



# Journal of Adorno Studies



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## Editors' Introduction Theodor W. Adorno: Between Critical Receptivity and Spontaneous Openness

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The *Journal of Adorno Studies* explores the multifaceted work of Theodor W. Adorno and its contemporary intellectual, cultural, and political potential. Facilitating exchanges between scholars, intellectuals, and artists, the journal publishes scholarship that thinks with and against Adorno as much as about him. Taking inspiration from the breadth of Adorno's work, the journal's orientation is explicitly interdisciplinary and therefore encourages critical investigations of art, music, media, culture, society, politics, and philosophy.

Each issue of the *Journal of Adorno Studies* consists of a thematic section and a free essay segment. An additional section, "Polemics and Encounters," examines the context(s) in which Adorno lived and worked while analyzing the often-fraught dynamics of correspondence, affinity, and engagement with his myriad interlocutors. New translations of Adorno's texts and reviews of current publications will add to the tapestry of contemporary scholarship on his work and legacy.

The *Journal of Adorno Studies* is double-blind peer reviewed and appears annually. It welcomes original contributions on hitherto overlooked zones of engagement within Adorno Studies and the Frankfurt School—such as feminism, post-colonial discourses, queer studies, and animal studies, to name but a few—and is especially interested in perspectives from scholars based in regions such as Latin America, East and South Asia, and Africa, among others.

This first issue of the *Journal of Adorno Studies* introduces many members of the community of colleagues and scholars that comprise the journal's editorial committee and board. In the thematic section, "Kaleidoscops," we reflect on the contemporary significance of Adorno's work from a host of different viewpoints, offered by short, partly aphoristic essays. The term "Kaleidoscops" gestures towards Adorno's penchant for the "aesthetic telescopes" of nature, which he experienced through the haptic toys of his childhood. The image of the kaleidoscope also constitutes a visual counterpart to the musical structures of repetition and variation. It serves as a fitting metaphor for the constellation of essays included in this volume, which, while varying in lengths and styles, correspond with each other to create an image of our peculiar moment of time and the state of critical theory. The essays address, *inter alia*, the ongoing importance of Adorno's psychoanalytically-informed critique of culture, language, art, and aesthetics, as well as questions of identity-thinking, the accelerating ecological catastrophe, and the enduring power of utopic moments of metaphysical thinking, however fragile.

The free essay section of this first issue of the *Journal of Adorno Studies* opens with a brilliant and timely contribution by Michael Schwarz on Adorno's public lectures. In it, the crucial role that Adorno played as a—or, perhaps, *the*—public intellectual in West Germany during the 1950s and 60s takes shape. Here we encounter a figure who defies the stereotypical image of a cultural mandarin, not incautiously confident of a public capable of engaging with new, critical, and complex thoughts and ideas. The spontaneity Adorno expected of and welcomed from non-academic and academic audiences alike was also, as Schwarz reminds us, at the very heart of his own praxis of lecturing, which was structured around the principle of "organized spontaneity."

The spontaneous, open-ended quality of Adorno's art of quasi-improvised lecturing is analogous to the dedication which, as he often argued, the interpretation of musical works demands. We are therefore particularly excited to publish for the first time in English Adorno's radio lecture "Beautiful Passages (*Schöne Stellen*)."<sup>1</sup> Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Jeremy J. Shapiro's elegant translation emphasizes not only the scintillating character of Adorno's lectures, which Schwarz so eloquently describes, but also Adorno's attentiveness to the unique "color" of the particular. In this text we hear the voice not of the

aesthete, but of the sensitive critic who insists that our understanding of musical works be nourished by an openness to their aura—an aura that makes itself felt when particular *beautiful passages* appear to transcend the totality of the individual composition. It is in his insistence on a critical receptivity and spontaneous openness that the “underlying goal” of Adorno’s lecture, as Nichol森 and Shapiro put it in their introduction, converges with the overall aim of his lecturing: to help “develop within the realm of aesthetic experience a kind of autonomy and freedom from reified stereotypes and ‘false consciousness’ that is essential to critical experience, thought, and imagination.”

It seems particularly apt to us to open this first free essay section with contributions that remind us of the significance of receptivity and spontaneity for critical thinking. In an age when partisanship and the compulsion to sacrifice one’s individuality seem to trump critical ambivalence, and ever more spaces of reflection are stifled by instrumental pressures of commodification and digitization, *Mündigkeit* from below, in the sense Adorno practiced it, seems to still hold out its as yet unredeemed promise in our increasingly illiberal times.

The section “Polemics and Encounters” opens in this first issue with a fascinating sketch by Günther Sandner of the confrontation between Adorno (and Horkheimer) and Otto Neurath, one of the most productive and original socialist intellectuals of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whose political program was not far removed from that of Critical Theory. This section is a testament to the fact that Adorno’s work was developed not only in his official publications but also in correspondence, discussions, and lectures, where the spontaneity of his judgment and critical stance becomes clearly legible. The boundary between concept and polemic, logic of thought and *ad hominem* claim, is often subtle, shifting, and permeable. Not only does Adorno’s thought not recoil from this boundary, it occasionally transgresses it, even to the point where it comes perilously close to enacting a kind of violence. For example, as Sandner notes, Adorno’s letter to Horkheimer dated June 25, 1936, refers to the “sadistic pleasure” to be had in “literally murdering” philosophical opponents.

This first issue inaugurates the process of critically reviewing scholarship on Adorno’s work and its legacy with Emile Ike’s review of Chris O’Kane and Werner Bonefeld’s edited volume *Adorno and Marx: Negative Dialectics and the Critique of Political Economy* (2022). After the cultural turn of the past decades, it is becoming ever clearer that Adorno’s contemporaneity has to do, in part, with the way his philosophical ideas are inextricable from the critique of political economy, at the heart of which stands reflection on the manifold social and cultural ramifications of the “real abstraction” of the commodity form as the embodiment of what Marx called “dead labour.”

The *metaphysical* meaning of death lies at the heart of Adorno's magnum opus *Negative Dialectics* and constitutes a profound reflection on mourning, melancholy, and remembrance. Consequently, the journal also regards itself as the site of remembrance of what Adorno scholar and translator Christian Lenhardt called "anamnestic solidarity" with recently deceased scholars, writers, artists, and producers who strove to work in Adorno's critical spirit. Accordingly, the issue includes an obituary by Jeff Noonan remembering Deborah Cook, former member of the editorial board of this journal (then known as the *Adorno Studies Journal*) and author of important books and articles on Adorno. Additionally, Gerhard Schweppenhäuser, editor of the *Zeitschrift für kritische Theorie*, reflects on the powerful impact of Hans-Magnus Enzensberger on post-war Germany.

The *Journal of Adorno Studies* is the reincarnation of the *Adorno Studies Journal*, which published three issues, and was originally founded by Kathy Kiloh and Martin Shuster. These issues will be made available in due course on our website. Many dear friends and colleagues have been deeply supportive of the relaunching of this journal, which has faced unexpected delays in production. In particular, we would like to thank Michael Schwarz of the *Adorno Archiv* in Berlin, as well as Henry Pickford, Surti Singh, and Pierre-François Noppen of the *Association for Adorno Studies*. We are very grateful to Kathy Kiloh and Martin Shuster whose excellent work we aspire to build on. We are also grateful to Mimesis Press, and especially to its director Roberto Revello, for having believed in the project and included it in its vast catalogue of journals and supported its realization. We also thank our Managing Editor, Morgan Young, who has performed heroically under difficult personal circumstances, and copyeditor, Cameron Duncan, for their excellent, assiduous work, as well as the Associate Dean of Research at SFU, Steeve Mongrain, and Huyen Pham, Communications Coordinator and Acting Manager of the Department of Global Humanities, SFU, for their administrative support. Finally, we acknowledge the generous financial support of Simon Fraser University's Publications Fund and the Institute for the Humanities, without which it would not have been possible to launch the *Journal of Adorno Studies* in its current form.