

Second Nature: Adorno and Contemporary Education

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Abstract. The paper aims to provide a conceptual basis for reconciling the radical resistance to totality posed by Adorno's negative dialectics with contemporary considerations of the environment, capable of developing a more symbiotic educational approach in the context of contemporary crises. This is done by exploring the notion of 'second nature', the significance of which is underlined by its rootedness in the dialectical tradition of German philosophy and Adorno's emphasis on the nonidentical as an essential condition for critique and a link between subjectivity and what is understood as nature and history.

Keywords: Second nature, education, Adorno, nonidentity, critical theory.

Antrinė gamta: Adorno ir šiuolaikinis ugdymas

Santrauka. Straipsnyje konceptualiai pagrindžiamas Adorno negatyviosios dialektikos keliamo radikalaus pasipriešinimo totalumui suderinamumas su šiuolaikiniais aplinkos klausimais, siekiant simbiotiškesnio požiūrio į edukaciją šiuolaikinių krizių kontekste. Atspirties tašku čia tampa antrinės gamtos sąvoka, kurios svarba išryškinama remiantis jos tradicija dialektinėje vokiečių filosofijoje ir Adorno pabrėžiamu netapatumu, kaip esmine kritikos sąlyga, bei subjektyvumu ir to, kas suprantama kaip gamta ir istorija, jungtimi.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: antrinė gamta, ugdymas, Adorno, netapatybė, kritinė teorija.

Introduction

In one of his lectures on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Adorno spoke of what he saw as a "remarkable dual structure of Kantian philosophy." What he was trying to reveal was the tension he felt in the Kantian project itself – to be aware of the unknown objective existence and to duplicate it in the known and conceptual. The idea of insisting on duplication – a world of experience that we do know, and the transcendental world, that we do not – amounts to an insight Adorno makes as if in passing – the world of experi-

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ence is *our* world, the world that has become familiar, the world that is known to us, and therefore that we somehow own, or we think we own, and yet it is deprived of meaning:

By making the experienced world, the immanent world, the world in its this-ness, commensurate with us, by turning it into our world, so to speak, something like a radical metaphysical alienation is achieved simultaneously. It may be that the expression “achieved” is a shade too idealistic; perhaps it describes an objective state of affairs too much as if it were merely the product of philosophical reflection. The more the world is stripped of an objective meaning and the more it becomes coextensive with our own categories and thereby becomes our world, then the more we find meaning eliminated from the world, and the more we find ourselves immersed in something like a cosmic night – to express it in a modern way. (Adorno, 2001, p. 110)

This seemingly coincidental quote points to several important threads that I would like to touch on in this paper. First, it was made in an educational setting, for the class attending Adorno’s course on 23 June 1959. What is described here is also roughly what is at the heart of how one is educated – by making the world more and more appropriate through experience and making it one’s own experience. It could also be interpreted as a world of ever-expanding identity thinking¹, that makes the Absolute, as Adorno puts it, “obscure and threatening” (Adorno, 2001, p. 111). Nevertheless, both sides of this double world are immanent to our reason, and it is only a matter of conceptual choice how we approach them. Secondly, this immanence is linked to the increased use of the pronoun ‘our’, implying the human world, and demonstrating the human-centred view that critical theory takes, as do many other philosophical currents in the Western tradition.

The passage thus explains the stakes of this paper, which are largely drawn from another text of Adorno’s that deals more directly with education – a radio broadcast entitled “Education after Auschwitz” (Adorno, 2005), and an article by Nathan Snaza “Posthuman(ist) Education and the Banality of Violence” (Snaza, 2017) which draws on the insights of Adorno to further develop the idea of contemporary education. The general thrust of this paper is therefore extensive. It seeks to illuminate the relationship between what is broadly understood as the relationship between nature and culture understood through the division of first and second nature. However, the issue is intertwined with education and the need for a paradigm that would consider this relationship in a way that would entail a certain symbiosis between the subject and its environment, while at the same time retaining the notion of subjectivity and the agency of the subject as one of the important factors within this new framework.

Since we have invoked the notion of ‘environment’, it has to be said that this study, as a broader project, is also an attempt to reconcile the idea of subjectivity with the notion of ‘milieu’, mostly understood in the sense of Gilbert Simondon (Simondon, 2020). Ac-

¹ Adorno contrasts ‘identity thinking’ with his own dialectics, according to him, identity thinking “says what something comes under, what it exemplifies or represents, and what, accordingly is not itself” (Adorno 2004, p. 149). Thereby, nonidentity becomes a way to dialectically retain what has been lost through conceptualization and negatively bring us closer to what the object actually is before being subsumed under a concept; a procedure, which sacrifices particularity to the general exemplariness.

cording to Kristupas Sabolius, the “idea of ‘environment’ risks to fall under the centralized logic of subordination,” meaning that if we follow the logic of environment, we risk presupposing the mutual exclusion – that of the human subjectivity and its surroundings (Sabolius, 2024). The present research will retain the use of ‘environment’ while exploring the notions of first and second nature from the perspective of critical theory and the kind of subjectivity it involves. It should help to articulate a more symbiotic relationship with negative dialectics through the notion of ‘milieu’ as part of further research.

Nature as nonidentical and the turn to the subject

In outlining what education should look like in the aftermath of the atrocities of war, mostly imagined in the industrial capitalist societies of the West, Adorno says that the necessary component of any education is “the turn to the subject” (Adorno, 2005, p. 193). One of the reasons he gives comes from Freudian psychoanalysis – noting that most personality development takes place in childhood – but the more important reason comes from the insight that, in an increasingly identity-driven society, it is impossible to imagine education other than that which leads to critical self-reflection (Adorno, 2005, p. 193). This can be seen as corollary to his *Negative Dialectics* and his laborious argument that the mutual indifference after Auschwitz is intolerable (Adorno, 2004, p. 361). What Adorno did not foresee, on the one hand, when he prescribed sociology, i.e., teaching about “the societal play of forces that operates beneath the surface of political forms” is that the imminent dangers we are now facing transcend the categories of society and politics and are related to the environment. On the other hand, his main method, i.e., negative dialectics, resigns itself to a purely negative account of things that go beyond identity thinking, and yet this recognition is a necessary precondition for critique. In other words, the non-identical is the irreducible that is acknowledged from a subjective point of view but never grasped – a contradiction “under the rule of law that affects the nonidentical as well” (Adorno, 2004, p. 6).

According to the philosopher and political ecologist Anne Fremaux, there is something irreducible and unbridgeable in our common thought of what nature is. Particularly in times of climate crisis, this irreducible part of nature returns to us as its ‘non-identical’ (Fremaux, 2017, p. 132–33; Fremaux and Barry, 2019, p. 183)² – a concept that she borrows from *Negative Dialectics*. Although Fremaux does not commit to complete consistency in adopting Adorno’s approach when considering climate issues, this borrowing and gesture gives us the right start in connecting several dots in the larger picture when considering Adornian theory vis-à-vis contemporary climate challenges, as well as those of education in this context. However, it is just as easy to assert something as a nonidentity by attributing an identity to it, and thus dissuading the negativity, so the approach needs to be carefully considered.

In order to maintain the critical potential and role of the subject within this framework, it is important to emphasise the dialectic between what Adorno calls nature and

² The hyphenated usage of the notion is particular to the authors, whereas in the English translations of Adorno usually use “nonidentity” without a hyphen.

history, and, in particular, the distinction between first and second nature. The impending climate crisis, which defies comprehension, can only be thought of as ungraspable, but it is ungraspable in the same sense that Adorno meant in his aforementioned lecture – as part of the unknown and not subsumed under identity thinking, which can only be perceived through the limited lens that identity thinking is.

This also brings back a call for an educational paradigm that could be considered as posthuman. One impetus for this comes largely from Nathan Snaza and the aforementioned article, where he says that the restriction to the subjective dimension that Adorno puts forward in his text on education after Auschwitz calls for “posthumanist educational response, one that would, in fact, take it as axiomatic that no such separation between objective and subjective is possible” (Snaza, 2017, p. 499). However, we must also consider how incompatible the general premises of critical theory, especially in the Adornian or Frankfortian sense, are with the considerations that come from many sides of the posthumanist discourse, which Anne Fremaux also attacks from an ecological point of view. Adorno states that the “earthquake of Lisbon sufficed to cure Voltaire of the theodicy of Leibniz, and the visible disaster of the first nature was insignificant in comparison with the second, social one, which defies human imagination as it distils a real hell from human evil” (Adorno, 2004, p. 361). This exemplifies the anxiety coming from the unknown that poses a reality we cannot subsume under the principle of identity. This anxiety is what Adorno recognized as already grasped by Kant, and it could also be observed through the dynamic between the first and second nature. While they are both identity concepts, the concept of the first nature is a placeholder of that which has not yet been subsumed under the full identical conceptuality of the second nature. In what follows, we will look more closely at this distinction and its relevance to both how we see nature, and how it helps in moving towards an educational paradigm that would consider subjectivity in a more symbiotic way.

Dialectics and second nature

In her argument, Fremaux suggests that both hypermodernity and postmodern eco-constructivism fail to acknowledge the nature that returns as the ‘non-identical’. What is considered hypermodern is the idea that, through increasing and more precise conceptualisation, it is possible to (almost) completely subsume the content of what is considered to be nature. Postmodern eco-constructivism sees nature only as a construct, and thus misses the certain ‘otherness’ of nature that bites back. In other words, the former is unable to grasp nature because it is lost in identity thinking, while the latter denies its existence altogether. Ignoring the nonidentity of nature, she argues, leads to the ‘return of nature’ in the form of catastrophes and dysfunctionalities (Fremaux, 2017, p. 132; Fremaux & Barry, 2019, p. 183).

Indeed, it is necessary to acknowledge this relationship in order to avoid treating nature as non-existent. One way to approach the problem is to seek symbiosis by changing the way we imagine the human relationship with nature, or perhaps even to rethink the notion of nature and human subjectivity as mutually constitutive, without completely

merging into one another. As Yuk Hui also noted, dialectics was also a way of overcoming the static or mechanistic mode of philosophising through an organic way of thinking, which became the new condition of philosophising after Kant's third *Critique* (Hui, 2019, p. 3). From this, one can conclude that the dialectic, understood as the reconciliation of the process of becoming with our own agency, although it inherits some of the organon of traditional metaphysics, had already been attempted in the so-called classical German philosophy. As Hui also notes, the organic "serves as the model of a system of metaphysics, but also as a resolution to the antinomy between mechanical laws and freedom that Kant proposed in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Hui, 2019, p. 3).

By highlighting this aspect within the dialectic that Adorno inherited but also developed, we connect it to the current issues that were not faced in its historical manifestation. It is also a way of maintaining accountability through a strong sense of subjectivity and its role that the dialectic implies, especially when it is realised in the Adornian prescription of the return to the subject. Furthermore, the framework that evokes the notion of nonidentity in the consideration of nature must maintain both the supposed reality of what nature is and its relationship to history, with which it is often juxtaposed. This leads to a closer look at the notion of the second nature. I will first give a brief overview of how it is understood here, and the key aspects that emerge in the German idealist tradition, as well as in relation to *The Idea of Natural History*, an early text by Adorno. It must be said at the outset that, in his later writings, Adorno rarely referred to 'natural-history' (spelt with a hyphen). When he did, he usually meant history in a natural state, while the framework outlined in this essay was largely dropped as the issues dissolved into his broader methodology, including his negative dialectics (Hullot-Kentor, 2006, p. 241). The notion of the second nature has its roots in a broader philosophical tradition. It is important for us to understand its place within the dynamic that allows us to see both human agency and its reciprocal relationship with nature.

In his article on the two conceptions of the second nature, Georg W. Bertram gives an interesting description of the Kantian and Hegelian conceptions of nature (Bertram, 2020). He deals with John McDowell's understanding of the second nature whose concept is slightly different from the one we are aiming at here. Importantly, these conceptions are not entirely attributable to them, either, but they nevertheless show tendencies coming from their philosophical systems (and McDowell's one falls into the Kantian category). The article considers the second nature to be acquired through what is described as 'the initiation principle' (Bertram, 2020, p. 69), whereas the Kantian conception considers the first nature to be the one that we are born into ('the preceding principle') and led out of/ through *Bildung*, or a certain education ('the transformation principle'). The transformation principle, as articulated within the Kantian framework, is something that connects the first nature and the initiation into the second nature.

Leaving other stakes aside, what is important in Bertram's account is the insight he gives when outlining the Hegelian conception of the second nature, i.e., "[t]ransformation does not take place outside of second nature, but within it. What the Kantian explains in terms of initiation or education is an element of second nature itself" (Bertram,

2020, p. 72). This means, as asserted by him further, that “the conception of first nature that human beings develop has to be understood as a second-nature conception of first nature” (Bertram, 2020, p. 73).³ The second point for him is related to the notion that transformation into the second nature is to be understood as self-transformation, and this gives Bertram the ground to articulate what he thinks is the Hegelian conception. In this model, what is considered the first nature is what the subject takes it to be and self-reflectively alienates itself from. The relation to it is also self-reflectively determined. It then makes this process a continuous and endless endeavour of self-transformation and self-initiation. In the Kantian framework, the conceptual structures were given and only needed to be introduced to, and here they are the medium through which the above process takes place (Bertram, 2020, p. 74).

Again, nature here is considered subjectively, as the inner natural principle led to be controlled, so to say, by the second nature, i.e., rationality, as reality for Hegel is construed through the constant sublation of concepts. As Hegel states in *The Science of Logic*:

the other, taken solely as such, is not the other of something but is the other within, that is, the other of itself. — Such an other, which is the other by its own determination, is *physical nature*; nature is the *other of spirit*; this, its determination, is at first a mere relativity expressing not a quality of nature itself but only a reference external to it. But since spirit is the true something, and hence nature is what it is within only in contrast to spirit, taken for itself the quality of nature is just this, to be the other within, that *which-exists-outside-itself* (in determinations of space, time, matter). (Hegel, 2010, pp. 91-92)

We can see from this passage that physical nature (which is linguistically a tautology) is seen here as ‘the other’, this alienated otherness or nature that is opposed to culture through alienation. ‘The other’ is an immanent notion, it exists for itself in opposition to itself and is here equated with physical nature. If we take the second nature to be everything that stands as a production of rational abstraction (the Hegelian Spirit, so to speak), then, physical nature, which should be thought of as the first, is immanent to the second. This brings us back to the point that there is no real separation between the first and the second nature, since the first nature is already in relation to, and even produced by, the second nature.

Similarly, we should always see ourselves as agents in a mutually constitutive relationship with the first nature. However, the first nature is a result of alienation, and, at the same time, it does not exclude our subjectivity. Hegel’s treatment of nature appears in his diverse body of work but is approached in a similar way. In his *Lectures on the Fine Arts*, for example, when describing natural beauty, he asserts that “in the free world of the spirit, mere regularity recedes before living subjective unity. Now of course, nature in general, contrary to the Spirit, is existence external to itself, yet regularity prevails in it only where externality as such remains the predominant thing” (Hegel, 2010, p. 136).

An important aspect connecting Hegel with Adorno is the revival of the notion of

³ Importantly, although Adorno is not really under consideration, his text *The Idea of Natural-History* is cited particularly on this point.

the second nature by Georg Lukács in his *Theory of the Novel* (Lukács, 1994) His contribution is important here as well to emphasize the direction our interpretation of the second nature is taking. The world of the second nature, or “the world of convention”, as he puts it emerges when he talks about the epic and the novel. In his idea, it is a completely alienated world, lost beyond recovery: “[...] it is a charnel-house of long-dead interiorities; this second nature could only be brought to life—if this were possible—by the metaphysical act of reawakening the souls, which, in an early or ideal existence, created or preserved it; it can never be animated by another interiority” (Lukács, 1994, p. 64). While Lukács’ tone anticipates the gist of Adorno’s diagnosis of modernity, it is of importance to note the final part – another interiority will never animate the supposed first nature because the latter is an interiority itself, and our only way of a rational access to the world is through the second nature; hence, it is a charnel house of all that we have known and conceptualised.

Adorno and Second Nature

Turning to Adorno and his views on second nature, it has to be said that, as with many concepts that Adorno takes up, their use in a way fleets between contexts, e.g., when ‘fetishism’ is invoked, it acquires both psychoanalytical and Marxian connotations, they intertwine and are in a way transient. The reason for this has to do with his methodological approach: what the concept has become and how it is invoked is always more important than its genealogy. When it is invoked, it already contains its historicity. He puts it well in his text *The Essay as Form*:

[...] essay refuses to be intimidated by the depraved profundity according to which truth and history are incompatible and opposed to one another. If truth has in fact a temporal core, then the full historical content becomes an integral moment in it; the a posteriori becomes the a priori concretely and not merely in general, as Fichte and his followers claimed. (Adorno, 2019, p. 35)

This is also true of the notion of the second nature, which is treated in a similar way but has a legacy in the German philosophical thought. As Robert Hullot-Kentor remarkably showed in his dissertation on the subject, the second nature became a Lutheran way of giving a solution to natural history – the internalisation of transcendence:

The key inheritance of German thought from the age of Luther is summarized as the transformation of *secunda natura*, the Greek doctrine of the perfectibility of nature, into second nature, the natural-historical phenomenon of the appearance of society as a model of an irrevocably fallen first nature. (Hullot-Kentor, 1985)

In Adorno’s view, this dynamic can be seen as being under scrutiny; on the one hand, there is a sense of something irrevocably lost, but, at the same time, it never existed before it was understood from the conceptualised, secondary, conventional standpoint, i.e., human rationality. Moreover, the dialectic between nature and history as unresolved is always present; how to account for something radically new and spontaneous (historical)

and static or given (natural)? The two aspects seem to coincide and pose challenges both historically (accounting for events that happen in history) and ontologically (of how things are). It can also be formulated as a problem of predetermination and contingency. And it can also inflect the stakes of our relationship with what we call nature and the climate crisis: we need an account of nature that is not fully determined and yet in some sense regulative or, say, normative.

Adorno declares that the idea of natural-history is conceived in a specific way; it is neither history in the prescientific sense of the history of nature, nor an object of natural science (which essentially takes nature to be an immutable whole, and its vicissitudes are understood as inherently natural). The concept is meant to “dialectically overcome the usual antithesis of nature and history” (Adorno, 2006, p. 252–53), and, by that, Adorno meant that there is a certain need to solve the problem of historicist relativism, which he saw in the neoontological and mostly Heideggerian attempt. Heidegger, who would become the main nemesis of Adorno in many later texts, for different reasons, is still quite influential in this text. The understanding of nature as an outer world that can only be accessed through the second nature can be read in *Being and Time* as well, e.g., when Heidegger says that “the phenomenon of ‘Nature’, as it is conceived, for instance, in romanticism, can be grasped ontologically only in terms of the concept of the world—that is to say, in terms of the analytic of *Dasein*” (Heidegger, 2008, p. 94, H. 65). However, Adorno opposes the idea that history and nature can be subsumed under the quality of human existence; this, according to him, amounts to modifying its logic, or misfires at “mastering the empirical.” The ‘accidental’ or ‘factual’ becomes a category, and, despite being logically consistent, this move, according to Adorno, is towards tautology, which fails at its initial endeavour (Adorno, 2006, p. 256–57). The second nature is “the nature of semblance [*Schein*] in that it presents itself as meaningful and its semblance is historically produced” (Adorno, 2006, p. 267). The notion of semblance itself is immensely important in his project as a whole; the world, in a sense, only reveals itself as a certain semblance, and this can only be accessed in a reflective and negative way. Semblance, then, can be understood as that which conceals nature beneath its conceptual appearance. As seen above, for Hegel, the second nature as otherness is part of a mutually constitutive process and is also an immanent notion at the same time. “The Idea of Natural-History” became an early attempt to juxtapose the notions of nature and history in such a way, that they become “mediated in their apparent difference” (Adorno, 2006, p. 253). At the same time, Adorno notes the division of the world into nature and spirit, or nature and history, which he attributes to subjectivistic idealism (we could also say Hegelianism). Ultimately, he aims at a concrete unity of nature and history, although he does not give us a positive formulation, and with a good reason, since, for him, it can only be approached negatively. At the same time, as noted by Jay M. Bernstein when commenting on *Negative Dialectics*, reason itself must be considered as something that has a natural origin, as coming from prehistory, hence, “[w]hat is being asked for is not a better theory of reason, but a reflective acknowledgement by reason that its force is not its own, and that it cannot utterly transcend its natural context

without self-defeat” (Bernstein, 2001, p. 259).

The other important part is Adorno’s interpretation of Benjamin, as Lukács helped to situate the problem of interpreting “this alienated, reified, dead world” (Adorno, 2006, p. 261) Benjamin’s analysis of allegory points to transience, which, according to Adorno, has an alternative logical structure, which is *a constellation* (Adorno, 2006, p. 263). This means that the idea of history, like the idea of nature, functions within a constellation in which its meaning is not clarified by each of them, but is fleeting. For, as Adorno’s interpretation of Benjamin puts it:

Nature, as creation, carries the mark of transience. Nature itself is transitory. Thus, it includes the element of history. Whenever a historical element appears it refers back to the natural element that passes away within it. Likewise the reverse: whenever “second nature” appears, when the world of convention approaches, it can be deciphered in that its meaning is shown to be precisely its transience. (Adorno, 2006, p. 264)

The transience of meaning is then what is accessible when we think of nature in historical terms, this transience is also what is fleeting and cannot be fully grasped. This alone seems sufficient to understand how this anticipates negative dialectics – one can only hope to mediate between concrete concepts, without determination. As a representation of nature, it can only be understood in relation to the historical circumstances that produced it and the conceptual apparatus that contributes to its semblance. It is a cautious approach that avoids universalising and false identity principles, but it also links our relationship to the nature we conceptualise through a critical lens.

The second nature might appear to be of secondary importance, or perhaps it might appear to be an obstacle within the questions posed in our investigation. After all, the second nature is the ‘charnel house’, the dead nature, and the idea is to grasp the non-identical that is concealed beneath its conceptuality. My argument, however, stands for the recognition of this notion as an important factor when considering access to what is considered natural. The so-called first nature, as we have already stressed, already belongs to the second, as it is reckoned through the process of reification and alienation. Yet, by considering this dialectical relationship, we can begin to think about where our understanding fails, and what is nonidentical when it comes to questions of subjectivity, education, and, perhaps, the notion of milieu.

Adorno’s critique of Hegel’s natural philosophy

In a way, the Adornian motion towards the non-identical has to do with what underlies such an understanding of the second nature in relation to Hegel’s dialectics *en masse*. This ‘otherness’, which nevertheless does not exclude the subject, is to be understood in terms of what Adorno perceives as a coercive tendency towards totality. Indeed, resistance to the absolute is one of the main impulses for the emergence of the critical theory itself. Adorno’s treatment of Hegel is complex – his general theoretical axis can be understood as both a continuation and a critique of Hegel. This is true of his *Negative Dialectics*, where the notion of the non-identical is most thoroughly treated, but can be

seen sharply in one of his three studies on Hegel from 1959, *The Experiential Content of Hegel's Philosophy* (Adorno, 1993) According to Adorno, “[i]f the subject-object toward which his [Hegel’s] philosophy develops is not a system of reconciled absolute spirit, spirit nevertheless experiences the world as a system” (Adorno, 1993, p. 87). The motion towards totality is itself important, as is the logical insight of double negation that guides Adorno’s dialectic (Brunkhorst, 1999, p. 64). However, its main impasse is the claim that the truth can be revealed unanimously, through absolute mediation, and that it acquires positive teleology:

The claim that he discloses the particular along with the whole becomes illegitimate, because that whole itself is not, as the famous sentence from the *Phenomenology* would have it, the true, and because the affirmative and self-assured reference to that whole as though one had a firm grasp of it is fictitious. (Adorno, 1993, p. 87)

Taking this understanding of what is the second nature, the nature of semblance, further, the Hegelian understanding of the relation to nature as self-reflectively determined must be left to the conditioned rather than to the possibility of the absolute, and this is roughly how the non-identical functions here. It must be understood as a resistance to totality and the claim to unconditioned truth. To do away with it is a tendency that can be observed in the ecomodernist and postmodernist conceptions of nature criticised by Anne Fremaux.

At the same time, by identifying nature *with* the nonidentical per se, one risks doing another fallacy, that of a tautology which Adorno saw in Heidegger and his *Dasein*; subsuming something irreducible (nature) under the notion of nonidentity turns it into a category and cuts it off from negative dialectics. Similarly, one can well transpose the particular into particularity and follow “the practice of a society that tolerates the particular only as a category, a form of the supremacy of the universal” (Adorno, 2004, p. 334). This would be a Hegelian motion, for whom, according to Adorno, “order is good a priori” (Adorno, 2004, p. 337). So even if the Hegelian version of the second nature sees the secondary character of the so-called *first* nature, its claim to totality still believes in its positive mastery.

Coming back to Adorno and his dictum of turning to the subject, it is clear that the procedure of understanding the dynamic of how nature can only be accessed as secondary is crucial for setting in motion the critique, that is up for the subject to undertake. As noted by Adorno, “education must take seriously an idea that is by no means unfamiliar to philosophy: that anxiety must not be repressed” (Adorno, 2005, p. 198, translation amended). This anxiety appears as a shudder in the face of non-subsumable and nonidentical nature. Approaching nature and what we consider to be the environment dialectically means resisting the totalising tendency to think of it as given and within human grasp, as well as resisting the idea that we ‘own’ the world. The change in our understanding, as well as in our education, should go hand in hand with Snaza’s point that “every subject is constantly being acted upon by a range of objects in its milieu” (Snaza, 2017, p. 505). We have hinted at the notion of the milieu in the beginning, and, importantly, it can also

be approached dialectically. The challenge of learning and understanding nature, thus, will be a radical shift of focus in considering our milieu, and its negativity.

Conclusions

The concept of the ‘second nature’ has been a key notion in underlining the separation between subjectivity and nature, understood as ‘the other’. Looking at it from Adorno’s perspective, we have been able to identify crucial points in a broader tradition that Adorno inherited and critically developed. To quote Adorno again, the second nature “remains the negation of any nature that might be conceived as first” (Adorno, 2004, p. 357). Thus, the second nature might appear as an obstacle, and this seems appropriate; the second nature is that which is reified, commodified and alienated. It can only be overcome conditionally, i.e., negatively, from the very standpoint that is the second nature. In other words, it is a nature of semblance that can only be recognised as such. This recognition could be seen as one of the central aims of this paper.

In the realm of education, by considering this dialectical relationship, we can begin to think about where our understanding of nature fails and what the nonidentical stands for when we consider nature as such. In responding to Nathan Snaza and his call for a posthumanist education, we may yet achieve a certain “turn to the subject,” called for by Adorno in *Education after Auschwitz*. It is a task for the subject to resist the claim to positive mastery of the world and, consequently, to begin to adopt a humbler approach which would question the individual’s agency, their ability to ‘own’ the world and their place within the environment and, beyond that, their milieu.

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