain people based on inferior intellect, but rather, granting that the task of engaging in dense philosophical debate is not something that everyone has time for or will want to do (Holub: 1991).

However, Kant is sceptical about the social use of knowledge. He differentiates understanding from reason by arguing that understanding is only concerned with causal knowledge (Bernstein 1995: 14). This is a distinction that would eventually become a central theme in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), whereby the pursuit of knowledge has become exclusively concerned with trying to control nature and circumstance. From this perspective, knowledge is no longer evaluated by the extent to which it is true, but by the usefulness or profitability of that knowledge. According to Bernstein, Kant's response to this is to develop a concept of reason that is able to relate to human life in a holistic sense rather than using reason for selected obstacles, all whilst encouraging the analysis of means and ends in such a way that the validity of goals is subject to reason, just as much as the means to achieve those goals (1995: 14). This position would eventually lead to the development of a crucial theme in Habermas's work, the notion that all knowledge is expressed with intent. Knowledge does not simply exist in the world; it is created and perpetuated with specific intentions, whether they be honourable or manipulative. Reason, therefore, is the filter that allows individuals to engage with knowledge without being coerced by it.

Kant insists that access to public debate should never be hidden from the common individual, but it is the role of responsibility for that debate that separates the professional philosopher from others. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Kant's approach is his understanding of the relationship between reason in the public and private sphere. For Kant, imposed limitations on the individual's access to reason (and in this context, debate) in the private sphere, will have next to no affect on the public sphere regarding a social movement such as the Enlightenment. This is because Kant believes that individuals have a tendency to work around the restrictions placed upon them regarding accessing and utilising reason. Therefore, he is optimistic about the prospects of an enlightenment taking place despite the authoritative power structures present in society. Morals, values and norms from the private sphere are inevitably going to seep into the public sphere where they will be considered and then decided upon by reasonable people and according to Kant this can always overpower political, cultural and religious authorities (Holub: 1991).

Such optimism regarding the transition between theory and praxis seemed much less convincing following the violence and suffering of the French revolution. This is where Hegel's critique of the relationship between subjectively derived positions and truth became highly influential. For Hegel, there is no relationship between the conclusions drawn by rational individuals and science. The fact that there is a common consensus between free-thinking individuals gives no indication whatsoever of the extent to which a particular claim is true. Therefore, the process of enlightenment is not directly related to the direction given to society by individuals. Hegel's work on the French Revolution is of particular interest here, as he suggests that there were significant inconsistencies between the theory of the movement and the practice of their actions (Habermas 1963: 125). Although he supported the theory of the revolution, for Hegel the actions were often beyond justification and this kind of perspective becomes particularly interesting when we consider that the violent acts of the revolution were necessary in order to create change.

The idea that extreme actions may be necessary to respond to extreme situations may not seem controversial, but in the wake of the Holocaust – where it could be argued that the actions of the Nazis were being justified among themselves in this way – the need for consistency was reiterated. Charles Taylor states, "For Hegel the drive to absolute freedom ends in the contradiction of the terror, a kind of destructive fury which destroys the individual it came to liberate" (1975: 187). It was this inconsistency between theory and practice – between ideal and reality – that Habermas aimed to address, with the intention of aligning the theoretical foundation of a movement with the actions necessary for positive social change.

To set out his interpretation of theory and practice, Habermas proposes a 'dual relationship' model (Habermas 1963). In the first relationship, he argues that his theory has a social element that considers the self-interest of individuals within the context of complex historical relationships. The key to these relationships is communication. It is the creation and evaluation of norms as well as the application of moral values that are used to explain and justify actions. For Habermas, this is where distorted aspects of language can lead to the degradation of reason as a shared and uniting principle, thus allowing the creation and application of reason to be taken away from the individual. To justify any action rationally, there is a need for purposive truth within the claims of the individual as well as a validation of the norms within which those claims function. David Held identifies two threads of concern within this evaluation of social structures and the public sphere. The first involves the role of the government in economic development with the intention of creating stability and attempting to prevent radical or sudden changes. This has become particularly relevant since the global financial crisis of 2009 whereby governments all over the world offered bailout packages to corporations and stimulus packages to consumers that sidestep the consequences of irresponsible lending in the private sector. Despite the obvious social and economic benefits of these programs, it allows faulty systems to continue functioning rather than adapting to, or being replaced by, better systems (1980: 263). The second

concern for Habermas is the nature of the relationship between science and production/industry. Increasingly, science is driven by privately funded research programs that seek profit as a primary goal rather than some form of public good (1980: 263). This highlights an ongoing concern in Habermas's work regarding the development and application of knowledge. All knowledge has a social context that is inescapable, yet according to Habermas, scientific research has been escalated to level of objectivity and this excludes individuals from participating in the development of knowledge.

The second aspect of Habermas's argument in *Theory and Practice* examines the role of human action as an aspect of life that is simultaneously influenced by theory and capable of becoming political action (1963: 2). This rational action is concerned with the manipulation of the physical world with technology and organisations as it utilises empirical data as a basis for justifying actions (Held 1980: 283). This understanding of rational action subverts reason as it does not value knowledge for its own sake, but rather for its usability in a practical sense and in so doing will reduce reason to nothing more than means and ends (McCarthy 1978: 21). It is perhaps worth mentioning here that Habermas considers critique to be outside of this distinction, and therefore, separate from both philosophy and action (Habermas 1963: 2)[15]. For Habermas, central to social theory is the idea that there is a separation between the experiences of the individual and the practical philosophy that may logically follow. This not only situates social theory and philosophy, it justifies its existence. Yet, Adorno considered empirical attempts to understand and translate this information to be incurably flawed. This particular view is present in much of the Frankfurt School's work, the argument that individuals are never sufficiently free from influence such that an understanding of experience can be achieved in a way that utilises an adequate

[15] This is because the claims made by critical theory can only be proven or disproven through the process of enlightenment. This is distinct from science as a scientific principle is 'true' regardless of whether that principle is used to improve or modify the world, meanwhile an ontological claim can be justified through understanding the logic of the scenario that leads to the philosophical question. Yet, critique can only become truth through enlightenment or alteration of the present.

level of logic to translate experience into philosophy, nor is the objectivity of facts about the world able to give individuals satisfying answers to inherently human problems. For these thinkers, the betterment of society is the primary goal of critical theory and Habermas is inseparable from this. Where Habermas differs is in his optimism surrounding positivist methodologies for understanding the relationship between theory and practice. This is in direct conflict with Adorno's rather blatant claims about the inaccuracy and irrelevance of positivist knowledge. Habermas agrees that individuals cannot be relied upon to accurately make judgements about theory from their experience, and this perspective is made clear in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968), yet he is not satisfied with abandoning this ideal. Rather he seeks to determine the circumstances where reason can be used, without coercion, to arrive at truth claims. Accordingly, information must be bound together through an engagement with continually tested theory and an adherence to relationships of logic. A similar view is present in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* where the claim is made that the modern era that is so widely celebrated, has not progressed at all.

For Habermas, there has been a transition in the role of politics from being a "continuation of ethics" (as identified by Aristotle) to a social philosophy that has bureaucratised political processes through rationalisation (1963: 41-2). By drawing upon Aristotle, Habermas highlights the relationship once shared between politics and aspirations for the good life; as for Aristotle the good life was only made possible through participation in politics. This participation was understood as being central to one's character, and through this process of citizenry participation, the relationship between the individual and society could be positively constructed in much the same way as proposed in this thesis. Central to this is the rejection of highly rationalised systems. Habermas writes,

> This separation of politics from morality replaces instruction in leading a good and just life with making possible a life of well-being within a correctly instituted order (1963: 43).

However, it is Habermas's optimism about positivism that distinguishes him from the critiques of rationality made by the first generation of critical theorists[16]. Social philosophy, according to Habermas, is incapable of providing accuracy as it is excessively focused on the goal related priorities of modern rationality. Whilst Habermas has some reservations, the intention of *Theory and Practice* is to provide a less pessimistic view to that of Horkheimer and Adorno. The lack of dependability between experience and theory leads to a society where development is seen to be intentional and systematic. Although Habermas argues that modernity does not possess the ability to develop in this way, the intention of *Theory and Practice* is to develop a theoretical structure where the problems identified in making these truth claims can be overcome by combining a theoretical structure of our praxis with a scientific foundation of knowledge (1963: 3). The practical result of this distinction can be found in the unique claims regarding enlightenment. For Horkheimer, the Enlightenment never really happened, social control simply became more covert as enslavement was sold to individuals under the branding of liberation. The ideal of knowledge and truth for its own sake was overlooked for the ability to manipulate the world into predictable scenarios whereby reason no longer had to fit between the individual and the world, but rather the world was stretched and adapted to fit pre-existing notions of reason. These notions were better suited to political, religious and economic authorities than to individuals. Yet for Habermas, enlightenment needs to be a part of any society's ongoing future. It is not plausible that a society can pass through Enlightenment and therefore 'be enlightened'. Reason and knowledge must continually be updated and can only happen through an ongoing discourse.

Perhaps the most crucial problem for modern contentment is the extent to which subjectively derived and justified goals, values, ethics and virtues can be treated with the same validity as they were when objective sources of truth

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[16] Habermas was critical of the lack of a tangible response to the problems identified in *Dialectic*, which Arnason describes as "The failure to shift from the level of action theory to systems theory" which "reflects the same philosophical presuppositions that also prevent Adorno and Horkheimer from going beyond the monological confrontation between subject and object and thematizing communitive relations between subjects" (1986: 83-83).

were still being utilised. Horkheimer describes a process of *spleen* whereby objective sources of truth, such as religion, fall away leaving communities to decide if a particular value should be upheld or if it should fade away as each generation redefines and re-evaluates the worth of said values (Horkheimer 1947: 38). Meanwhile, Bauman's analysis of modernity may very well be suggesting that for meaning to be attainable, society must find a way to validate these subjective values. This is easier said than done, yet Habermas's work on the public sphere intends to make this transition from objective to subjective meaning possible. Habermas was able to show in *Theory and Practice* that such a process of justification could be established and why this has not yet occurred. However, this era of Habermas's work is only the beginning of his interest on this subject, as the processes of validation, justification and meaning are still present themes in his work today.

There is a fundamental transition here from a society where autonomy comes from participation in the public sphere, while the private sphere was reserved for obligation and responsibility such as providing for one's family, to a depoliticised model of civic engagement – or disengagement. This could be imagined in the Athenian sense of civic engagement and democracy, and Habermas shares some common ground with the work of Cornelius Castoriadis at this point. However, for Castoriadis, autonomy is the result of creativity as there is the potential for individuals and communities to bring into the world something that is entirely new. From this perspective, creativity is key to notions of progress and intellectual freedom (Adams 2011: 20). Yet for Habermas, autonomy is dependent upon access to – and the quality of – reason in a similar sense to that of Horkheimer. Modernity has reversed the traditional approach to public and private freedom and this transition has severely stunted the individual's ability to contribute to this ongoing process of constructing values. The individual must conform to the rules and conventions of modernity in order to flourish in it and therefore sacrifices are made to benefit a career, an investment portfolio or a mortgage. These sacrifices are made to possess freedom in the private sphere in the form of leisure time. However, this

approach severely depoliticises the individual and for Habermas, this is one of the great tragedies of modernity.

Habermas is not simply arguing that the private sphere has been made public (in a sense he argues that it always has been), but also that the public sphere has been privatised. The privatisation of the public sphere could be understood as the takeover of public space through advertising and marketing. It could also be seen in the development of privately owned shopping malls and housing developments. Yet the privatisation that is of concern to Habermas is the disintegration of the individual from the public sphere concerning engagement with public discourse. People have become the audience in debates about society rather than the participants and for Habermas this is of great concern. In this context, to say that the public sphere has been privatised is not radically different from saying that democracy has been privatised. It could be drawn from this that Habermas is, much like the first generation critical theorists, distancing himself from traditional Marxism by abandoning the need for a revolution to create the social change necessary for a fair and just society. The involvement with democracy that Habermas calls for does not require a radical takeover by force or violence, but rather a fresh understanding of the role of the individual in society, among individuals in society. Habermas argues that communication as discourse and debate has the potential to empower the individual in a democracy, but that there is an element of ambivalence in the way that participation is now performed[17].

It is important to note that the discussion of democracy, specifically in the context of the individual's access to participation within it, is not limited to the realm of politics. It is crucially important to the development of a socially constructed model of contentment that individuals feel that they can meaningfully participate in the democratic process. Habermas is also concerned with access to the construction of values, ethics and meaning in

17 It is through this approach that Habermas reaches the view that the project of modernity should not be abandoned, but pursued. Modernity is perhaps better described as bent, rather than broken and in need of an entirely new beginning.

society. The idea of democratic access to social change exists beyond politics and governments; it exists within the individual's understanding of society and the relationship between them. Therefore, radical social change must begin with rethinking society and this cannot be done without an ongoing discourse in a manner that is open, free and accurate. Consequently, the great tragedy in the decline of the public sphere is the loss of a recognised public opinion (Held 1980: 262). This is not to say that there is no public opinion in modern society (a quick perusal of the letters to the editor page in any local newspaper will show this, as will the plethora of twitter updates online), it is the claim that public opinion is lacking the ability to adequately create change. In response to Freud's analysis of discontentment in modernity, Habermas concludes that a more interactive relationship between the individual and society is necessary and that this must be accomplished through the mending of the individual's disconnection and disenchantment with society. Yet, before this can be accomplished, an individual's internal conflicts must be addressed resulting in a 'catch 22' like situation. Individuals must restore a meaningful and sincere relationship with society to overcome their disconnection from themselves; meanwhile the problematic relationship with the self is encouraged by the disenchantment with modernity. In the following era of Habermas's work, he attempts to resolve this issue with a shift towards understanding intersubjectivity as a means to simultaneously reconnect the individual with the self and society.

Knowledge and Human Interests (1968) and Legitimation Crisis (1975)

Knowledge and Human Interests is the result of the inevitable position Habermas was left with after *Theory and Practice*; put simply, How is reliable knowledge possible? My intention in utilising these texts is to provide an insight to two key discussions in this thesis. The first is on the role of knowledge in the experience and construction of contentment and the extent to which Habermas's theory of knowledge is plausible. The second, and perhaps

most relevant to the overall theme of this thesis, relates to the potential for individuals to know what it is that leads to contentment. Habermas's theory of knowledge will be discussed further in chapter six of this thesis. At this stage it is necessary however to provide an overview of the significance of knowledge in the analysis of contentment.

Perhaps the ideal place to begin this discussion is regarding the social process of legitimation that refers explicitly to the cultural use of knowledge through the labelling of legitimate or illegitimate ideas. Concerning the importance of the legitimation process in the development of knowledge, Habermas states,

> The public realm, set up for effective legitimation, has above all the function of directing attention to topical areas – that is, of pushing *other* themes, problems, and arguments below the threshold of attention and, thereby, of withholding them from opinion-formation. The political system takes over tasks of ideology planning (1975: 70).

This reflects a theme that is present throughout Habermas's work and refers to the key question; Why do societies capable of identifying and diagnosing their own social problems (i.e. Rationalisation) continue to repeat the same mistakes? It follows that the social use of knowledge as a means to inform processes of legitimation are of particular interest in the discussion of socially constructed notions of contentment.

Building on the discussion of *Theory and Practice*, Habermas seeks to understand how the legitimation of ideas can motivate action and in doing this he identifies two key admissions. The first refers to the "position that motivations are shaped through the internalization of symbolically represented structures of expectation" (1975: 95). This perspective draws upon the broad range of ideas from Freud's psychoanalytic understanding of the self, to Mead's symbolic interactionism. Yet it is the second notion that is most relevant to this section and this is in regard to the relationship between legitimation and motivation on one hand, and truth on the other. As Habermas considers there to be the potential for universalism in knowledge, it follows for

him that legitimation can function in much the same way. The problem then lies in the process of determining the validity and reliability of knowledge.

Knowledge and Human Interests attempts to unravel Kant and Hegel within a critique of positivist social knowledge that echoes Horkheimer and Adorno's own disputes with positivism. Habermas begins with the role of science and scientism in epistemology. He argues that as a result of Kant, philosophy has ceased to consider science as the source of truth and knowledge, but rather one of many different forms of knowledge. It therefore must be subject to the same doubts and critiques as other kinds of knowledge. Scientific knowledge does not exist in some objective sense whereby individuals can 'discover' information that is somehow beyond human bias and influence. The view being challenged here is often referred to as 'scientism', the assumption that science is knowledge in and of itself. Yet the information acquired through the ideals of scientific research, whether it be from cells in a Petri dish or the responses in a quantitative survey, is dictated by the interests and curiosities of the researchers involved. There is an undeniable human element to the selection of a hypothesis and the criteria used to develop the answers. Therefore, no knowledge is objective.

In response to this challenge to knowledge[18], there is a tendency to claim that either nothing is true or that everything is true. Habermas argues that positivist methodologies rush to consider all principles of knowledge as problematic and must be treated with doubt, meanwhile theories of knowledge have been eager to interpret truth as a whole. Either perspective results in a circular logic upon which either nothing or everything is true in some abstract sense. This is just not practical for providing a usable understanding of knowledge as each of these models is striving for some kind of objective truth that is impervious to criticism. However they lack an understanding of knowledge in a practical or usable sense. Therefore, what is needed is a method of utilising subjectivity in

18 It should be made clear that Habermas's critiques and challenges to knowledge are made with the intention of improving the quality of knowledge rather than to discredit it.

a meaningful and useful way and this is why Habermas is so important to this subject.

Habermas's account of Marx in the chapter 'Theory of Knowledge as Social Theory' is of some interest here. Marx is used to tie together reflection with labour, through the role of instrumental action. According to Habermas, Marx considered the role of reflection to serve as little more than a part of instrumental action. Thus suggesting that individuals do not reflect for the sake of reaching a higher or more meaningful understanding that can be justified by its own existence, but rather they reflect in order to make sense of a form of rationality that is far from humanistic. This is of some concern to Habermas as this perspective denies the importance of reflection in the progression of history, placing the habit of self-reflection within the means of production and thus being somewhat removed from the individual. This is used to highlight Marx's subsequent position that there is no reason to differentiate between "the logical status of the natural sciences and of critique" (Habermas 1968: 44). Marx considers this as evidence that the motivations of inquiry in both the natural sciences and philosophical critique are both open to distortion through false consciousness. In an argument that would eventually become synonymous with the Frankfurt School, Marx then argues that there can be no meaningful separation between philosophy and science if both seek to find new forms of control as their primary goal. Marx eventually argues that a single science will be formed from a culmination of all forms of knowledge, although the intentions of this knowledge are unclear. For Habermas, Marx's position here becomes untenably positivist and therefore severely limited in scope (Habermas 1968: 46). This is because of the lack of critique in the reflection involved in the scientific process. For Habermas, a fundamental aspect of knowledge is the extent to which social and cultural factors influence the way that it is acquired or created and so long as this separation between subjective and objective exists, there can be no single science. This account highlights the need for a better application and understanding of contentment concerning knowledge as the integration of human interests into the relationship between

social values and social action that can lead to the systematic distortion of knowledge.

Habermas's position at this juncture could be seen as arguing that all forms of knowledge are acting as a mode of self-awareness for society, or as he states, "the self-constitution of the species" (Habermas 1968: 47). As scientific knowledge becomes integral to the processes of production, it comes to affect social life and this leads to a blurring of the lines between science and philosophy. If human interests were truly at the core of knowledge, then it would seem that contentment would be a primary concern. However, the role of instrumental action (and reason) in discouraging the individual to engage in reflection, leads to a missing link in the logical construction of self-understanding. Whilst this may seem to be an inherently individual concern, it is applied and maintained socially and therefore creates a problem at a social level. The question is then, How can individuals, as a part of society, come to an understanding of contentment – as a social construction – that is beneficial to themselves and others, without succumbing to the influence of authorities, both structural and individual, that do not have the best interests of individuals in mind? In justifying this line of questioning, Habermas refers to Marx's *Critique of Political Economy* where he states that, "the history of transcendental consciousness would be no more than the residue of the history of technology" (1968: 48). For Marx, liberation from this can only come with freedom from 'necessary labour', or at least freedom from performing the labour of others.

It is here that Habermas begins to hint at the idea of communicative action as a plausible response to the pessimism of Marx's view. For Marx, the extent to which individuals can know themselves as either individual subjects or as part of society in general, is dictated by economic and technological progress as well as the desire to manipulate nature (Habermas 1968: 54). Discussions surrounding the 'knowing subject' are therefore hopeless when the subject is left without a valid understanding of him or herself. Marx argues that individuals are constantly struggling to find stable ground between the ongoing

attempts to find emancipation from nature, whilst simultaneously dealing with the repression of their 'natural instincts' (1968: 55). Put simply, there can be no discussion of the knowledge of the subject if the individual cannot yet know themselves. Habermas responds to this by claiming that

> The course of the social self-formative process, …is marked not by new technologies but by stages of reflection through which the dogmatic character of surpassed forms of domination and ideologies are dispelled, the pressure of the institutional framework is sublimated, and communicative action is set free as communicative action (1968: 55).

The Theory of Communicative Action (1981) would eventually become Habermas's most famous publication, notorious for both its considerable length and its complexity. Yet more than a decade before its publication Habermas was developing the concept in *Knowledge and Human Interests*. For Habermas, the problem Marx outlines above can be resolved through free and open discussion between individuals. However, liberation from the patterns and hegemonic influences present in language often lead to distorted forms of communication. Individuals must therefore develop an available realm or method of reaching rational conclusions to problems through communication. This is fundamentally attached to the act of critical discourse, and must also depend on the ability for the individual to freely participate in critique. Habermas acknowledges the importance of liberating individuals from what is deemed 'unnecessary labour' in order for subjects to participate in communicative action.

Yet there is something crucial about the relationship between knowledge and human interests that should be clarified here. Habermas makes the following point most clearly in the appendix of the text, stating that

> The *only* knowledge that can truly orient action is knowledge that frees itself from mere human interests and is based in Ideas –in other words, knowledge that has taken a theoretical attitude (1968: 301).

There are two fundamental arguments to be drawn from this. First, that knowledge that can be separated from human interests must be valued if that

knowledge is to be capable of creating social change. This does not imply that knowledge should be based upon principles of positivism or a perceived objectivity, rather that knowledge should be admired and pursued for the sake of itself instead of knowledge being assembled on the basis of technocratic needs. The priorities that dictate the direction of knowledge must be debated and discussed by all interested parties to reach what Habermas might call a rational consensus. The second point is that social change is not motivated by facts but by ideas (or theory or philosophy). It is only through embracing theory as a form of knowledge that the problems discussed above can plausibly have solutions. Problems of misguided self-reflection and distorted communication must be clarified through the abandonment of scientism and the adoption of a new model of thinking about knowledge.

Concerning the questions posed at the beginning of this section, an answer is gradually forming, although it is far from complete. It seems that if contentment as a kind of knowledge is plausible, then modernity is still far from reaching it. Although some of Habermas's more recent works might imply a sense of optimism regarding this question (this will be discussed in more detail later in the thesis). Yet, for individuals to be in a position whereby they can know what is necessary for contentment, a shift in the use and understanding of knowledge is still needed. There is a shift in the source of such knowledge from particular cultural authorities, to the engaged discussion and critique of individuals. Yet, the problem of reaching an understanding of contentment still looms and this is where the idea of contentment as a form of reason (or perhaps as reason itself) becomes interesting.

The Theory of Communicative Action (1981) and The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity (1985)

Often referred to as his magnum opus, *The Theory of Communicative action* is perhaps better understood as a collection of Habermas's ideas that he developed throughout his earlier publications, but had not been fully developed

in a single text. Concepts such as rational discourse, reason and truth within broader attempts to grasp communication as the subject of critical inquiry, were not new to Habermas's work. Rather, *Communicative Action* is an attempt to bring together a career worth of ideas into a single set of principles and ideas. I should be clear however, that it is not my intention to recite or summarise *Communicative Action*. Many others have done this with great accuracy and clarity (Outhwaite, McCarthy, Bernstein). Instead, I hope to highlight sections of the text that relate directly to this thesis. I will, however, attempt to provide a brief summary for the sake of giving context to Habermas's arguments.

Habermas makes it clear in the preface that he has three intentions that he wishes to put forward, and these intentions highlight both the usefulness of this text to the discussion of modern contentment and as a way to make this 1200 page text less daunting. The first is an approach to communicative rationality that insists upon ongoing, critical discourse that prevents the individuals from resorting to instrumental reason. This should be understood as an alternative approach to Horkheimer's distinction between subjective and objective reason. Much of the first volume is taken up by this argument and it is highly relevant to the development of a social theory of contentment. This will be discussed in more detail shortly. The second intention for Habermas is to further investigate the relationship between 'lifeworld' and 'system'. By this Habermas is contrasting the systematic nature of modern technocratic society with the role of intersubjectivity for individuals. This could be seen as an attempt to understand the way in which individuals must work with, and often fit within, a program of systematic reason that does not relate to, or consider, individual difference. There could be parallels drawn between this aspect of Habermas's work and that of Zygmunt Bauman's later work (i.e. *Wasted Lives*), although the differences are noteworthy as well. Finally, the third intention in *Communicative Action* is to show that a theoretical analysis is necessary to understand the "social pathologies that are today becoming increasingly visible" (1981: xl). This relates back to the role of distorted communication, but considers more closely the importance of action. The purpose of this could

be understood as an attempt to re-imagine critical theory in a way that would allow it to make positive changes to present day society.

At this point I would like to return to the discussion around rationality, reason and contentment to further explore the relationship between these terms. As previously discussed, Horkheimer was interested in the breakdown of objective reason into the more flexible and individualised subjective reason. This could be understood in the context of the growing disillusionment with religion over the last 100 years and the shift from concepts of morality and truth as being objective – in that they are come from external sources rather than internal ones – to the more modern use of these ideas as subjective or individualised ideas. Habermas interjects here and claims that reason is neither subjective nor objective, but rather it can only exist between individuals within an ongoing rational discourse. For Habermas, rationality is distinctly different from knowledge, however this is not the common view held by the social world. He argues that, "rationality has less to do with the possession of knowledge than with how speaking and acting subjects *acquire and use knowledge*" (1981: 8). Put simply, pieces of knowledge are expressed in all statements that are deemed to be either true or false, just as any action that is goal oriented also presumes some portion of knowledge. These pieces of knowledge are then made true or false through the results of such actions or statements and in a social sense, an element of rationality is considered to be present. Irrationality could then be defined as a lack of coherence between the claims or actions of an individual and the practical result or knowledge that relates to it. This conceptualisation would be far more straightforward if knowledge and truth were not such problematic terms. It is important here to distinguish between the rationality of claims and the rationality of actions. A simplification of this idea might consider the difference to be the presence of truth. A rational statement is made through the provision of proof in that it relates the claim to some form of knowledge. Yet, a goal-oriented action is judged by a different characteristic, namely the effectiveness of the claim. Even though a goal-oriented action is based upon perceived knowledge about the world, it is not

necessarily judged by the accuracy of that knowledge, but rather by the extent to which the goal is achieved (1981: 10). This may be entirely independent from any form of truth, yet it is considered to be a successful truth claim, whether that is the intention or not, through the misguided understanding of the relationship between rationality and knowledge. This missing link in rational action could be seen as an example of the kind of irrationality often present in the problem of contentment. Claims can be taken for truth without a logical or theoretical foundation, instead with an excessively pragmatic justification of how contentment and happiness should be understood and therefore how discontent should be resolved.

Yet, Habermas does not subscribe to the argument that critical discourse can resolve or even engage with questions of the good life in the same manner as questions of justice or morality (Benhabib 1992: 72; McCarthy 1990). According to Benhabib, Habermas considers the discourse regarding the good life to lack structure and consistency. This could be understood as the lack of a clear question that is to be placed under analysis, or an insufficient development of a clear set of parameters within which this critical discourse is to take place. McCarthy describes this as questions of the good life disintegrating in to "the irreducible pluralism of modern life" (1990: vii). However, Benhabib is far from convinced by this claim as she considers the differences between good life claims and justice claims to be based upon the same intention, the betterment of society. The point of difference that could be problematic in applying a similar method of communicative analysis to these differing questions, arises from the expectation that claims of morality and justice are made with the intention of becoming legislated to be equally applied to all members of that society. Good life claims are radically different in this respect as even the most sincerely made claim to truth, would not be assumed to hold the same relevance to others. What is not entirely clear, is why this must be the case? If, through a process of rational discourse, claims can be made about moral judgements, then why is it that good life claims cannot be treated with a comparable kind of Habermasian universalism. According to

Benhabib, “One should regard such conceptions of self, reason and society not as elements of a “comprehensive” Weltanshaung which cannot be further challenged, but as presuppositions which are themselves always also subject to challenge and inquiry” (1992: 7). Here it must be made clear that to reach an ‘answer’ through rational discourse, does not mean that this knowledge is made immortal or irrevocable. The knowledge that is agreed upon through rational discourse is sufficiently true in order to be utilised, but it should not be considered objective or non-falsifiable. In this case, the argument for the distinction between justice claims and good life claims on the basis of the extent to which it can be applied to all, seems less important. Habermas argues,

> We call a person rational who interprets the nature of his desires and feeling in the light of culturally established standards of value, but especially if he can adopt a reflective attitude to the very value standards through which desires and feelings are interpreted (1981: 20).

If we consider the process of rational discourse to be a part of an on going and constantly evolving program, then should it not follow that differing social conditions will lead to a range of possible outcomes.

It seems as though Habermas’s differentiation between the plausibility of justice claims and good life claims is the result of his understanding of the relationship between the individual and society. Justice claims are plausible because they are a part of a structured set of rules that are intended to apply equally to all individuals and can only be changed through a gradual and considered process. On the other hand, claims regarding conceptions of a good life are made by an individual who cannot escape their own subjectivity and simultaneously lacks the potential for universalizability. In this sense the individual is only capable of transcendental knowledge.

At this point Habermas makes a distinction between two differing forms or uses of rationality. First is that of the realist, who considers rationality to be the factor that allows an act to be labelled as rational. This would usually involve a relationship between the intention and goal, so that the action can then be defined as rational or irrational. The action in this case cannot be non-

falsifiable, nor is it exempt from critical scrutiny. In response to this position Habermas describes another form of rationality as being phenomenological. The key element to this approach is regarding the role of intersubjectivity in understanding that, "the world gains objectivity only through *counting* as one and the same world *for* a community of speaking and acting subjects" (1981: 13). This position would consider the use of rationality by the realist to inevitably be an attempt to make objective claims, despite the apparent rejection of objective truth for the use of a means/ends rationality regarding problem solving. This criticism is supported by the way in which knowledge that allows certain actions to be made and problems to be solved, are interpreted as actions that *should* be made and problems that *should* be solved. It is a similar misjudgement that would justify what Habermas also calls scientism, and this involves a defect in the way that knowledge is used. According to Habermas, the phenomenologist does not view the objective world to be something that exists in the world and is studied by individuals, but something that is created through the unity of individuals on a large scale. It is here that Habermas introduces the concept of the lifeworld as an intersubjectively shared sphere of communication and interaction. This perspective utilises a relationship between meaning and rationality, whereby attempts to understand the individual's relationship to the objective world is validated by the extent to which it is meaningful and therefore rational. This equates the rationality of an action to the degree to which it is worthwhile. Therefore the objective world is that which is agreed upon or shared by the actors of the social world. Such an approach is far more suitable for the discussion of contentment as a social construction as it involves an ongoing process of redefinition and revaluation whilst simultaneously providing a forum for discussion. This is in contrast to the realist position that would understand contentment as either an effective or ineffective way in which to relate to the objective truths of the world. The claim could be made that this view is indicative of the studies of happiness from the empirical and psychological researchers who have become authorities on the matter. Habermas's contribution here is valuable as an alternative that allows the

concept of contentment to be more fluid whilst not being any harder to grasp. This would still allow for an understanding of contentment and reason where both of these terms are defined by the ability of the individual to relate to, and feel content with their position in the world. However in this case, the world is not a list of objective facts about what works and what doesn't, it is a swarm of meaning and activity that is created by the intersubjectivity of individuals.

Contentment can then be placed in a realm of discourse and inquiry that is constantly searching for truth and always open to critique. Yet, there is simply no time for this discussion in modernity. Individuals have become accustomed to quick fixes and 'right' answers, instant-gratification and minimal personal sacrifice. What has occurred is a sacrifice much greater than anticipated and a result much emptier than imagined. However, it is not fair to over simplify the modern individual as an impatient and apathetic character, who believes that happiness and contentment exists in the latest Apple product or *Glee* season finale. The modern individual consists of a complex set of contradictions, whereby irony and sarcasm have become part of a reflexive way of viewing the world. Yet there is a need for more than modernity can offer, and this is precisely why communicative action is relevant today. There is a space in blogs, twitter and podcasts that is perhaps the closest society has ever really been to Habermas's infamous coffee shops of the 1800s – this will be discussed in more detail in chapter seven. What is needed is the application and engagement with concepts of critical theory as a means of improving society. Critique should not end with the dispute or complaint about the way things are, but should be the first step towards an ongoing process of imagining utopia in a Marcusian sense.

In *Moral Textures* (1998) Maria Pia Lara expands on this use of discourse ethics as a means for social change by examining the women's movement as an example of how language and reason can be connected by a process of validation or legitimation. Lara argues that recent progress in the women's movement can be associated with the re-imagining of social narratives; something that is made possible through the ability for speech-acts to decipher

original solutions to old problems, whilst shifting or modifying normative values that are no longer defendable (1998: 3).

In the introduction to *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* McCarthy insists that when reading Habermas's work from this era, one must recognise that the principle task of this work is to reject notions of a "paradigm of consciousness" and the "philosophy of the subject" (McCarthy 1987: x). The only way forward from these problematic philosophical cul-de-sacs, is for Habermas to venture into an understanding of truth that is built upon intersubjective communication. This approach to truth clearly places the social subject in the process and development of knowledge and meaning, provided that reason and autonomy are accessible and valid.

Despite the lack of specific references to contentment and happiness in Habermas's work on communicative action, there is clearly an intention to use this understanding of reason to resolve social and cultural inconsistencies, and discontent among individuals. Habermas claims that, "Anyone who systematically deceives himself about himself behaves irrationally" (1981: 21). From this, Habermas continues to illustrate that the project of self-enlightened thought, whereby the individual seeks out their contradictions and irrational beliefs, is central some kind of satisfying life. This considers some form of rationality to be key to the progression of humanity, although in this case, rationality is by no means technocratic or instrumental, but rather the ongoing attempt to understand the relationship between the individual and society. Therefore, it is to have a theoretical basis for justifying the actions of the individual in response to the conditions of society. This should not be understood as the belief that rationality is the highest possible human goal or that reason equates to happiness or contentment. Instead, Habermas's notion of rationality[19] is a tool capable of resolving deeply seeded problems in the human understanding of the relationship between the individual and society. This is not to say that the individual must reach some level of rationality to have a

19 Or Horkheimer's interpretation of reason.

satisfying or content life, as it is the pursuit of rationality and the resistance toward self-deception that is most important. In this case, Habermas considers the project of self-Enlightenment for individuals to be a kind of parallel to that of the Enlightenment in modernity. It is a process of questioning, critical analysis and the search for consistency through the valued use of reason that will lead to social improvement. It is an unending course, not a conclusion.

Pragmatism and Knowledge: Contentment as truth?

The role of truth has a unique relationship to contentment. Whilst this thesis considers feelings of contentment to be deeply influenced by social context, the belief in truth as something that exists beyond social constructions is necessary for human action. Habermas states, "A belief is a behavioural rule, but not the habitually determined behaviour itself. Behavioural certainty is the criterion of its validity" (1968: 120). And it is the justification of validity that is of pressing importance to an analysis of contentment. Although there is not room here for an in-depth discussion of pragmatism, nor do I think that such an inquiry would be beneficial to this thesis, there is a need to acknowledge the use of pragmatism in commonly held beliefs regarding contentment. In fact, the argument could be made that many of the problems with empirical studies of happiness and contentment are the result of a pragmatic approach to understanding notions of the good life. The opening paragraph of Horkheimer's *Eclipse of Reason* argues that the question of reason is, to the layperson, almost too obvious to bother defining; it is the action that most is reasonable regarding circumstance. Horkheimer then dissects this approach, concluding that this is a mode of instrumental rationality that is more concerned with means and ends than reason itself. To some degree, the same could be said for contentment. A reductionist view may suggest that contentment is whatever it is that makes someone content, and arguably this view is pragmatic. Yet, it allows for the distortions of knowledge and voluntary limitations of autonomy that critical

theorists have been trying to expose for generations, to be incorporated into a problematic, yet widely adopted, model of contentment.

There is some debate over the extent to which Habermas's work on communicative action falls under the title of pragmatism. Because of its discursive element and the way in which it engages with the practical over the theoretical, Habermas identifies with the pragmatists despite their significant differences. It is, after all, somewhat pragmatic to argue that some form of truth can be reached through the rational discourse of individuals, but this is not the kind of pragmatism discussed by James or Rorty. Habermas is not referring to a mentality where truth can be defined as what works regardless of logical theoretical frameworks, but rather the role of theory and practice are deeply entwined in reaching an answer as individuals participate in discourse with the intention of solving problems. This is because Habermas is arguing that truth is made possible through action, in this case the act of communication. He therefore suggests that truth exists neither objectively nor subjectively, but in our intersubjectivity.

When considering the problematic nature of defining socially constructed definitions of happiness, satisfaction and contentment, it is no surprise that for many, the problem can be simplified into a matter of pragmatics. It could be argued that the pursuit of a theoretical understanding of something like contentment is futile, and that a practical and pragmatic approach is all that is necessary. This is to say, that if it works, it is correct. The following section will first consider the work of William James on the matter of pragmatism and truth, before discussing the evaluations of Richard Rorty and Hans Joas on the subject and finally ending with Habermas's own perspective.

For William James, truth does not exist as an idea, but rather as something that happens to an idea in order to make it true. Truth exists between an idea and an object, and therefore serves as a method of bridging theory and practice. Yet James makes his pragmatism known at this point by furthering the claim to state that truth is only that which can be proven and thus what cannot be

proven is false. According to James, theories must then acquire an element of truth through the correlation between the theory and the object. The role of evidence is crucial here as it is not sufficient for a theory to be proven through logic or the support of other theories. The functional element or practical result of any theory must be visible in the physical world. Yet, these truths are not guaranteed to be universal, they depend upon specific details of the idea and object in a specific time and place. Therefore, the extent to which something is true can be understood through the individual's use of that truth. This suggests that circumstance can work as a third factor in the definition of truth and this draws upon the role of the individual and their use of perspective.

For James, traditional empiricism is not sufficient for discovering such truths, despite the seemingly logical link between pragmatism and empiricism. Radical empiricism is therefore developed as a philosophy of acquiring knowledge that, according to James, can be impervious to both the problems of empiricism and theory. He argues that a radical empiricism would restrict any discourse to include only what can be experienced. The realm of what cannot be experienced should be of no interest to either philosophers or empiricists. Yet, James considers:

> The relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as 'real' as anything else in the system (James 1912: 42).

Rorty offers a slightly different approach to truth concerning pragmatism by claiming that truth is nothing more than "a property which all true statements share" (1982: 1). This blurs the line between statements of truth made about science or mathematics, and statements made from theory or logic. This bridge between seemingly different kinds of knowledge can be made, according to Rorty, because the element of truth that applies to them is not of great interest or significance whatsoever. Therefore, truth is not something external to causal relations that must be discovered and defined, but rather it is simply one of many attributes that can be applied to a statement or a belief. For example, to say that two separate statements are true, is not radically different from saying

that these statements are offensive, beautiful or condescending. This may seem as though truth must be a purely subjective matter, but this is not accurate. For Rorty, as for James, there must be an element of practicality in the truth claim such that evidence can be seen or observed. Yet this should not draw a distinction between scientific and theoretical claims, as though one can be observed and therefore proven whilst the other cannot. Rather that the element of truth is not something mysterious, but simply an element that is present in certain claims but not others.

If James's pragmatism were applied to the question of contentment, it would follow that the most suitable approach to understanding contentment in modernity would be to simply ask people who feel contented. However, for many of the reasons already stated in this chapter and the chapter before it, this information would not only be problematic, it would likely be inconsistent and therefore ineffective in providing information for better understanding the contentment of individuals. Experiencing contentment does not equate to an understanding of the nature of contentment, nor does it qualify an individual to speak authoritatively on discontentment. There is sufficient distortion in the understanding of contentment and happiness for a pragmatic understanding to be enormously problematic. Yet, Habermas's version of pragmatism through communicative action is far more capable of reaching knowledge suitable for providing solutions to the problematic logic behind contentment and happiness in modernity.

Despite aligning himself with pragmatist thought, there is some doubt over the extent to which Habermas's thought is entirely pragmatist. Pragmatism however, is a term that seems to have as many definitions as it has subscribers. Habermas's use of the concept is best understood as a by-product of his interest in universalism, and can be described as a pragmatism of theory rather than truth in an objective sense. What is of interest to Habermas is radically different to the pragmatism of Peirce, Dewey or James. For Habermas, pragmatism is far more sociological. It is concerned with issues that affect the individual's relationship with society such as meaning, justification and

validity. These terms could not be more important in developing this understanding of contentment. By drawing upon concepts developed earlier in Habermas's writings, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968) links action and belief through pragmatism. Therefore, what is interesting about pragmatism is not the pursuit of absolute and irrefutable truth, but the need for individuals to believe in their actions in order to feel contented with them.

Habermas makes his position on communication and truth unique by arguing that truth claims do not simply exist in the world as stagnant objects. Within every truth claim is the intention to persuade or coerce others to agree. For Habermas, all claims intend to provoke discourse, and eventually, agreement. The key to this is the validation of beliefs by others to find meaning in that individual's beliefs and that can lead to action. Habermas states,

> Pragmatism is the principle that every theoretical judgement expressible in a sentence in the indicative mood is a confused form of thought whose only meaning, if it has any, lies in its tendency to enforce a corresponding practical maxim expressible as a conditional sentence having its apodosis in the imperative mood (1968: 120).

Although this seems confrontational and even exhausting, Habermas is optimistic about this kind of communication. It can cast doubt upon, and eventually eradicate, vague or misleading statements through an ongoing process of evaluation. This results in an almost Darwinian treatment of language and meaning where context and relevance must be maintained[20].

There is an unambiguous difference here between Habermas and his predecessors, Horkheimer and Adorno, in regard to the use of communication as an instrumental action. Habermas does not seem concerned about the use of language as a process of individuals trying to control meaning, or alternately, projecting their interpretation of meaning onto others. Horkheimer and Adorno would share concerns over attempts to control language and meaning by individuals due to potential circumstances of manipulation and the use of

[20] This is not surprising considering the Darwinian influence among pragmatists more generally. This could be understood as Habermas applying principles of pragmatism to his pre-existing work on communication.

power by one over another. I accept that Habermas's intention is for a fair and balanced sphere of communication, but I share the hesitation of Horkheimer and Adorno in thinking that this is open to corruption.

Habermas's ongoing interest in universalism is inseparable from his interest in pragmatism. For early pragmatists, such as Peirce, the key component of pragmatism is the ability to draw universalised conclusions from single events (1968: 128). Whilst pragmatists like Peirce are often using scientific examples to show this, Habermas wants to blur the distinction between the action oriented speech and scientific experimentation. He argues that experimental action is "only a precise form of instrumental action" (1968: 128) and therefore is not dissimilar to communicative forms of truth claims. In both circumstances, a belief about the world has led to a question that is subject to individual bias and cultural distortions, and an answer is sought that will be treated as a truth. Habermas is simultaneously demoting science from the status of objectivity and promoting discourse as an almost scientific discipline. When an individual acts based upon a belief, there is at best an expectation and at worst a hope, that their belief will be shared by others. This logic is in many cases artificial in terms of some kind of objective truth, but it is taken to be real in order for the action to be adequately motivated. This is also referred to as 'synthetic reasoning' and is used as a criticism of scientific progress. It is a valid criticism as the direction of scientific progress which is, by definition, taken to be beneficial, may be misleading[21]. Habermas responds to this by arguing that,

> Since the transcendental conditions of possible knowledge are posited not by a consciousness as such but by a behavioural system, the transcendental concept of *possibility* acquires the meaning of a concrete program for future action (1968: 129).

This draws an irreversible connection between the communicative action of individuals and scientific development by basing progress on social and cultural determinations. Although this may seem to be far from the original

[21] Reminiscent of Freud's critique of 'progress' as an objectively understood benefit to society.

discussion of contentment, it contributes a great deal to Habermas's perspective on the maintenance and ongoing recreation of problematic systems of thought, such as the diminished importance of contentment in modernity through the distortion of priorities and truths.

Held argues that despite the criticism of pragmatism in Habermas's work, particularly in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, there is a distinction made between the success of an action and the truth claim that motivated that action (Held 1980: 325). Therefore if an individual performs an action under the belief that it will bring contentment, then even if they are rewarded with precisely that amount of contentment, the extent to which that belief is true is still undetermined. Whilst this may seem rather abstract, examples of this can be seen in the way that individuals pursue happiness and or contentment (or perhaps more accurately, happiness rather than contentment).

Therefore to utilise a Habermasian approach to contentment is not pragmatic in the sense that whatever it is that makes people happy or content is some form of truth, but rather the application of reason to such problems such as distorted language, repression and the twisting of reason itself is a plausible resolution to the problems surrounding contentment in modernity. Parallels can be drawn here between Habermas and Horkheimer in his use of reason as a tool for liberation, or at the very least, a crucial aspect of autonomy.

Utilising reason through critique remains the necessary tool for emancipation in Habermas's work as it did for the critical theorists who came before him. Habermas quotes Herder from his essay 'Why Study Logic' to place the importance of reason in the centre of this discussion. Herder writes,

> A small dose of reasoning is necessary to connect the instinct with the occasion. . . . It is only a remarkable man or a man in a remarkable situation, who, in default of any applicable rule of thumb, is forced to reason out his plans from first principles. . . . Fortunately . . . man is not so happy as to be provided with a full stock of instincts to meet all occasions, and so is forced upon the adventurous business of reasoning, where the many meet shipwreck and the few find, not old-fashioned happiness, but its splendid substitute, success. . . . The best plan, then,

> on the whole, is to base our conduct as much as possible on Instinct, but when we do reason to reason with severely scientific logic (1968: 134).

Habermas distinguishes himself from Rorty in one particularly crucial way regarding the interpretation of Kant. Habermas takes issue with the new role of the philosopher in Kant's transcendentalism, particularly what he calls the role of the usher and the judge (Habermas 1990: 2). According to Kant, if transcendentalism is capable of leading to new forms of pure knowledge that account for a kind of *a priori* gathering of information, then the role of the philosopher changes dramatically. First, the philosopher becomes the usher, who must guide all other researchers toward their specified and clearly defined field. Second, they must become a judge, who is able to determine the validity of varying pursuits of knowledge by distinguishing different forms of reason, such as practical reason, judgement and theoretical cognition (1990: 2). Habermas finds this conception to be problematic and largely responsible for the scepticism surrounding Kant's transcendentalism, yet Rorty's critique intends to be more damaging. From the position Kant is left to defend, Rorty argues that there are grounds to doubt the philosopher's authority regarding reason whatsoever. For Rorty, if the philosopher cannot fulfil the enormous task of usher and judge, then they no longer have any claim to the ideal of reason that is so central to their field. Habermas, of course, disagrees with this claim and therefore manages to sidestep the rather serious critiques of pragmatism. Regarding a study of contentment, Rorty would perhaps argue that the pursuit of a philosophical or theoretical approach would be futile. What should be made clear at this point, is that the Habermasian use of pragmatism is distinctly different from the kind of pragmatism that is essentially the philosophy of anti-philosophy.

In 2003, Habermas published a series of essays under the title *Truth and Justification* that, for the first time in almost 30 years, returned him to the issues raised in *Knowledge and Human Interests*. This text indicated a turn in Habermas's thinking concerning pragmatism, truth and transcendentalism that he describes as a form of 'Kantian pragmatism'. This shift intends to

detranscendentalize Kant into a mode of thought that connects universalism with the linguistic and pragmatic turn. His intention here is to bring the discussion back to the 'real world' in a practical and grounded sense. Habermas states that, "all experience is linguistically saturated" as cognitive thought cannot be understood independently of the individual's ability to act and use speech (2003: 30). From this he draws that this transition can be described as a move from transcendental subjectivity in a Kantian sense, to a detranscendentalized intersubjectivity (2003: 30). The purpose of this shift is to make two distinct changes to his position in *Knowledge and Human Interests*. The first involves the reconciliation of the normative regulation of meaning in the lifeworld with the unpredictability and contingency of the sociocultural world. The second is to show how an objective reality can be accessed by all individuals through subjective or individualised channels, such as interaction through language. In other words, how can he show that there is a world that exists regardless of the ability to describe it, when it is the process of description that puts the individual in contact with that world (2003: 2). It is the recognition of these problems that leads to a new direction in pragmatism for Habermas; thus creating a position that is able to defend the objectivity of truth claims with respect to the fundamental nature of language. It is a unique form of objectivity that recognises the location of the subject as being in the lifeworld in an intersubjective sense rather than observing the world from outside. This is based upon the idea that judgements are made from rules of inference rather than categories of understanding. Therefore reason itself exists only as a conclusion drawn from language through the process of interaction. Yet the processes leading to the necessary inferences are generally overpowered by rules rather than the discovery of rules themselves. In other words, individuals are more familiar with the practical implications and uses of such rules than they are with the processes of reason used to reach that position. In my view, this is an attempt to go beyond objective and subjective forms of reason and rethink the location of reason itself. This would allow for the validation of linguistically derived conclusions through discourse and an engagement with accessible knowledge.

Conclusion

Habermas believes that through a process of rational discourse, individuals can reach legitimate answers to questions of justice and ethics, but not for the question of the good life. This is because both the questions and answers regarding the good life are, in contrast to questions of ethics, far too unstructured and personal to effectively engage with the core issues. The intention of this chapter, was to show how shifting the focus from attaining the good life to eradicating false or distorted notions of contentment, can result in the development of knowledge that is capable of creating positive change in society. Through the lens of critical theory, identifying ill-conceived claims regarding contentment and developing solutions based upon reason and logic, contentment becomes a matter of ethics and therefore within Habermas's model. This creates a semiotic theory of understanding contentment, made plausible through a process of critique rather than imagination or creation.

Regarding the construction of validity in the context of contentment, this perspective is perhaps Habermas's greatest contribution. The belief in a truth of some sort is necessary for the individual to feel validated in their decisions. And in a circumstance where the process of validation is problematic, Habermas makes a plausible contribution in both the way in which reason can be used to resolve these problems, and also in reaching an understanding of the nature of these problems in the first place. Pragmatism, in the sense that William James and John Dewey described, remains highly problematic in the discussion of contentment in modernity insofar as its use in finding answers regarding this problem could be seen as partially responsible for the experience of discontentment itself. In contrast, Habermas's approach is far more plausible as it recognises the transience of reason and the influence of reflexivity in the social.

One could be forgiven for getting lost in the details of Habermas's complex and rigorous analysis of truth, communication and reason, yet it is his persistence

on the matter of legitimation that is most relevant here. Arguably the question of legitimation is a core issue in social theory today and it is certainly at the centre of this analysis of contentment. The way in which new forms of legitimation can be built around the constantly shifting contexts of modern life are as important as having the means to deconstruct networks of legitimation that are no longer relevant. Although Habermas cannot do this on his own, there appears to be a shift in the third generation of critical theorists towards the application of critical theory to understanding the good life (Honneth, Kompridis, Benhabib, Lara), even though Habermas restricted his model for rational consensus to questions of justice. There is the potential through the collective contributions of not only Habermas and Bauman, but also the range of perspectives offered through social and critical theory in this thesis, to provide a meaningful understanding of the nature of contentment in a society that is post-scarcity.

Chapter Three Zygmunt Bauman: Ambivalence and Contentment

> You gain something, you lose something else in exchange: the old rule holds as true today as it was true then. Only the gains and the losses have changed places: *postmodern men and women exchanged a portion of their possibilities of security for a portion of happiness*. The discontents of modernity arose from a kind of security which tolerated too little freedom in the pursuit of individual happiness. The discontents of postmodernity arise from a kind of freedom of pleasure-seeking which tolerates too little individual security (Bauman 1997: 3).
>
> The point is precisely that modern life does not abide by the 'either/or' of logic (Bauman 1993: 5).

For Zygmunt Bauman, modernity is a strange place. Individuals respond to uncertainty by making the elements of life that are within their control into something extremely ordered, whilst at the same time experiencing unprecedented levels of change and upheaval that are perhaps too great to fully comprehend. For Bauman, individuality is the new religion of modernity, yet individuals face an overwhelming pressure to fit in to a society that struggles to accept difference and enforces new forms of homogeneity everyday. According to Bauman, modern life is better than our grandparents could have imagined and yet more problematic than ever before. Individuals possess a seemingly limitless freedom from the liquefaction of social structures, yet they are paralysed by the lack of dependability on meaning and validity. This world of contradiction and inconsistency has become a normality that is difficult to re-imagine into something else, yet for Bauman, this is precisely the point of social and critical theory. In recent years Bauman has become increasingly fascinated by a very similar question to the one posed in this thesis; that is, 'Why is it that despite the radical progress of modernity, individuals are less content than their grandparents?' Although there is no doubt that modernity has made significant progress in recent generations, for Bauman it can no longer be claimed that society is on the right track, but still has further to go (2008b: 1).

Rather, it is society itself that must be put under analysis in order to further understand the nature of contentment.

Bauman draws upon a broad foundation of critical thought ranging from the Frankfurt School to literary analysis to further understand the human condition and the social context within which meaning is constructed. Although the question of happiness has only been directly assessed by Bauman in recent times, the extent to which modernity is troublesome for the individual has been a topic in his work since the very beginning. Despite Bauman's extensive critique of modernity, the reader will not find an answer to the problem of happiness (or contentment) in his work that is simple, clear or all encompassing. Instead, what Bauman contributes to this discussion is a superbly painted picture of modernity that displays the maladies and the fears of the individual in great detail. For Bauman, society is insufficiently structured for solutions to such problems to take the form of universalised systems of logic, and here he stands in contrast to Habermas. Bauman illuminates an understanding of modernity that is undeniably human, and intended to first comprehend the complexity of modern life, before claiming to have solutions to its problems.

Numerous sociologists have pointed out the flaws of modernity, but few have been as poignant and all encompassing as Bauman. Bauman first gained international attention with his highly influential critique, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989). This publication put forward a unique and brilliantly crafted argument that the Holocaust was not an excursion from the priorities and intentions of modernity, but rather the logical and rational result of the flawed modernity in which we live. Bauman argues for a revised view of modernity where the horrific events of the past and present must be dealt with rather than simply describing them as exceptions to our normal way of life. Such a practical use of critique echoes many of Bauman's Frankfurt School influences and will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. Since *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Bauman has published a string of highly influential works that will also be considered in the following chapter. These include but are not

limited to; *Liquid Modernity* (2000)*, Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991)*, Postmodern Ethics* (1993) and *Wasted Lives* (2004). It is through Bauman's discussion of identity, consumer culture, instant gratification, narrative, ambivalence, ethics, fear and the rationality of modernity that I intend to give a firm grounding of Bauman's contribution to the subject of modern contentment.

This chapter will also consider the unique influences that have contributed to Bauman's current position. The distinctive approach to social and critical theory in Bauman's work is linked to an unorthodox range of influences from literary authors like Milan Kundera to the sociologically based works or Freud and of course, the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. According to Tester, the three most significant thinkers in the development of Bauman's work are Gramsci, Camus and Levinas; with each making their own unique contribution (2002: 56)[22]. And yet Bauman manages to avoid becoming tied to or dependent upon these influences. It would seem misguided to call him a Marxist, a Gramscian or even a critical theorist as he avoids becoming attached to any single mode of thought[23]. In this chapter Bauman will contribute to a notion of contentment that is capable of showing how the ongoing interruption of contentment, is in fact a matter of ethics. For Bauman, moral systems project a sense of order onto the world such that society can appear to be a safe and likeable place, despite the chaotic and fast paced nature of modernity. If morality can be understood as a way for society to be more likeable to the individual, then contentment can be thought of as making the individual more likeable to the self. Bauman's unique understanding of morality is a result of the previously mentioned influences; such as the revolutionary potential of theory described by Marx and Gramsci, or the maladies of living in modernity discussed by Freud and Kundera. These ideas will come to form an understanding of contentment that is as socially grounded as it is individually

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[22] Dennis Smith would add Habermas and Marx to this list.

[23] The influence of Gramsci can be seen as a way out of Marxism for Bauman, in an interview with Tester, Bauman explains "I owe to Gramsci an 'honourable discharge' from Marxist orthodoxy" (2001: 24).

relevant, and in doing so, will form a critique of modernity that is as pertinent to the general as it is to the particular.

It is worth noting that until recently, Bauman rarely spoke directly about happiness. In *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (1992) he quoted Schopenhauer's claim that, "[t]here is only one inborn error, and that is the notion that we exist in order to be happy" (1992: 89). From this perspective, happiness is not dissimilar to Bauman's own description of morality in that the individual is not born with it, but rather they learn its rules and desire to be on the right side of it. Just as people are not born moral, they are not born happy, and this has very little to do with our nature, but to do with the way in which happiness and morality are socially constructed. However, Bauman's approach here should not be reduced to nihilism, regardless of how close he seems to get to this conclusion. There is always a priority given to the significance of meaning and emotional experience in his work that never undervalues the essentially social nature of individuals. In this thesis I intend to break apart the concept of happiness that Bauman refers to and extract the elements of his work that can be better understood through a framework of contentment. For Bauman, this is an important distinction as being happy or content is not necessarily a natural state of being for the individual. At his most cynical, he suggests that not only is the grass always greener on the other side of the fence, but the search for contentment is not necessarily satisfying either (1992: 90). Yet in more recent works (2008a; 2008b), Bauman reinforces a form of defiance against the deterministic nature of such cynicism, even if he still falls short of optimism. Modernity has simply allowed us to increase the speed with which individuals chase happiness, and therefore has allowed people to witness the discontentment of modernity faster than ever before.

This project will begin with an analysis of society as a means of considering the potential flaws in the current approach to contentment. Perhaps the ideal starting point is with Bauman's work on ambivalence, which connects his ideas around contingency and control for the modern individual with the feeling that something is missing. This will help to develop a more thorough understanding

of how the oversight of contentment in modernity can be addressed by social theory.

Ambivalence, Contingency and Contentment

Bauman is critical of the way that flexibility has changed the relationship between the individual and society in modernity. His theory of Liquidity describes the melting of social structures into something malleable, whereby ethics, norms and values can adjust to fit the container that holds them[24]. Although there are many benefits for a society with this newfound flexibility, Bauman also considers a number of problems that must be acknowledged. Yet, for more than a decade prior to the publication of *Liquid Modernity*, Bauman was already working on such issues under the title of postmodernism. Although his withdrawal from the postmodernist debate signified a dramatic turn in the aesthetic of his theory, texts such as *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991) are just as relevant today as they were at the time of publication. Perhaps *Modernity and Ambivalence* should best be thought of as Bauman describes it in the introduction; it attempts to "wrap historical and sociological flesh around the 'dialectics of Enlightenment ' skeleton" (1991: 17). It extends from the realisation that the Enlightenment has failed to overcome the tyranny of superstition through to reasoned thought and knowledge for its own sake. For Bauman, contentment is only possible through the relinquishing of control and the acceptance of disorder such that the relationship between the individual and the world is no longer intermediated by anthropocentric control. This perspective is motivated by the need to use reason alongside emotion, as a means to bring people together rather than separate them from the rationalisation of human experience[25].

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[24] The theory of liquidity will be discussed in more detail towards the end of this chapter.

[25] It is worth noting that Bauman considers love and reason to be in tension with one another. He writes, "Reason and love do not really converse – more often than not they shout each other down" (2001: 163). But here he refers to the extent to which love cannot not be justified by reason – an argument he also makes in *Liquid Love* (2003) – rather than claiming that reason does not have the potential to overcome social problems such as hyper-individualism.

In *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991), Bauman claims that the pursuit of control and order is deeply problematic for the well being of the individual. By ambivalence, Bauman refers to a feeling of disengagement in the individual's association with the world whilst simultaneously placing the phenomenon within a broad social trend. The choice to use ambivalence to describe what could be understood as an apathetic branch of nihilism, is a critique of the over-individualised nature of modern society. Progress in modernity is analogous to the pursuit of knowledge and understanding of the world, yet knowledge is insufficiently valued for its own sake. Rather the pursuit of knowledge as a matter of progress is limited to attempts to order, define and manipulate aspects of life from the environment and technology to relationships and identity. In *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987), he refers to this as the 'garden state'. A world where there is nothing that cannot be understood and therefore nothing that cannot be altered into something that better suits our desires. Anything outside of this is a contradiction, an insult or a challenge to modernity that stands in the way of living in a world that is precisely what you or I want it to be. He states, "If modernity is about the production of order then ambivalence is *the waste of modernity*" (1991). Therefore, what cannot be classified cannot be of use, as individuals develop a socially constructed need for structure and predictability (1991: 15). And in much the same way as Horkheimer and Adorno argued in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the pursuit of knowledge and rationality has been distorted through the very process that intended to clarify it. Instrumental rationality is the celebrated false prophet of modernity that is permanently, although somewhat covertly, in opposition to the best interests and well-being of individuals. According to Bauman, "For most of its history, modernity lived in and through self-deception" (1991: 232) – a view that undoubtedly echoes the concerns of the Frankfurt School, although he contributes greater substance to the often problematic claims in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

The need for classification and order are artificial needs according to Bauman, as individuals have learnt to desire such things through the promises of a rational modernity. He states:

> The residents of the house of modernity had been continuously trained to feel at home under conditions of necessity and to feel unhappy at the face of contingency; contingency, they had been told, was that state of discomfort and anxiety from which one needs to escape by making oneself into a binding norm and thus doing away with difference (1991: 233).

This places considerable pressure on the concept of truth in modern society, as though the purest form of knowledge will save us from the reality that the world can be a dark and scary place. However, much like Habermas, Bauman argues that truth is a social relation that is susceptible to the influence of hierarchy and power structures (1991: 232). The *rational* approach to knowledge promises to rid the world of ambivalence and disorder, but it is the rationality of authority figures rather than the people that individuals are expected to accept. What we are left with in this case is the idea of hope being used to support the misguided plans of a flawed modernity. Hope is the justification for continually pushing society in a direction that is not designed to help people, nor in some cases even allow people, to feel contented. Bauman argues:

> Present unhappiness is the realisation that this is not to be, that the hope will not come true and hence one needs to learn to live without the hope that supplied the meaning – the only meaning – to life" (1991: 233).

Bauman concludes this rather dark view of modernity by restating a point made by Agnes Heller about destiny. He suggests that in order to conquer our desire to overcome contingency, we must accept the disorder of modern life. Through accepting the world as it is and not as we want it to be, we are able to incorporate disorder into our conceptions of destiny. If contingency can become a part of 'normal' life then it can be expected and can no longer be a source of anxiety and uncertainty (1991: 234).

Bauman's perspective on contingency can be better understood through a comparison with the comparatively similar position put forward by Sennett in *The Uses of Disorder* (1970). This text endeavours to show that the student protests of 1968 may have made significant changes to civil rights, but they have not left the average person feeling happy and completely satisfied. He states,

> The Revolution redistributed wealth, but the fact of Revolution did not determine how the eventual affluence was to be taken into a life, what men would dedicate themselves to when they no longer needed to struggle for enough to eat (Sennett 1970: 9).

This raises a number of interesting issues. First, social life has evolved at a pace that has left individuals behind. Sennett argues that from an evolutionary point of view, people are not able to cope with questions about how we should be happy or content. Instincts still revolve around survival and reproduction, therefore attempts to understand how individuals should live in order to be happy are not only very recent, but also an excursion from human nature. This echoes Schopenhauer's claim about the flaw of humanity being the belief that we exist to be happy, and that perhaps without this emphasis on happiness, people would be more satisfied. Second, when Sennett discusses the revolution he refers to a transition where all people are able to spend time outside of the factories and workhouses, and the polarisation of wealth is minimised across communities. For modernity however, Sennett argues that freedom from poor working conditions and strong class divisions has translated into the freedom to pursue material desires. This perspective can also be seen in Bauman's critique of instant gratification and consumption and this has lead to new threats to individual autonomy. The freedom to buy one fashionable new outfit over another, is not freedom but a powerful form of hegemonic repression.

The way in which individuals respond to this crisis of meaning can be understood through Bauman's work on contingency, yet Sennett employs a more dramatic approach. Sennett's central argument in *The Uses of Disorder* is that the modern individual is in a state of self-enforced slavery (1970: xvii). He

argues that modernity encourages adults to remain in a state of adolescence, and that so long as individuals are occupied by a desire to attain consumer items, they will have no need for the kind of adulthood known by previous generations. An essential part of becoming an adult is accepting that the world is not an orderly or fair place. Yet, for the child living under the supervision of a parent, there can be an element of order and consistency that is not found in the outside world. Sennett is arguing that individuals are so reluctant to leave this adolescence that they are voluntarily enslaving themselves to material desires, as consumer culture is perhaps the only place where the eradication of contingency is possible[26].

In comparison to Bauman, Sennett has a relatively unsympathetic approach to the problem of modern discontentment. Bauman seems to mourn the loss of a meaningful and sincere past, where there was a connection between dedication and achievement (a view that Sennett certainly argued in *The Corrosion of Character*). Yet, in *The Uses of Disorder* Sennett explicitly states that individuals need to feel dissatisfied if they are to provoke social change. Components of modernity such as consumer culture, have served as distractions from the reality that modern life is losing meaning. Therefore, discontent is functional in order to see past these distractions and work toward mending the elements of modern life that are dissatisfying. For Bauman however, modernity is not sufficiently systemic for this kind of functional relationship to be at all reliable. The realisation of the contradictions and shortfalls of a rational modernity arrive through a self-actualising process. This would involve an engagement with love, literature, art and most importantly, the self.

Bauman's view on this matter is not necessarily more optimistic, but certainly more positive than Sennett's. Rather than suggesting that the feeling of hopelessness is necessary for creating change, Bauman is concerned that the experience of living in modernity has the potential to send individuals into an

[26] This will be discussed in great depth in the next chapter.

even deeper level of ambivalence. Therefore, the chaotic nature of modern life must be accepted and embraced rather than resisted; and the drive for rationalisation as a mechanism that reduces the complex humanity of social life, can be overcome. This is not to say that the quality of modern society is adequate and that individuals should be complacent about it, but rather that modernity must be critically assessed and understood such that the experience of living with it can be enhanced.

In addition to this concern regarding order and contingency, Bauman develops a critique of the social desire for purity and cleanliness that echoes the claims made by Freud in *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930). The concept of purity and impurity is an idea that must be imposed upon nature through cultural definitions of the way things 'should' be. Yet he takes this point a step further and argues that it is a dangerous ideal that is capable of leading to extreme versions of the garden state mentality. The modern emphasis on order and predictability will only ever bring temporary periods of happiness that, for Bauman, encourage sameness among individuals and stigmatise difference as unknown and therefore, something dangerous. Purity is the gleaming example of the success of modernity's progression and impurity is the adverse sign of our failure, or at least of the things we have not yet been able to manipulate. The discussion of purity and dirt regarding the tolerance of difference will be further developed in the next chapter where the relationship between Bauman and Freud is discussed in greater detail.

At this stage however, the garden model is applicable in a greater sense than just an individualised approach. Just as the garden can be thought of as a barrier that individuals can build around themselves, modernity is also a garden in itself (Beilharz 2001: 104). This particular view considers the influence of social, economic and cultural authorities in the creation of modernity as a controllable entity. Here Bauman reinforces the point that modernity is far from being a natural state and that the efforts to control circumstance are characteristic of modernity. For Bauman, there has been a transition from a handful of authorities acting as gamekeepers in the pre-modern era, to

authorities working more like gardeners in modern society. The distinction is that gamekeepers wish to have a system that is capable of supporting and reproducing itself with the ongoing goal of profiting from the surplus of such a system (Bauman 1987: 52). This view does not consider attempts to create better or worse communities, nor does it try to make decisions on behalf of individuals, but rather it seeks to provide all that is needed for individuals to prosper. According to Bauman, this process transformed into something radically different due to a handful of social and economic shifts. There were issues with the sustainability of the system, the desire for profit from the gardeners was not being met by natural methods and the efficiency of the natural system was deemed insufficient. As a result, the role of the gardener became more prevalent and the extent to which authorities interfered with the lives of individuals increased dramatically (Bauman 1987: 52). Yet this change takes place in an era of unprecedented levels of perceived freedom and liberty. This became the era of creating new wants and needs for consumers rather than appealing to the pre-existing ones, an era where nothing is as good as it could be elsewhere or with someone else. This creation of false needs and artificial insecurities is tied to the forceful nature with which social authorities have attempted to control intimate aspects of individuals' lives. Of course, this kind of control is never completely effective and individuals will inevitably deviate from the one-dimensional characters prescribed to them. Therefore, when ambivalence becomes the norm, the ability to meaningfully validate aspects of life becomes increasingly difficult.

A new approach to understanding the relationship between the individual and society is necessary in order to rethink contentment in modernity. A more individualised approach may consider external or social influences to be of minor concern and instead view contentment as a unique goal for every individual, whereby the responsibility for attaining contentment rests within each individual. Although the importance of an individual's decisions and preferences cannot be overlooked, it would be naïve to underestimate the importance of social conditions regarding contentment. Bauman's contributions

to this subject are important for precisely this reason. He considers the freedom associated with modernity to be both liberation and enslavement. This contradiction breeds ambivalence which will inevitably render some form of socially constructed contentment as an impossible goal.

It could be argued that *Modernity and Ambivalence* is Bauman's most Nietzschean publication. Nietzsche's metaphor of standing at the edge of the abyss that is meaning, and becoming comfortable with the fact that there is nothing there, could be a more philosophical version of Bauman's critique of contingency. Rather than speaking of contingency and order, Nietzsche discusses the human dependence on hope and morality as a source of meaning in life. Of course, for Nietzsche, meaning is a purely individual and flexible concept that has no 'real' foundation in the world, rather it is for each person to decipher and apply to their lives. This is a diversion from Bauman's discussion of narrative and meaning in a shared context. Tester highlights that Bauman never fully accepts nihilism due to the influence of Levinas as a means to always appreciate the "ethical importance of the Other" (2002: 56). To follow Nietzsche's perspective closely would result in a lack of concern regarding the things that are meaningful to others and this is distinctly different from Bauman's perspective. Yet, Nietzsche was equally concerned with the trepidation that individuals had toward difference and saw this as an indication of an individual's own weakness and limitations. He states, "if you have virtue and it is your own virtue, you have it in common with no one" and that this is something that should be celebrated rather that feared (1961: 63). It is important to note that Nietzsche's use of the term nihilism does not necessarily indicate the denial of all meaning, but rather the denial of all objective meaning. It seems logical that this approach is a fundamental aspect of understanding the social world as a construction and therefore, it must be a part of this discussion around the construction of meaning in society for the benefit of creating a society that is better equipped to harbour the contentment of individuals. Yet for Nietzsche, the role of society is to distract the individual from what we can refer to as their *true nature*. Nietzsche intended much of this

to be a critique of religious and moral authorities, yet in a liquid modernity we could consider these authorities to be that of consumer and celebrity culture alongside traditional religious and political authorities.

In comparison to Habermas, the most glaring difference in Bauman's position here is in regard to the impossibility of universalism. For Bauman, there are no social structures or causal relationships that are sufficiently consistent to be recognised and understood before they disappear or merge into something else entirely. Habermas wants to develop a system of rational discourse whereby truths about the social world can be discovered that are, in some sense, beyond subjectivity. This is not an option for Bauman. Yet, he values the importance of truth in the process of legitimation, and this allows for the individual to navigate their way through the chaos of modernity. Socially created order relies on a form of rationality that is contrary to human nature. For Bauman, the pursuit of order and consistency is not simply a source of disappointment and disenchantment for individuals, it is responsible for some of the most cruel and horrific acts in modern history.

Modernity as Rationality and Truth as Rationalisation

Bauman's 1989 publication *Modernity and the Holocaust*, offers a radical rethinking of the nature of rationality in modernity. Following on from the analysis of instrumental rationality made by the critical theorists that preceded him such as Horkheimer and Adorno, Bauman puts forward the argument that horrific events like the Holocaust must lead to a re-evaluation of the priorities of modernity. Although the events of the Holocaust may seem like an extreme example in contrast to the subject of contentment in modernity, Bauman's intention in this text is to show how the horrific acts of genocide consist of characteristics that are present in the rationalisation of social processes. *Modernity and the Holocaust* can be seen as an example of critical theory in action; it considers the nature of a broken social structure alongside distorted notions of truth and virtue, all within a normatively reinforced cultural

movement. In doing so, it provides an analysis of how and why social processes allow for the same mistakes to be repeated and for the most irrational beliefs to be seen as rational.

The core of Bauman's argument in this text consists of two main parts. First, he argues that the Holocaust was not a specifically Jewish event in modern history. Bauman insists on this point because he refuses to accept that the Holocaust would not have happened if there were not a Jewish population in Germany at the time. Therefore, the Holocaust is not something that happened to a group of people because they were Jewish, but rather it is an event that could have occurred with any marginalised group in modern society. He also states that the role of the perpetrators in the Holocaust cannot be seen as specifically German, as anti-Semitism was widespread throughout Europe and America at the time. He argues, "Whatever moral instinct is to be found in human conduct is socially produced. It dissolves once society malfunctions" (1989: 4). Therefore the idea that the brand of rationality behind the Holocaust has anything to do with either German or Jewish people is a fundamentally misguided idea. This point is supported by the second and main part of Bauman's argument. Here he states that the Holocaust was not a unique event that can be seen as an exception to the 'normal' events of modernity. Acts such as the Holocaust are not only a part of modernity, but they can only be made possible by modernity. He argues that the view of the Holocaust as an exception to normality allows us to direct the blame away from modernity as a flawed system and instead view it as an anomaly. This results in modernity being able to continue as a broken system without being subjected to critique and re-evaluation. What this means for the study of sociology is that our preconceived notions of modernity do not require any form of revision or modification. For Bauman, the concern that events like the Holocaust may become reoccurring is a genuine apprehension. One does not need to look far

to find distressing cases of genocide, racial vilification and religious discrimination all over the world[27].

Central to this interpretation of the Holocaust is the notion that within the most extreme acts of cruelty and systematic violence, is a form of rationality that can be found in the successes of modernity. Tester highlights the role of bureaucracy in these events as way for organised systems to lose track of the most elementary forms of human respect and dignity. He writes, "in a bureaucratic system no individual has responsibility for the entire system, and neither does any individual role within the system constitute a perspective from which the totality can be seen" (2004: 126). Consequently the justification for a certain act becomes something that exists beyond any individual, but also something that is outside of culturally developed standards of decency. Rationality becomes a force unto itself.

It is important to note that Bauman stops short of saying that an event like the Holocaust is an inevitable part of modernity, rather Bauman states that, "the Holocaust was as much a product, as it was a failure, of modern civilization" (1989: 89). This redefines the role of modernity in the Holocaust from being an innocent bystander to making such atrocities possible. One should not forget that genocide was not something that was invented by modernity, yet the scale and speed of the killings in Nazi Germany were only made possible because of the advances of modern society. The technology, transport and record keeping systems were all central to the nature of this genocide. Furthermore the technological advances that contributed to the Holocaust go far beyond the machinery. The ability to communicate particular information whilst suppressing contradictory evidence was also a major factor in the process of accruing public support for the Nazi Government. The role of propaganda in media formats such as film, radio and newspapers was a fundamental feature of the Holocaust. These new developments allowed the

[27] Although Bauman argues that the application of rationality that is at the root of many modern atrocities, is the same as the calculating and means-ends based decision making that has given individuals greater material possessions. And so, modern life is not simply getting worse, it is simultaneously becoming more luxurious and less autonomous.

perpetrators of such an atrocity to carry out acts of enormous violence and suffering in a clean and mechanical way. In other examples of genocide such as the slaughter of indigenous people by settlers in North America and Australia, murder was largely done by hand and it was dirty, graphic and emotional. The application of modern rationality made it possible for the Nazis to execute people in a way that denied victims the status of human life as they were disposed of rather than murdered.

To return to a term used earlier in the *Modernity and Ambivalence* section of this chapter, the idea of a 'garden state' is particularly interesting here. The garden state is modernity's quest for order and consistency through manipulating the surrounding natural and social elements of the world. For Bauman, the Holocaust was the ultimate case of an attempt to create a garden state. He uses the analogy that Hitler considered the Jews to be weeds that could not be changed or altered to fit within his ideal society and therefore must be removed. He argues that people were not killed because of a dispute over a particular region or because the German public could not have lived comfortably with people that were termed undesirable. It was about the purification of the race for Hitler. The example of removing weeds is particularly insightful due to the cold and emotionless process of removing people deemed to be undesirable from society. Bauman argues that this could barely be described as something hateful, because there is not enough passion to warrant the use of the term. Hitler simply selected people that did not conform to his Aryan vision and removed them. This is the garden state taken to extremes. It is absolutely central to Bauman's understanding of modern rationality and the Holocaust, that events of this nature are present throughout modern society. Extreme acts such as genocide as well as the more moderate restrictions on modern life through rationalisation, are still a part of modernity.

Concerning the matter of contentment, *Modernity and the Holocaust* highlights the horrifying dangers of rationalisation, but it also identifies the way in which people are subjected to social values that are not inline with their best interests. This text can be seen as a powerful critique of rationalisation in modernity,

whereby the best and worst of human achievements can be found. Yet it is also as a way of seeing the potential for meaning and legitimation to be distorted and perverted through the use of fear. From the perspective of the perpetrators, it reflects the desire to have control and to eradicate difference, as well as the ability for people to put aside their own use of reason in order to fit within a greater bureaucracy.

What Bauman describes in *Modernity and the Holocaust* is the practical use of critical theory in its most elementary form. The impact of rationalisation on the thinking, feeling and emotional aspects of humanity result in a mismatch of intentions and outcomes, and of needs and wants. This idea flows through Bauman's discussion of topics from consumption and relationships to ethics and ambivalence, yet it consistently draws on the idea that modernity is profoundly problematic. In the following chapter, a more in-depth discussion of the way in which contentment has been exchanged for security will highlight the application of this critique of rationality from an even more humanistic standpoint. At this point, the most crucial aspect of Bauman's work on this matter is regarding the link between the rationality that led to atrocities of human history and the rationality that drives modern society. *Modernity and the Holocaust* permits an evaluation of modernity that recognises the inability for the current direction of society to benefit individuals. Just as this book shows how modernity not only failed to stop, but also assisted in the Holocaust, this flawed modernity also stands in the way of modern contentment.

Chaos, Ethics, Narrative and Contentment:

Bauman's understanding of morality considers the function of moral systems as a uniting mechanism that makes society more agreeable to individuals, rather than a system that guides or directs ethical human behaviour. For Bauman, there is a need to differentiate between the use of ethics and morality. Ethics refers to something external to the individual. It consists of the laws and

legislation that give society order. Meanwhile, morality refers to our personal judgement of what is right and wrong or good and bad[28]. According to Bauman, within modernity there can be no morality without ethics. Moral systems are then justified through the presumption that without some kind of ethical guideline for people to follow, individuals would be reduced to savages (1995: 36). This has blurred the line between morality and ethics such that the role of individual moral choice has been marginalised. All too often we define what is moral by what is legal or socially acceptable rather than employing judgement and independent thought. To consistently use our individual morality to make decisions requires us to challenge the rules that are commonly accepted and seen as truths. Therefore, the use of morality requires doubting the relevance and accuracy of truth in modernity, an idea that is central to the notion of contentment as described in this thesis. Bauman considers this to signify a social change in recent years when he postulates,

> It may happen that in the same way as modernity went down in history as *the age of ethics*, the coming post-modern era will come to be recorded as the *age of morality*... (Bauman 1995: 37)

What Bauman is suggesting here is a shift away from ethics as a means of commonality that individuals can subscribe to and interact with, and a shift towards individualised constructions of ethics that can be tailored to fit an individual's identity like a hairstyle or smart phone. It is at this point that another potentially overwhelming internal contradiction is highlighted in Bauman's work; that the unique and highly individualised self is, in many ways, less tolerant of difference than the more heavily structured generations that preceded them. Bauman claims:

> Ours is an era of unadulterated individualism and the search for the good life, limited solely by the demand for tolerance (when coupled with self-celebratory and scruple-free individualism, tolerance may only express itself as indifference) (1993: 3).

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[28] A parallel could be drawn here between public and private sphere whereby Bauman's model for ethics referred to the kind of ethical judgements that Habermas discussed through discourse ethics. Morality, as Bauman uses the term may have no equivalent in Habermas's work due to its individualised and subjective nature.

This has created a new kind of ambivalence towards morality that is ultimately tied to the transience of meaning today (Bauman 1993: 10). For Bauman, the participation in some kind of public sphere discourse regarding ethics has not resulted in systems of equality of authority, but has resulted in a greater feeling of disengagement from society and the inevitable withdrawal into a more self-oriented use of morality. If the individual cannot convince another of their position, then rather than adjust their claim, they can withdraw from the debate and simply claim that their view is akin to their unique individuality. Yet, what ensues from this approach is a somewhat arrogant intolerance for the views of others based upon unqualified and untested presumptions[29].

In the malleable and constantly shifting society that Bauman describes, the normative values that can connect the individual and society are ambiguous. Yet morality can be seen as a binding social structure that insulates individuals from the chaotic nature of modern life. For Bauman, the relationship between society and ethics is a response to the problem of chaos that allows individuals to feel as though they have greater control over their lives. This concept considers the state of chaos as a form of fluidity and flexibility, where structures are either not present or not relevant and nothing is entirely predictable. Bauman borrows this definition from another Polish sociologist, Elżbieta Tarkowska, and it is characterised by a claim that chaos is a state of endless possibilities, as opposed to a state of consistent order that ensures restrictions through structure (1995: 13). The role of structure in this definition is to alter the probability of certain events, thus ensuring repetition and consistency in modernity. It is important to note here that Tarkowska refuses to see chaos as a deviation from the norm of civilised order, but rather it is a more primal state of being that has been overridden by the regulation of order. In what Bauman calls the postmodern era, individuals have "exchanged a portion of their possibilities of security for a portion of happiness" which can be distinguished from Freud's claim that the individuals of modernity "exchanged a portion of his possibilities of happiness for a portion of security" (Bauman

[29] This view will be developed further with Sennett's notion of the purified identity (1970).

1997: 2). A discussion of the extent to which freedom is enhanced or restricted by civilisation will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four with a comparison of Bauman and Freud. For now, this chapter will consider the tension between chaos and order in modernity and the way in which morality is used to link the two. In a continuing theme from the previous chapter, I will argue that the question of contentment is a question of ethics, and that Bauman's work is capable of showing that this is the case.

In *Postmodern Ethics* (1993), Bauman begins with a set of unique claims regarding morality in the present day. First, contrary to the age old philosophical debate over whether individuals are inherently good and require moral systems in order to help them do the right thing, or if they are generally bad and need moral systems to force them to behave, Bauman asserts a position of moral ambivalence (1993: 10). Individuals cannot be naturally good or bad, because the very idea of good and bad are culturally established and maintained. Furthermore, he argues that acts of morality are 'non-rational', as by definition, moral acts must override common decision making processes of means and ends. Moral acts are made so by the disregard for rational decision making [30]. Moreover, moral systems are endlessly contradictory, to the extent that, according to Bauman, moral decisions are made between contradictory options that are almost never unambiguously good (1993: 11). Although Bauman makes numerous other claims in this text, for the benefit of the focus of this study, I will limit this discussion to one final point. For Bauman, there is no way that morality can be universalised (1993: 12). This must be distinguished from moral nihilism as Bauman is not prepared to abandon morality, but rather the idea that moral rules can be enforced across cultures through the justification of universalism.

Central to the argument of this thesis is the idea that notions of contentment are socially constructed, monitored and regulated. It depends upon factors that are beyond the individual and therefore require social or cultural definitions of

[30] As Bauman claims that the term is now used in modernity.

pride, virtue and ethics to classify the experience of contentment. Bauman's argument in *Postmodern Ethics* (1993) is that ethics have become an aesthetic simulations rather than something deeply meaningful. It is as though there is a dramatic social transition towards something resembling nihilism and individuals are struggling to find their footing without some kind of objective meaning that can be relied upon. This is not to say that such a construction of meaning is not possible, but rather it has just not been realised and this is affecting the way in which individuals engage with the project of contentment.

In a sense, Bauman argues that it is essential for any human being who wishes to be free from the self-imposed restrictions of modernity, to be willing to look into the abyss in order to fully appreciate that there is nothing there. This is the understanding that there is no god, no fixed morality and no objective meaning that can bridge the gap between the individual and the world around them. Although Bauman has not argued the case of nihilism in the same manner as someone like Friedrich Nietzsche, some element of nihilism is necessary to apply Bauman's approach to narrative[31]. Nietzsche's critique of conceptions of 'good and bad' and 'right and wrong' in *The Genealogy of Morals* argues that such things are not based on fact, but are entirely human inventions. Further he states that the origins of the word 'good' stem from the notion of being noble, which implies a class based element to the idea of being good. This is crucially important to Bauman's approach to modern contentment and liquidity, for if there were such a thing as meaning that exists in an objective sense rather than at a social or individual level, then there would be 'right' answers to questions about contentment.

Whilst Nietzsche saw this as an essential part of self-improvement and development, Bauman seems to mourn the loss of a past that was capable of delivering a more satisfying relationship between the self and the social world. Society is the object that stands between the individual and the abyss, and whilst it will never be capable of filling the abyss, it serves as a constant

[31] In relation to the construction of meaning/validation

distraction from the chaotic nature of the world. Bauman states, “If one cannot confront the Abyss, the best thing is to chase it out of sight. This is exactly what society/religion achieves” (1995: 15). It should be noted that Bauman considers religion and society to be inseparable (1995: 15). This is not only because society cannot function without something to distract people from the Abyss, but also because religion is the justification for all things wrong with society. Although religion no longer possesses the dominance over values and ethics that it once had, for Bauman, new social institutions such as consumerism have come to hold authoritative roles in much the same way. This may be a stretch for some, but consumerism has its churches, its holy items, its own system of ethics and it certainly seems to have its priests. Meanwhile, it also has its own sins and punishments to accompany those sins. A core theme in this thesis identifies the potential for culture to fill the void of religion in the process of developing and legitimising ethics, as well as notions of contentment or the good life. If we take seriously the suggestion that individuals must subscribe to something ‘greater than one’s self’ in order to effectively engage with meaning and avoid falling into the traps of anomie or hyper-individualism, then culture can – or perhaps it already does – fill the social role of religion. This is a perspective that will be developed further throughout this thesis, and it is further highlighted by the role of narrative in the legitimation of values.

For Bauman, we apply familiar narratives to otherwise meaningless events in order to reassure and comfort ourselves about modern life. This could be considered as modernity’s response to contingency and disorder. There has been an enormous transition within the timeframe of only a few generations whereby the linear narrative of a person’s life has become fragmented and rearranged. This can be seen in trends ranging from work and consumption to relationships and family. With such a great emphasis on flexibility, it is no wonder that people endeavour to place the more chaotic elements of their lives into a familiar narrative, even when the application of narrative requires something of a stretch of the imagination. Yet the narrative is not only used to

illuminate comforting aspects of modern life, it is also used to hide things we may not want to consider. Bauman states:

> Left to its own devices, unlit by the spotlights of the story and before the first fitting session with the designers, the world is neither orderly nor chaotic, neither clean nor dirty. It is human design that conjures up disorder *together with* the vision of order, dirt together with the project of purity (2004: 19).

The way we view ourselves as successful, attractive, intelligent or happy people deeply depends on the way in which we have constructed these terms within a narrative. Just as Goffman emphasised the role of constructing a character that can be performed as a social actor, the narrative is a shared interpretation of meaning that the character can live within. Therefore, identity cannot exist in the manner in which we currently understand it without the presence of narrative, and in a time of such flexibility, narrative is essential to a feeling of order.

In his more recent work, Bauman has discussed the notion of living with uncertainty within the context of an analysis of fear in modernity. Bauman borrows an analogy from Milan Kundera to set out this problem. This describes the experience of living in modernity to be like walking in a heavy fog where we can see only the dangers that are nearby and easy to overcome, such as things we might walk into or trip over. But what we cannot see are the threats that exist beyond what is in the near vicinity, such as a speeding car for example (2006: 11). Therefore we select the predictable and manageable risks to focus our concern upon, whilst things that cannot be anticipated or calculated are put aside. It is not that individuals do this because they are weak or timid, but because to fully acknowledge the risks involved in day to day living would be paralysing.

Bauman adopts a position from Ulrich Beck in *Risk Society* (1992) by insisting that what is truly astonishing about modernity is that for many people we live in the safest and most consistent era in history. For the citizens of the first world, there are preventions and cures for countless diseases, there are the safest forms of transport and work, there is arguably less risk involved with day

to day activities than ever before. Bauman suggests that the focus on risk has become relevant because our expectations are also higher than ever before. People expect to live a long and independent life, we expect to be able to drive a car everyday without injury and eat food without being poisoned. However, this assertion does not change the level of risk and fear felt by citizens of the modern era. This kind of contradiction is crucial to this thesis and can be found in examples other than fear. For example, the level of safety that many individuals have become accustomed to is higher than ever before, yet there is also a feeling of even greater chaos. In many ways society seems to be suffering from a decline in morals, yet individuals also seem to be more morally stringent and the same could be said for the construction of meaning. What appears to be happening here involves several conditions that have lead to a distorted view of society. First, there has been a shift towards an emphasis on aesthetics over reality. By this I mean that the gap between the public image and the reality of a product, person or institution is subject to significant levels of distortion and manipulation. Whilst the misrepresentation of public figures is nothing new (consider the effectiveness Hitler's propaganda or the terrorist status originally given to Nelson Mandela), it is as though the aesthetic of transparency and free information of the modern age has allowed for new kinds of deception. Marcuse was right to think that despite the rapid social improvements after the Second World War, there were still very real problems to consider. In this respect, the present era is not radically different.

Yet it is worth mentioning here that the lack of certainty associated with living in modern society has resulted in the acting out of narrative in unique ways. Consumption is an interesting example of this as important milestones are often about buying or attaining things rather than actually doing things. My own evaluation of this is that our modern approach to narrative is an aesthetic one. There have always been culturally created and maintained narratives, but now it seems that an individual's efforts are directed more towards looking as though one has achieved certain goals rather than achieving them. Take for example, creating an aesthetic of wealth and security based upon renting and

leasing rather than owning. Home ownership is expensive and requires a significant financial commitment, yet a more expensive property can be rented for less than the mortgage of a cheaper house. This approach is tightly bound to the role of consumerism and instant gratification in modern society, but is also linked to the need to make sense of a rapidly changing world. That is to say, the argument that individuals are impatient or uncommitted when taking on long-term challenges is an oversimplification. A more accurate approach would see the short-term tactics of modern individuals as a reasonable response to the nature of the present day.

The discussion so far has shown how systems of ethics and morality serve as a lens through which the individual can view the world without the fear and uncertainty that can result from living with chaos. The individual can form a relationship with the world with the use of ethical systems that are appointed to distinguish between right and wrong, between what should happen and what should not. Unlike contentment, the purpose of this is not necessarily for the benefit of individuals, but for the benefit of the individual's perception of society. Ethical systems make the world likeable for the individual, rather than acting as a mechanism that restricts or guides the individual. My argument suggests that contentment is the other side of the equation as the relationship between the individual and society can be understood in such a way that the individual can find contentment within it. This application of Bauman's work in regard to contentment involves thinking of such an idea as a way for the individual to feel as though the self is more likeable. A common thread for many of the theorists used in this thesis, is the notion that the individual has become detached from the self. Modernity is so powerful as a means of manipulating circumstance that it has come to influence every relationship. Therefore, in contrast to ethical systems, the purpose of contentment is to make the self more likeable within the individual, through a meaningful relationship with society and culture. Although Bauman does not make this claim directly, his work concerning individualism certainly reflects and fits within this notion. Perhaps this could be thought of as Marx's alienation theory applied to the

postmodern era, where the focus on the alienated worker has instead become the alienated consumer. The importance of individualism to alienation will be developed further in the next section.

Identity, the Self and Contentment:

For Bauman, identity is not something that people are born with, but rather something that we create and continually update throughout our lives. This flexible and constantly shifting view of identity construction is reminiscent of Goffman's concept of the social actor in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) in that identity is a performative task. Yet Bauman's analogy of liquidity makes his approach unique. *Liquid Modernity* (2000) develops a new perspective of the structure/agency debate whereby the rigid social structures of previous generations are melting into a more malleable and unpredictable source of identity, morality and meaning. For the individual this results in a world of constant and unpredictable change where long term plans and goals are rarely achieved before they are abandoned for something else in the almost desperate attempt to not be left behind. Bauman's perspective here can easily be differentiated from theorists who have been notably more optimistic about these new forms of flexibility. Anthony Giddens, for example, describes the way in which flexible identities can allow for greater equality and the development of lifestyles that better suit the individual (1992). The breakdown of strict structural formations of meaning has lead to substantial developments in the lessening of discrimination in almost all forms, and Bauman would certainly not oppose this. He is, however, cautious about the emotional costs of what could be called flexibility for some, but functions as uncertainty to others. Bauman's concerns regarding the modern use of identity include, but are not limited to; the risk of anomie from over-individualisation, the contradiction of recognising each individual's unique identity whilst remaining intolerant of difference, and finally, the eventual withdrawal from participation in the social whilst simultaneously becoming alienated from the self.

For Bauman modernity is characterised by the rapid pace of change and the flexibility of social life that allows constant change to become the norm, yet he is sceptical about the extent to which this constitutes progress. He describes the transition from heavy to light modernity as a means to show the slow and clunky character of modernity prior to the present era (Bauman 2000: 113-4). Heavy modernity involves a kind of civilising process for space and resources, such that vast factories of mass production and a sprawling landscape of construction sites come to dominate spaces, no matter how sacred or remote. In contrast, light modernity is not weighed down by the limitations of space or the slowness of permanence. Consider the enormous library of heavy modernity that can now be accessed on the mobile phone of light modernity, or the traditional furniture store juxtaposed with IKEA. This is not simply a matter of efficiency, as the potential for speed has resulted in a temporality for all things.

The liquid element of modern society allows people to adapt their identities to numerous social environments. Bauman states, "The shape of our sociality, and so of the society we share, depends in its turn on the way in which the task of 'individualisation' is framed and responded to" (2001: 144). It is important to acknowledge that Bauman considers identity construction to be a task, rather than something that happens with relative ease and simplicity. Identity construction is time consuming and requires constant adjustment in order to avoid falling behind. The idea of constant adjustment and redefinition accompanies the view that society is constantly in a state of forward progression. Therefore, people do not 'fail' to modify themselves in a state of accordance with society, instead they 'fall behind' as they are surpassed by modernity's perceived progress. This becomes highly problematic when we consider that the progress of society is arguably not progress at all. A central element of modernity is the view that society is constantly moving forward through our technological advancements and increased productivity. This supposition of progress allows people to feel that the future will justify the present discontentment, whilst individuals feel reassured about the present being 'better' than the past. Therefore, the task of constructing one's identity is

a culturally mediated experience that is heavily dependent upon the use of meaning in understanding the relationship between the individual and society.

The extent to which identity is very much a public issue cannot be overlooked, nor can the aesthetic nature of our representation. Not only is identity written, it is also performed. This demands a level of engagement with the audience, resulting in an identity that is constantly influenced by the positive and negative responses we receive from others. Bauman explains:

> "Perhaps instead of talking about identities, inherited or acquired, it would be more in keeping with the realities of the globalising world to speak of identification, a never-ending, always incomplete, unfinished and open ended activity in which we all, by necessity or by choice, are engaged" (2001: 152)

In Bauman's view, identity construction takes time and effort, particularly in regard to the constantly changing environment in which the individual must function. This seems to indicate a more inward view of the world for the modern individual where concerns about image and representation of identity are more important than the reality of our circumstances. This is a central point in the discussion of contentment in modern society. The superficiality of modern culture will instruct and encourage people to look satisfied and fulfil the social roles of appearing as a functional and complete member of society, often leaving a well of contradictions and internal conflicts below the surface.

The question of identity has become synonymous with the plethora of possible options that an individual can draw from in constructing an identity. This can be seen as both a form of liberation and something deeply troubling according to Bauman. The individuals of modernity are faced with a multitude of choices beyond anything previous generations have experienced. The breakdown of boundaries has left individuals to make decisions that would previously have been made for them, meanwhile the influx of globalisation allows people to construct their identities from influences all over the world. Therefore the process of identity construction is both complex and demanding; and the responsibility for our decisions rest largely on the individual. While the breakdown or liquefaction of certain social structures that have inhibited

behaviour in the past may have given people a great deal of variety and choice, should an individual make the wrong choice, the burden of responsibility is all theirs.

For Bauman, Liquid Modernity leaves the individual with the feeing that something is missing and in this thesis that idea will be construed into the notion of a lack of contentment. Bauman claims that 'Generation X' has been exposed to a form of uncertainty that is unlike anything previous generations have faced. It is important now to clarify that debates regarding whether certain eras were 'easier' or 'harder' to live in are inconsequential. What is clear however is that modernity is fundamentally different from the world experienced by previous generations, and this is what Bauman calls a Liquid Modernity (2004: 10).

Bauman is careful to point out that Generation X is hardly the first generation to feel disillusioned or discontent (2004: 15). Yet there is a sense of uselessness and confusion that almost defines this era. Bauman uses the example of employment to show the consequences of living in an era of such radical change. The success and prosperity of a society is often judged by its ability to provide people with reliable and meaningful employment, and it is here that he makes a point of the differing terminology from previous generations to that of the X and Y Generation. The term for people without work was once 'unemployed', for which Bauman emphasised that the condition was curable and the problem was solvable. The term implies a sense of temporality and an excursion from the norm. However the term 'redundancy' seems to have replaced unemployment. Redundancy is a term that refers to a disposable item that is no longer of any use. It has no inverse meaning that alludes to a cure or even to the source of the problem. For Bauman, redundancy refers to human beings as waste; as though the business or organisation would be better off without these people who have nothing left to offer. The harsh reality is that these businesses are better off without these people – they make a great deal of money from selectively laying off workers. This is the world that the X and Y generation know, the world they have always known. It is a society where the

process of treating everything as disposable and temporary, has finally spread to human beings. The progress made by modernity has in some ways exceeded every expectation, yet there is a flip-side to the excessive pursuit of certainty and control that seems deeply problematic for individuals.

Sennett constructs a similar critique of identity in his argument regarding a kind of self-imposed slavery and adolescence, yet there are some central differences between him and Bauman. At the centre of Sennett's critique is the idea that identity theory leads to an almost reckless form of individualism and is partially responsible for the prolonged adolescence discussed above. Sennett argues that it is easier to identify as a sinner than to change one's behaviour or reconfigure one's identity, and this is a method of avoiding the disorder of modern life (1970: 147). This implies that it is more socially acceptable to identify as a bad person than to act according to a chaotic reality that is void of meaning. Having access to a more flexible identity has been associated with movements for feminism, gay rights and racial equality and has contributed positively in challenging assumptions and expectations about how people 'should' be. For example, incorporating homosexuality into a person's identity can now be constructed as something that is a source of pride, whereas this characteristic may have been considered something that in the past would warrant shame. What Sennett is criticising however, is the way that simply incorporating something into an individual's identity, results in that characteristic becoming free from social critique. This, according to Sennett, has led to characteristics such as selfishness or arrogance to be justified as part of an identity. This conception of identity is explored in what Sennett calls the purified identity. This is not a reference to purity in the same context as Bauman, but rather a method of creating a unified individual identity that is impervious to external challenges (1970: 19). Any historical period of rapid social change will be accompanied by a fear of losing one's identity, as the foundation of who a person really is can no longer be based upon their surroundings. This construction of the purified self becomes something that separates individuals at the level of personal interaction such that the only

remaining commonalities between them are the norms and values that are present, but not fully engaged with. This is, in a broad sense, a way of protecting one's self from aspects of life that are unpredictable and unknown. Individuals are able to avoid pain and suffering through the distractions of modernity, which in turn, will create an inability to appreciate happiness. Sennett is careful to avoid saying that experiencing misery is essential to being happy, however both Sennett and Bauman would suggest that some form of sacrifice is necessary in order to appreciate good things. A life of suffering is not inherently satisfying, but neither is a life of avoiding pain and uncertainty. Sennett states, "great injustice seems to arise when a certain pain and disorder in social life is consciously avoided" (1970: 93). Arguably, failure makes us human, and it allows people to reconsider and reassess their surroundings and priorities. Sennett argues that failures deconstruct the idea of a purified version of 'us and them' and therefore allows people to accept difference rather than object to it. This can been seen in Sennett's example of the aspirations of young people. He argues that youth will often have aspirations that are well beyond the reality of their abilities and opportunities and that when these goals are not reached individuals resent the foolishness of their dreams. This implies that the journey into adulthood is about giving up on hopes and submitting to the routines of mundane life, though for Sennett, giving up is about receding into a familiar comfort zone where the challenges of the unknown are forfeited rather than challenged. This is a sign of immaturity or 'self-imposed slavery' rather than becoming an adult.

A direct consequence of the flexibility of identity is a substantial increase in the importance of individualism. Not only does the process of identity construction allow for a heightened level of individualism, it encourages people to consider their own identity as separate to others. Whilst this idea appears to nurture and endorse difference as something that makes people special and unique, it also withdraws individuals from the social world. When individualism is used as a justification of action or identity, something is lost in the relationships between that individual and others. For example, to say that something about a person

cannot be criticised because it is a part of their identity, is to place that person outside of the realm where others are judged. It allows that person to act as an individual with minimal influence from their social surroundings. It is clear that there have been times where the social influence on individuals has been too strong (consider conservative approaches to the gay rights movement for example), however the influence of modern individualism has become capable of turning into anomie. Although anomie is not the same as discontentment, a detachment from social bonds and the inability to find meaning in the construction of the self are common to both approaches.

Whilst Sennett's argument makes a number of valid claims, there is a danger in oversimplifying the complex nature of human interests, desires and identities. It is conceivable that the individual can appear to present certain traits that are knowingly contradictory. Although Sennett's argument regarding the purified identity is still highly relevant today, Bauman's notion that this is something that individuals are subjected to rather than using it to escape from responsibility is considerably more convincing. Sennett appears to undervalue the emotional toll of becoming disconnected or disengaged from the self in modernity[32]. Whilst this hardly makes Sennett's idea redundant, it is problematic to think of the behaviour of modern individuals in terms of their inability to cope with circumstance rather than as response to the conditions of modernity.

Although Bauman does not provide a neat or analytical theory of identity or individualism, a handful of ideas can be clearly established regarding his concerns for an individualised modernity. First, Bauman is concerned that individualism can lead to a voluntary disengagement from the social world which will inevitably lead to some form of alienation from the self. This is perhaps best thought of as a defence mechanism for an individual who has become dependent on certainty, but must deal with contingency. Second, Bauman contextualises this rather emotional and personal experience within a

[32] Although this is somewhat rectified in his later work, in particular *The Corrosion of Character* (1998).

broader social spectrum by analysing the pitfalls of living in a 'liquid modernity'. In this case, uncertain and unreliable social conditions are marketed as free, flexible and endlessly changeable to the needs of the individual. The third and final concern in this overview is that the increase in individualism can lead to a greater feeling of intolerance towards others. Knowingly or unknowingly, this is tied to the ideology of rationality in modernity whereby all things must be predictable, classifiable and under human control. Generally speaking, Bauman's trepidation regarding a society obsessed with individual identity is that it is antisocial, whilst according to Bauman, the desire to be social is at the core of every human being. There is a need to assess the aspects of the relationship between the individual and society that are functioning to draw people together through the participation in cultural legitimation. However the means for doing this in modernity are as problematic as ever.

Consumption, Aesthetics, Mortality and Contentment:

The increasing scope of consumer culture unearths a number of problems according to Bauman, and this highlights a number of issues in the pursuit of contentment. The following section will consider central themes in Bauman's critique of consumerism in modernity. First is the extent to which consumer items are inevitably disappointing and incapable of providing lasting satisfaction or contentment. Following this, there will be an analysis of the role of choice regarding happiness and contentment through the work of Barry Schwartz. This will highlight deeper justifications for Bauman's cynicism regarding consumer culture. The discussion will then move to notions of disposability born out of consumerism and spreading to personal and emotional aspects of human life. Finally, Bauman's unique work on mortality and immortality will be used to contextualise the themes of this section within a wider social theory of modernity.

Despite the pessimism in this section around the idea that consumer goods are somehow meaningful and fulfilling, I will argue that consumption can lead to happiness. The discovery and acquisition of consumer items is very much capable of creating sincere feelings of happiness for individuals, although the definition of happiness must again be clarified. This is the result of a very important, but often insufficiently recognised distinction between happiness and contentment that has already been discussed in this thesis. Happiness is, by definition, fleeting, transient and pleasurable. It involves a feeling of happiness that is justified outside of social constructions of good and bad or right and wrong. Therefore, socially valued concepts like pride, dignity and responsibility are of little to no consequence in the pursuit of happiness, and this suits consumer culture enormously well. Of course, this becomes highly problematic when individuals seek contentment and lasting satisfaction from chasing consumer desires. Bauman explains,

> Consumer society rests its case on the promise to satisfy human desires in a way no other society in the past could do or dream of doing. The promise of satisfaction remains seductive, however only so long as the desire remains ungratified (Bauman 2005: 80).

Consumerism offers images of satisfaction that are increasingly more elaborate and exciting, but it is only capable of delivering temporary doses of happiness. It is this transitory satisfaction that allows consumer culture to continually grow into the market of fulfilling artificial needs and become something far bigger than is necessary. Yet, it is not simply the way in which consumerism is dissatisfying that makes it relevant to the question of modern discontentment; it is the compulsion to look for contentment in consumption. It should be made clear then that consumerism is not necessarily a problem for the pursuit of contentment, it is the value and importance that is placed on consumer items that will inevitably result in discontentment.

The work of Barry Schwartz becomes particularly relevant at this point. Schwartz's *The Paradox of Choice* (2004) argues that while an increase in choice will often result in an increase in contentment, there is a point where

excessive quantities of choice will make whatever it is we decide upon less satisfying. This is the case even when inflated levels of choice allow us to acquire better options. According to this argument, we have well and truly surpassed what could be called a 'healthy' level of choice. In more recent years, this has been referred to in popular culture as the 'fear of missing out'; the notion of 'the grass is always greener' principle for the current generation.

The practical consequence of this inflation of choice is the shift of responsibility for our discontentment from the outside world to the self. Schwartz uses the example of shopping for a pair of jeans to make this point. Put briefly, in the average clothing store a few generations ago, there were only a few options when it came to buying a pair of jeans. Finding the perfect pair was not an expectation and the consumer could easily walk out of the clothing store with a poorly fitted pair of jeans and still feel somewhat satisfied. This is because of two main reasons; first, their expectations were low and therefore easily met, and second, any dissatisfaction they felt could be blamed on the lack of variety at the store. However, in the modern shopping mall there could be hundreds of possible options ranging across a dozen stores and if the consumer walks out of the mall with anything less than a perfect pair, then the fault is solely their own. Perhaps they didn't have enough money or didn't know the 'right' places to look, either way the perception of the mall is such that the perfect jeans are in there somewhere and the consumer failed to attain them. Whilst this emphasis on consumption is not necessarily new (consider the argument of conspicuous consumption from Thorstein Veblen for example) it is now available to people of almost all income levels rather than strictly existing for the upper echelons of society.

Modernity is structured on the idea that more choice equates to greater freedom, even if all the options available are dissatisfying or virtually indistinguishable from one another. Whilst Bauman has not specifically described the problem of choice in this way, he has alluded to this view in other texts. In *Wasted Lives* he states, "Today's troubles have changed: They are *goal-related* rather than *means-bound*" (Bauman; 2004: 16). This phrase

epitomises the generational shift that Bauman discusses from pre-generation X to the present day society. Modernity has shifted from people knowing what they want but having trouble with the means to attain their goals, to a society where the means are seemingly plentiful, but the goals are elusive and constantly changing. Perhaps through the shift in generations we have emphasised the need for greater means without asking the more difficult question of what we should do with the opportunities once we attain them. This is at the core of Schwartz's argument.

Whilst Schwartz's argument is directed at consumer items, this approach to understanding the discontentment associated with modern society is applicable to numerous areas such as work, family and identity construction. Arguably the choices we have in regard all areas of life could lead to dissatisfaction. Schwartz then poses the following question; Is it possible that things were better, when things were worse? He is alluding to the idea that when things were simple and decisions were largely made on behalf of the individual, the lack of complication allowed people to be happier. Perhaps Richard Sennett's anecdote of Rico and Enrico in *The Corrosion of Character* could be seen as evidence to support this argument. In this example, Sennett compares the lives of Enrico, a hardworking, blue collar father with Rico, the privileged, jet-setting son of Enrico. Sennett finds that despite the successes of the son, he is struggling to find meaning and validity in his life, this is true to such an extent that Rico feels as though he has profited from disregarding the values of hard work and commitment that Enrico had tried to teach him. But this question raises a more interesting problem of understanding what is good and therefore what it is to be better. Perhaps the question of this thesis could be understood to mean; 'Is it possible that things were better, when the concepts of better or worse were not so flexible?' This contradicts a primary value in modernity that seems almost too obvious to mention, simply that freedom makes people happy. There is of course a valid point to be made here that freedom today is not really freedom, but something more sinister that is presented as freedom and this point will be discussed at length in this thesis. But for now, consider

the possibility that even if true freedom is attainable, it may in fact make us miserable. This requires a radical rethinking of the priorities and direction of modernity that would suggest the need for significant change to occur.

For Bauman, the culture of instant-gratification indicates a crucial error in the construction of everyday life. Modern, western culture is defined by our demand and our ability to fulfil our needs with a level of immediacy and minimal personal sacrifice. This is a considerable excursion from the social experience of people only a few generations ago. The term instant-gratification has a tendency to be used to describe consumer culture and examples of it are not hard to find. Consider vending machines that serve fried food, one hour photo stores, online shopping and high interest personal loans. All of these things require minimal input from the consumer in terms of time, money and effort, whilst attempting to maintain or maximise the satisfaction from the product. The unfortunate reality of this form of consumption is that the fries are soggy, the online store may not deliver what was promised and the high interest loans need to be repaid. What is astonishing in the case of modernity is that this absurdity is painted as completely rational behaviour. To avoid high interest loans and work towards particular goals is 'old fashioned', perhaps even deviant.

> 'Rational choice' in the era of instantaneity means *to pursue instant gratification while avoiding the consequences,* and particularly the responsibilities which such consequences may imply (Elliott 2007: 44).

Bauman's analysis of modernity is often considered to be quite dark and critical, as though modernity is a place void of meaning and authenticity. Meanwhile there is something that previous generations had which has been forgotten or left behind in the present day. Perhaps his perspective here can be summarised in the proverb that 'everything in life that is worth doing is hard'. In fact, Bauman has argued that the amount of contentment we acquire through achieving a particular goal is directly proportional to the amount of work it takes to accomplish it. Furthermore, this is the case even for things that we may not have 'wanted' to do in the first place. For example, a person may feel a

great deal of pride and contentment from surviving a particularly horrible and traumatic event.

Bauman's work becomes highly relevant when he argues that the demand for instant gratification has spread to areas of life other than consumption. In *Liquid Love*, Bauman states that we are applying the approach of instant-gratification to relationships. Put simply, we are trying to consume relationships rather than produce them. He argues that a fundamental aspect of a successful relationship is the willingness to endure situations that may be dissatisfying for us. These periods require personal sacrifices that cannot always be justified or calculated into simple equations. Therefore it is the experience of making these sacrifices that makes a relationship meaningful and worthwhile. This contradicts the key characteristics of a society defined by instant-gratification.

The inevitable consequence of disposability is waste, and this may become a defining characteristic of modern society. As discussed, the dogma of disposability has spread from consumable items to people and this is arguably a leading cause of depression and discontentment today. Bauman refers to this approach in *Consuming Life* where he argues that we are treating all aspects of life as objects of consumption rather simply consumer items. This results in people trading commitment and dedication for immediacy and instant gratification.

An inevitable aspect of consumer culture is the concept of disposability. For Bauman, we live in an era where disposability has become something of a metaphor for modernity. This can be seen in a practical sense as consumable items are mass produced and easily replaceable – for example the fast food industry depends upon items that are easier to replace than reuse and here George Ritzer's term 'McDonaldization' characterises this attitude of disposability. However, Bauman takes this idea a step further and argues that people are made disposable by Liquid Modernity. For example, in the modern workplace employees are increasingly being treated as commodities rather than

people. The increase in short term contract-based work means that an employee can be let go the moment they are deemed to be unprofitable. In a more global sense, this can be seen in the massive layoffs and outsourcing that has become a common characteristic of the modern economy. Disposability has also become a part of our relationships with others as with the increasing divorce rate – for example, marriage itself has become something that people commit to only for a period that suits them. When the relationship is no longer needed, it can simply be left behind.

For Bauman, the concept of waste is inseparable from liquid modernity. In *Wasted Lives* he states, "Nothing is truly necessary, nothing is irreplaceable. Everything is born with a branding of imminent death; everything leaves the production line with a 'use-by-date' label attached" (2004). According to Lemert, this becomes a central element of Bauman's perspective on identity and individualism. In relation to identity, the limited life-span of social structures results in the unprecedented flexibility for people to construct an identity with only minimal restrictions. Yet the influence of this approach on individualism is perhaps more fascinating at this point. If, as Lemert puts it, modernity endeavoured to keep the social problem of death off the *agenda*, and postmodern thought preferred to keep the deconstruction of mortality and immortality on the *agenda*, then the individual must face a significant re-evaluation of the concept of death. Modernity is an era of avoiding death, not just delaying it. People seek immortality through wealth, reputation and memory, or in other words, history. Therefore, without the restrictions of Modernity, we are left in a world where we must "make history in the absence of history" (2007 Lemert & Goodman). This fundamentally challenges the idea that by contributing to the course of history, we can be remembered or immortalised. In doing this, the motivation to be exceptional is smothered by the fact that mortality is the one element of our lives that cannot be altered or made flexible by the idea of liquefaction. This reflects Bauman's argument regarding living with contingency and ambivalence, as individuals are relatively unequipped to deal with things that are out of our control. Yet this

point is taken a step further in relation to creating a meaningful narrative for individuals in modernity. Bauman states that, "[g]roup identity is shown as having no future if it has been effectively denied a past worth preserving" (1992: 122). In the context of individualism, death is a homogenising process that indiscriminately overlooks our differences. From this we can draw that death destroys the possibility of meaningful individualism, as the importance with which we treat our individualism becomes irrelevant when death eventually arrives.

This can be taken one step further by questioning the influence of death upon reason, or at least the legitimacy of reason as a source of meaning. Bauman states,

> Death blatantly defies the power of reason: reason's power is to be a guide to good choice, but death is not a matter of choice. Death is the scandal of reason. It saps trust in reason and the security reason promises. It loudly declares reason's lie. It inspires fear that saps and ultimately defeats reason's offer of confidence. Reason cannot exculpate itself of this scandal. It can only try a cover-up. (1992: 1)

Regarding this thesis, the predominant theme to be taken from this is that reason cannot be all that guides human behaviour. Reason is a means to resolve distortions and inconsistencies, but there are aspects of humanity that cannot survive on reason alone. This is particularly interesting in the context of consumer culture, as the attempt attain some form of immortality though the accumulation of culturally valued items can defy the shortcomings of human life and reason.

It is by no means a radical claim to suggest that consumer culture is not capable of providing meaning or validation, particularly in the long term. As a result, the question must consider why individuals place such a high value on the acquisition of consumer items. If consumerism is failing to satisfy people, then why do people continue to line up outside department stores before the Post-Christmas sales and take out high interest loans to purchase temporarily satisfying products? Bauman suggests:

> It is the non-satisfaction of desires, and a firm and perpetual belief that each act to satisfy them leaves much to be desired and can bettered, that are the fly-wheels of the consumer targeted economy (Bauman 80: 2005).

I would argue that consumption is capable of creating a world without contingency. The rules of the game are laid out in advance, and there is a money back guarantee to provide confidence where there is doubt. Products are manufactured to satisfy the needs of manufactured desires. Consumer culture is therefore the ideal for a modernity that cannot or will not tolerate ambivalence and contingency. For Bauman, this is precisely the attitude that must be overcome in order to reach some kind of contentment. Notions that the individual can gain something meaningful without making a proportionate sacrifice, and that satisfaction can be found through the rationalised calculation of means/ends relationships, is the primary contradiction at this point. Bauman has shown that the use of modern rationality in regard to questions of intimacy, art and morality is problematic. Yet, for the consumer, the brand of rationality that Bauman[33] has criticised is perfectly suited to aid them in finding the best possible product without the need to ask questions regarding why they want the item or if they really need it. Consumer society is a perfect world for the individual who desires certainty, control and consistency, and although it may bring moments of joy and happiness to the individual, circumstances that are so dominated by control will never yield contentment.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of Bauman's work capable of showing how feelings regarding contingency, disorder and unpredictability have lead to deep seeded problems in the experience of living in modernity. This suggests that the direction of modernity utilises a set of priorities that are not suitable for encouraging contentment and that there is a recognisable need for change. This is not to say that we should revert to some other system of priorities that was

[33] As well as Horkheimer and Adorno.

cherished in the past, as though there was previously a ‘golden’ era where life was infinitely more satisfying. Nor has this chapter tried to argue that any one generation has more or less reason to be dissatisfied than any other. Rather, the argument is that modernity has achieved many of the goals that were set in the past with the intention of improving modern life, yet our level of contentment has not increased. From this it seems that the priorities that shaped modernity have been misplaced and are in need of readjustment. Bauman provides a broad range of explanations regarding this problem, yet they all consider the attempts and consequently the failures of trying to overcome contingency. Put simply, modernity has tried to eradicate contingency rather than learning to live with it. Yet no matter how ordered and consistent we can make the world around us, individuals will often be unpredictable and irrational beings.

There is a need to consider the potential future for a society where the objective values of the past have been replaced by a fluid and constantly shifting construction of meaning. Individuals then face the challenge of validating the cultural constructions of modernity, such that they can be considered sufficient for defining truth, morality and legitimation. On a social level, individuals have seen enough of the abyss to know that it is there, but they have not yet learned to feel at ease in its presence. My argument in the previous chapter has suggested that Habermas’s communicative action and rational consensus thesis is potentially a way to rethink the role of universal truth without resorting to some kind of objective truth that exists beyond the individual. Rather, it places considerable value in discourse and critical debate as the path to the kind of knowledge that is necessary for contentment is apprehended through the engagement with intersubjectivity. Much of this approach could be seen as an extension of Bauman’s work that has been discussed here, yet the differences between Bauman and Habermas will become more apparent in the fifth chapter.

Chapter Four — From Freud to Bauman: a Modern History of Discontentment and Society

The influence of Freudian theory in Frankfurt School critical theory is indisputable. Notions such as unconscious repression, the pleasure and reality principle, and the death drive inspired a new direction for Marxists in need of fresh ideas to employ and new questions to answer. This chapter will develop a chronological narrative of this discourse in order to show how social and critical theorists have been working on the idea of contentment since the inception of the Frankfurt School. The notion that contentment has deeply social roots will be traced from Freud's *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930), through to Bauman's response in *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (1997). To develop a greater insight into this concept, contributions will be made by Herbert Marcuse, Norbert Elias and Erich Fromm. This chapter will consider the nature of the relationship between the individual and society within a discussion of contentment. There is a need to develop a further understanding of the role of society as something that enables or prevents, is essential or intolerable, responsible or negligent in the pursuit of contentment. With the variety of critiques of modernity discussed in this thesis, it is necessary to consider the role of society and the extent to which it can benefit individuals. I will be arguing that society is not only unavoidable, but also essential to fulfilling a social need for contentment. The very notions of the individual and society are dependent on the existence of one another, and therefore, contentment as a socially mediated aspect of the good life is absolutely indispensable. Although this chapter will touch on concepts of psychoanalytic theory, the limited size of this project will not allow for it to become a dominant theme[34]. Rather, the social elements of Freud's work will be developed to establish a greater understanding of identity, freedom, purity and contentment. In short, Freud provides the question for this thesis, but not the

[34] The subject of melancholia is already well documented in the field of psychoanalysis (Freud 1917; Kristeva 1992; Žižek 2000), and so this thesis will remain focused on the social aspect of contentment rather than further developing aspects of the deep psyche of the individual.

answer. Rather, this chapter will consider the influence of Freud in critical theory, which arguably dates back to the very beginning of the Frankfurt School (Jay 1973: 87).

According to Joel Whitebook, the central flaw in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) is in regard to the internal nature of the individual (1996: 22). Whitebook is arguing that the problems associated with trying to control nature are plagued by the inability for individuals to adequately control themselves. Since the rationalisation of the self and society is a problematic and dangerous ideal, it could be argued that this dead end inspired the incorporation of Freud's social thought. Whitebook states,

> Martin Jay correctly observes that the early Frankfurt School had interpreted psychoanalysis as an empirical concretization of Kant's practical philosophy. Whereas Kant had formulated a purely philosophical account of autonomy, Freud provided an empirical theory that delineates the psychic structures that are the necessary conditions for autonomy and the developmental steps that must be successfully negotiated for those structures to be established (1995: 86).

The discovery of unconscious thought within the individual is perhaps Freud's most significant contribution to understanding the human subject (Elliott 1992: 16). The extent to which unconscious thought permits the individual to possess internal conflicts within socially acceptable behaviour is central to this project, yet the analysis of id, ego and super ego will not be discussed in any great length here. Rather, I will restrict my use of Freud to concepts specific to understanding the emotional connection individuals have with society. The potential for individuals to experience repression in a form that could be impossible to detect is a crucial notion in the development of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. Therefore, some investigation into the nature of the individual is necessary. Perhaps the ideal starting point is with Freud's claim regarding how and why individuals have feelings of discontentment.

For Freud, there are three reasons for a society of people to have feelings of discontentment, and it is worth noting that he certainly thinks that the modern individual is discontented. First is the extent to which human beings cannot

entirely overpower nature. Whilst technological and scientific advances have given individuals access to possibilities that were unimaginable only a few generations ago, nature still has the ability to threaten and undermine civilisation; consider the natural disasters associated with global warming as a potential example of this. The extent to which human beings are successful and prosperous has been defined by our control over nature in farming, housing and energy sources, yet there are constant reminders of the earth's enormous power and our relative insignificance. The second reason is in regard to the feebleness of the human body and the individual's inability to fully master ourselves. For Freud, this is not only impossible, but also undesirable. The individual will naturally experience a great deal of pleasure from their imperfections and the lack of control available to them. This is not radically different to the first point as it is still concerned with the inability to control circumstance, but here it is not a form of external control that is the problem, but rather the individual's ability to control him or herself. The inevitability of death could be understood in these terms, as could the popularity of cosmetic surgery or mood regulating medication. Yet for Freud, these problems are not of much interest as overcoming them is, almost by definition, out of reach. Freud explains that the technological advancements intended to solve human or social problems, tend to result in the creation of more problems. Just as Bauman has made the point numerous times (1991; 1997), discontentment arising from these issues can be resolved simply by accepting the world as it is and stepping back from the quest to control all aspects of life. Thus, for Freud it is the third reason for unhappiness that is truly fascinating. Here he refers to the relationship between the individual and society, and argues that it is our inability to effectively regulate that relationship that is the problem. In this evaluation of what Freud refers to as civilisation, the discontentment felt by individuals is the result of the very circumstances created by individuals. Solutions to this particular problem are further complicated as all alternatives proposed by individuals are, to some extent, the result of an already broken system. This is a seemingly radical claim. He is acknowledging that society is nothing more than a construction made by individuals, yet individuals have constructed it to be

detrimental to their needs and for this reason, not only are individuals responsible for unhappiness, but that overcoming this problem is impossible (Freud 1930). In this analysis, society is a reflection of human nature – as though the dissection and critique of society is a mirror is being held up to humanity. For Freud, the problem of discontentment is the result of individuals struggling to come to terms with their reflection. An analysis of Freud's notions of human instincts will be discussed in more detail shortly, for now however, it is important to recognise that for Freud this problem cannot be resolved, as society will inevitably be shaped by human drives and instincts.

Whilst Freud mentioned that the third reason for unhappiness is the most interesting for further study, he makes a number of interesting points on how the three interact. For example, he argues that the achievements of human beings in controlling and manipulating the natural world has not increased the happiness of individuals (1930: 26). This has been supported in a number of 'happiness studies' since Freud made the claim (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky 2006; Glatzer 2000; Ahuvia 2000; Brickman *et al*. 1978), yet what is perhaps more unique about this position is that he considers progress to be only one of many factors in the pursuit of happiness. This is particularly interesting in the context of the modern day society and the enormous value that is put on progress as something of an end in itself. For Freud, the advances in technology have only sought to fix problems that have been created by other advances in technology. Perhaps the most valuable point here is that not all progress is good for individuals and that many of our technological solutions to social problems fall short of making up for the damage done by past forms of progress.

This heightened ability to control circumstances and surroundings has left individuals in a rather unusual position according to Freud. People are simultaneously less dependent upon one another whilst their ability to see the world around them as they wish to see it rather than as it really is, has increased. This led Freud to the claim that, "Man has become, so to speak, a god with artificial limbs" (1930: 29) as individuals no longer have a need for god as an external entity, rather, we can all possess elements of control and

authority that were once reserved for only the most elite. Yet, this control is comparatively illusory and hollow. Bauman expands upon this approach with a number of critiques of modernity and civilisation. However, it should be specified that Bauman is by no means a Freudian social theorist. My intentions here are simply to highlight the overlap in their positions and to utilise Bauman in trying to answer a question posed by Freud in *Civilisation and its Discontents*. At this point, some clarification of what Freud means by civilisation is necessary.

For Freud, civilisation accounts for the achievements of society that have sought to distinguish humans from animals (1928: 2). This consists of two interrelated concepts; first are the ways in which individuals have tried to overpower and manipulate nature, and second is regarding the attempts to regulate the behaviour of individuals. From the first use of tools and shelter, to the complex and constantly shifting modern society, Freud argues that individuals have sought to overcome their natural weaknesses through the manipulation of nature. For Freud this includes everything from the telescope that allows the individual to see beyond his or her own natural limitations to the car or train that allows them to travel in ways that they never could on their own. He explains, "with every tool, man is perfecting his own organs" as the use of technology signifies the development of civilised behaviour (1930: 27). But there is also an element of regulation regarding the individual's relationships with others, such that society can function effectively. There is always a degree of conflict between the individual and civilisation (or more accurately the pressure to be civilised) such that society must be defended from the individual's attempts to pull it apart (1928: 2). This idea is further developed through Freud's discussion of the repression of unconscious desires and the renunciation of instincts, although it should also be acknowledged that Freud refused to distinguish between civilisation and culture (1928: 2). In another sense, Freud refers to the benefits of civilisation as being twofold; there is a moral system that maintains order and civility among individuals who often possess differing goals and priorities, and there is the potential for

civilisation to warrant satisfaction among individuals (1928: 10). There is a Marxist conflict here as only a privileged few have access to the satisfactions of civilisation as Freud describes them, yet all must submit to the moral system that enables the system to exist. There can be two central responses to this from Freud's perspective. First, that the competitive nature of individuals makes this polarisation inevitable, and second, that there is some level of satisfaction experienced by those who are not privileged. This second point is perhaps the most interesting in relation to this project as the feelings of discontentment in modernity are not simply belonging to the least privileged, but are also experienced by the most privileged.

It is important to distinguish between the German, French and English uses of the term civilisation. For example, in German the closest term is 'Kultur' which is precisely what Freud was referring to in the above definition. According to Elias, Kultur refers specifically to objects of value (such as art or literature) rather than all of the aspects that make up a civilisation. The Kultur of a nation should represent the strengths and qualities of that nation over other nations. Meanwhile the term 'Zivilisation' refers to something more symbolic that exists only on the surface of a society and is somewhat detached from reality. Zivilisation is secondary in importance however as it represents the functioning of a culture rather than the accomplishments of that culture. This is quite interesting when contrasted to the French or English understanding of the term. For Elias, civilisation refers to the "political or economic, religious or technical, moral or social facts" (Elias 2000: 6). According to Elias, the German understanding of Kultur became less nationalistic after the First World War as the term gradually came to hold a more international meaning. What is perhaps most relevant for the purpose of this thesis is that either term, society or civilisation, are seen as human creations that are susceptible to the reflexive will of the individuals that live within it. And this will serve as a core notion of this thesis, simply that it is the society that individuals have created and other individuals currently maintain, that has lead to the present feeling of

discontentment and therefore, the solution must come from further developments in the understanding and future vision of society.

According to Bauman, *Civilisation and its Discontents* is a book about modernity rather than civilisation (1997: 1) and so for the sake of simplicity, modernity will be the term most frequently used in this project. Bauman also uses the term postmodernity in order to distinguish the present day society from the modernity of prior generations[35]. What must be drawn from Freud's perspective is that the very developments that allow groups of individuals to be civilised, are associated with the cause of discontentment in society. In this view, the individual is deeply opposed to civilisation, to the extent that Freud describes the individual to be the enemy of civilisation. He states, "civilization has to be defended against the individual" as the interests of the individual must be restricted in order for society to function (1928: 2). Yet, he also states that "the principle task of civilisation… is to defend us against nature", for it is our own nature that is particularly self-destructive and aggressive (1928: 11). The Frankfurt School considers the process of 'repressive desublimation' to be correlated with the development of civilisation. Elliott explains,

> The shift from simple to advanced modernity comes about through the destruction of the psychological dimensions of human experience: the socialization of the unconscious in the administered world directly loops the id and the superego at the expense of the mediating agency of the ego itself. (2004: 30)

Consequently, the developmental progress that has led to present day modernity is tied to a numbing repression of the individual. In response to this, my thesis is determined to understand how the individual's relationship with society can be constructed positively in an attempt to lessen the impact of the unavoidable maladies of civilised life.

Such an undertaking will require a more developed understanding of the relationship between the individual and society in a way that is able to deeply root the subject of contentment in sociological thought. For Elias, there is no

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[35] It should be made clear that much of Bauman's work regarding postmodernity does not contradict his earlier ideas or his later work regarding liquidity. It is perhaps best thought of as a means to distinguish the X & Y generations from the baby boomers.

individual without society and there can be no society without individuals. The discussion of the relationship between the two is of interest because neither could exist, as we understand them today, without the other. Elias suggests that the individual and society are both aspects of the human character, rather than assuming the former as the person and the latter as the something to engage with. Society therefore, is contextually unique, constantly changing and only possible in circumstances where a number of people must live together with some form of order or structure (Elias 1991: 3). Elias considers there to be a lack of understanding regarding the process through which a group of individuals can become a society and how the society can become an influential force in its own right, in that the direction and goals of society seem beyond the intentions of the individuals (1991: 7). If contentment is to be understood as an ideal form of a relationship between the individual and society, then Elias' viewpoint of a society of individuals demands a re-evaluation of this relationship.

Elias argues that the relationship between the individual and society is of greater importance than the bond that has been described so far. It is not enough to say that contentment is the result of an improved relationship between the individual and society, as for Elias, the betterment and development of society also depends upon the contentment or satisfaction of the individual. He states,

> In social life today we are incessantly confronted by the question how and whether it is possible to create a social order which would allow a better harmonization of the personal needs and inclinations of individuals on one hand and the demands made on each individual by the collective work of many, the maintenance and efficiency of the social whole on the other. There is no doubt that this, the development of society in such a way that not merely a few but all of its members have a chance to attain such harmony, is what we would call into being if our wishes had enough power over reality. But if one thinks calmly on the matter it soon emerges that the two things are only possible together: there can only be a communal life freer of disturbance and tension if all the individuals within it enjoy sufficient satisfaction; and there can only be a more satisfied individual existence if the relevant social structure is freer of tension, disturbance

> and conflict. The difficulty seems to be that in the social orders which present themselves to us, one or the other always has the worst of it (1991: 8-9).

This suggests that notions of contentment are not simply about shaping society to the needs of individuals, but that society is necessary in order for the individual to experience contentment. Meanwhile, society itself cannot develop into something greater without the support of content individuals[36]. Elias continues by considering the role of conflict in this relationship. He argues that,

> Between personal needs and inclinations and the demands of social life, in the societies familiar to us, there seems to be always a considerable conflict, an almost unbridgeable gap, for the majority of people involved. And it seems reasonable to suppose that it is here, in these discrepancies in our lives, that the reasons for the corresponding discrepancies in our thought are to be sought (1991: 9).

Although discrepancies in the individual's understanding of the world should be tested and resolved, the idea of eliminating all forms of conflict seems problematic. Conflict is an essential aspect of the development of knowledge and the accomplishment and validation of goals. Perhaps there is a need to distinguish between healthy conflict and unhealthy or unnecessary conflict. The internal class conflict that Marx described, that prevents the working class from recognising that the owning class are responsible for their economic and social limitations, is unnecessary. However, some form of conflict is a necessary part of life[37]. Conflict exists in completing tasks that are meaningful and legitimising, it is a part of discovering new knowledge and the implementation of that knowledge. In a sense, conflict ensures a level of honesty in the context of discourse ethics as it places a higher value on truth than agreement. For Elias, conflict contributes to the idea that the individual and society are separate and distinct from one another and this is fundamentally problematic as it underestimates the way in which one cannot exist without the other. This perspective reflects a critique of the brand of individualism that

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[36] Elias' use of the word *satisfaction* seems to correlate with my use of *contentment* in this thesis, and so, in order to avoid confusion, I have tried to use contentment as an umbrella term.

[37] Although this is not to say that the desire for conflict is some kind of natural human urge or instinct, simply that it is an inevitable part of progress and development.

places the importance of individuals over and above society. Elias is equally critical of the opposite scenario where the society is deemed to be the ends, whilst individuals are the means. Rather he suggests that society as we know it would not exist without the individual; and the individual as we know it would not exist without society. Therefore a distinction between the general and the particular may be a better means of describing this association rather than speaking of the society and the individual.

Despite Freud's understanding of society as a reflection of the individual, he contributed substantially to notions of the relationship between the individual and society. First, he regarded society as something that is intended to correlate various forms of knowledge for the purpose of meeting the needs and desires of its citizens. However, he also considered society to be something that is always at odds with the individual. The inner-nature of the individual is something that threatens civilisation, therefore modernity must play a regulatory role where individuals are coerced, albeit through a system of hegemony, to refrain from letting their inner-nature challenge or overthrow civilisation (Whitebook 1995: 20). Freud's perspective here reflects Rousseau's famous argument that civilisation is not something that allows people to have freedom, as Hobbes would argue, but rather that civilisation is something that restricts our ability to be truly free – that perhaps society is something we would be better off without. However, Freud utilises a rather different approach in explaining how this happens. Law and government do not restrict individuals anywhere near as much as they are restricted by the seemingly self-imposed regulation of thoughts, desires and impulses. The socialisation process is characterised by the repression of our true nature and the teaching of appropriate behaviour and thought. It is worth mentioning however, that Freud refused to consider civilisation as something that creates and sustains individual liberty. He argued that liberty was greater before civilisation, but that it could rarely be enjoyed as there was little to no protection of that liberty (1930: 27). It is the restriction of our liberty that allows individuals to appreciate freedom and in doing so creates a desire for more. What is key to

this idea is that for both the pre and post-civilisation individual, circumstances are not favourable or entirely satisfying. Bauman pursues this discussion to some extent in *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991) by concluding that individuals must accept the chaotic and turbulent nature of modern life in order to overcome the desire to control it, and this will be discussed in more detail elsewhere in the thesis.

Horkheimer and Adorno contributed to a similar line of argument in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where they argued that the manipulation of the surrounding environment was not sufficient for contentment unless we are also capable of controlling ourselves. This is significant because Horkheimer and Adorno argued that the influences that affect the behaviour of the individual are not always external. The presumption that the world should be orderly and manageable overlooks the irrational and inconsistent nature of the individual. This is not intended to suggest that individuals should attempt to erase disorder and contingency from their humanity, but rather that a system based on purity and consistency will never be fully satisfying as there will always be disorder within the individual. Irrespective of the validity of Freud's claims regarding natural drives and instincts, it seems fair to argue that although each individual has the capacity for reason, there is always a tendency for behaviour that contradicts reason. That is to say, individuals simultaneously have the capacity for reason and emotion, and that the two are as essential to humanity as they are contradictory. Rather than supposing that individuals have a tendency towards specific characterises such as aggression or greed, it seems far more plausible to see the individual as the result of an emotional and a reason-based thought process, that when paired with socialisation can result in any number of human characteristics.

Freud described the conflict between the needs and wants of the individual and the limitations of their circumstances within the context of instincts through the reality principle and pleasure principle. In this model, the individual has two competing natural drives that can contribute significant explanations for human behaviour. The pleasure principle entails the natural instinct for gratification,

which Freud describes as the release of tension in all forms (Freud 1950: 1). Yet a person with only an instinct for pleasure would simply not survive in navigating the challenges of social life. Therefore, the reality principle refers to the desire for self-preservation and ensures characteristics such as responsibility and reliability[38]. For Freud, these rival instincts are in constant dispute with one generally over powering the other. Some kind of harmony between the reality and pleasure principle is simply not possible. This is not to say that either principle is capable of dominating the decision making processes of the individual as much of human behaviour is neither pleasurable nor practical. As a result, Freud describes a strong tendency for the pleasure principle, which exists in competition with the reality principle (1950: 3). What is perhaps most interesting about the pleasure principle in the present day, is the questionable amount pleasure that is actually experienced by individuals[39]. If Freud is right to suggest that there is a natural tendency towards pursuing pleasure, then it is the repression involved with social circumstances that keeps this instinct in check. Although the argument in this thesis will not pursue the possibility of natural or inborn human instincts, the use of this dichotomy can be useful through the development of socially conditioned behaviour. Individuals certainly seem to deal with the internal clash between the desire to fulfil pleasure and the responsibilities they are required to adhere to. Yet, the way in which individuals have gone about this task has varied a great deal throughout past generations. If we think of contentment as the individual being satisfied with their relationship with society, it seems that it is in times of great responsibility and restraint that contentment is most common. This is in stark contrast to the present day, where the maximisation of the pleasure principle is not simply an urge, but a promise made by modernity. This leaves us with a

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[38] This understanding of instincts is reflective of an early stage of the development of Freud's theory. Although the somewhat oversimplified nature of this argument is further developed by Freud, the idea that these instincts are inborn remains.

[39] There is a need to recognize the significance of conscious as opposed to subconscious pleasure at this point. For the purposes of this argument however, the central idea is that modern life is still enormously burdensome despite the increased perception of pleasure driven and short-term goals. For example the use of technology in increasing productivity has not made simply made tasks easier, but also increased the expectation to perform more tasks.

strongly Durkheimian view of the importance of community and civic duty as opposed to the anomie of the fortunate society. However, this relies upon the presumption that the dominance of the pleasure principle – which has become part of the aesthetic of modernity – is an accurate reflection of modern life, whilst it assumes that the dutiful attitude of individuals in a society facing scarcity, is indicative of the actual situation. Neither of these assumptions are wise, yet there is certainly something worth acknowledging here on the matter of balancing contradictory priorities.

For Freud, the reality principle encourages the individual to modify their approach to pleasure, and this contributes to the more general concept of repression. However, Sennett's understanding of modernity considers it to be something that allows the individual to delay adulthood rather than pleasure. For Sennett, modernity not only facilitates, but also encourages prolonged periods of adolescence through constant distractions from the reality of the world. He argues that the belief that the world is fair or orderly is an indication of childishness as the realisation that this is not the case is a crucial part of entering adulthood. Sennett argues that the world is disorderly, and much like Bauman, he argues that modernity leaves individuals ill-equipped to handle such chaos. The difference between Sennett and Bauman is that Sennett thinks that the discontentment felt by individuals today is necessary in order for people to realise the potential problems with modern priorities. Therefore, whilst Sennett considers modernity to be something that allows individuals to avoid growing up, Freud sees modernity as something that forces people to grow up and denies their actual desires.

I wish to argue that to some extent, both of these arguments are valid. In fact, I see no reason why the two approaches are necessarily mutually exclusive. The pressures of the reality principle can coexist with a yearning for a youthful escape from duty. Whilst Bauman contends that the pleasure principle has come to dominate the responsibilities of individuals, there are simultaneous feelings of anxiety and the pressure to succeed that are applied in new and complex ways. Individuals are very much capable of being both increasingly

adolescent whilst simultaneously denying their 'inner child' for lack of a better term. Freud's notion of repression and unconscious desire could be used to develop this idea, as could the inner conflict between reason and emotion. This requires a more detailed discussion of the possibility of human characteristics and the interplay of socialisation in determining individual perspectives.

Marcuse's use of Freud in *Eros and Civilisation* creates an alternate view to that of Sennett on the subject of modernity and adolescence. In Freud's later work, the interplay between the reality principle and the pleasure principle forms a considerable section of his social analysis. This is central to Freud's evaluation of society as a tool of repression upon human beings. In Marcuse's discussion of Freud, the reality principle is seen as something that has grown in force and scope in modernity, resulting in a greater pressure to delay pleasure and contentment and therefore deny the individual of their innermost desires. Whilst this might seem to oppose the present day concerns about instant gratification, it is referring to a different kind of delayed gratification. In Freud's example, gratification is being pushed back such that individuals must do more before gratification can be achieved rather than feeling satisfied with simpler pleasures. Gratification is perhaps easier to see, but harder to grasp in this example. Therefore, an individual may be able to purchase a consumer item instantly using a credit card, but the thought of the next consumer purchase will already be present and gratification can remain elusive.

A crucial distinction between the Freudian and the classic Marxist approach to understanding the individual must be developed further here. For Freud, there is an inevitable tendency for aggression in human nature that must be repressed by society through law and normative rules. The individual who knows that violence is wrong will feel guilt for these urges, thus resulting in an individual that simultaneously dislikes him or herself, and feels detached from society. For this reason, Freud believes that the relationship between the individual and society is irreconcilable, such that contentment as it has been discussed in this thesis, is simply not possible. Marx possesses a considerably more sociological approach to understanding the tendency for aggression in human beings. He

argues that aggression develops as a response to the polarisation of wealth in class structures and the way in which capitalism forces individuals to compete for work and pay. In Marx's view, if class structures were to be dissolved the tendency for aggression would eventually disappear as the removal of alienation[40] would radically alter the mindset of individuals (Thurschwell 2009: 106). This seems to highlight a potential problem with Freud's understanding of the individual in regard to society. Since Freud offers no clear solution to the problem discussed in *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, all that can be drawn from his analysis is a form of socially withdrawn individualism whereby the individual must learn to be less dependent on society for a sense of contentment. Modern civilisation is functional because it is able to repress the individual through guilt, which inevitably results in discontentment. This guilt is enormously powerful in persuading the individual to think less of him or herself, and the lack of confidence and certainty in life that results from this is debilitating. Therefore, the individual must seek freedom from the demands of civilisation as a means of attaining some kind of happiness[41]. There are a number of problems with this perspective. First, sociology has a long history (initially through Marx and Durkheim, more recently with Putnam and Sennett) of showing how individualism or the withdrawal from the social realm leads to discontentment. It is more plausible to suggest that human beings are naturally inclined to be social than to suggest that they are naturally aggressive. Elias gives greater attention to the social sculpting of an individual than to any notion of natural human characteristics. For the adult, there is a level of convenience and comfort in seeing him or herself as naturally possessing certain traits. Yet Elias insists that the human child cannot survive without intensive socialisation and that we cannot imagine the emotional nature of an individual sans socialisation. Therefore, solutions to the problem of contentment must be derived in a social context. Second, the argument that individuals are naturally aggressive – or possessive of any other instinctual

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[40] Alienation here refers to Marx's four distinct forms; alienation from the self, from the products of labour, from nature and from other individuals.

[41] Presuming that contentment is no longer possible.

personality trait – in a way that surpasses the influence of socialisation, is not convincing. This is not to say that the human being has no natural instincts, but rather that there is nothing about the individual that cannot be written or rewritten through socialisation[42]. Although there may be natural or inborn urges and drives, the power of socialisation is capable of reconfiguring the result of any or all of these. The process of socialisation, in this sense, may be unpleasant or even painful for the individual and the repression necessary for this to occur is at the core of Freud's understanding of discontentment. Social theory regarding this notion must shift away from the relatively anthropocentric view that the nature of the human being today is somehow the only possible version of a human being. Finally, even if Freud was right in his analysis of human nature and Marx was wrong to place such value in the social realm, Marx's approach still has greater potential to derive actual improvements to quality of life. That is to say that even if a utopia is not possible, individuals can still have much to gain from attempting to realise some form of ideal society. Although this final point does not contribute to the extent to which Marx's position can be thought of as true, it does justify the further study of contentment in this particular direction.

This is not to say that there are no inborn human desires, but rather that characteristics such as aggression or greed are socially determined and deeply contextual. Therefore, to claim that they are genetically hardwired and common to all people is problematic. However, natural desires such as pleasure are considerably more plausible as they can result in any number of outcomes depending upon their specific context. Therefore, to say that society possesses a particular characteristic due to the natural aggression of individuals is

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[42] Freud was right to point out that the individual consists of countless internal contradictions and that these contradictions are an essential aspect of humanity. One may draw from the emphasis that critical theorists place on the use of reason, that attempts should be made to overcome these contradictions into a more streamlined and consistent personality. This view, however, is flawed in that it fails to acknowledge the importance of conflict in critical theory. Internal conflicts are fine, so long as they are the result of the individual's own desires and not artificial needs or desires that have been pressured upon them. If Freud is to claim that contentment, as the resolution of tension between the individual and society, is impossible, then he is in error due to the individual's potential ability to find enjoyment in contradiction and inconsistency. Yet, this is precisely what individuals have learned to reject.

incorrect. There can however be *a priori* drives for desires such as pleasure, sex, food etc. As a result, there is a natural and individualistic drive towards pleasure (which fits within notions of happiness in this project), whilst contentment reflects the socially developed benefits of civilisation[43].

There is a need to clarify the nature of the conflict between the individual and society in Freud's work in order to better place his work in this analysis. For Freud the tension between the self and society is more a clash between the unconscious or repressed self and society, rather than a clash between the socially constructed self and society. To some degree, the socially constructed self and society are on the same side of this conflict, and so the individual is internally conflicted, just as they are troubled by their external relationship with society (Frosh 1987: 38). This realigns the question of contentment into an internal conflict between the known interests and desires of the individual that interact with consideration for social structures, with the unconscious and socially irreverent aspects of the self. Yet, if the socially constructed self and society are not the source of conflict, then Freud's understanding of individual/ social conflict does not necessarily contradict the more sociological approach developed by Marx.

For Erich Fromm, the need to meld Marxism and psychoanalysis was at the very core of the project of critical theory, though despite Fromm's reputation as the resident psychoanalyst and psychologist within the Frankfurt School, Marx was arguably a much larger influence on his work (Jay 1973: 90). Fromm sought to revise Freud's notions of the self, the unconscious and the libidinal drives in order to better understand the relationship between the individual and society. This application of psychology to groups or communities rather than solely to individuals could be seen as the birth of what is now called social psychology, and psychoanalysis was key in developing this. Yet Fromm's revisionist approach to Freud – as a means to enhance the theories of Marx –

[43] It should be noted here that Freud's discovery of the unconscious and the relevance of this in understanding human desires, should not be dismissed based upon this critique of meta-social human characteristics.

were never fully accepted by the other members of the institute; in particular his rejection of Freud's death drive theory (Jay 1973: 92). In contrast, Marcuse refused to modify the theories of Freud in order to benefit the work of Marx, and it was precisely this application of psychoanalysis that led to the success of *Eros and Civilisation* (1955).

Marcuse's use of Freudian drive theory considers the development of consciousness to occur through the meeting of the unconscious and the external experiences of the individual (Elliott 1992: 53). This application of a notably biological slant in Freud's early work is both an advantage and a hindrance to Marcuse, as it allows for a theory that adequately supports his claims regarding the superficial autonomy of individuals, yet it grounds aspects of the self in notions of inborn and somewhat asocial characteristics (1992: 53). This view does not consider the dichotomy of the individual and society as something that just occurs, but rather the individual develops through the interaction with society and is always in some form of conflict with it. Therefore, the conscious and unconscious are always contributing to decision-making processes, even in circumstances where the individual may have complete faith in their own autonomy. Marcuse's use of psychoanalysis attempts to reach an understanding of the self whereby the distortions of the will can be explained within the revolutionary potential of knowledge.

Additionally, Marcuse contributes a kind of middle ground between Freud and Marx on the subject of happiness and contentment. Whilst he considers the external pressures of an over-rationalised and class driven society to be a significant source of internal tension for the individual, he is very much aware of the conflict between the interests of the general and the particular. According to Marcuse, the use of reason in the general sense, such as the pursuit of knowledge in a Kantian or Habermasian context, is at odds with the happiness of the individual. Reason and happiness are not in harmony, and at this point Marcuse suggests an alternative parallel to happiness that is essentially social, much like the notion of contentment in this thesis. The key to this involves the use and pursuit of knowledge as a liberating force that allows for the

development of autonomy from social pressures. From this perspective the individual's happiness and pleasure must occasionally be given a lower priority for the benefit of the social, general or universal good.

A key aspect of Marcuse's perspective on civilisation and contentment involves the role of information. The relationship between reason and contentment is of crucial importance since without the full use of one's own reason, their interests cannot entirely be their own. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter six, however at this point it should be noted that there is a key relationship between reason and knowledge in the ongoing process of developing and challenging concepts of truth, and therefore knowledge is essential to contentment[44]. The problem that has become central in this thesis concerns the extent to which knowledge can be acquired and utilised successfully in the pursuit of contentment (Marcuse 1955: 82). And so, Marcuse draws upon Freudian notions of repression and guilt in order to develop a branch of critical theory that considers the emotional and personal impact of modernity, whist trying to resolve the problem of the innate human characteristics according to psychoanalysis.

In regard to Freud's understanding of the three sources of discontentment in society, Marcuse identifies two to be specifically historically situated. These include, the overwhelming power of nature (and the relative insignificance of humanity to it) and the individual's relationship with social structure and meaning (1955: 81). What Marcuse is alluding to here is the substantial shift in control over nature that has become common in modernity and the inevitable way in which this affects the individual's understanding of their relationship with society. It is here that Marcuse argues that as society has developed with science and technology, the need for repression within the individual has increased[45]. With an increased need for repression in order for civilisation to

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[44] Although Marcuse uses the term happiness in a more general sense on this topic.

[45] One could also argue that the other reason for discontentment that Freud discusses (the inability to prevent the decay of our bodies) has also shifted significantly since the time of Marcuse's writing.

function as it does, Marcuse also puts forward the claim that the role of guilt in the self-understanding of the individual has also increased.

Marcuse considered modernity to be not only a place of artificial needs and the manipulation of both nature and the individual, but also that modern industrialism is the enabling element of much of what is wrong with the world. A utopia can be imagined as a 'nonrepressive civilization' that can be made possible through a redefinition of the relationship between the individual and nature (Whitebook 1995: 25). This is in contrast to the Freudian perspective that suggests that a nonrepressive civilisation is not possible (Elliott 2004: 33). It also shifts away from the socialist realism to the socialist surrealism that Marcuse discusses in *Eros and Civilisation* (Whitebook 1995: 25). This is in contrast to Marxist notions where the problems with utopian thought are the result of a new understanding of progress and what it means to be modern. What Marcuse describes at this point could be understood as an early attempt to define the postmodern. Essentially, this is a period at the end of the traditional development of society, where restrictions and limitations on all aspects of life can be reconsidered. Whilst this is perhaps Marcuse at his most dystopian, this clears the way for a discourse of utopian concepts to appear. He states:

> Such a hypothetical state could be reasonably assumed at two points, which lie at the opposite poles of the vicissitudes of the instincts: one would be located at the primitive beginnings of history, the other at its most mature stage. The first would refer to a non-oppressive distribution of scarcity (as may, for example, have existed in the matriarchal phases of ancient society). The second would pertain to a rational organisation of fully developed industrial society after the conquest of scarcity (Marcuse 1955: 126).

This is as much about overcoming capitalism as it is about overcoming repression, as for him the two are inseparable. The ability to live without repression is inextricably linked to being able to live without the artificial impulse to consume unnecessary items and feel inadequate when we fail to do so. In this case, consumption is not the cause of repression but an indication of the power of social influence over the individual's perspective.

Bauman's position here is certainly closer to Marcuse's than to Freud's as he considers the concept of utopia as an aspiration or a philosophy rather than a strictly defined model for how the world 'ought' to be. He states, "Utopias, to be sure, differ from electoral platforms and even from long-term political programmes in that they seem to be little concerned with pragmatically conceived realism" (Bauman 1976a: 13). This definition is not far from Bauman's understanding of socialism as an egalitarian philosophy that stands against the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few, rather than an economic structure or a political movement. Yet it is also a process rather than an end point – an idea that is not dissimilar to the 'Project of Enlightenment' in the work of Habermas. Consequently Bauman approaches discussions of utopia as a means to imagine future possibilities in a positive light. In reference to Camus and Benjamin, Bauman describes progress as though individuals "move with our backs turned towards the future, pushed back-to-front by the horrors of the past" (Bauman & Tester 2001: 47). It is in response to this idea of progress as being motivated by a negative decision making process (e.g. as an attempt to escape something), that Bauman insists on the importance of utopia, even if it is nothing more than a thought experiment.

Yet there is the potential for conflict in Freud's use of the relationship between the individual and society. If, as Freud states, the discontentment experienced in the interaction with civilisation is the result of the imperfection of the psyche being projected out into the world, then it may be necessary to re-evaluate his notion of order. Freud argues that civilisation is associated with consistency and cleanliness, which is a reflection of an individual's ability to control their physical nature, whilst dirt and filth are associated with the primitive individual. This is Freud's critique of civilisation, rather than his own view, but it does not seem to fit within his conclusions regarding the role of beauty in society. For Freud, beauty is also a sign of civilised behaviour, as the individual should not only seek to identify and preserve beauty, but also to make things that are beautiful in any format. The contradiction here is that beauty requires

an element of dirt and disorder. The breathtaking landscape is made from mud, manure and wild animals, and the most spectacular painting is often the result of months or years of experimenting with ideas that do not work. What is beautiful about the symphony is that it has imperfections and therefore it is constantly changing depending on the mood of the conductor and the musicians. It is the imperfection of humanity that appeals to individuals, yet Freud suggests that, to some extent, beauty is under threat in modernity. Whilst this seems to strike a current of detachment in modernity, it is an excessively bleak perspective of human nature. Although the rationale of modernity tries to justify order as beauty, as though beauty is associated with mastery, there is certainly space allocated to the appreciation of disorder in beauty.

In response to Freud, Bauman insists on a more sociological view of the relationship between the individual and society, although the importance of recognising the limitations of socialisation is a crucial aspect of his early work. Prior to his work around *Liquid Modernity* (2000), Bauman's approach to understanding human nature and the role of the social considered the limitations of nature to be a practical part of freedom itself. Beginning with a discussion of Francis Bacon's understanding of the flexibility of the human condition depending on certain circumstances, Bauman utilises the metaphor of a sculptor to clarify his position. He states,

> The structure of the stone is not of the sculptor's making; he can still make the stone accept his intentions, but only by learning what the stone will not accept. One has only to extend this metaphor so as to embrace the totality of the human condition. Life then becomes the art of the possible, and knowledge is there to teach us how to distinguish the possible from the idle dreams (1976: 3).

Bauman then draws upon Hegel in order to further explain how the limitations of our sociality can be construed as a means to better understanding a meaningful form of freedom. He argues,

> To be free means to know one's potentiality; knowing potentiality is a negative knowledge, i.e. knowledge of what one is prevented from doing. Proper knowledge can assure that a man will never experience his constraints as oppression; it is the unknown, unsuspected necessity which is confronted as

> suffering, frustration, and humiliating defeat. But it is only unenlightened action which exposes necessity as an alien, hostile, and thoroughly negative force (1976: 3).

This touches upon a crucial element of the relationship between the social and the natural elements of life whereby control over circumstance is detrimental to human needs. Here we can see a point that Bauman develops significantly in his later work (1991; 1997; 2004), namely that the well-being of individuals exists in the acceptance and understanding of limitations rather than within the ceaseless attempts to overcome them, to be the 'god with prosthetic limbs' as Freud describes. What is essential here is the role of knowledge and therefore reason in delivering a relationship with society that is capable of enabling freedom and contentment.

The question we are left with is simple yet troubling, How can we know what kind of society is suitable for fostering satisfied individuals? Marcuse's notion of perversion can reveal a great deal to these ideas of utopia. As Marcuse draws on the ideas of Freud, he considers perversions to be cases where the individual is exposed to ideas they would normally repress. Our perversions, even when they seem unspeakable, are capable of bypassing the hegemonically imposed restrictions on our thought. This can be used to overcome the desire for modernity to dominate ambivalence and allow the individual to construct a framework where they are capable of moving away from the dependence on order and consistency. As utopia, according to Bauman, must be a place where we overcome our need for consistency and eventually embrace the world as it is, it is only through our perversions that we can truly acknowledge our desire for dirt and abandon our need for purity. This analysis of purity and dirt is perhaps best described in *Modernity and the Holocaust*, a text that has been discussed at length in the previous chapter, and which is arguably Bauman's foundational work on the subject of modernity as a system that is deeply flawed. Yet, it is worth drawing attention to Bauman's observation that utopia is a society that has surpassed the need for progress. He argues that common notions of an ideal world are fundamentally 'anti-modern' as they imagine an

endpoint for society rather than an evolving system of networks, values and norms (1997: 12). There are two key points here; first, progress is believed to be the means to an end such that there is something that can be called an end point, and second, there is an inconsistency between common notions of utopia and the reality of creating an ideal society. Constant adjustment, revaluation and critique are essential to ensure that any society moves in a positive direction and to think of an ideal society as no longer needing to be concerned with such things is as ludicrous as thinking that an ideal democracy is one in which I no longer need to vote. Participation is key to progress, and the progress is never ending. Other means of determining the ideal society are not capable of serving the best interests of individuals.

Bauman's reply to Freud's analysis of civilisation came in the form of *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (1997). This text could be seen as the culmination of his thought from the previous decade, centred on Freud's question of happiness and the relationship between the individual and society. He draws more substantially from Freud's premise than his approach as he utilises texts like Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger* (1966) and the phenomenology of Alfred Schütz, whilst weaving in literary works such as Robert Musil's *The Man without Qualities* (1965). Bauman considers the role of the stranger, the other and the humiliated in his assessment of the troublesome aesthetic of postmodernity.

The first aspect of *Civilisation and its Discontents* that Bauman intends to modernise involves the acknowledgement of the pleasure principle's newfound dominance of the reality principle. According to Bauman, during Freud's era the pleasure principle was effectively restricted by the reality principle. Freud claimed that "civilised man has exchanged a portion of his possibilities of happiness for a portion of security", and now Bauman states that "Postmodern men and women exchanged a portion of their possibilities of security for a portion of happiness" (1997: 3). The modern era was excessively concerned with security and therefore sacrificed elements of individual happiness, whilst in the present day the opposite of this is true. There is no doubt that sacrificing

either happiness or security is insufficient, but Bauman appears to lament the loss of security to some degree. This could be understood in the context of the breakdown of social structures and meaning without an adequately secure construct to fill its place. When writing about Liquidity, Bauman seems to yearn, not for a return to some kind of bygone era, but for greater stability in the structure with which individuals make sense of their lives. If we think of happiness in a Freudian sense of 'the release of tensions' based upon some kind of change, then according to Bauman "freedom without security assures no more steady a supply of happiness than security without freedom" (1997: 3). This discussion of security in regard to happiness, and vice versa, occurs within the context of the social individual's attempts to control nature, which, at an emotional level can be understood in the distinction between purity and dirt.

The social aversion to dirt and preference for purity has been a major concern in Bauman's writing for almost three decades (1987; 1991; 1997; 2004). It is an apprehension that rests at the core of the relationship between the individual and society, as well as our notions of normative behaviour. In *Legislators and Interpreters*, Bauman considers the analogy of the garden where individuals seek to control their surroundings, yet in *Postmodernity and Its Discontents* Bauman further develops the way in which the distinction between dirt and purity is applied to people through a process of homogenisation and exclusion. He argues, "Human intervention does not soil nature and make it filthy; it introduces into nature the very distinction between purity and filth, it creates the very possibility of a given part of the natural world being 'clean' or 'dirty'" (1997: 5). However, dirt could be more accurately thought of as disorder as it is not strictly the nature of something that makes it dirty, but rather its placement in a location that is not deemed appropriate. Just as a flower can be a weed in the wrong part of a garden, a thought or an action can easily be made iniquitous by its lack of order or inability to adhere to the strict rules of circumstance. Whilst aspects of this rationalization may seem harmless, the devotion to cleanliness and order promotes a devaluing of difference and has been applied to all forms of the social 'other'. The practical

result of this obsession with purity is the development and support of discriminatory social attitudes such as racism, homophobia, sexism and xenophobia. It fundamentally devalues individuals while it justifies inaction in times of dramatic moral turmoil such as famine and war. Bauman states,

> We may go a step further and say that the 'order-making' now becomes indistinguishable from announcing ever new 'abnormalities', drawing ever new dividing lines, identifying and setting apart ever new 'strangers' (1997: 11).

There is a need, however, to acknowledge the reflexive capabilities of the individual under these conditions. Although a deeply rationalised and ordered society inflicts a homogenised understanding of cultural meaning, the individual is able to respond to, and process, this meaning in any number of unpredictable ways. In an effort to bridge Freud's social thought with an updated understanding of current circumstances, Elliott argues that,

> [I]f we understand psychic dislocation and fragmentation principally as *reaction* to the cultural multiplicity and institutional dynamism of postmodernity, as something like a knee-jerk response to the new and unfamiliar, and if we see that such reactions are in turn open to reflective thinking and scanning, then a more complex picture emerges (1996: 128).

For Bauman, this reflects the need to incorporate the disorder and mystery of life into our expectations and ideals, and this is certainly something that individuals are capable of. It involves the reimagining of the 'other' with a tendency towards recognition and a welcoming of difference.

However this is a problem that extends beyond the treatment of others according to Bauman. The devaluing of others inevitably leads to a devaluing of the self. In *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?* Bauman argues that the concept of 'loving thy neighbour' can shed considerable light on the question of self-love in modern society. Here he considers Freud's objection to 'loving thy neighbour as thyself' as a basis for human morality. Bauman proposes that the basis of modern morality claims to utilise the 'love thy neighbour principle' which suggests that we should feel sincere affection

for the people around us. Yet the process of prioritising one's own needs above others is quite central to the normative functioning of human relationships.

Whilst some may draw from this moral suggestion that to love thy neighbour is precisely the opposite of human nature, neither Freud nor Bauman seem satisfied with this explanation. There are two main reasons for this; firstly the opposite of loving thy neighbour is self-love, and self-love is not the same as human nature. Secondly, Bauman argues that "The less likely a norm is to be obeyed, the more likely it is to be stated with resolve and obstinacy" (2008c: 32). Therefore, loving thy neighbour is less likely to be obeyed than self-serving individualism, and so it must be reinforced with our moral teachings. However the question of self-love is the most relevant in the discussion of modern contentment. It should be clarified that Bauman considers self-love to be an excursion from human nature or animal instincts, not unlike loving thy neighbour. This is significant to the question of contentment because according to Bauman, in order to love ourselves (or in other words to be happy, proud and satisfied) we must feel that we are, or at least could be, loved by others. Before we can define ourselves as beings worthy of self-love we must believe that others will be willing to love us. This would suggest that the notion of loving thy neighbour as an egalitarian or Christian approach to morality whilst self-love is dominated by individualism and self-interest, must be false. There can be no separation because neither can exist independently. In Bauman's view, to love thy neighbour is to overcome the hierarchical formation of people as better or worse than one another, and instead to appreciate and validate the uniqueness of individuals. This is what modern individualism has failed to do. The refuge for many individuals from the social world has resulted in an inability for people to be truly satisfied with themselves. This results in a contradiction in modernity which is simultaneously embracing individuality whilst condemning difference.

Conclusion:

The relationship between the individual and society is such that neither can exist without the presence of the other. Therefore, to place a focus on individualised solutions to social ailments will always fall short of a providing a suitable understanding of ourselves and our maladies. This chapter has sought to draw from Freud's radical rethinking of the human subject and contribute to a question that is deeply sociological, in a sense, 'How can we construct a more beneficial society?' This question is highlighted by the development of the first world to the degree that it can truly be called 'post-scarcity'. This is not to say that every person's needs are fulfilled, but that scarcity is no longer a matter of collective wealth, but a matter of waste. If we consider aspects of social life like access to healthcare and energy as needs, then the lack of access for many individuals is not the result of scarcity, but of the aspects of modern culture that do not value equality or responsible scientific progress. Now that individuals can be assured of their basic rights, their next meal, and a dizzying array of technological advancements, what is left to comprehend, but ourselves.

Bauman describes the task of moral systems to be a means to order and structure a chaotic and directionless world. The key element of this structure is to make the world more likeable to individuals by introducing notions of fairness and respect that are normatively enforced. If the project of morality can be seen as a means to make the world more likeable to individuals, then the concept of contentment discussed in this thesis can be seen as an attempt to make the self more likeable to the individual. The development of a relationship between the individual and society that is beneficial to all parties depends upon the way in which the individual can positively construct themselves and their relationships with others.

In order for this kind of understanding to be developed, the role of contentment must utilise both reason and emotion to function in a way that is beneficial to the individual and to society in general. This process can be described in several stages, beginning with the individual. The individual must encounter and pursue knowledge beyond the needs of instrumental rationality. To participate in society without having one's desires and priorities distorted by

others, and to make one's will truly their own, they must engage with knowledge through the lens of reason. Reason allows the individual to interact with knowledge without being coerced by it. Yet, the possession of reason and knowledge is not sufficient without meaning. As meaning has become such a flexible and malleable construct, the individual must find a way to validate and legitimise their priorities and goals. This is where the role of emotion meets reason to create meaning. To have meaning without reason would leave the individual open to manipulation and coercion, whilst to have reason without meaning would constitute a mechanical and fundamentally anti-human existence. Therefore, through an ongoing rational discourse of knowledge and reason with the embracement of emotional and subjective human experience, a model of contentment that is socially gratifying can be developed, and constantly redeveloped, for the best interests of all individuals.

Chapter Five Habermas and Bauman: A Comparative Critique

> The voice of conscience – the voice of responsibility – is audible, as it were, only in the discord of uncoordinated tunes. Consensus and unanimity augur the tranquillity of the graveyard (Habermas's 'perfect communication', which measures its own perfection by consensus and the exclusion of dissent, is another dream of death which radically cures the ills of freedom's life); it is in the graveyard of universal consensus that responsibility and freedom and the individual exhale their last sigh (Bauman 1997: 202).

When considering the array of noteworthy similarities and differences between Jürgen Habermas and Zygmunt Bauman, it is surprising to find that there is virtually no comparative literature on the two. In a handful of passing statements, Bauman has mentioned that he has trouble with Habermas's notion of rational discourse, yet he has also referred to Habermas as one of the greatest social theorists alive today. In contrast, there is no mention of Bauman in Habermas's work; he is essentially, off the radar. Yet, this chapter will argue that there is a great deal to gain from a comparison of the two that allows for a critical analysis of both theorists within a discussion that adequately acknowledges the significant overlap between the two. This chapter will traverse through a select group of topics consisting of rationality, legitimation, universalism, consensus, communication and the nature of individuals. Through the comparative critique of Bauman and Habermas, a middle ground can be developed that makes use of the strengths of both approaches. Such an approach could be described as a weak program of Habermas's rational discourse thesis, or perhaps a more systematic adoption of Bauman's evaluation of modernity. However it is by no means an attempt to reconcile or underestimate the key differences between these theorists. There are disagreements between Bauman and Habermas that cannot easily be resolved, rather I intend to construct a position that draws from the strengths of each theorist. Before delving into the application of these ideas to contentment,

perhaps the ideal place to start would be with the unique origins of their social thought.

Despite efforts to distance himself, Habermas has always been associated with the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. Habermas worked for over a decade as Adorno's assistant before a falling out occurred that would never be reconciled. The bitterness of this dispute (allegedly over Habermas's dissertation) has resulted in a drive within Habermas's work to leave behind the theoretical dead ends of Adorno's critical theory and develop significant changes to the foundations of critical theory (Outhwaite 2009: 2-6). Consequently, Habermas has become the face of what is sometimes referred to as the second generation of critical theorists, notwithstanding his efforts to distinguish his work from the first generation. This forms a unique contrast with Zygmunt Bauman, a theorist who has no practical ties to the Frankfurt School, yet is arguably one of the greatest proponents of early critical theory today. Bauman considers himself a critical theorist, although not in the same manner as Habermas. Rather, Bauman believes that all social theory must be critical in nature and therefore his work is no exception. There are concrete links between Bauman's work and the Frankfurt school that, unlike Habermas, Bauman is eager to establish. For example, in the preface to *Modernity and Ambivalence* Bauman states that he would like the book to resolve some of the problems and restate the significance of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Meanwhile, *Wasted Lives* (2004) discusses the practical and emotional implications of instrumental rationality that was such a concern for Horkheimer in *Eclipse of Reason*. Finally, *Modernity and the Holocaust* could certainly be seen as an attempt to be the final word in Adorno's critique of modern rationality and homogeneity in the context of the atrocities of genocide. A simplified understanding of Bauman and Habermas's differing connections with the Frankfurt School would describe Bauman as the willing advocate of the first generation of critical theorists, whilst Habermas is the reluctant face of the second generation of critical theorists today. This is true, for the most part, however it is problematic to think of any generation of the

Frankfurt School as being so unified. There was a significant difference between the definition of critical theory used by Max Horkheimer and the definition used by Theodor Adorno, and the disputes Habermas has with early critical theory are more directed at Adorno than Horkheimer. In fact, the notion of critical theory utilised by the second generation has a great deal in common with Horkheimer's original use of the term 'critical theory' in the early 1930s before Adorno redirected the concept in the 1940s.

Yet the atypical similarities between Bauman and Habermas go beyond their relationships with critical theory. Both are still very active writers, with publications ranging from dense academic work, to newspaper columns and online opinion pieces. In recent times, they have both written on the role of Europe in global politics and the possibility of a European union, as well as the topic of globalization more generally. This will be discussed in considerably more detail in chapter seven of this thesis, but for now it is worth noting that Bauman and Habermas share a similar stature as social theorists and are both dedicated to an involvement in public discourse.

A significant difference between Bauman and Habermas is immediately noticeable in their unique styles of writing. Habermas is a deeply analytical thinker who constructs highly detailed structures of theoretical relationships and social functions. This technical approach to theory creates a grand and somewhat totalising model of thought that is remarkably consistent across a range of publications; it is as though many of his texts fit together like puzzle pieces. Habermas clearly prioritises the need to be thorough over the need to be approachable and this is best made clear in *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981). Between the two volumes it tallies around 1200 pages and although the task of reading it cover to cover is too daunting for most, it was Habermas's attempt to bring together his work over the previous 20 years into one consistent and comprehensive text. This shows Habermas's willingness to bring together a vast array of ideas, developed over a long period of time, into a single theory.

Bauman, on the other hand, has a radically different approach. His texts are more like deeply detailed pictures of society that illuminate the good and the bad, the old and the new, and the moral and immoral. This has much to do with his unconventional background as Bauman did not come to be a sociologist through studying what is considered to be classical sociology (i.e. Marx, Weber, Durkheim), but through sociological works by his mentors Stanislaw Ossowski and Julian Hochfeld and through the literary works of Robert Musil and Milan Kundera. The combination of Polish sociology and modern European literature contributed to a style that is detailed in its description, yet Bauman manages to produce texts that are beautiful to read with ideas that are often disturbing to consider. In contrast to Habermas, Bauman has resisted the urge to develop an overarching theory that encapsulates his work, and for this reason it can be difficult to briefly describe his theoretical perspectives. The series of books regarding a phenomenon that he has branded 'liquid modernity' could be seen as an attempt to develop an all-encompassing theory of society, but this perspective seems to miss the point to some degree. Liquidity involves the breakdown of structures and structural thought such that consistency becomes a characteristic of society that we see less and less. Therefore, thinking of *Liquid Modernity* (2000) as Bauman's definitive theory of society is deeply flawed. It would be better to think of it as a theory of social change rather than a theory of society, or perhaps yet another detailed picture of society.

As previously mentioned, there has been almost nothing published in the form of a comparative critique of Bauman and Habermas. In addition to this, Habermas has not referred to Bauman in a single one of his publications. Perhaps then the best place to begin this analysis would be with Bauman's opinions of Habermas's work. According to Dennis Smith, up to the early 1980s, Bauman's three greatest influences were Marx, Gramsci and Habermas (1999: 27). Bauman certainly seemed to have a great deal of respect for Habermas's early work regarding the public sphere and knowledge as a socially produced form of truth. Beilharz notes that for Bauman, the most

influential of Habermas's work seems to be from the early 1960s; and that as Habermas moved closer to a Durkheimian view of society, Bauman seems to lose interest (2000: 43). But his faith in Habermas's project withered most notably after *The Theory of Communicative Action* when, according to Bauman, Habermas shifted from the pursuit of truth as a socially binding and meaningful discussion of utopia to the "straightforward positivistic re-hashing of Parsons" (1992: 217). Bauman's disagreements with Habermas will be discussed in some detail throughout this chapter, but for the sake of simplicity, his dispute could be understood in terms of the lack of recognition of the human subject in Habermas's work. For Bauman, the extent to which human beings are erratic and at times self-destructive, is overlooked in the latter half of Habermas's career.

This chapter will now discuss several of the dominant conflicts between Habermas and Bauman through the discussion of a select number of specific themes. Since Habermas has not voiced his opinion of Bauman to any usable degree, I can only speak of the inconsistencies found when comparing the ideas of the two. Perhaps the ideal starting point is with the role of reason and rationality in society.

Reason and Rationality

The interplay of reason and rationality is a topic that exposes some overlap of Bauman and Habermas, but there are some key differences that should be recognised. For Habermas, individuals have the capacity for reason in much the same way that they have the capacity for sight or hearing. It is simply a part of human behaviour[46] that can either be active and engaged, or sedentary and disconnected. Part of this approach is the understanding that reason – in its relationship to knowledge – has the ability to subjugate the individual and the potential to liberate them from oppressive social structures or threats to their autonomy (Dews 1987: 193). Therefore, a principle element in the resolution of

[46] Or more specifically, part of the speech act.

false consciousness and the betterment of society is for individuals to use their ability to reason at all times. In much the same manner as Horkheimer, this approach links reason with liberation and autonomy. Habermas refers to the use of reason against dogmatism as "a step forward in the progress toward the autonomy of the individual, with the elimination of suffering and the furthering of concrete happiness" (1963: 254). This line of thought in Habermas's work is reminiscent of Kant's essay, 'What is Enlightenment?' (1784). The Kantian commitment to public discourse and participatory democracy is found throughout Habermas's work on the public sphere, yet it is Kant's view of reason over superstition that is most relevant here. Bauman is not strictly opposed to this view, but he would certainly add that this kind of reasoning is not always simple or easy for the individual. Concerning Habermas's use of reason in *Legitimation Crisis*, Bauman writes, "But the twisted roads of our awareness do not necessarily follow logical signposts" (1999: 141). Bauman certainly seems to give greater recognition to the emotional aspects of human behaviour and reasoning, but this does not mean that he disregards reason to any degree. The difference in perspective between Habermas and Bauman on the topic of rationality and rationalisation is considerably more substantial. Habermas's use of reason as a means to fully understand the world hints at the existence of calculable and rationalised systems as somehow being naturally occurring in the world. This is radically different to Bauman who would suggest that reason should be used to accept the chaotic and random elements of modern life. Bauman's concerns regarding rationalisation have been present throughout his work, but they have never been more detailed than in *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989). Here he considers atrocities such as genocide to be a logical result of the attitude and priorities of modern rationality, whereby the need to control, manipulate and order the world results in the degradation of the individual's rights to freedom and autonomy. Bauman's hesitation in applying reason in the same way as Habermas, stems from a concern that the inimitable nature of human beings will be lost in a world of calculations and equations. In *Towards a Critical* Sociology (1976), Bauman outlines the tension between sociological analysis and commonsense in a way that casts

doubt upon the style of unified reason found in Habermas's work. The presumption that reason will necessarily lead individuals to reach the same answer reflects a style of thinking that is dangerously close to rationalism for Bauman. Although this alludes to a critique of Habermas, Bauman concedes that knowledge is key in the advancement of human freedom, and that knowledge must be subject to rationality in order to prevent circumstance that limit or restrict the autonomy of the individual (1976: 4)[47].

A significant point of difference becomes apparent at this point over the question of universalism. To some degree, Habermas has always sought to show how universal values, reason and truth could be made possible through discourse and critique. The influence of Kant's attempts to justify universalism as a central feature of post-Enlightenment thought has clearly been a driving force in Habermas's work. This is because, for Habermas, a construct such as morality is formed in specific ways and for specific reasons. It therefore has the ability to form such that it benefits some over others; in most cases the wealthy and powerful over the majority. The most effective way to remove bias from moral constructions is to subject them to a thorough analysis based upon reason and logic. Therefore, what cannot be reasoned and justified should hold no value in public discourse. If Habermas is right, then it is prudent to conclude that the moral truths discovered in this way would be as true in any place as they are in the place of their discovery. For Bauman, this is enormously problematic and the key word from the previous sentence is 'discovery'. Individuals do not discover moral truths; they invent them. For Bauman the most consistent and stable truth in modernity today is the speed with which things are changing. In *Postmodern Ethics* (1993) Bauman described postmodernity as modernity without illusions and although he ceased using the term postmodern over a decade ago, the sentiment of this claim holds true. The most *universal* truth in the world today, is that structures that were once seen as objective and permanent are now melting into malleable and, to some degree, free flowing social constructions. Yet, this should not be confused with post-

[47] Although Bauman's position on rationality certainly shifted in his later work.

structuralism, as Bauman is not suggesting that modernity exist without structures, but rather that structure is capable of transforming so rapidly that continuity can be difficult to grasp.

There are shortcomings with both perspectives here. Although Bauman's approach may be easier to defend, Habermas is arguably being more proactive in trying to provide solutions to social problems. This is not to say that Bauman is disengaged or resigned from the idea of benefiting social change[48], but that Habermas's idealism in regard to the potential for ideas to resolve social problems, is otherwise unparalleled. I am sympathetic to the view that an improbable and idealistic idea can be more effective in creating practical, positive social change than a pessimistic view that may in fact be closer to the truth. McCarthy highlights this position through Habermas's critique of Heidegger's differentiation between beings and Beings. For Habermas, the insistence that the world perceived by the individual can never match the world as it is, attempts to "uproot propositional truth and devalue discursive, argumentative thought" (McCarthy 1987: xi). The great inconsistency here is that if this is the case, then Habermas's rational discourse may fall on its own sword. If it cannot be justified through logic, then to some extent, its practical results are irrelevant. This also causes a significant contradiction regarding Habermas's own sympathies regarding pragmatism[49].

There is another significant distinction between the arguments being used here in that Habermas is arguing for an ideal version of society as it could potentially function, whilst Bauman is more focused on describing the world as he sees it. In *Life in Fragments* (1995) Bauman appears to mourn the end of the project of universalism, a task that has fallen into disrepair as a result of globalization. Here he describes the abandonment of the ideals of the Enlightenment to rid the world of backward and illogical moral systems in the

[48] Chapter seven will discuss this in more detail.

[49] Although it should be clearly stated that Habermas's own brand of pragmatism is radically different traditional definitions of the term.

interest of emancipation, all in favour of excessive individualism and the overwhelming power of economic institutions. Bauman laments,

> Universality was a proud project, a herculean mission to perform. Globality, in contrast, is a meek acquiescence to what is happening 'out there'; an admission always tinged with the bitterness of capitulation even if sweetened with an 'if you can't beat them, join them' self consoling exhortation (1995: 24).

This dramatic change occurs simultaneously with a growing public anti-intellectualism whereby the work of philosophy becomes increasingly worthless to the general public. Bauman refers to a 'dumbing down' of the universal project into a commodified and narcissistic culture that is open to change but closed off to being given advice[50]. Additionally, he argues that "Chronology replaces history, 'development' takes the place of progress, contingency takes over from the logic of [a] plan that was never meant to be" (1995: 25). Bauman's concern seems to suggest that the need for critical theory is greater than ever, but that the project of universalism is close to extinction; not necessarily through poor logic or careless planning, but through a lack of interest from the general public. This ambivalence is a potential black hole that society is at risk of falling into, although it should be made clear that Bauman is not always this pessimistic.

The difference in opinion between Bauman and Habermas on the subject of knowledge follows a similar falling out as mentioned above. Bauman's position on knowledge seems to be rather close to, if not influenced by, Habermas's early work on knowledge as a social construction. In this case, objectivity is replaced by the next best thing in the form of the outcomes of rational discourse. The significant differences arise with Habermas's affiliation with pragmatism and his shift towards more radical forms of positivism. For Bauman, positivism opposes what it is to be human and so the use of positivist social research methods will inevitably reduce individuals to something technocratic and one-dimensional. In *Culture as Praxis* (1973) Bauman expresses serious concern over the extent to which knowledge can be

[50] Sennett's thesis regarding the adolescent nature of society would fit in well at this point.

dominated by the industry of science and the scientific method. This is not to say that science is not helpful, but rather like Habermas argued in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968), facts alone cannot explain human behaviour. A central notion for Habermas in this text is that facts cannot justify 'ought' statements without the application of a theoretical evaluation that allows for human elements such as priorities and values to be considered. Bauman echoes Habermas by claiming that positivism not only reduces human behaviour to technical knowledge, but that positivism encourages and justifies the social pursuit of technical mastery (1973: 163). This desire to control and manipulate the world through the development of technology has been a subject of great criticism throughout Bauman's work and is traceable back to Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947). *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981) could be seen as a turning point however, in which the enormous value that Habermas places on communication as a naturally occurring human activity capable of determining universal truths, essentially relocates positivism in Habermas's work in a rather radical way. If truth can be discovered through communication as discourse, then theoretical truth can be said to exist in the 'real world' rather than in some kind of logical construction. Just as the interpretation of human behaviour can be misread through positivism or empirical studies, the same misunderstandings can exist in the interpretation of speech acts. The potential danger here consists of relocating the objective status that has unduly and exclusively been awarded to science, and placing it in the realm of communication through discourse ethics. Habermas is forced into this rather awkward theoretical position because he has essentially followed his own rules, whereby logic is given a supreme value over information about the real world, and so the contradiction becomes evident. He has simultaneously created a theory that places the highest possible authority for truth in the real world, whilst creating a theory that fails to adequately apply to the real world.

The debate regarding the practicality and potential inconsistencies of Habermas's communicative action thesis has motivated criticisms that range

from adjustments for the sake of enhancing the theory (Derrida, McCarthy, Outhwaite, Lara, Benhabib) to more damning rejections (Foucault, Giddens, Gadamer and Rawls) and these criticisms have come from numerous directions including feminist theorists, linguists, poststructuralists and fellow critical theorists. There is insufficient space to consider all of these criticisms here, however Giddens's overview of these critiques is useful in providing a brief picture of the grievances, and some of these can be discussed here. First, there is a potential conflict regarding the basis of human knowledge between his earlier view that is highly dependent upon human interests and the *Communicative Action* argument that places knowledge solely within communication (Giddens 1987: 243); Habermas does not adequately acknowledge or resolve this conflict. This kind of criticism suggests that Habermas fails to adequately show how rational discourse can occur in a truly democratic manner whereby individuals are willing to put aside their biases[51]. But it also alludes to the distinction between idealist and realist critical theory, which will be discussed later in this chapter. The use of idealism in Habermas's philosophy is the source of common criticism as Giddens suggests that it is not clear how Habermas's use of rationality can manage to avoid the dangers that rationality has led to in the past, nor does the universalism that comes along with this rationality seem to overcome the problems of relativism that are well documented. At this point it is worth noting, as Apel claims, that the critiques against idealism and utopianism are often critiques of discourse ethics based upon a rejection of historical movements that claim to have had utopian agendas (1990: 24). The use of problematic or disastrous historical movements that have claimed to be utopian projects are as problematic as their socialist or communist equivalents. The crucial point here is that critiques of idealist or utopian philosophies must be based upon the theory itself, it cannot be based upon the alleged applications of these ideas throughout history. Another line of critique attacks the practice of speech and its relation to truth claims. This approach claims that it is not clear why speech is the 'natural' communicative

[51] This will be discussed in the following chapter in regard to the Habermas/Gadamer debate.

act that houses the potential for truth when it seems that the process of rationality can plausibly operate independently. Finally, there is a common criticism that Habermas is far too dependent on Weber in developing the *Communicative Action* thesis as Weber's pessimism is somehow translated into optimism in Habermas's work without a thorough explanation of how this can occur (1987: 251). In contrast to these critiques as highlighted by Giddens, Bauman's concerns with the thesis of communicative action are unique to his own unorthodox understanding of sociology. This chapter will assess the potential use for the process of rational discourse in socially constructed notions of contentment with considerable attention given to the potential input from Bauman in evaluating Habermas's communicative action thesis. It is in this light that Habermas's ongoing work on legitimation is perhaps more useful and less troublesome than communicative action, whilst also highlighting some interesting common ground between his work and Bauman's.

Legitimation and Contentment

Despite their disagreements regarding the potential universality, both Bauman and Habermas recognise a crumbling of social structures that simultaneously allows society to reshape itself, whilst making the task of generating meaning from social bonds rather problematic. It is in their solutions where the two differ; Habermas argues for new means to develop social structure and Bauman believes that individuals should learn to depend less on structure and consistency. This initial problem is central to the discussion of contentment in this thesis. For Bauman, legitimation is justified through sacrifice. Following on from Horkheimer's dissection of the breakdown of objective reason to the realm of subjectivity, individuals must now find a way to justify priorities that would have been otherwise mandatory in previous generations. Bauman emphasises the challenges facing the individual today consist of not only deciding how they can achieve their goals, but whether their goals are worth achieving. Therefore, the goals that individuals dedicated themselves to must

be legitimised through other means. This means that in a world of liquefaction, there is no stable or universal explanation for doing anything in particular. Bauman's solution to this is to apply a model of legitimation that is as flexible and malleable as social values themselves, namely that goals are given meaning by the sacrifices one is willing to make in order to achieve them. Therefore, aspects of an individual's life are given meaning through the work and dedication that has been ascribed to them, thus making a goal or achievement into a symbolic representation of the effort that has been put into the task. This is a model that not only allows for, but also embraces the subjectivity of our preferences; and sufficiently considers the social influence of context.

For Habermas however, legitimation is formed through two ongoing social processes; rational discourse and intersubjectivity. Through a process of rational discourse a society can develop and redefine normative values, which are then incorporated intersubjectively into what Habermas calls the Lifeworld. The Lifeworld is perhaps best thought of as a collection of shared social and normative meaning that are a key element of any society. Ideas are shared and evaluated in formal and informal settings and eventually become common knowledge. For Habermas, the Lifeworld is central to being human; it becomes, in a sense, the collective soul of a community. This is constantly under threat however by the demands of a rationalised modernity whereby our most human elements within the life world are forced into regulated and categorised social systems. Legitimation, for Habermas, is a means for the public to direct and guide society according their own needs rather than through the influence of varying kinds of authorities. According to Dews, Habermas wants to avoid a 'perpetual reflexive critique' and therefore the possibility of relativism in his approach to legitimation (1987: 194). He does this by focusing the pursuit of knowledge through discourse on questions of a specific social or historical nature, such as his work regarding justice. Yet there is a potential problem here in that the question of culture, and therefore contentment, are inherently perpetually in need of adjustment. As previously

mentioned, Habermas does not believe that discourse ethics can be used to develop notions of the good life, although many of the third generation critical theorists would disagree. Arguably, Bauman's notions of accepting the chaotic nature of modern life rather than trying to control it, is of some help here. If the individual can accept the perpetual and ongoing nature of reflexive meaning, then the construction of something like a culturally defined notion of contentment becomes plausible.

However, the problem that Habermas describes as the crisis of legitimation is instead described by Bauman as the irrelevance of legitimation. In Habermas's description there is a growing discord in the public's view of political authorities due to the growing impracticality for the Lifeworld to coexist with a rationalised system. Consequently there emerges a state of crisis whereby nothing truly seems legitimate according to traditional social definitions. Yet for Bauman, the problem is potentially more sinister as a state of ambivalence has led to an increased level of abandonment of the idea of legitimation. It is not as though people are desperately trying to get a hold of some form of legitimation, but rather they have lost hope in the sincerity of legitimation altogether (1992: 99). Bauman declares, "contrary to Habermas, there is no 'legitimation crisis' in the postmodern state – it is just that postmodern conditions have made legitimation redundant" (1995: 155).

It is necessary to point out that Bauman's use of the term legitimation possesses an element of scepticism regarding its ability to resolve social problems[52]. For Bauman, legitimation refers to the social functions that allow economic and state powers to continue functioning in a regulated and consistent manner (1992: 46). In contrast to Habermas, Bauman considers the *crisis* of legitimation to be a crisis for the status quo rather than for civil participation, as structures of legitimation are potentially the systems that individuals must emancipate themselves from rather than as a means of emancipation in and of itself. The extent to which Bauman argues that the

[52] It is worth mentioning that Bauman considers Habermas to be far less skeptical regarding the potential of public processes or legitimation (2004,:132).

legitimation crisis is perhaps not a crisis at all, but a growing irrelevance of legitimising processes, becomes rather interesting. In this case it appears to be Bauman who is more optimistic regarding the potential for individuals to deal with abrupt social change and the development of new social values, whilst Habermas has great concerns over the possibility for individuals to effectively engage with social values. Meanwhile this engaged participation that Habermas is describing, is seen by Bauman as simply contributing to the maintenance of a broken social system that may in fact need a more radical period of crisis in order to create meaningful social change. Regarding Habermas's work on the crisis of legitimation, Bauman writes, "The perception of 'value crisis' is an artefact of the overtly or implicitly fundamentalist concept of ethics" (1999: 148). In Bauman's view, the parties most concerned by a legitimation crisis are those who stand to lose their authority and so to some extent Bauman's welcoming attitude regarding the broad redefinition of social values is perhaps more Habermasian than Habermas himself, or at least than the Habermas that Bauman describes. The stable process of legitimation encourages the individual to follow rules rather than make moral judgements that require them to participate in the creation of normative codes (1999: 149). Utilising legitimation in this way could be understood as prioritising obedience over involvement and therefore contributes to the endemic problem of ambivalence in modernity. The alleged crisis of legitimation is, according to Bauman, a sign of a healthy multiplicity of differing moral choices that the individual can navigate their way through. He describes the 'value crisis' as the "natural home of morality", where "freedom, autonomy, responsibility, judgement – all of which loom large among the indispensable features of the moral self – [are] allowed to grow and mature" (1999:150). Whilst it is perhaps unreasonable for Bauman to present Habermas as being less than supportive of open and all-inclusive moral discourse, there is truth regarding the need for regularity, consistency and order in his theory. Therefore, there is a potential problem in the effectiveness of Habermas's implication of a rational consensus, in the form of the desire to reach universal outcomes. Once again, Bauman's insistence on the simple need for individuals to become more comfortable in circumstances

that are unknown or unpredictable, seems to clash with Habermas's goal of a structured and systemic vision for society. Regarding this difference in opinion, Bauman's perspective certainly appears to be more agreeable to the modern and individualised person, but whether it is more capable of providing effective solutions to social problems is another matter. After all, it was Bauman who was lamenting the loss of pride in the project of universalism and who mourned the crumbling of moral tasks into a mess of unusable moral ambivalence. According to Beilharz, "Crisis is the ambivalence we have to learn to live with, which suggests in effect that the idea of crisis is redundant, which in turn makes sense because it is everywhere and nowhere" (2000: 168).

The difference in opinion here reflects a common thread of disagreement between the two on the matter of social change, whereby Habermas is notably idealistic and Bauman is comparatively cynical. For Habermas the strength of human determination for freedom and autonomy will inevitably result in the development and adaptation of society into something not only more democratic, but also more satisfying for individuals. The human capacity for reason is determined to prevail so long as it is able to engage in public discourse and therefore participate in forms of legitimation. But it seems that when Bauman looks to modern societies he sees a withdrawal from this participation in favour of prime television shows, smartphones and credit cards. Yet he insists that this is not the result of an apathetic or lazy generation, but rather this is all that is left after the death of legitimation. Although Bauman's sympathetic view of the maladies of generation X and Y is refreshing, it is unwise to think that legitimation is out for the count. In some of his more recent publications Bauman seems to have become less pessimistic, yet he is no less aware of the radically new pressures and challenges facing young people today. Perhaps somewhere in the middle ground between Habermas and Bauman is a more practical understanding of the problem of legitimation. A more appropriate model could consider the task of legitimation in the Lifeworld to be undertaken in circumstances that are murky and unclear with the option of giving up seeming ever more appealing. But if the spirit of

Marxism still moves either of these theorists, then they must acknowledge that at some point, people who feel powerless and detached from legitimacy will rebel and demand change.

In contrast, on the topic of rationalization, Bauman and Habermas have much on which to agree. Their concerns regarding the role of rationality in modernity align them both with the first generation critical theorists, and in varying degrees, with Weber. As mentioned, Habermas talks of the clash of the Lifeworld and system whereby individuals who think, feel and care are required to fit into regulated and systematic programs that allow for productivity and efficiency whilst concurrently encouraging homogenisation. Bauman shares these concerns when he talks of the disposability of modernity, which has occurred to such a great extent that individuals have become the new disposable items of society. Bauman is certainly less reliant on Weber in this critique as he focuses on the critique of instrumental reason and the potential for emancipation. Yet Bauman is considerably more eager to distinguish between reason as a liberating function of social thought, and rationality as a regulating and often homogenising force. The distinction here boils down to the extent to which a social theorist should have faith in rationality as a means to understanding and eventually improving society. Habermas's devotion to the pursuit of 'the right kind' of rationality as opposed to the distorted or misleading forms is in contrast to Bauman's ongoing scepticism regarding the potential for a structured and consistent explanation of society.

In *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968) Habermas infamously claimed that rationality has less to do with knowledge and more to do with the way in which knowledge is used. This places a greater value on the nature and context of a claim than on the information within the claim itself. By thinking of rationality in this way, Habermas is acknowledging that information can be used in a variety of ways beyond the standard meaning of a claim. Therefore, rationality can be used to purify knowledge just as effectively as it can be used to distort it, and it is this idea that justifies the model of communicative action. This idea allows Habermas to dissect the intention within acts of communication by

developing a more thorough understanding of the speech act itself. Put briefly, he suggests that communicative acts function because the speaker can indirectly claim that four key aspects of their statement are correct; that the statement is understandable, that the speaker is warranted in saying it, that they believe the statement to be true and finally, that they are sincere and not intending to deceive or mislead the listener. As the listener is able to dispute whether any or all of these aspects of a statement are actually correct, then it can reasonably be thought that the application of rationality during the conversation can eventually lead to the eradication of false information and dishonest intentions. Although there are numerous critiques of the more technical aspects of communicative action, this project is more interested in Habermas's faith in the potential for rationality to purify knowledge from the dangers of systematic distortions, which stands in contrast to Bauman's description of the quest for purity as a social evil. As a result, there are two distinct lines of thought here; first, that rationality cannot be inherently good or bad, but it can be unrefined and so in a sense, the solution to the problems associated with rationality is more rationality (or perhaps a higher quality of rational thinking). And second, that rationality is strictly opposed to the nature of the individual, as well the most celebrated aspects of modern culture (such as creative endeavours like music, art and design).

Critiques

At this point it would be appropriate to consider a selected handful of external criticisms of Bauman and of Habermas. Although is it interesting to explore the potential conflicts between their theories, it would be an incomplete project without giving some explanation of their critiques in a broader sense. Due to the limited space available, this thesis will not be able to provide a comprehensive critique of either Bauman or Habermas, instead I intend to assess specific critiques whereby one theorist could benefit from being more like the other. I will begin with Ray's critique of Bauman's liquid modernity

that seems to call for more of an analytic or Habermasian approach, and then move to Benhabib's critique of Habermas being too analytic and in need of greater acknowledgement of the emotional needs of individuals.

Although critiques of Bauman's earlier concepts do exist, his recent work regarding the liquidization of society has certainly attracted more attention from critics. There are a number of potential reasons for this that do not threaten the core of his theory; essentially that his work on *Liquid Modernity* (2000) is more accessible and more widely read than his previous texts and so this has attracted a more general audience beyond theorists; secondly the increased public attention is always bound to attract greater criticism as he has become more active in the process of public discourse. It should be made clear, however, that I do not believe that Bauman's withdrawal from the postmodern debate in the 1990s and his adoption of liquidity post 2000 necessarily indicates that these divergent eras are contradictory or in opposition to one another. In fact, I would argue that the vast majority of the principles of postmodernity as described by Bauman still hold true despite his reluctance to be associated with the term. This can be attributed to Bauman's dissatisfaction with the direction postmodern theory had begun to take in the mid to late 1990s. Although one could argue that *Liquid Modernity* contains some key contradictions with postmodern theory in general, it does not necessarily contradict the postmodern theory of Zygmunt Bauman. The era of his work regarding liquidization should not be seen as a rejection of his own work prior to 2000, but a reworking of the language that Bauman uses to develop an understanding of society – a new language that simultaneously made his work more accessible to the general public, and provided a theoretical escape route from the disintegration of postmodernism. In response to the criticism that his more recent work lacks the theoretical intensity and force of his previous texts, I do not see any need for Bauman to explain himself. Although the books on liquidity are less analytical and dense, they are arguably more effective in describing the radical changes in modern society.

There is however a need to acknowledge the potential difficulty in using a metaphor like liquidity to describe modernity, from the vast and complicated networks of global industry to the subtle nuances of interpersonal relationships. According to Larry Ray, Bauman's reliance on metaphor to explain sociological concepts is useful for a simple explanation, but falls well short of providing a detailed and effective explanation of society. Ray points out two key problems with *Liquid Modernity*; first that Bauman is not sufficiently precise in how, where and why these changes have occurred, and second that liquidization is too focused on the visible or surface changes rather than the deeper and more practical causes of change (Ray 2007: 63). The second point is perhaps the most worthy of development here as Ray explains his critique by considering a comment from Bauman regarding Habermas. From an interview with Welzer and Beilharz published in 2002, Bauman states that for the general public, reading Habermas would be a "waste of time" (Welzer 2002: 111). He expands on this to say that Habermas's theories are "populated by concepts, not by people" and do not engage with people in a meaningful or inspiring way (Welzer 2002: 111). Ray concludes that despite the number of theorists who may agree with this criticism of Habermas, Bauman's most recent era of work simply cannot stand up to Habermas's detailed and thorough analysis of society. It is precisely the empirical and calculative aspect of Habermas's work that Bauman both criticises in others and lacks in his own work. Ray states, "the key attribute of a metaphor is allegorical appropriateness rather than validity or truth, in terms of correspondence between propositions and an externally knowable reality" (Ray 2007: 64). Although there are certainly some shortcomings in the use of metaphor as social theory, yet Ray seems to be searching for systemic and structured ideas in a theory that is trying to show how increasingly malleable and flexible social life has become. The fact that Bauman's style of writing appears to match his description of society hardly seems to be a substantial criticism of his use of metaphor, but rather a rejection of the concept of liquidization more generally. Ray continues with a critique of the heavy/liquid modernity distinction that consists of a number of unique angles; that Bauman's justification for when the change occurred is ambiguous,

that he lacks specificity regarding whether the change was due to shifts in tradition, technology, rationalization or individualisation[53], and that the explanation of the inner workings of a liquid modernity are vague (2007: 71). Although there is some validity to Ray's claims, it is not convincing that the concept of liquid modernity is no longer applicable or that it substantially conflicts with Bauman's earlier work. The reason for this second point, is that if the reader feels that use of metaphor is too imprecise for social theory, then there is a great deal of more analytical work published prior to *Liquid Modernity* that could potentially fill that need.

One of the more pertinent criticisms of Bauman's work can be found in the work of Mark Davis in his book *Freedom and Consumerism* (2008). In this analysis Davis argues that the role of freedom in Bauman's work is neglected to the extent that it has become inconsistent. This results in an approach that simultaneously longs for freedom, whilst suggesting that the individual is likely to struggle with the danger and unpredictability of choice (2008: 48). Davis divides the concept of freedom in Bauman's work into three categories; insecurity, choice and privilege. For Davis there is a degree of ambivalence regarding the role of freedom as both an ideal and a cause for anxiety in the modern individual, although I doubt that Bauman would consider this to be a problem. It could be argued that the concept of freedom is as contradictory in Bauman's theory as it is in modern life, and that his inconsistent application of the idea is in fact highly suitable. Freedom reflects the unprecedented array of choice in modernity, yet it does not result in autonomy. Rather an almost paralysing degree of uncertainty and insecurity, one that both sustains and plagues the individual.

Generally speaking, popular critiques of Habermas take a very different form to the critiques of Bauman. Habermas's dedication to rationality, universalism and the development of his notion of the 'uncontaminated' speech act can all be difficult concepts to defend, even to the sympathetic reader. Consequently the

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[53] Unlike Habermas for example, who is very clear about the clash between lifeworld and system and the trouble with the application of rationalization to modernity.

critique[54] of his work by Seyla Benhabib is particularly poignant in that she shares a committed approach to the troubled defence of universalism, whilst seeking to revise Habermas's notion of discourse ethics by acknowledging the importance of gender, community and postmodernism in the act of communication. This intends to enhance the practicality of the ideal speech situation whilst more appropriately contextualising the circumstances in which this communication occurs. She states.

> My goal is to situate reason and the moral self more decisively in the contexts of gender and community, while insisting on the discursive power of individuals to challenge such situated-ness in the name of universalistic principles, future identities and as yet undiscovered communities (1992: 8).

Benhabib calls for the recognition of the 'moral point of view' in the process of discourse ethics where by the individual is not simply a bank of ideas that come and go, but rather a collection of perspectives and biases that develop into a character that is utterly human. Rather than requiring a rationalised and unemotional mode of thought in order to navigate such issues, Benhabib proposes the notion of 'enlarged thinking' as a means to cleanse the mind of distortions of logic (1992: 9). Yet the most crucial aspect of Benhabib's reworking of Habermasian discourse ethics, is the element of community that contextualises moral discourse. The distinction here lies in the difference between an individual coming to a moral position and then having to defend it in the process of finding consensus, and the individual pre-empting the need to find an agreement as part of a community even before discourse occurs. In such a circumstance, discourse is derailed through the inclination to agree with established ideas and the need to engage with social and cultural factors that inevitably alter the course of an exchange of ideas. Although this may seem insignificant, it overcomes an aspect of Habermas's communicative action thesis that intends to be community centred whilst placing enormous value on the individualisation of values. Therefore, Benhabib's integration of community more closely resembles Bauman's understanding of morality as a

[54] Or rather the 're-imagining' of his work.

socially binding mechanism that makes the world more appealing to individuals. Benhabib describes the 'general interest' as being a method of developing and regulating the moral views of individuals in a social context as opposed to being a kind of forced consensus among a group of individuals. There is a further deviation from Habermas at this point as the participation in this process is arguably more important to Benhabib than the outcome of the debate. Consensus is an ideal situation, but it is not necessary. Rather, the participation of individuals regardless of their persuasiveness or their ability to present ideas in such a way that they are exceptionally convincing, is the key element in working towards universalised moral thought.

Benhabib describes Habermas's approach to moral discourse as a cognitivist use of ethics in language. This perspective draws a blunt distinction between the role of reason in developing moral rules and the integration of emotional or preferential values into those rules. To borrow Benhabib's example, the statement that 'child molestation is wrong' is vastly different and cannot be reconfigured into the claim 'I dislike child molesting' (1985: 86). The notion that something is wrong is therefore beyond the individual, regardless of how emotionally distressing or abhorrent the act may be. The key to this distinction for Habermas is evidence; emotional perspectives do not require a thorough investigation in order to support their claims, whereas the claim that an act is wrong is a statement not about the individual's feelings regarding the act, but about the act itself. Consequently, there is a need to develop Habermas's rational approach to developing truth without distortion, whist sufficiently acknowledging the emotional, social and communitarian needs of individuals in a way that serves not only themselves, but others as well. This sounds alarmingly utopian, which may surprise many readers of Habermas, but Benhabib argues that despite Habermas's claim, discourse ethics can be used to construct notions of the good life[55], in fact the ideal speech situation involves an ideal form of communication within the self such that internal tensions and

[55] In contrast to earlier generations, much of the third generation of critical theorists argue that critical engagement with discourse can lead to a better understanding of the good life (e.g. Honneth, Benhabib, Lara)

distortions can also be resolved (1985: 91). In the context of this project, Benhabib appears to be integrating an approach more commonly seen in Bauman's work as a means to better develop Habermas's moral system.

Meanwhile, Maria Pia Lara draws upon the work of Albrecht Wellmer in order to incorporate a more interactive interpretation of Habermas's communicative action thesis. This approach adopts an almost dramaturgical perspective as Lara gives particular interest to the 'expressivistic aspects of communication' in the actions of social actors (Lara 1998: 50). For Lara, Habermas's project is significant as a means to legitimise the value of subjectivity, but it falls short of recognising the potential of expression in discourse. This kind of objection to Habermas alludes to a core element of the communicative action thesis; that reason is unemotional to the extent that the quality of reason is dependent upon the removal of personal or emotional influences. However, Wellmer identifies a more all-encompassing notion of reason in Adorno's work which incorporates the wealth of human experiences in the culmination of discourse ethics – a connection made possible through Adorno's work on art (1998: 53). It is in this association between reason, knowledge and meaning that discourse ethics can be utilised to better understand claims regarding the good life, in particular the relevance of contentment in the relationship between the individual and society. Wellmer and Lara are effectively doing something that is quite similar to the intention of this thesis, that is, to reconfigure the application of Habermas's idealistic approach to intersubjective truth for purposes outside of his original intended outcomes.

There is a need to consider the post-structuralist critiques of Habermas at this point, as a means of getting to an understanding of discourse ethics that can be defended from claims of relativism or ignorance regarding the role of power. From a post-structuralist perspective, truth – particularly claims that involve universality – can be interpreted as an attempt to attain power thought authority. Dews finds this perspective unconvincing however, as it is the open discussion of truth that allows for its democratic aspects (1987: 222). In this defence, it is not truth that Habermas is proposing, but the relevance of truth

claims; something that allows for the minimisation of coercion through discourse. Yet, if we reconsider the contributions of Wellmer at this point, there is an argument to be made that intersubjective models of truth can sidestep the problems found in objectivism and relativism. Wellmer suggests that the connection between truth and experience can be understood as either strong or weak; in the former example, truth derived from rational consensus is applicable outside of its cultural origin. Yet, weak connections allow for an enhanced understanding of the cultural significance of knowledge, whilst avoiding the problem of relativism (Wellmer 1993).

Among the popular critiques of both Bauman and Habermas, there appears to be a common thread of analysis. Generally speaking, Habermas is too rationalistic and analytic, which insufficiently accounts for the emotional and often unpredictable aspects of human behaviour. Meanwhile Bauman is considered to be too metaphorical and descriptive, in a literary sense, without the sufficient development of a structure to his theory. It would be foolish to suggest that either theorist should change their approach, yet there is room for a synthesis of ideas that could be enormously helpful in both developing a more productive model of contentment for society, whilst also furthering the project of critical theory. The model for contentment developed in this thesis incorporates the rational approach to knowledge and the pursuit of truth championed by Habermas, with the humanistic and creative aspects of Bauman's work that acknowledges and embraces aspects of human behaviour that are erratic and unknown.

There is a danger in becoming caught up in the numerous differences between Bauman and Habermas in a general sense, and so there is a need at this point to reintroduce a model that synthesises the most applicable aspects of both theorists into something practical and beneficial to the task at hand. The potential for a theoretical model of contentment has been sketched out in other parts of this thesis, but the areas in which they overlap required a deeper analysis, and that has been a driving theme in this chapter. The intention of this approach is to extract the most effective elements from each method discussed

so far, whilst attempting to avoid the potential dead ends in both Bauman and Habermas's work. In short this will aim to bridge the benefits of Habermas's rigorous rationality within discourse and the development of social values, whist sufficiently acknowledging the unpredictable and often irrational behaviour of individuals as being central to preserving useful notions of the good life. At this point the work of Leszek Kolakowski – in particular, the essay 'In Praise of Inconsistency' (1968) – can serve as a bridging piece between the humanistic tendencies of Bauman and the organised and streamlined approach of Habermas, such that the inconsistent aspects of human behaviour can be celebrated through an ongoing process of discourse[56]. The consistency referred to by Kolakowski describes the relationship between 'behaviour and thought' – although Habermas would use the terms 'practice and theory' – in order to highlight the enormous benefits that arise from our inconsistencies. From this perspective the entirely consistent individual is a kind of fundamentalist for whom the ends justify and means. Kolakowski uses the example of a police officer who insists on penalising every jaywalker, but also the executioner who cannot hesitate but to perform his or her duties if the penal system is to effectively fulfil its social role in deterring people form crime. Accordingly, he then praises "those who eat steak for dinner, but are totally incapable of slaughtering a chicken" and "those who prize frankness but cannot bring themselves to tell a famous painter that his work is terrible" (1968: 213). Kolakowski is not suggesting that the kind of consistency necessary for Habermas's model of discourse ethics is always a negative influence on society, but he does seem to argue that a strict adherence to the rule of consistency undervalues the complex nature of society and human behaviour. In a line that seems to speak to Adorno's fabled declaration, that "Wrong life cannot be lived rightly" (1951: 18), Kolakowski explains that "Inconsistency is simply a secret awareness of the contradictions of this world" (1968: 214). He goes on to claim that "The real world of values is

[56] It should be made clear that Kolakowski does not claim to be resolving the problems of Habermas and Bauman, in fact neither of these theorists are mentioned in this essay. This is simply my own implementation of his ideas into the discussion of Habermas and Bauman.

inconsistent; that is to say, it is made up of antagonistic elements" (1968: 216) and in doing so describes an approach to the dichotomy of theory and practice that could be described as a weak model of Habermasian discourse ethics. It is here that the synthesis of Bauman and Habermas can be seen as something that is not only theoretically justified, but also tailored to the unique and inconsistent trends of human behaviour. Through the admissions suggested by Kolakowski, aspects of Habermas's theory such as truth as a socially constructed and mediated phenomenon, as well as informed, reasoned discourse as a means of eliminating falsehoods can be maintained while problematic notions of universalism and transcendentalism can be transformed from a logic of either/or, to a more humanistic understanding of the inevitable contradictions of social life.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to show that the theoretical contributions of Bauman and Habermas can enlighten a middle ground that is capable of complimenting the work of both writers, rather than necessarily disproving one or the other. In regard to the matter of contentment in modernity there is a place for both the idealism of Habermas and the realism of Bauman, just as there is a need for the structured logic of Habermas and the descriptive and humanistic work of Bauman. The contradictory nature of modernity cannot be overlooked when considering the maladies of the modern individual, and this chapter has pursued a middle ground between these theorists to illuminate the complex relationship between the individual and society. The comparative critique of Bauman and Habermas will continue though the next chapter with a discussion of the construction of knowledge and meaning in modernity.

Chapter Six Knowledge, Meaning and Contentment: Hermeneutics and Critical Theory

> "I'd far rather be happy than right any day." (Douglas Adams, *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*)

Up to this point, this thesis has considered the relationship between knowledge and meaning in an implicit sense. The intention of this chapter is to further develop an understanding of the significance of knowledge in meaning construction, with regard to a critical analysis of modernity and the matter of contentment. Meaning in this framework, refers to processes of validation and legitimation that are capable of fostering a rewarding relationship between the individual and society. It must be made clear that the notion of meaning is being used selectively in this thesis; it refers to the *use* or *application* of meaning in a practical way, in contrast to an understanding of meaning as something that is simply *identified* in certain circumstances. The intention here is not to reject the latter understanding, but rather to assess the extent to which social constructions of meaning can be either legitimated or rejected through intersubjective notions of contentment. Alfred Schütz explains that meaning does not exist in experience, but in the individual's reflection of experience, therefore experience can be either meaningful or meaningless depending on the efforts made to reflect upon it (Schütz 1967: 68). From this perspective, the presence of meaning can be affected by the normative values placed on certain kinds of experience that may or may not result in reflection. Therefore, in discussing the problematic of contentment, there is also the problematic of meaning. This line of argument can be found in Bauman (1991; 2004) and Habermas's work (1981[1987]; 1975), and so this chapter will explicate the role of knowledge in trying to develop a theoretical resolution to the elusive matter of meaning. In order to explore the use of knowledge in meaning construction, this chapter will consider the common ground between critical

theory and hermeneutics as a means to investigate the role of interpretation in the process of self-understanding for individuals. The revolutionary potential of knowledge must therefore be considered, yet it is within the context of memory, recognition and self-understanding that the importance of interpretation comes to the fore. A discussion of the specificities of knowledge creation and maintenance may seem abstract in a thesis tackling notions of contentment in modernity, but the importance of knowledge – or at the very least, perceived knowledge – is essential to the development of more effective constructions of contentment. Perhaps the ideal place to begin this discussion is with Marcuse and the importance of reliable knowledge.

In *Eros and Civilisation* (1955) Marcuse draws an association between happiness and knowledge that illuminates a core issue in the project of critical theory. During a passage that is undeniably Adornian in nature, Marcuse claims that, "the individual's awareness of the prevailing repression is blunted by the manipulated restriction of his consciousness. This process alters the contents of happiness" (1955: 104). He then makes a claim that redefines happiness into something much closer to the model of contentment discussed in this thesis. He writes, "happiness is not in the mere feeling of satisfaction but in the reality of freedom and satisfaction. Happiness involves knowledge: it is the prerogative of the *animal rationale*" (1955: 104)[57]. The quality of knowledge available to, and experienced by, individuals is crucially important to the development of a practical understanding of contentment in modernity. This leads Martin Jay to highlight the role of memory in Marcuse's work through a discussion of past knowledge in shaping knowledge of the present and of the future. A key question here relates to potential for new knowledge to surface from old frameworks. Although Marcuse is highly critical of what Habermas later described as Historicism, Jay makes reference to the substantial philosophical dilemma of new knowledge (1982: 7). Yet, even in the example of art as a means to unveil new ideas, Jay claims that "for Marcuse, the promise of future happiness embodied in art was dialectically related to its retention of past

[57] Freedom in this quote may be better understood as autonomy or liberation.

instances of joy and fulfilment" (1982: 7). The question of understanding and eventually escaping from distorted or limited constructions of knowledge will serve as a key theme in this chapter, as the application of this matter to the question of 'Why is the relationship between the individual and society not more fulfilling?' is dependent upon application and quality of knowledge. Therefore the distinction between happiness and contentment is relevant in making clear the importance of knowledge in the explanation of a social construction of contentment.

The key difference between happiness and contentment, as discussed in this thesis, is in the role of context. Yet, as discussed by Ben-Ami Scharfstein, the complications associated with context highlight a lack of clarity in the use of the term. Put simply, contentment requires a fulfilling relationship regarding the social, within which the individual is functioning[58], whilst happiness depends upon the personal and subjective pleasures of life. This is not suggesting that happiness is an unimportant or meaningless aspect of the good life, but rather that it relies predominantly on the subjective interpretation of a circumstance, without regard to the specific cultural values of society. Contentment, on the other hand, depends upon a meaningful relationship between the experience of the *particular* and the experience of the *general*. In this chapter, two key ideas will be drawn from this perspective; that some form of knowledge is necessary for contentment, and that the interpretation of meaning plays a key role in the intersubjective engagement of the individual with society. Beginning with the first point, traditional critical theory would insist that the distortion of knowledge through the perception of predisposed ideas is directly contributing to the corrupt and rationalised social meaning in modernity. This inhibits the emancipation of individuals from restrictive power structures and effectively maintains broken social systems. Therefore, if contentment consists of a satisfying relationship between the individual and society, then the individual must possess, or at least be able to engage with, reliable and meaningful knowledge about that society. Concerns regarding the

[58] This could also be thought of as satisfaction at an intersubjective level.

distortion of knowledge have always been central to critical theory, which sees individuals as being subjected to forms of manipulation through the hegemonic application of knowledge. This leads into the second point regarding the acceptance of social meaning, as the potential for a satisfying relationship with society depends upon the ability of the individual to find meaning within that relationship. In order for this to occur the individual must feel as though socially constructed beliefs, such as their morality, are based upon some form of truth. This creates an opportunity for the individual to contextualise their circumstances in a positive manner, such that the individual can feel satisfaction in their relationship with society.

This chapter will begin with the premise that knowledge and meaning are intertwined and then work through a number of issues centred around hermeneutics and the development of knowledge as a social phenomenon. The use of hermeneutics in the work of Bauman and Habermas will then be discussed in order to better understand the role of interpretation in the social constructions of meaning and knowledge. This will begin with a discussion of hermeneutics and critical theory in order to weave a theory of knowledge into this thesis. Then Bauman's *Hermeneutics and Social Science* (1978) will be used to introduce his distinctive position before assessing Habermas's *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968) and *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981). The debate between Habermas and Hans-Georg Gadamer will then be used as a means to better understand the relationship between ideology, culture and knowledge. In many ways, Gadamer can be used as a stand in for Bauman in this text as there is a lack of direct discussion between Habermas and Bauman on this matter. Although there are differences between Gadamer and Bauman on the matter of hermeneutics, it will become clear in this chapter that they share common disputes with Habermas's method. Finally the contributions of Ricoeur to this discussion will provide a possible resolution to the Habermas-Gadamer debate, as well as the means to move beyond the limitations of these frameworks. My intention here reflects the significance of meaning in this project and the importance of knowledge – as well as the

individual's ability to trust knowledge – in developing valid legitimations of social life.

Johann Arnason[59] describes the transition of Frankfurt School critical theory from a critique of capitalism to a critique of civilisation that involves the development of the focus on the presuppositions of modern culture, which he refers to as the hermeneutic turn in critical theory (1989: 126)[60]. Yet, it is Adorno's critical theory of aesthetics as well as his critique of culture that involves a notable hermeneutic element according to Arnason. On the surface, the uniting premise of first generation critical theory refers to the potential for individuals to be misled by culture through the problems of engaging with and recruiting knowledge. It would seem from this that hermeneutics and critical theory would make natural allies over a shared rejection of positivism, yet theorists like Adorno were reluctant to engage with hermeneutics as a means of resolving the problems of knowledge. Arnason uses Adorno's own words to make this point as he argues that "[t]he "comprehension of a thing in itself," in contrast to both causal explanation and subsumption under general categories, clearly shares something in common with the hermeneutical idea of understanding" (1989: 133). Arnason argues that this line of hermeneutical thought is most apparent in Adorno's work in *Negative Dialektik* (1966), and he is right to suggest that without a critical evaluation of the process of interpretation, there is no way for the project of emancipation to possibly occur. This alludes to a central premise in Adorno's work from this phase in his thought, namely that positive dialectics or the philosophy of developing utopian versions of society, is deeply problematic and subject to significant

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[59] It is worth noting that Arnason began his career as a critical theorist and eventually moved into the field of hermeneutics and civilisational analysis, although his work was always somewhat detached from the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. Arnason's early work can be seen as an engagement with Marcuse, yet he eventually became frustrated by the tendency for grand or meta-theory to overlook the complexities of the individual (Knöbl 2011: 10). This of some importance here as his contributions to this discussion around critical theory and hermeneutics involves a less than neutral perspective.

[60] Arguably, the influence of hermeneutics was present form the early 1930s. Hence, why Arnason also refers to this as an 'undercurrent' of hermeneutic thought in critical theory.

distortions of knowledge. Therefore, the role of philosophy as a means to improve society, is in critically engaging with culture in order to better understand its faults. For Adorno, there can be no meaningful change to the ideals and direction of society without first having a sufficient level of self-understanding, on a social level, that is capable of resolving the fabricated elements of everyday life. In order to do this, Arnason argues that in Adorno's work there is a need for a "less restrictive relationship between conceptualization and experience" (1989: 132) that would aim to critique the relationship between knowledge and technocratic rationality. From this perspective, the traditional model of hermeneutic thought that aimed to discover the objective truth within a text was not conducive to some form of liberation from inhibiting social processes. Rather, the reductive principles of knowledge acquisition are insufficient for creating meaningful change in society. Despite Adorno's refusal to acknowledge hermeneutics, even with the overlap between it and critical theory, this project will aim to further the modern application of critical theory by considering the fields as parallel rather than competing discourses. Arnason considers the shift from a study of knowledge to a study of meaning in the philosophy of post-Enlightenment society to be the most significant development to date (1989: 145). In the context of critical theory, this could be best thought of as the shift to a philosophy of knowledge that exists with respect to the inherent problems of knowledge.

Bauman's *Hermeneutics and Social Science* (1978) is typically non-conventional as he seems to broach the subject without any clear association to a particular perspective or school of thought. Jacobsen and Poder explain that Bauman is eager to distinguish a 'hermeneutic sociology' as a means of thinking about social issues, from the 'sociology of hermeneutics' as a specific discipline (2008: 4). The idea that hermeneutics is an optional way of viewing sociological issues is vastly misinformed as the role of interpretation is present in all forms of analysis. The task of trying to overcome the subjectivity of a

social observer, who is inevitably also a participant in the social world, is not only impossible, but also undesirable. By developing a better understanding of hermeneutics, Bauman seeks to develop a means to embrace our subjectivity in the process of developing a greater understanding of the world (Tester 2004: 17). Therefore, it is problematic to think that there are theorists and researchers who use hermeneutics and others who do not, but rather that every member of society engages with hermeneutics to some degree. Bauman understands hermeneutics to be the way in which individuals try to know the world, as well as participate in it. It is also important to note that Bauman considers the study of hermeneutics to be a deeply sociological matter rather than being predominantly an interest for philosophy or linguistics (Bauman 1978: 8). This is because the distinct interpretations made by individuals reflect currents of social thought and are generally anchored in culturally defined knowledge. For example, aspects of language such as inflection, irony, humour or jargon are indicative of very specific social meanings depending on the location and time period in which the speech act occurs.

An essential aspect of Bauman's hermeneutical approach involves the defamiliarization of social knowledge, whereby the researcher must see what is relevant or unique in a given situation, regardless of whether it seems common or unusual to them. For Bauman, this is an example of embracing and improving the subjective view of the researcher rather than simulating some kind of objective view of the world. Through an enhanced understanding of hermeneutics as an interpretive process in the development of knowledge, the subjectivity of the researcher can be utilised to create greater and more relevant knowledge about the world. Bauman specifies that if some form of purely objective knowledge about the world could be developed, it would involve information that does not relate to individuals who can only perceive the world in subjective terms (Bauman 1978: 231). Hypothetically speaking, objective knowledge would seem abstract or irrelevant to an individual, as it would refer to a world that is foreign and unfamiliar. Ideally, the researcher must develop a lens through which they can share a view of the world with others in order to

enhance an understanding of it. Bauman's approach here could be described as a kind of ethnography as he urges the theorist and the researcher to acknowledge that they live in the world that they describe, and therefore to embrace it in order to develop concepts and ideas that are not only more accurate, but ultimately more socially relevant as well.

This is a radically different approach to that of Habermas (Habermas 1990; 1968; 1998). A fundamental motivation in the development of hermeneutics in Habermas's work is in regard to the possibility of universally consistent truths and, therefore, interpretations of knowledge that can be understood in a general sense. From this perspective, hermeneutics is not simply a way in which individuals enhance their view of the world, but rather an analysis of interpretation that strives to understand the intersubjective nature of society. This leads McCarthy to suggest that hermeneutics is crucial to Habermas's intellectual trajectory because "it leads back to a set of ideas that were central to his earlier formulations of critical social theory without being satisfactorily developed in them" (1978: 177). Habermas is certain that the capacity for reason exists (somewhat equally) in all people and so through a process of ongoing rational discourse, 'truths' can be discovered through the clearing away of distortions in speech acts. Therefore, hermeneutics can be a means to understand how individuals use speech acts in the process of legitimation, and for Habermas there is the potential here for ideal forms of rational interpretation (Habermas 1981[1987]: 105). On the surface, this is not an easy position to defend and so it is clear why Habermas felt the need to put together a text like *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981[1984]). Before delving into that work, there is a need to explain Habermas's distinctive approach to truth, which for the most part, Bauman seems quite happy to accommodate (1978: 239).

The Habermasian approach to knowledge radically shifted the direction of critical theory by reconstructing the oppositional nature of subjective and objective knowledge. Horkheimer described the breakdown of what was seen to be objective knowledge into new patterns of subjectively understood ideas

that could be validated or rejected (1947). But for Habermas, the existence of quasi-objective knowledge could be established as a substitute for objective truth. Therefore, the problematic paradigm of objective and subjective knowledge can then be avoided through the acceptance of truth as a cultural or intersubjective idea. However, it must be made clear that truth in this sense is not a claim that is somehow non-falsifiable, but a claim that has managed to survive criticism. Central to the existence of truth is the task of seeking out the possible flaws associated with the current version, and so the importance of critique in this model is very clear. The validity of a truth claim is less about being right, than it is about being successfully defended from criticism (Habermas 1981[1987]: 72). Therefore truth is not a claim that is impervious to criticism, but a claim that has survived criticism. This is of great significance to Habermas's model of hermeneutics as it shows the nature of the end point that he is trying to reach through this study of interpretation, whilst restating the importance of critique in the study of society.

As a result of Habermas's linguistic turn, truth becomes a subset of communication. Although it may seem abstract to think of truth in this way, Habermas is claiming that the source of truth in society is communication[61], or more precisely that communication is the only means through which truth can be discovered and evaluated. This could be reworded into something like, 'truth can only become known through communication', but the idea is essentially the same. Therefore, the need for Habermas to develop a theory of hermeneutics that supports his approach is essential to his argument. If truth can only be understood through the discourse of individuals, then hermeneutics is more than just a way of seeing the world; it is a means for the individual to interpret the world. Interpretation is central to this discussion as it concerns more than just truth, but also the meaning that can be associated with truth. It should be noted that there is an overlap with Bauman's position here, yet there are some key differences. Although Bauman considers hermeneutics to be crucial to the development of social knowledge, Tester suggests that the

61 Which may take a variety of forms; i.e. Speech, text, inflection etc.

analysis of communication would be enormously problematic for him as it arguably reduces individuals to predictable and insipid creatures whose motivations, emotions and ideas can be catalogued and ordered by a theory (Tester 2004: 23). There is a need to see how Habermas claims to analytically deconstruct the speech act in order to better understand how this kind of truth occurs.

For Habermas, there are two key events that occur in any meaningful expression; there is the physical event that is observable through sound or vision, and there is the 'objectification of meaning' in the form of interpretation (1990: 23). In a technical sense, two sounds could be identical, but their interpretations could be radically different. In order for a phrase to make sense to another, both parties must participate in some kind of shared communicative action, which operates within the realm of intersubjectivity. In contrast to an epistemological interpretation, Habermas's hermeneutics is concerned with three key aspects of an utterance. First is an expression of the speaker's intention, then an expression of the establishment of the interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the other and finally, an expression about the social world (1990: 24). In this view, epistemology is concerned solely with the relationship between language and the reality of the situation. For Habermas, there is information in every speech act regarding the world as it is understood intersubjectively, and of the personal perspective of the speaker. The project of hermeneutics has the potential therefore, to extract the relevant parts of a speech act to remove occurrences of systematically distorted communication and in doing so, assist in the development of a rational discourse.

According to Habermas, from a sociological position, there are three functions of language that can be extracted through hermeneutics. First, it is capable of "reproducing culture and keeping traditions alive" which is a view that Habermas identifies as being central to Gadamer's perspective (1990: 25). Second, there is the "social integration or coordination of the plans of different actors in social interaction", which Habermas identifies as the position from

which communicative action theory was developed (1990: 25). And finally as "that of socialization or the cultural interpretation of needs" which Habermas associates with the work of G. H. Mead (1990: 25). As mentioned in the previous chapter, prior to Habermas's work on communicative action in the early 1980s, Bauman was evidently influenced by Habermas's work on knowledge and his earlier work on the public sphere (Beilharz 2000: 43; Smith 1999: 27). As a result, it is to be expected that there is some overlap between Habermas's hermeneutics (1981[1987]) and Bauman's *Hermeneutics and Social Science* (1978), despite the obvious differences in their unique approaches to sociology.

For Bauman, the purpose of hermeneutics is to understand a text, phrase or gesture rather than simply explaining it. The key to this is the application of meaning to knowledge rather than pursuing a form of knowledge that is somehow void of meaning. This bypasses one of the problems with Gadamer's approach, in that hermeneutics transcends the scientific method, and places hermeneutics as a means to improve science and sociology[62]. But what is most important about Bauman's claim is the integration of the intentions and priorities of the speaker into hermeneutic analysis (Bauman 1978: 9). The study of hermeneutics was originally revered as a means to analyse and discover the 'true meaning' of a text; consequently it was commonly used throughout the pre-Enlightenment period for trying to *objectively* interpret passages from biblical texts. This kind of analysis considered the meaning of the text to reside in the text alone, with no consideration for the influence of the writer whatsoever. As more sociological forms of analysis became increasingly popular during and after the Enlightenment period, the view that a text could not be fully understood without knowing the context in which it was produced, became the standard view in hermeneutics (1978: 31). Therefore, hermeneutics is not simply a study of the meaning of a text, but of the meaning of the speaker or writer in producing a text, and this is where the shared ground with Habermas occurs. In *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Habermas claims that

[62] This will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

facts alone cannot motivate human action without some kind of theory (1968: 301). This suggests that no amount of information can produce an 'ought' statement without the application of value judgements that reflect priorities and preferences that are based upon meaning rather than fact. This emphasis on the integration of knowledge and meaning as not only being a part of human conduct, but essential to it, is a key factor in developing notions of contentment. If contentment is to be understood as a fulfilling relationship between the individual and society, then meaning is absolutely vital as it is intertwined with the need for reliable knowledge.

The similarities end however at the point in which truth must be defined. In contrast to Habermas, Bauman is clear in pointing out that the interpreters of communication cannot fully overcome their historical experiences in order to reach some form of consensus (Bauman 1978: 20). Gadamer describes these historical experiences as 'prejudices'; where knowledge is always developed through the use of prior information or 'pre-judgements'. For Bauman, the experiences that have led to the formation of individual preferences and priorities are not likely to quickly change through coming into contact with a better or more convincing argument. He states, "Consensus, therefore, would not guarantee truth" (1978: 14). If hermeneutics abandons the attempt to objectively interpret texts in a means that is consistent beyond the influence of the interpreter, then it must acknowledge that the consensus formed between different parties over an interpretation is both temporal and dependent upon some kind of historical similarity. Therefore, according to Bauman there are two key difficulties in incorporating the methodology of the natural sciences into the social sciences: "that of consensus and that of truth" (1978: 14).

As mentioned, there is some common ground between Habermas and Bauman on the matter of truth and consensus. For example, Bauman argues that truth is not an irrefutable claim, but a claim that, so far, has not been refuted (1978: 238). Therefore, a theory should not be thought of as true, but rather as the best

explanation available at the time[63]. The importance of this distinction is concerning a specific problem that Bauman identifies in Habermas's theory of rational consensus; that discourse is only a valid means for weeding out false concepts and therefore it cannot derive any form of truth (unless truth is defined as something that is not yet proven wrong). Put simply, the discourse that Habermas describes as a rational consensus is only effective as a means to identify claims that are false, it cannot reliably lead to truth. Habermas responds to this kind of criticism to some degree by arguing that his notion of truth is based upon redefining notions of objective or universal truth into something that is beyond the subjective realm, but is well within the intersubjective formation of a society (Habermas 1981[1987]: 287). At this point, a contrasting view between Bauman and Habermas, again comes to the fore. Again, Bauman is proposing a perspective that is less idealistic and therefore easier to defend, whilst Habermas again struggles to justify his project of universal truth. In this sense, Bauman's approach to discourse may be less problematic, but he himself admits that the downfall of universal philosophy is a tragic loss to the project of moral and social theory. Additionally, there is some consensus between the two that Habermas's grounded theory of truth would be more beneficial to social values in general. Bauman states, "if it were not for the ideal of truth as the supreme standard of belief, no agreed interpretation of meaning would be conceivable" (1978: 239). Although definitions of truth may be difficult to defend when subjected to Habermas's own standards of interrogation through discourse, belief in the plausibility of truth is essential to the functioning of society. To some degree, if Habermas's perfect truth through discourse is not practical or possible, then the problematic and even obsolete versions of truth developed through tradition may be more useful to the construction of meaning, and therefore contentment, than no truth at all. This is a view that, despite its pragmatic nature, would be at best problematic and at worst dangerous according to Habermas. In response to

[63] Although this claim regarding the nature of truth sounds remarkably similar to Popper (1972), Bauman would object to hardline stance that Popper eventually reaches. Rather, this can be seen as an example of Bauman's ability to blend vastly varied positions without limiting his work by 'taking sides'.

the quote from Douglas Adams at the beginning of this chapter, Habermas would assert that being right is more important that being happy, as prioritising 'happiness' over 'rightness' inevitably leads to manipulation and the distortion of truth. Yet he is, potentially, offering more to be optimistic about than Bauman.

Perhaps the best way to locate Bauman and Habermas in the diverse field of hermeneutics is through the substantial debate between Habermas and Gadamer. It is here that Habermas is challenged with a less rationalised and comparatively anti-universalist approach to hermeneutics that, despite a select number of key differences, shares some considerable similarities with Bauman's work. The Habermas/Gadamer debate is significant to this thesis due to an ongoing thread of discussion involving Habermas and Bauman over the role of knowledge in the relationship between the individual and society. According to Ricoeur, the key disagreement between Habermas and Gadamer on hermeneutics, is over the role of ideology as a positive or negative aspect of knowledge accumulation (1990: 298). It is a debate where the model of knowledge through hermeneutic interpretation battles the model of knowledge though critique. Essentially, this questions whether ideology allows for or prevents the development of meaningful knowledge. The Habermasian critique of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1989 [1960]) attacks the ability for hermeneutic interpretation to assess itself without the use of critical theory (Ritivoi 2011: 64)[64]. Therefore, it potentially suffers from the same inconsistencies and distortions as the texts that hermeneutics intends to clarify. As Habermas is deeply concerned with the systematic distortion of communication, and therefore knowledge, he believes that critique must break through the routines of social thought enforced by tradition and ideology. Yet

[64] A brief note regarding the publication date of *Truth and Method* is necessary here. Gadamer first published the text in German in 1960, yet revised versions were published culminating in the 5th edition in 1986. The original English translation was published in 1975, although the second edition (1989) is now considered authoritative. As Habermas's first public engagement with this text was in 1970, the chronology of this debate (particularly with the necessary translations) can make the lineage somewhat unclear, it should also be noted that the version that I refer to is the 1989 edition which presumably differs from the version Habermas would have been engaging with.

for Gadamer, there is no knowledge without context, therefore history and ideology are necessary for knowledge to exist at all.

Although this dense and specific debate may seem abstract, Gadamer's position is arguably in line with the commonly held view that Habermas has been trying to challenge since the early 1960s. Ricoeur encapsulates Gadamer's perspective in the following statement, "History precedes me and my reflection; I belong to history before I belong to myself" (1990: 303). But for Habermas, such an approach is too close to positivist notions of truth and rationality, and therefore suffers from the variety of identified problems in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Ritivoi 2011: 64). In regard to defining a social or cultural definition of contentment, this approach could be considered as the norm to some degree, as the knowledge utilised to determine the nature of a good life is personal to the individual. Claims regarding a description of contentment might begin with a precursor such as 'from my perspective' or 'in my experience', and this is a seemingly reasonable way to approach the question. Yet Habermas raises a powerful challenge to this approach by insisting that without vigilant critique, there is simply no certainty that the individual's perspective, is truly their own. The question becomes, Can hermeneutics be used as a method of interpretation that can overcome distortions of truth and is it therefore capable of resolving the problems of the past?

The Habermas-Gadamer debate began with a review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* by Habermas in 1970 and resulted in several rounds of critique and reply between the two[65]. Whilst Gadamer argued that meaning is created and maintained through communication in the social realm – a position that almost certainly influenced Habermas's work – Gadamer argued that achieving any form of objectivity was impossible, even with the development of

[65] The chronology of this debate can be somewhat hard to follow with some inconsistency regarding publications dates and the delays involved with English translations. However, the key essays are as follows: 'A review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*' (Habermas), 'Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik' (Gadamer) (There does not seem to be an English translation of this essay), 'The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality (Habermas), 'Reply to my Critics' (Gadamer).

hermeneutics. This is not a problem for hermeneutics but an indication of its enormous potential, as for Gadamer, hermeneutics can venture beyond the limitations of objective truth in the study of the human sciences, a field where objectivity comes with a number of potential problems. This is possible through a form of philosophical hermeneutics whereby interpretation is not simply a means of unpacking information from a text, but *the* way for individuals to engage with the world. Gadamer draws upon Heidegger in developing this position whilst contributing to the concept an element of the historical progression of interpretation. It is through this analysis of the historical circumstances that influence interpretations and create bias, that Gadamer develops his understanding of prejudices[66]. For Gadamer, the existence of historical prejudice means that no interpretation occurs in a vacuum of social meaning and therefore he insists upon a thorough acknowledgement of context in all cases of hermeneutic analysis. In reference to post-Enlightenment thinking, he refers to the "tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition" as a general mode of rejecting and undermining the past in favour of the future (1989: 270). This is not simply a matter of historical bias, but often the opposite, as modern societies tend to place great value on the progress of knowledge[67]. What is most significant in this idea, is the potential for misinterpretations to repeat themselves through the influence of context and this is a powerful challenge to Habermas's model of ideal or perfect forms of communication. Yet, this is also a rejection of the rationalised approach of extracting knowledge from a text as though there can be a hierarchy of knowledge that favours information that is not reliant upon human involvement. Gadamer explains:

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[66] Although the term prejudice often evokes a negative connotation, Gadamer is referring to the 'Pre-judgements' of interpretation. Simply that all interpretation involves some degree of prior knowledge, and this is not necessarily a bad thing. The complete removal of prejudices is seen by Gadamer to be a dangerous or even extreme position, he claims "a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's alterity. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither "neutrality" with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices" (Gadamer 1975[1960]: 269).

[67] It should be made clear however that Gadamer believed that prejudices could be either positive or negative in their influence.

> The only thing that gives a judgement dignity is its having a basis, a methodological justification (and not the fact that it may actually be correct). For the Enlightenment the absence of such a basis does not mean that there might be other kinds of certainty, but rather that the judgement has no foundation in the things themselves−i.e., that it is "unfounded." This conclusion follows only in the spirit of rationalism. It is the reason discrediting prejudices and the reason scientific knowledge claims to exclude them completely. (1989: 271)

This allows for the development of what Gadamer describes as horizons of interpretation. As there is no way to fully detach an interpretation from the cultural and historical perspective of the interpreter, the ideal hermeneutic reading can function as a bridging of the perspective displayed in a text with the perspective of the reader. In short, "The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (1989: 302). This presumes two unique aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutics: that a text does not have to be interpreted as intended by the author (in fact, it is generally better if it is not) and that the priorities of the scientific method are insufficient for studying the human sciences. Therefore an ongoing combination of ideas without a rationalised priority status given to some form of 'right' answer over all others, is the ideal form of ongoing discourse. This emphasis on horizons of perspective places a significant and well deserved value on the role of context in all forms of understanding that not only validates the human aspects of knowledge, but embraces them as the most relevant to social issues.

Gadamer does not intend to develop a methodological hermeneutics whereby interpretation is decoded by analysis, but rather a theory of understanding that considers the influences that lead to the act of interpretation. Since the process of interpretation is never performed by an individual without context or without pre-existing knowledge, the actual interpretation itself is less interesting to Gadamer than the ideas and beliefs that have led to that perspective. This can be seen as an attempt to uncover the true nature of the human sciences as a body of knowledge rather than a functional explanation of the basis of social knowledge (Outhwaite 1985: 31).

For Gadamer, prejudices are not necessarily distortions that must be resolved, but are an essential aspect of all forms of interpretation and therefore, understanding (Thompson 1981: 40). Gadamer argues this perspective through a discussion of historicity and tradition as the prejudices of historical context cannot be seen as a problem to overcome, but are essential to the existence of knowledge (Outhwaite 1985:26). It is easy to see why Habermas would find this notion problematic. There is no doubt that Habermas considers prejudices to be an unavoidable element of interpretation, yet he illustrates a danger in becoming unaware of the potential flaws in our perspectives (1990: 247). Gadamer tends to view language from a perspective that is notably abstract next to Habermas's stern practicality and rationality. Whereas Gadamer sees the great potential for understanding through prejudices in the fusion of horizons (Ritovoi 2011: 69), Habermas sees the potential for falsehood to become legitimised and this is a major contributor to forms of repression. To some degree, this becomes a debate around objectivity, although the point of contention refers to Habermas's reformed version based upon communication and consensus, rather than objectivity based upon positivism. Essential to this use of hermeneutics is the distinction between interpretive understanding (*Verstehen*) and experience as differing modes of knowing the world. An example of the defence of experience can be seen in the work of Popper or in the more traditional empiricist approaches. Yet, Gadamer and Habermas are defending the approach of *Verstehen* that identifies the meaning of an event or speech act to be an inseparable aspect of the event itself, and therefore, a key aspect of any analysis. This approach incorporates aspects such as the historical and traditional conditions of the event, the role of the speaker and interpreter, as well as the use or application of it. In opposition to the arguments that place experience as some form of pure and ideal form of knowledge, Gadamer and Habermas intend to show that the interpreter can never be removed from circumstance, nor can the context of tradition. Yet it is on the matter of tradition that Habermas breaks away from Gadamer and builds his critique of *Truth and Method*.

In Habermas's critique of Gadamer the discussion of horizons is bridged into an analysis of communication, which is deemed to be an equivalent due to the interpretive nature of both examples. As Gadamer discusses the prejudices of tradition, Habermas instead uses the framework of systematically distorted communication in discourse and so his use of hermeneutics is developed in a technically similar yet distinctive model. According to Habermas, the central problem with Gadamer's hermeneutics involves the historical participation of the interpreter in the understanding of a circumstance. Gadamer wants to incorporate the perspective of the individual in a historical context, without adequately describing how the regulation of bias can occur.

According to Habermas, Gadamer's description of hermeneutics as transcending the scientific method rather than becoming incorporated into it, is not a means to defend the project of hermeneutics as a form of higher knowledge, but is in effect, stating its illegitimacy. Gadamer is effectively siding with the positivists by excluding hermeneutics from science, rather than managing to show how hermeneutics transcends science (Habermas 1990: 234). In this sense, Habermas and Bauman share the view that hermeneutics is deeply incorporated into all forms of knowledge and therefore cannot be excluded from science. Hermeneutics is not above science and it is precisely this kind of thinking that is problematic in the pursuit of knowledge. Rather, hermeneutics is a part of scientific discovery, even if it is not particularly scientific in and of itself.

For Habermas, the lack of a systematic understanding of the social framework of society is a significant problem in Gadamer's approach to hermeneutics. He argues that interpretive sociology or *Verstehen* lacks the framework upon which intersubjective meaning is able to grow and adapt. Habermas claims, "The linguistic infrastructure of a society is part of a complex that, however symbolically mediated, is also constituted by the constraint of reality" (1990: 240). The analysis of hermeneutics, therefore, is never totally independent from social circumstance or historical movements. To suggest that sociological knowledge could depend upon *Verstehen* alone, is problematic as the structure

within which interpretation occurs is not recognised in and of itself. Hermeneutics is really only half the picture for Habermas, and although individuals will always be limited by their ability to perceive knowledge objectively, this does not mean that all knowledge can be discovered hermeneutically. There must be a framework within which social meaning can be attached. Habermas continues, stating that, "Social actions can only be comprehended in an objective framework that is constituted conjointly by language, labor, and domination" (1990: 241). Tradition itself cannot play the role of this 'objective' framework as implied by Gadamer's argument, but rather tradition is applied to a social framework, much like any other social narrative.

If applied to the discussion of contentment and false consciousness within the context of critical interpretations of society, then Habermas's approach has the potential to aid the development of an intersubjective and functional framework of contentment. Habermas describes hermeneutics as the art of understanding meaning and of overcoming systematically distorted communication through learning to interpret language with great skill and accuracy (1990: 245). Yet, for Gadamer, "Hermeneutics is the art of agreement" (1990: 273). He wants to show that the knowledge that has become most influential in shaping and directing modern life, is in fact not subject to the interpretative understanding of the world, utilised by individuals. He writes, "only scientific consciousness worked up to the point of delusion can fail to recognize that the controversy about the goals of human society… point to a knowledge that is not science" (1990: 273). Again, Gadamer is referring to a model of understanding knowledge that considers the scientific method to be subsequent to the field of perception and the analysis of hermeneutics. For example, if scientific knowledge is to be understood as empirical studies of happiness and well-being, then I would not hesitate to agree that there are aspects of human knowledge and experience that cannot be reduced to scientific measurement. Arguably much of the distortion surrounding popular notions of happiness and the good life are perpetuated by research that fails to

acknowledge the creative, emotional and unpredictable elements of human action. However, this view places an exaggerated level of blame upon science without sufficiently considering the distortions made by culture and tradition. By viewing science as an incomplete and external influence, it does not adequately consider the individual's internal potential for the perpetuation of false notions. When Gadamer claims that hermeneutics is the art of agreement, he is referring to agreement among individuals to the exclusion of the world – in an almost *objective* sense. Therefore, without incorporating scientific knowledge into a theory of interpretation, Gadamer's hermeneutics fails to apply to the relationship between the individual and society.

Although the Habermas/Gadamer debate has been discussed here as a means of uncovering a deeper understanding of the novel positions of Habermas and Bauman, it should not be assumed that Gadamer and Bauman would agree on all (or even most) aspects of their respective hermeneutics. It is clear that both consider hermeneutics to be more than the analysis of speech or text, but rather a way of being in-the-world and a way of interpreting experience and knowledge. However there is an element of universalism in Gadamer's work that Bauman may object to. Although this is far from Habermas's systematic analysis of hermeneutics, Gadamer seeks to develop a model of interpretation that is universally shared and in doing so, he somewhat under values the importance of cultural difference. Meanwhile, Gadamer's acceptance of traditional bias reflects his background in the philosophy of Romanticism, a perspective for which Bauman has a great deal of respect, despite the more Marxist origins of his social thought. Yet Bauman would struggle to accept the validity of truth from authority in the manner for which Gadamer has become known. Instead, Bauman might be tempted to side with Habermas on the importance of critique in order to pursue truth[68].

[68] It is interesting to note that whilst Habermas is considered a critical theorist and Gadamer a hermeneutician, Bauman has argued that to some degree all social theorists must be critical, and that all social theorists utilised hermeneutics.

Ricoeur poses a resolution to this dispute over ideology. He does not attempt to merge the two ideas into some kind of grand theory, instead he is acknowledging that the argument for critique and the argument for hermeneutics seem to come from radically different places (1990: 321). Ricoeur argues that there are irresolvable differences between these approaches that can coexist within some form of intersubjective truth because these differing claims have unique intentions and origins. Ricoeur develops this idea under the title of 'Critical Hermeneutics', whereby the individual can be critical without needing to be extracted from tradition. In pointing out the shortcomings of both Gadamer and Habermas, he states (respectively), "Hermeneutics without a project of liberation is blind, but a project of emancipation without historical experience is empty" (1986: 236). Critical Hermeneutics is therefore an idea that recognises the significant conflict in the construction of a meaningful relationship between the individual and society.

Yet, Ricoeur identifies problems in both Habermas and Gadamer's arguments. Vessey explains Ricoeur's position as such,

> Although primarily siding with Gadamer, Ricoeur took Habermas's criticisms more seriously than Gadamer and argued for a dialectic of engagement and distanciation, a dialectic toggling between the hermeneutics of meaning and the hermeneutics of suspicion (2011: 142).[69]

Ricoeur claims that there are inconsistencies with Habermas's breakdown of social functions into labour, power and language as integrated into the three interests that drive the creation of meaning; technical, practical and emancipatory. For Ricoeur, Habermas cannot resolve the problem of where this perspective can be grounded without the hermeneutic notion of tradition described by Gadamer. Yet Gadamer faces a significant problem regarding the location of subjectivity in hermeneutical thought. Ricoeur claims that, "To understand is not to project oneself into the text but to expose oneself to it; it is

[69] These terms require some further explanation; Friedrich Ast describes a 'hermeneutics of meaning' in contrast to a hermeneutics of the letter, he explains "The hermeneutics of the letter is the explication of the word and subject matter of the particular; the hermeneutics of meaning is the explication of its significance in connection with the given passage" (1990: 48). A hermeneutics of suspicion on the other hand refers to interpretation that this more concerned with knowledge and the uncovering of falsehoods (Gadamer 1984).

to receive a self enlarged by the appropriation of the proposed worlds in which interpretation unfolds" (1990: 327). That is to say, subjectivity becomes realised through interaction with text that is external to the individual, it does not simply exist within the individual. The bias of an individual's subjectivity is not simply prone to fiction, but rather it is entirely dependent upon the integration of non-factual information.

Additionally, George Taylor suggests that both Habermas and Gadamer are mistaken in their understanding of a shared approach to reason or the construction of meaning (respectively), as though individuals share similarities at the core of their decision making processes. According to Taylor, Ricoeur recognises this problematic assumption and develops an approach to 'understanding as metaphoric' which adheres to "the creation of similarities across difference" (Taylor 2011: 104), rather than seeing similarities between individuals as given[70]. This is a perspective that I predict Bauman might be willing to side with, and it highlights a flaw in the universal implications of both Habermas and Gadamer's views.

Although there are numerous other assertions made by Ricoeur in his evaluation of the debate, my analysis at this point is in regard to the use of differing perspectives in the development of a functional and beneficial framework for contentment. A considered understanding of the maladies of modernity cannot solely focus upon the reasonable or hermeneutically established modes of understanding, and expect the outcomes to be relevant or useful to individuals. Where Habermas and Bauman might agree, is in regard to the need for reason without rationalism, whether it be instrumental, technocratic or authoritarian. Within the greater context of hermeneutics, Bauman and Habermas have more in common than once thought. There is of course a thread of romanticism within Bauman's work, yet he balances this humanism with the sprit of critique and the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of emancipation.

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[70] It is worth noting that Taylor is a Ricoeurian scholar and so his position should be considered as favorable to this kind of view.

To some extent, both Bauman and Habermas can be seen as branching off from the work of Husserl in regard to the relationship between truth and reason. On one hand, Husserl rejects the notion that truth can be found in consensus and this point has been made in Bauman's work. Yet, he argues for the stripping away of all social, cultural and traditional influences in the pursuit of truth – a view that Habermas would certainly defend (1968; 1981). Husserl's approach here can be understood as the recognition of two distinct assertions that make up any specific truth claim: namely a sense and a state of affairs (Smith 2007: 275). Rather than viewing truth claims as either subjective or objective, truth claims consist of both a subjective and objective element, such that there is interplay within the individual between these contrasting approaches. This intersubjective understanding of experience and interpretation culminates in the notion of the life-world (*Lebenswelt*). What is admirable about Husserl's approach is that when the individual is reduced to the barest of perspectives, the remainder is not some kind of mechanistic and calculating individual who has lost their humanity through the loss of sociality. Rather, the pure consciousness of the individual is exposed to the world as it really is, through the transcendence of prejudices (Moran 2000: 61). Therefore, the pure consciousness of the individual is something that is ultimately human, something capable of transcending the distortions of interpretations in everyday life. Husserl describes this ideal as transcendental subjectivity, a concept that no doubt influenced the development of Habermas's transcendental intersubjectivity. Yet the ultimate goal of Husserl's transcendental subjectivity is not truth, but meaning. It is a means to connect the subjectivity of the group with that of the individual through the process of intention (Bauman 1978: 122).

Despite the magnificence of Husserl's phenomenology, Bauman is prepared to acknowledge the extent to which it cannot be proven. There are still aspects of the problem of objectivity here as whatever truth that may be uncovered through Husserl's notion of pure consciousness, would still face the even

greater task of then trying to share that knowledge with others. The problem of communication surfaces again here to leave individuals ill-equipped for the discovery of the world as it is and so Bauman's critique of knowledge that is beyond subjectivity is again relevant. That is to say, that knowledge is meaningful to individuals so long as it relates to the world that they live in. The knowledge of pure consciousness is simultaneously neither useful nor comprehensible to individuals, beyond that of the individual who perceives it. For Habermas, the solution is to develop the capabilities of knowledge though the eradication of systematically distorted communication. Although the problems he faces in testing and applying this ideal were arguably problems that Husserl himself could not overcome.

Without the support of knowledge, meaning is unfounded and delegitimised, yet without a productive and suitable understanding of how truth is appropriated in modernity, knowledge and therefore meaning, is at risk of becoming misguided and manipulated. I am not trying to suggest that individuals are being fooled by a specific authority who is capable of commanding popular forms of knowledge, nor that there is some kind of conspiracy of which individuals are not aware. Rather, the arguments here suggest something about the way in which individuals interpret the social world that is problematic in developing a fulfilling and rewarding relationship with society. Habermas's model of systematically distorted communication as well as the role of the public and private sphere contributes a great deal to this kind of thinking – as does Bauman's description of ambivalence in modernity and the problems of rationalisation as a legitimising process. Gadamer furthers the humanistic dimension of knowledge by attempting to show how individuals are central to all knowledge creation, and more importantly, to all understanding. There is absolutely no doubt that the individual has a creative and multi-dimensional self, capable of a highly intricate use of language and meaning. And so the question remains, Why have we, as a society, not developed a more effective notion of contentment?

At this point it is worth returning to Bauman's *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991) as there is a practical concern regarding the discussion of this chapter so far. That is to say, if modernity encourages an ambivalent approach to the construction of meaning and, in some sense, therefore to knowledge, then to what extent is this analysis of knowledge immaterial. For Bauman, the most effective way to navigate social life, may be to accept the homogeneity of normative pressures and avoid challenging the rationalised aspects of modern life. This is, to some degree, an approach for which individuals are rewarded for adopting. If this is the case, then the task of determining the finer details of acquiring accurate knowledge becomes secondary to having an interest in knowledge in the first place. I am not convinced, however, that this would negate the relevance of the ideas discussed in this chapter as the need for accurate and reliable knowledge is just as much a part of understanding contentment, as being motivated to pursue knowledge for its own sake. Yet there is cause for concern regarding the extent to which knowledge is valued in modernity, and its inevitable relationship to the validation of meaning in social life.

In trying to answer this, I would like to briefly compare two dystopian texts that have been of some interest to social theorists (Horkheimer 1947; Bauman 2000; Beilharz 2009) George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. The key point of interest here is in a comparison of the way in which the government in each text controls their public. In *1984*, the government employs a panopticon like approach to surveillance and violently threatens individuals in order to dictate behaviour. Although there are parts of world where this is relevant (consider the recent shootings at polling booths during the last election in The Democratic Republic of Congo for example), in the majority of the first world, Orwell's analysis of modernity arguably misses the point. In the case of Huxley's text however, individuals subscribe to the requests of authorities without the threat of violence. Rather, the government uses technological capabilities to keep the public 'happy' such that they feel no

need to challenge the status quo. This is despite the atrocities taking place and the significant threat to civil rights that the government is trying to enforce. The relevance of this to present day society must be approached selectively, yet as an analogy for the differing forms of coercion, there is something very interesting occurring. Huxley's version of a future society is far more terrifying than Orwell's because the control is both invisible and voluntarily subscribed to. Horkheimer associates the formalisation of reason in *Brave New World* with a kind of voluntary stupidity that persuades individuals to overlook their own judgement in favour of a readymade view of the world provided by the authorities who are provisioning their happiness (1947: 56). This is not to say that all happiness is misleading. There are obvious differences between *Brave New World* and the first world of the present day, yet it suggests that society cannot function on happiness alone. Without a valid process of the legitimisation of meaning, happiness can occur without rights, autonomy or dignity.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to show how knowledge is essential to the production and reinvention of meaning. Knowledge is important in two distinct ways with regard to the ongoing search for truth. First, reliable and meaningful knowledge is essential to ensure that the priorities and values of an individual are based upon an accurate understanding of the world. Without access to knowledge there can be no democracy, let alone political involvement, and there can be no morality without the ability to justify perspectives through information about the world. The second reason for placing such a high value on knowledge is regarding the need for individuals to feel that there is truth to their knowledge or at least, that there is a reason for their understanding of the world. There is a practical benefit to believing in some form of truth to apply meaning to the things that people value, without which society could not function. Therefore, knowledge must be critiqued, challenged and pulled apart

whilst being valued and cherished as something that has the potential to resolve any possible problem.

Chapter Seven Democracy, Globalisation and Contentment

> When the ruling class "must feed the workers, instead of being fed by them", revolution is at hand (Horkheimer 2005 [1942]: 96)
>
> The new religion, however, which mankind needs, will first emerge from the ruins of this culture (Cornelius 1923)

In this final chapter, there is a need to make clear the significance of fairness and access to democracy in the construction of social frameworks of contentment. Much of the empirical research on happiness, contentment and Subjective Well-Being measures the influence of financial status and security, this results in a presumption that enhancing the economic standing of a society is a reasonable way to better the quality of life for individuals. However, due to the substantial evidence linking well-being to a *relative* understanding of financial success, there is a need to reconsider this presumption within the context of fairness rather than just income. This chapter will draw upon Habermas and Bauman's more recent work – including a number of 'blog' like publications about current social and economic issues – in order to seek a better understanding of the nature of contentment in modernity. The chapter will then consider the problematic nature of meaning through Habermas's work on participatory democracy and Bauman's work on living in a liquid modern world. This will then lead to a brief overview of both Habermas and Bauman's political commentary on the future of Europe and globalisation more generally, within the context of the future of the public sphere. The importance of fairness in social constructions of contentment can best be thought of through Bauman's own terminology regarding 'humiliation' as a means of exclusion in modernity, whereby the increasing polarisation of wealth – both nationally and internationally – is a direct threat to the individual's experience of contentment. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, the point here is not to reconcile Habermas and Bauman, but to draw from the strengths of each perspective. There is a clear theme of fairness and participatory democracy in both Habermas and

Bauman, and so there is a need to explore the relevance their ideas in regard to contentment.

It would not be unreasonable to question whether the troubles facing individuals in the present day could be understood as effectively with the work of Bauman and Habermas, as through the lens of classical sociology – namely Marx's alienation theory, Weber's critique of rationality and Durkheim's work on anomie and the importance of community. There is some validity in this question in that the conclusions reached in this thesis so far, have largely been concerned with the maladies of alienation from the community as well as the self, nature and the products of our labour. This could also be seen in the irrationality of rationalised systems and the importance of building strong social relationships of dependency and trust, rather than the flaunted individualism that has come to dominate the construction of the modern self. From this perspective it seems more plausible to say that very little has changed since Marx and Durkheim made their diagnoses, than to argue that they somehow managed to predict the future. But this is not the argument to be made in this thesis. To say that there have been no significant or radical changes to the experience of living in society over the last 100 years is astonishingly narrow-minded. This is not to say that there is no commonality between the experience of social life in Marx's time compared to the present day. Clearly the relevance still present in much of classical sociology is evidence that there is much that can transcend the difference of these times. Yet, to underestimate the dramatic changes in terms of the pace, scope and openness of present day society would be a significant error. Although the links between classical sociology and the present day can clearly be seen, there is a need to contextualise the discussion of contentment and modernity within the rapidly changing and undeniably global world in which this thesis is being written.

It is important to note that the process of globalisation, in terms of the cultural and economic merging of nation states, is understood as being implicit to some degree. It is not my intention to show that globalisation is occurring as this

point has been made countless times and in much greater detail than this thesis can permit (see Elliott *et al.* 2010; Lemert 2005; Held 1999; Sassen 1998). Rather, this chapter will consider the relevance of globalisation in an attempt to align much of the theory discussed throughout this thesis, with social and political matters of the present day. Change can be seen in the way in which information is shared and distributed, the normality of long distance travel, the medical advances that give individuals unprecedented control over their bodies, the changing nature of socialising and intimacy, and now the potential for global warming to radically change the world paired with significant evidence that modern civilisation is to blame. The increasing gap between the rich and the poor has also taken on a new form of inequality that is distinct from the past. Saskia Sassen is right to argue that we can no longer think of the gap between the rich and the poor in terms of increased socio-economic polarisation, but rather that this gap has become so large that it must be thought of as an entirely new beast (2010). This is the approach necessary for understanding the nature of discontentment in modernity – that aspects of the past have been magnified to such a degree that they can no longer be thought of as the same problem made slightly worse.

Despite this pessimistic tone, it would be negligent to overlook the countless instances of positive social change in a thesis concerned with the nature of contentment. To say that there has been dramatic social change, and that much of this change has had negative consequences, can potentially overlook the enormous potential for individuals to adapt and overcome challenges. There have also been significant improvements concerning civil rights for minorities and access to knowledge and information, yet this contributes to the validity of the questions posed in this thesis rather than challenging them. Consequently, this chapter will consider the present day role of contentment in a rapidly changing and deeply globalised world; a world where identity is not only in a constant process of re-evaluation, but where discontentment can be understood within the reflexive, interpretive and often ironic process of self-understanding in a social context. There is much to be optimistic about in the process of

liquefaction, but there is also a need to better understand the role of structure as something that can both limit and enhance autonomy.

Although speaking on different matters, both Bauman and Habermas identify the dangers of exclusion from public sphere processes. Of course, the feeling of exclusion and powerlessness is a cause for concern for contentment, but it has also been identified as a major contributor in lowering scores in Subjective Well-Being (SWB) tests (Lane 2000: 16). In response to the problematic of alienation, individuals are increasingly showing their frustrations concerning this feeling of exclusion.

To set the scene however, there is a need to consider Habermas and Bauman's recent contributions to debates on the dilemmas of social life in a global society. In *Liquid Modernity* Bauman quotes Emerson in proclaiming that, "in skating over thin ice… our safety is in our speed" (2000: 209), yet it seems that after the Global Financial Crisis of 2009, the cracks in the ice may indeed be catching up with us. The market crash that saw people losing their jobs, their homes and their savings was arguably the result of a rationale for society that has no meaningful definition of what it means to have *enough*. Bauman's critique of consumer culture describes a motif of instant gratification and the tendency to always want something more than one already has and this results in a dangerous devaluation of possessions and achievements in favour of the need to focus on the next acquisition (Bauman 1998: 31). The scope of credit card debt present among individuals today reflects this desire to live beyond one's means and spend money that one does not have[71], but it fails to provide the whole picture. Bauman has argued that the first world has shifted from consisting of societies of producers to societies of consumers, yet the experience of living within 'light' capitalism, as he describes it, involves a deeper emotional experience. This is a world of impermanence and chaos,

[71] According to the ABS, in 2009-2010 the average amount of credit card debt among households (not including the minority of 30% that did not have credit cards) was $3,800 (ABS 2011).

whereby substantial risk is an essential aspect of normality and to be left behind is to be outcast from the ideology of an 'advanced' society. In a recent web article, Bauman describes the 'Unclass of the Precarians' as a group that has merged the middle class and the proletariat in their shared exclusion from wealth (2011d). A key element of class difference for Bauman is in the inevitable humiliation of those who have come to be excluded from the upper echelons. This is a new derivative of the classic 'haves' and 'have nots' dichotomy as the objects which are of interest ceased to be *needs* and now tend to be the *wants* of society. Yet the power of exclusion from participating in the wealth of consumer opportunities available to the rich has moved beyond creating a working class who aspire to become bourgeois, and towards a working class who resent the financial elite. This has led to a form of socioeconomic polarisation that has been identified by Saskia Sassen (2010) as something radically different to the traditional class difference that has intrigued sociologists for centuries. She describes this era of advanced capitalism as post-Keynesian, as the dependence of capitalism on a population of workers and consumers has shifted beyond exploitation and into an era of exclusion (2010: 25). There is a unique logic present in this approach to capitalism whereby industry no longer understands individuals to be objects of use value, but rather, individuals are 'expulsed' by rapidly changing economic conditions. For Sassen, and equally for Bauman and Habermas in this sense, the nature of the beast that is the gap between the wealthy and the poor, can no longer be understood as simply increasing, but rather it is out of control. In an interview with Thomas Assheuer, Habermas explains

> What worries me most is the scandalous social injustice that the most vulnerable social groups will have to bear the brunt of the socialised costs for the market failure. The mass of those who, in any case, are not among the winners of globalization now have to pick up the tab for the impacts of a predictable dysfunction of the financial system on the real economy. (2009: 227)

The analogy of the 'juggernaut', as popularised by Giddens, is an example of the chaotic and dangerous manner in which society is progressing (1990: 151). Yet for Bauman, it is as though there is a need for a distinction between the few

who are fortunate enough to be riding the juggernaut, as opposed to the general population at risk of being trampled by it.

Habermas characteristically takes a more analytical view of the state of the global economy. He has reserved his judgement for matters regarding the European Monetary Union and the various 'bail outs' that have reluctantly been offered to parts of Europe that have not coped well in the market downturn. His interest is regarding the strength of an active democracy within European countries as governments are increasingly likely to face contradicting pressure from the citizens who elect them, and the European authorities who must regulate them. Whilst the construction of a European union has obvious benefits, the creation of yet another level of government could potentially exclude individuals from the democratic rights available to them in a sovereign nation. Therefore, European citizens must be able to engage with a European parliament rather than electing a national-level government that speaks on their behalf, as this would result in a severe lack of faith in the democratic process at a grass roots level (Habermas 2011).

In the transition from the nation state to the postnational constellation, as Habermas calls it, trust in the power of democracy to resolve social problems is essential for nations to function. Habermas argues that conflicts only become recognised as social problems when they are considered within a normative framework of values and moral systems, and in being classified as a social problem, potential solutions are identified and responsibility for circumstances can be applied. The idea that there is the capability to resolve conflicts such as economic inequality or access to quality health care and education for all people, inevitably turns conflicts into challenges for political leaders. And because challenges have resolutions, a healthy democracy will demand that changes are made (Habermas 2001: 59). Yet he suggests that in recent times, politicians seem to be moving away from the language of fixing or eliminating social problems and towards a more defeated language of doing what they can and therefore bypassing the ultimate responsibility. This is not to say that politicians are responsible for every social problem, this would be ludicrous,

but rather that a general feeling of disenchantment regarding the power of democracy in first world countries has resulted from this paradigm shift. For Habermas, it is vitally important that people believe in democracy, in order for democracy to work. As the citizens of nations are increasingly affected by decisions made by people, governments and corporations outside of the democratic process, the individual is becoming lost in the democratic process and the potential result of this is catastrophic for Habermas. Social problems or conflicts must be seen as challenges in order to avoid allowing these issues to merge into the backdrop of normative social trends. If populations were to give up on the idea that economic polarisation is a problem by accepting it as 'just the way it is', then democracy has failed. The growing tensions regarding this kind of social exclusion can be linked to the matter of contentment, or more accurately, to discontentment as a defining feature of the individual's relationship with society.

There is a need at this point to frame this argument in regard to a reinterpretation of social constructions of contentment within the extensive body of work on social and critical theory as a project in the discussion of utopia[72]. This is made all the more important with the number of parallels made between the project of globalisation and potential frameworks for utopia (Beilharz 2009; Habermas 2010, Hayden 2009). Hayden (2009) calls for the distinction of three separate kinds of modern utopian thought, only one of which offers a prospective future. First is a nostalgic utopianism that involves a return to stronger national identity and yearns for the memory of a better time in history. This is not only implausible, but also detached from the reality of global economic systems and the vast inequality present in past versions of international relations. Second is an idealist utopianism that argues for the complete disintegration of national borders in favour of a global world that

[72] It is important to note that whilst Bauman discusses utopia at some length (see: Bauman 1976a), Habermas's project is arguably more utopian in nature. Meanwhile the notion of utopia as a philosophical and political project can be found in the work of both Habermas and Bauman.

could unite as one. This is a view that ignores the deep cultural influence in the process of self-understanding at both an individual and state level. Finally, there is an option for a reflexive utopianism that Hayden identifies in Habermas, whereby there is an integration of the national and transnational that takes into consideration the delicate relationship between lifeworld and system (Hayden 2009: 64). This reflexive approach to utopianism is capable of responding to the rapidly changing social and economic structures of normative ideals while recognising the significance of both the individual as a single entity and also as a part of a larger cultural identity.

The notion of reflexive utopianism has the potential to apply to far more than transnational policy decisions as it implies a radical redefinition of the nature and role of revolution in social change. The reflexive adjustment of normative ideals through challenges to extraneous models of social meaning is capable of working to resolve social problems at their core rather than simply trying to fix the symptoms of greater problems. This is not an attempt at utopia by design and implementation, but through an ongoing process of adjustment, updating and reform in order to ensure that values, such as the ideas regarding the good life, can be modified in a way that is liberating rather than troubling to the modern individual[73]. The key to such a model requires an ability to feel comfortable within this kind of social change, rather than constantly seeking stability. In a lecture at the LSE in 2005, Bauman quoted Oscar Wilde in saying that "Progress is the realization of Utopias", although he sought to amend this quote to "progress was a chase after utopias" (2006: 2). The need for this modification rises out of the significant pursuit for technocratic control that has come to define modernity. A rather intriguing contradiction in Bauman's work comes to the fore at this point, as he simultaneously considers oppressive social structures to be melting whilst he also acknowledges the inevitable emotional toll that comes with living in a chaotic modern world. For all its faults, there are benefits to a heavily structured society in that it provides a great deal of

[73] Whitebook (1995) is not convinced that "the constraints of his (Habermas's) position" regarding communicative action will allow for a utopian application of critical theory, despite his attempts to deal with such outcomes.

consistency, and just as Bauman suggested in *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991), individuals have become dependent upon this kind of structured dependency on consistency.

In his first major work on the topic, *Socialism: The Active Utopia* (1976), Bauman argues that utopias are necessarily idealistic and detached from the complications associated with accounting for the human condition. The concept of utopia overcomes the dangers of instrumental rationality by transcending the limitations of theory and practice, and pushing critical social thought into the realm of the imaginary (1976a: 14). This is a task that is not solely for intellectuals according to Bauman, but rather is an aspect (to a degree) of everyday culture. The concept of utopia is a means for society to re-imagine itself as something better, to critique the past whilst focusing on the future. One could argue that this notion of utopia is uncharacteristically optimistic for Bauman, but this text is an attempt to explain how sociology *can* be optimistic. It is a matter of using the imaginary to understand the potential for social change, through a critical understanding of history.

In contrast, Bauman's more recent work could be understood as a project in trying to determine the practicalities of living in a liquid modern society. This challenge involves living in a world where the stability of values and meaning have been traded for an escape from the domineering structural determination of previous eras[74]. The question here is twofold; To what degree do individuals require structure in order to legitimate their life practices? And, to what extent does that structure need to be based upon notions of truth and fairness? The breakdown or liquefaction of social structures that are no longer deemed relevant or useful for individuals, has resulted in some very positive shifts in social values and equality in general; but the dissolution of problematic or outdated normative beliefs does not mean that all structure is bad, or even that people can't be content within a problematic structure. Durkheim's (1897) work on suicide was able to show this well over a century ago; that in times of

[74] A more detailed discussion regarding Bauman and Freud on the 'trading' of happiness for security and vice versa can be found in Chapter 4.

hardship or discrimination, social solidarity is often strengthened and common bonds are reaffirmed. In order to respond to the aimlessness of the lack of structure, society does not need more structure, but a more involved and more relevant social structure – a structure of normative ideals that individuals can form a meaningful relationship with, regardless of whether they agree or disagree with the archetype.

Although for much of this thesis Habermas has been described as an idealist thinker in opposition to Bauman's more solemn realism, the matter of utopian thinking is a field where both theorists adopt an idealistic approach. That is to say that for social theorists to engage in the discourse of utopia will, by definition, fail to result in a perfect or ideal society, but it is likely to lead to improvements in modern life. For Bauman it is the increasing lack of social connectedness that has resulted in the decline of utopian thought (2006: 5), whilst Habermas might point to the distortions of communication that have lead to a decreased valuation of utopian discourse. Habermas argues that for global democracy to sufficiently guide the future of a world society in a meaningful and beneficial way, there are four key requirements[75]. Put briefly, these can be understood as; a government capable of enacting their citizen's decisions, a developed notion of the 'self' for individuals to utilise politically, a means for people to make decisions through public discourse and finally, the ability for this discourse to be organised and specifically focused at important social issues (2003: 88-89). Habermas is particularly interested in the formation of a European union regarding this kind of international democratic participation, but the idea has global relevance.

More recently, Bauman has argued that despite the liquefaction of social structures, the role of ideology in motivating human action is still enormously powerful (2008a). This ideology however, transcends the differences of left and right or free market and the welfare state. It is the ideology of individualism

[75] It is worth noting that these requirements are necessary for people to influence the future of social life rather than solely economic authorities, which Habermas considers to be the most powerful mode of operation currently available (2003).

that has sweepingly altered the priorities of individuals such that the pursuit of the 'good society' is seemingly unnecessary in the pursuit of happiness (Bauman 2008a)[76]. This largely takes the form of the unending quest for consumer satisfaction in Bauman's work, although the application of consumer rationality to non-commercial pursuits would suggest the validity of this approach in other areas of life[77]. Alternatives to this ideology of consumption and disposability have been abandoned, even by those who oppose it, as there is a presumption that other possible modes of life are either ineffectual or impossible within the current context. Consequently, even those who critique the obsession that many individuals have for consumer goals, will inevitably fall into a form of individualised and consumption based ideology. I have argued that modernity is obsessed with happiness to the degree that contentment has been neglected, and Bauman appears to be saying something very similar. Happiness is for the *winners* of the globalised and fast paced world, yet happiness through rationalised forms of individualism will struggle to fulfil even the most successful among us. In this sense, Bauman argues that the enemy of contentment is humiliation, and that to some degree, humiliation is necessary to validate the happiness of the winners. Bauman argues that humiliation has the ability to displace an individual's sense of belonging through a process of exclusion and rejection. Concerning the London Riots, Bauman refers to the 'mutiny of the humiliated' as a means to grasp the seemingly chaotic eruption of violence that made headlines all over the world (2011c). There is a mood in Bauman's writing that suggests this ideology of individualism is inescapable when its only challenges come from within. In regard to the previous chapter where the question arose regarding the role of ideology in either allowing or preventing knowledge, it seems that knowledge of liberation or revolution is increasingly difficult to imagine. As recently suggested by Immanuel Wallerstein, despite the criticisms of the Occupy

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[76] The incorporation of the study of happiness into the discussion of individualism is a notable addition to this era of work, in contrast to *The Individualized Society* (2001).

[77] Also see Hochschild's work on the clash of commercial and intimate spheres (2003).

Movement, the mere existence of a protest of this size and scope is cause for optimism (2011).

The Occupy Wall Street protests serve as an interesting example of public sphere discourse regarding the matter of fairness – and to an extent, contentment – that has formed out of grass roots political action and quickly made its way into popular political and cultural discourse. In an article from 2006, Habermas provides a modern evaluation of the necessary elements for a functional public sphere and in doing so, provides an insight into the nature of modern democracy. Yet, it is in the notes of this article where Habermas briefly mentions his views regarding the Internet as a means of creating a public sphere that is capable of strengthening democratic principles[78]. Habermas is concerned that the innumerable quantity of running debates online results in a fragmentation of public discourse into countless discussions that are unable to merge into a popular discourse (2006: 423; 2008: 53). From this view, the big topics of public discourse need to merge into a central location and in doing so, be legitimised by authoritative sources such as newspapers and the news. He acknowledges the potential for 'grass-roots' discussions and the sharing of information that has been blocked or ignored from the mainstream media. But, this seems to radically underestimate the potential for online movements to grow into normative discourse throughout media outlets that are beyond Internet chat-rooms and forums. Although the media initially resisted covering the OWS protests, the continued pressure of individuals that Bauman would describe as humiliated, resulted in a change in the language used to discuss income inequality.

The influence of the 99% slogan is still developing, but has the potential for significantly shifting the mood and language of contemporary political and economic discourse. The concern for Habermas here is that such movements do not overpower ideologies through logic or knowledge, but through a kind of

[78] There are now numerous publications regarding the Internet and the future of the public sphere, although there is generally a focus on the Internet as a means to share knowledge (Antony & Thomas 2010; Röhle 2005) rather than as a space that functions democratically.

bullying whereby issues are forced onto the public agenda. One can see how online discourse can be subject to this kind of distortion, but it is problematic to suggest (as Habermas does in *The Structural Transformation of the Public* Sphere) that the bourgeois public sphere is less ideological or domineering. The idealisation of the bourgeois public sphere in Habermas's work has been a common criticism for some time now (Calhoun 1992), and with the rise of online public space, there is further evidence that Habermas is perhaps too cynical regarding the prospects for a discourse to occur elsewhere.

There is cause for optimism regarding the potential for alternative discourse, such as the 'grass roots' discussions within the Internet, to penetrate the mainstream media and popular discourse. After the efforts from mainstream media to understate and even ignore the actions of the Occupy Movement, the sharing of information though social media sites like YouTube, Twitter and Facebook led to a media presence for the protesters. The success of the movement's integration into popular discourse was epitomised in a speech by President Obama in December 2011, where he explicitly discussed the unacceptable degree of economic polarisation and criticised the nature of American capitalism. In reference to the housing crisis of 2008, he declared,

> We all know the story by now: Mortgages sold to people who couldn't afford them, or even sometimes understand them. Banks and investors allowed to keep packaging the risk and selling it off. Huge bets – and huge bonuses – made with other people's money on the line. Regulators who were supposed to warn us about the dangers of all this, but looked the other way or didn't have the authority to look at all.
>
> It was wrong. It combined the breathtaking greed of a few with irresponsibility all across the system (2011).

He then quoted a number of statistics that directly referred to the financial nature of the 1% and the hardships of the 99%, a move that utilised the language of the Occupy protesters and was met with rapturous applause from his considerably conservative Kansas audience. Obama lamented,

> The typical CEO who used to earn about 30 times more than his or her worker now earns 110 times more. And yet, over the last decade the incomes of most Americans have actually fallen by about 6 percent (2011).

Then something startling happened, Obama criticised the notion that free market capitalism is capable of resolving its own problems and stated that the justification that wealth will 'trickle down' from the top "doesn't work… And has never worked" (2011). This may not seem particularly significant on the surface, but it is essentially an attack on what has been the strongest defence of capitalism for generations of Americans. It is, in fact, a radical statement for the President to make and speaks to the ability for alternative discourse to be legitimised by popular discourse. In the face of such events, Habermas's evaluation of the present state of the public sphere demands revaluation, and calls for a renewed optimism in the potential for the Internet as a new public sphere capable of benefiting democratic principles.

This leads the discussion back to the matter of fairness as being key to contentment rather than economic prosperity alone. Perhaps the first stage in attempting something like a reflexive utopianism would be to reconsider the normative notions of progress in modernity. What does it mean for a society to have progress? Eder puts forward a view that echoes Horkheimer's *Eclipse of Reason* (1947) by claiming that progress is tied to the human mastery of nature, which is inevitably the result of increased rationalisation (Eder 1990: 67). In this view, modernity must move away from the desire to possess technocratic control over nature and move towards a relationship with nature that considers humanity to be within it rather than beyond it. But in the relationship between the individual and society, the re-evaluation of progress requires the ability to value the old by refusing to presume that all that is new must be an improvement. This is not to say that the past should be unduly idealised, but that the justification for the current direction of modernity is validated by self-fulfilling prophecies that presume that all change must be a form of progress. The Occupy Movement is stating that the direction of economic rationalism in

the United States has been a mistake, a wrong turn. Although there is no option to go back to the way it was before, the mere acknowledgement that what has been thought of as progress – may in fact be far from it, is very important. For Habermas, the presumed progression of society is capable of preventing valid ideas of critique entering into public discourse.

Somewhere in-between the abyss of Bauman's unreliable and always shifting liquid modernity, and Habermas's alienating and withering public sphere, has to be the individual. Social and critical theory of this kind cannot afford to overlook the importance of the individual's self-understanding in regard to society, and this may be the key to envisioning a more effective model for contentment in a globalised modernity. Elliott and Lemert identify three modes of thought regarding the construction of the individual in modernity, before offering their own model of the new individualism (Elliott & Lemert 2006: 54). First is the notion of manipulated individualism, which is most commonly attributed to the Frankfurt School critical theorists who have already been discussed at some length in this thesis. Manipulated individualism refers to the ability for culture to influence and guide the knowledge and preferences of individuals. The individual is therefore at odds with society in the ongoing battle for autonomy and freedom. There is a danger in taking this approach too far, as the thesis of manipulated identity can result in underestimating the ability for individuals to engage in original thought and break away from social pressures. The second school of thought is described as isolated privatism, and consists of a voluntary withdrawal from the public sphere into a comfortable and predictable environment. This approach to individualism is a convenience made possible by the nature of modernity and can be associated with the work of sociologists like Sennett, Putnam and Bell (2006: 61-63)[79]. Although this kind of perspective may provide an accurate description of the individual's approach to self-understanding for some, it cannot provide a model that can be

[79] At times Bauman could be placed in this category.

applied to broad sections of the community. Finally, the model of reflexive individualisation alludes to social structures as categories of meaning such that individuals are able to develop a kind of meaningful self-understanding. These categories both influence individuals and are influenced by individuals, and it is recognised that they can change dramatically over time. Beck is most commonly associated with this kind of view and he has since described outdated or redundant categories as 'zombie categories', in that they continue to exist even after they are dead. Although this approach acknowledges the temporary nature of social structure, it seems to neglect the possibility that structure itself is changing or even eroding. This kind of understanding depends quite heavily on the value of narrative in the construction of a meaningful identity and this is a commendable view, but it is not simply a question of the kind of narrative that one can commit to, but *how* one can believe in a narrative at all. As a result, Elliott and Lemert propose *The New Individualism* as an ongoing reflexive process, but also a challenging and exhausting 'emotional struggle' within the task of bridging the experiences of the general and the particular. As Bauman has stressed that the project of constructing an identity is a tiring and never ending process, the new individualism envelops this idea into the greater question of the individual's relationship with society. The key to this approach involves the events occurring in what Elliott and Lemert call the imaginary domain, within which the social pressures that are encouraging the surge of individualism, clash with the individual's emotional states and result in modes of self-understanding that can be seen today. This calls for a greater integration of psychoanalytic methods into the study of the individual's emotional states within specific social circumstances, and there is just cause for this direction[80].

In considering the questions posed in *The New Individualism* regarding the problematic relationship between the individual and society, there appears to be

[80] Frosh and Baraitser demonstrate how the use of psychoanalysis can help to integrate the plurality of identity into the study of individualism in a fast-paced and global age (2009: 158). And so, it is through this kind of investigation that the importance of identity *to* the individual can be reasserted as a deeply emotional and seemingly personal process.

a lack of significant or useful theoretical mechanisms through which we can resolve the conflicts that Freud presented in *Civilisation and Its Discontents* over eighty years ago. In order to bypass what an unsympathetic critic might call a series of dead ends, there is good reason for Elliott and Lemert to suggest that the answers may lie at a deeper emotional level than sociologists and social theorists tend to feel comfortable with questioning. This project however, is an attempt to emphasise the importance of theory at a social level, and it endeavours to find a way out of the dead ends that social and critical theory has met since Freud posed these questions about socially derived self-understanding. This project critiques the way in which privileged societies have constructed notions of happiness, contentment and the good life, such that genuine resolutions for these tensions could result from positive reconstructions of social values and substantive meaning. This project intends to exist alongside studies of these inner workings of the psyche, and even to draw upon key concepts such as the unconscious and forms of repression, yet the conclusions developed in this project remain social in nature.

In returning to the starting point of this chapter, there is no doubt that significant social change has occurred among recent generations and that this has altered the way in which individuals engage with other individuals and society as a whole, as well as creating a unique process of self-understanding for individuals. Throughout these changes, it must be noted that despite substantial improvements to civil rights, access to knowledge and general living standards, the average citizen of the first world is reporting lower levels of happiness and well-being than previous generations. It is my contention that there are significant social factors that have influenced this loss of contentment and therefore solutions ought to be of an equally social nature.

Conclusion

In *The Uses of Disorder* (1970), Richard Sennett asks a simple, yet unsettling question regarding life after the 1968 student revolutions, namely, 'How are individuals to live their lives now that the basic need for food and shelter no longer occupy the majority of their time and effort?' (1970). Sennett's question implies that the physical and biological needs of the individual have been met to the extent that individuals in the first world rarely experience scarcity of these basic necessities[81]. Yet the well-being of individuals has not increased alongside these social developments. This thesis has pursued the idea that social theory is ideally positioned to make sense of this question in a manner that fully appreciates the complexity of both the individual and society. The contributions from Bauman and Habermas are vital to my line of argument as it stands; yet the potential for contributions to be made from an array of theoretical positions cannot be overlooked. In the present day context of happiness research, there is a need to be clear about what this research can and cannot reliably conclude. As a result, this thesis has sought to offer a framework within which the problematic of happiness and contentment can be best understood and further developed. The nature of this thesis is enormously ambitious and there are certain consequences that are likely to occur as a result. However the potential benefits for the study of happiness, contentment and well-being – as well as for the discipline of sociology – outweigh risks involved in taking on such a large and cumbersome subject. Although this project could have been constructed in a way that is less guarded from potential criticisms, there is a need to recognise the place for ambitious sociology in this field. The difficulties involved with discussing contentment in an analytically concise manner must not remain as a deterrent for sociologists. This conclusion will offer a summary of my argument as it has progressed from chapter to

[81] As discussed earlier in this thesis, scarcity is understood here as the result of wasted resources rather than an actual lack of resources. According to this understanding, scarcity of needs exists in the world only because the distribution of resources is obscenely unbalanced and resources are wasted at an extraordinary rate.

chapter, before concluding with a discussion of the potential for further research in the field.

At this point, it is necessary to briefly review the development of this thesis in reference to what has been covered thus far, and to concede that there are aspects of this discussion that are yet to be considered with great depth. Chapter one introduced reason into the discussion of contentment in order to reaffirm the idea that contentment is ultimately tied to the self-understanding of the individual regarding their relationship with society. The contributions of first generation critical theory to the discussion of reason as a means to autonomy – but also as something that could be directed away from the best interests of the individual – is central to this idea. The critical emphasis on reason set the foundations for a discussion of social knowledge that – alongside the individual's interaction with meaning – would come to form a major tenet of this project. Chapter two ventured into the second generation of critical theory with the work of Jürgen Habermas. The intention here was to better understand the potential for distortions in the construction of meaning and to consider the potential for legitimation in the individual's participation with public discourse. In this chapter the relevance of intersubjectivity is introduced as a way to progress beyond the theoretical dead ends of objectivity and subjectivity, whilst keeping the discussion grounded in social experience. For Habermas, the significance of democracy is always present and the ideal of citizenship rather than individualism remains an important concept throughout the thesis. The role of reflexive social constructions that either facilitate or problematise contentment set up a kind of common ground with Bauman, despite the differences between the two. In chapter three, the work of Zygmunt Bauman was explicated in relation to the question of contentment through notions of ambivalence, waste, liquidity and contingency. Bauman's highly descriptive approach stands in contrast to Habermas's systematic and structured theories, yet Bauman more acutely manages to portray the maladies of the modern individual with regard to a rapidly changing society. Bauman reminds us that chaos is only ever hidden by the thinly veiled sense of order

that culture projects on to it. The resolution to this discord between expectation and reality requires a shift in the former rather than the latter as social life can never be entirely ordered. Following on from Bauman's analysis, chapter four traces a genealogy of social analyses of contentment – or more accurately, discontentment – from Freud's *Modernity and Its Discontents* to Bauman's *Postmodernity and its Discontents*. In this chapter, there is a focus on the nature of the individual/society nexus with a specific consideration for the self-destructive tendencies of the individual. Freud's question asks: If society is indeed a social construction, then why is the individual's relationship with it so dissatisfying? Through an exposition of the relationship between the individual and society, this chapter shows that contentment is by no means a singular or individual matter. As a result, the value of traditional sociological approaches in understanding contentment becomes clear. In chapter five, a comparative critique of Bauman and Habermas is expanded upon in order to make clear the specific contributions of each theorist with regard to their unique similarities and differences. The distinction between the idealism of Habermas and the realism of Bauman is explored in this section, as are the relevant benefits and shortcomings of Habermas's rational and analytical approach, compared to Bauman's more humanistic and descriptive social theory. Chapter six delved into the role of knowledge as an essential aspect in the construction of meaning by considering the lessons of hermeneutics as a socially defined method of approaching truth. This chapter specifically considered the differing notions of truth among this project's key theorists, and aimed to unpack the potential role of ideology or culture in the process of constructing knowledge and meaning. When considering the relationship between the individual and society from a critical perspective, the discussion of knowledge – as a social and cultural phenomenon – is necessary in order to understand the development of self-understanding. Finally, chapter seven applies the findings of this thesis to modern political events and the significant social changes that have occurred through the sprawling process of globalisation. There is a degree of optimism here regarding the heightened sense of social and political tensions with questions of access to democratic participation, economic polarisation and the

ever-increasing power of corporations. The critical understanding of conflict as an essential aspect of social advancement and autonomy, can be seen in new forms of political participation and in more traditional protests such at Occupy Wall Street. This conclusion grounds the matter of contentment and meaning in a focus on fairness, democracy and the extent to which individuals can identify with, and find validation through, their interaction with society.

At this point I would like to reiterate my contributions to this discussion. I have proposed a novel approach to understanding contentment as a social construction, such that the murky waters of knowledge, reason, meaning and emotion can be understood through the matter of contentment in the relationship between the individual and society. What this thesis cannot and does not do, is describe the nature of contentment or the good life as though critical theory can illuminate an image of the ideal lifestyle. Such an image simply does not exist. What this thesis can propose is an understanding of contentment through a critique of social functions and conditions that identifies aspects of modern life which problematise contentment for individuals. This model involves a relationship between the individual and society where the application of knowledge and meaning through the experience of reason and emotion, seeks to better meet the needs of individuals within the context of social life. Although the process may seem straightforward, the application of the concepts in this project are anything but. Much of this project has focused on overcoming the technical challenges of pursuing the good life and so I will again summarise the central themes and unique elements of this thesis.

First, it must be recognised that the good life is made up of several kinds of fulfilment. I have sought to make a distinction between social and non-social forms, which have been described as contentment and happiness respectively. Happiness in this sense refers to feelings of pleasure, excitement or relaxation that involve the subjective experience of feeling good. Whilst happiness is crucial to the individual's well-being, it is temporary and therefore incapable of

supporting the good life on its own accord. My argument suggests that modernity offers a multitude of avenues for satisfying such needs; from iPhones and cable television, to restaurants and holiday resorts; there are more than enough ways to indulge in happiness with little more than a financial investment. Yet, by drawing upon the contributions of social theory it can be argued that these regulated and sanitised options for happiness are simply not enough for the individual, and the simple reason for this is that they lack a sufficiently valued social element. This perspective can be found in Bauman's *Modernity and Ambivalence* and Douglas's *Purity and Danger*. Contentment is not a matter of control, but a perspective capable of dealing with the unpredictable nature of modern life. In contrast to contentment, the experiences that inspire happiness lack social characteristics such as respect, pride, dignity or generosity. The experience of happiness could also be differentiated from contentment due to the presence of control, order and predictability. For example, if happiness involves consumer purchases then the individual is likely to want their specific needs to be met without interruption. In order be happy with a new purchase, the item needs to be everything that the consumer wants it to be, regardless of whether those expectations are realistic or relative to their needs. Happiness may make the individual feel pleasure, but it fails to make the individual likeable to others, and even more importantly, it fails to make the individual likeable to themselves. As the social element of modern life is absolutely fundamental, this shortcoming becomes problematic in pursuing a good life. This is not as simple as being liked by other members of society, rather in order for the individual to like themselves, they must feel as though they are worthy of being liked by others. Such a perspective draws heavily on Bauman's analysis of Freud (2008c), yet it also ties in notions of intersubjectivity and the lifeworld as described by Habermas. Consequently, contentment as a socially constructed and maintained alternative to happiness, must be developed in order to work alongside happiness in creating a good life. Contentment refers to a feeling of satisfaction and fulfilment with the way in which the individual understands their place and value in society. This does not abide by some kind of objective list of accomplishments that are shared across

society, instead it considers the relationships and character narratives of the individual in such a way that a feeling of contentment can result. Therefore, contentment is not a passing feeling, but a means to validate and justify a person's accomplishments, priorities and perspectives. Not only does contentment depend upon socially derived meaning, it is itself a construction. It is the best possible version of the individual's relationship with society. Unlike feelings of pleasure, contentment validates accomplishments through the work and sacrifice necessary to complete them. Therefore an ongoing satisfaction can result.

It must be made clear at this point that my claim is not to say that contentment is not already present in modernity, or that contentment is not possible without knowledge of the arguments contained in this thesis. Rather, that contentment is deeply undervalued in present day society and that critical theory is capable of highlighting this aspect of modern life. Bauman describes a world of instant gratification where the association between goals and the means to achieve them are problematic, not only because of the rapidly shifting priorities of modernity, but also because of the 'buy now, pay later' ethos of modern consumer culture. Meanwhile Habermas is concerned with the lack of citizenry participation in the individual's engagement with democracy, and also cultural processes of legitimation. The result of this will devalue the aspects of life that the individual is responsible for validating and therefore, evaluating. This creates a negative cycle of alienation from meaning and the development of values for the individual as they struggle to embrace their role within a larger network such as a community or society. Although Bauman is critical of consumer values and the way in which irrational forms of rationality have contaminated other areas of social life (2004), Habermas's contribution is commendable for providing a direction for social values that exists outside of consumer satisfaction. There is particular attention given to democratic participation as a means to become citizens rather than just consumers, as it provides a connection between the individual and society that is meaningful rather than simply being pleasurable. An area for further discussion on this

point would be through the work of Cornelius Castoriadis, although this will have to be put aside due to the size constraints of this project.

The analysis offered here regarding the problematic of contentment in modernity almost certainly falls short of a thorough justification. Therefore, I must recognise the limitations of this project. I have argued that a disproportionate focus has been awarded to the pursuit of happiness without the adequate recognition of social bonds and meaning, but this is arguably a symptom of a greater problem. The decline in Subjective Well-Being (SWB) in a number empirical studies suggests that there is cause for concern (Lane 2000), yet the approach of this thesis considers this decline to be symptomatic of a much larger social transition. For this reason, it is necessary to avoid thinking about this matter as a problem that ought to be solved, or as a matter of public or economic policy. The matter of contentment is a sign of the times and evidence of the troubling ambivalence that individuals encounter in the process of self-understanding. Although Habermas himself states that his model of rational discourse can only be applied to matters of justice and morality – and not to questions of the good life – I argue that when social conditions distort and mislead the individual away from contentment, then these matters become a moral issue. What is needed is an ongoing public discourse that is capable of shaping socially defined notions of contentment that are beneficial to all members of society. This does not require a formal and regulated public debate whereby the interests of individuals are represented by officials and authorities, rather that meaning and justification can be in a state of constant adjustment and experimentation based upon the needs and requirements of the time. The reflexive process through which this may be possible must now be discussed in more detail.

To bond the individual with society in a way that is fulfilling and enriching, an ongoing social discourse regarding knowledge and meaning is required. Such a discourse needs to recognise the individual's ability to use reason and experience emotion, and for these human capabilities to be seen as inextricably linked. This reflexive and ongoing process can be understood though the

following connections. First, the individual must engage with and pursue knowledge. Without knowledge, progress can be directed away from the needs of individuals and manipulated toward the interests of others. Drawing upon theorists such as Horkheimer, Habermas and Honneth, it can be argued that in order to engage with knowledge in an analytic and critical way, the individual must use their faculty for reason. In doing so, reason allows the individual to engage with knowledge without necessarily being coerced by it. Knowledge in all forms (scientific, social, philosophical etc.) must be a part of social development and reason is the individual's tool for ensuring that the nature and application of that knowledge is in their best interests. However, reason and knowledge alone cannot suffice in the development of the good life as the emotional aspects of the individual must also be recognised and appreciated. The individual can use knowledge to develop a sense of meaning though emotional states. Additionally, to have knowledge without meaning would deny the truly human aspects of our nature to feel, appreciate and to love. Yet, to have meaning without the engagement with knowledge would leave the individual open to manipulation and effectively disconnect them from participating in the development of society. Using Freud, a parallel could be drawn here between the cold and rationalised individual who is dominated by the reality principle and has a grounded knowledge based in reason without any construction of meaning, and the childishness of an individual whose behaviour is dictated by the pleasure principle and has no real understanding of the world around them. Here we can see the opposing schools of thought regarding the ability for modernity to either drive individuals into an unemotional adulthood (as suggested by Freud) or keep them in a state of self-enforced adolescence (as argued by Sennett). Yet it seems that for most individuals, living somewhere between these poles is probably closer to the truth. While utilising knowledge to develop constructions of meaning through the recognition of emotional states, it becomes plausible to develop socially constructed notions of meaning that are both beneficial to the individual and capable of developing a practical framework of the good life. Therefore a relationship between the individual and society can be derived that fulfils the

needs of both the general and the particular, whilst reducing the distortions in knowledge and legitimation that effect positive social change.

The contributions of Habermas and Bauman, among many others, were specifically selected in order to provide a critical overview of modernity. However a similar project could have made substantial contributions through the analysis of countless other theorists. A focus on Beck and risk, Foucault and power, Giddens and reflexivity or Kristeva and melancholia are all capable of aiding in the development of an understanding of contentment. I say this, not to ignore the substantial differences between these theorists, but to show that social and critical theory are ideally placed to contribute to the discussions surrounding happiness and contentment. The unwillingness to do so would be a loss for the discipline of sociology, but also for collective well-being. There is great potential for a future project to consider other possible contributions to the discussion of happiness, contentment and the good life from notable social theorists. In particular, the work of Bourdieu, Žižek, Castoriadis, Honneth and Ricoeur would make for a rich and valuable discourse. There is considerable public attention surrounding the study of happiness, and this paired with movements like Occupy Wall Street suggest that there is potential for a significant social change in the coming years.

In closing, I would like to reflect on the key aspects of Bauman and Habermas's ideas in the development of this thesis. Despite the considerable overlap and also the crucial differences between the two, there are a select few points that are instrumental to this project. From Bauman, the idea that normative social structures like morality are capable of imposing a sense of order onto the world and in doing so, making it more likeable to individuals, is a key notion. If we are to think of morality – as Bauman does in *Postmodern Ethics* (1993) – as something that makes the social world more approachable and forgiving, then we can think of contentment as a means to make the self more likeable in a similar way. Therefore, contentment refers to the positive construction of the relationship between the individual and their social context. Bauman is clear that in order for individuals to be content with themselves,

they must feel as though they are likeable to others (2008c). Perhaps it is a result of the ambivalence that Bauman describes whereby individuals experience a troublesome engagement with meaning in modernity. For Bauman there is a lack of certainty in life narratives, yet individuals are promised a degree of predictability by the organised and rational nature of modernity. Therefore, a social construction of contentment is capable, not of resolving all problems and creating a world where nothing bad ever happens, but of creating a framework with which individuals can appreciate the good and survive the bad. The experience of fairness is of great value here, such that the social world can be likeable to the individual, regardless of whether they are among the 'winners' or the 'losers' of modernity (as Bauman might put it). The point is not about sharing privilege through increased access to consumer items, but through a greater emphasis on fairness in a social, political and economic sense. It is a matter of people functioning as citizens rather than individuals or consumers. This is where the contributions of Habermas are most relevant.

Habermas provides a ceaseless dedication to participatory democracy that not only seeks to resolve social inequalities, but also contributes meaning through the legitimation of social practices. It is participation in society that makes individuals into citizens and this sphere of democracy is the key to overcoming anomie and alienation. People must belong to a community rather than simply existing within it, whatever the form that community may take. The utopian vision of rational discourse that Habermas puts forward may suffer from problems of practical application, but that by no means suggests that his intentions are any less beneficial to real social problematics. When these perspectives overlap, there is a clear emphasis placed on the importance of the individual's belief in fairness in society. The trust that the individual may or may not possess is profoundly tied to notions of democracy and participation, without which the relationship between the individual and society can be deeply ruptured.

This thesis has sought to show the importance of social meaning and knowledge in the construction of the good life. The crux of this project can be

seen as regarding two key questions; first, how the individual's relationship with society can be reconstructed in a more meaningful and beneficial manner and second, how social functions have not yet managed to effectively resolve the discord in this relationship. This is not to say that conflict must be resolved, as difference is an inevitable and important part of social life. Rather, that contentment is an ongoing process of social and cultural reconfiguration that requires a degree of consideration and constant re-evaluation. From this perspective, the field of sociology and social theory have a great deal to contribute to this discussion. For there to be significant advances in the understanding of the good life in modernity, there must be ample consideration of the roles of social and cultural meaning and this must begin with a critical understanding of modernity. It is through understanding the limitations of social life that discontentment can be responded to in a way that is not only fulfilling, but capable of combating forms of alienation.

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