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

Samir Gandesha, Johan Hartle, Antonia Hofstätter, Han-Gyeol Lie, Stefano Marino

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, "Kaleidoscopics," we reflect on the contemporary significance of Adorno's work from a host of different viewpoints, offered by short, partly aphoristic essays. The term "Kaleidoscopics" 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 stuctures 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*)." 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 Nicholsen 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 20th 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.

# Kaleidoscopics

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# Parataxis in Primordia

Robert Hullot-Kentor

Depend on going a lifetime in English without coming across the word parataxis. The nation in its habitus values plain speaking that at least purports to get straight at the topic and, as is well known, would rather skip rhetoric and its expertise. On the rare occasion, however, when that particular rhetorical term gained some general, if technical usage, as it did briefly in the 1950s in Harry Stack Sullivan's interpersonal theory of psychiatry as "parataxic distortion," it described the reality of individuals speaking in parallel fantasied miscomprehension past one another. That lesson should not be sloughed. But note that the interpersonal pathology, as Sullivan conceived it, is curiously identified as the intrusion of a rhetorical form on an otherwise healthy world of direct communication.[1] Paradoxically, the same ethnological animus is at least partly responsible for the fact that the term parataxis is then characteristically left aside in early schooling when the prohibition is established on the use of "and" as the first word

1 Harry Stack Sullivan, *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* (New York: Norton, 1953), 18-19, 342-343.

of any sentence. What is supposedly faulty in the construction is thus left inertly opaque and this may remain to preoccupy the attentive student with the question of how it then ever occurred that a semi-archaic priest class fixed on that singularly embargoed word to initiate a sequence of thirty-one testimental verses that to this day stands as the most exalted and sublime text in the Western tradition. The verses persist in such universal familiarity that at their slightest invocation any mind will spontaneously and even correctly begin to fill out the ellipses, "And the earth was without form…And God said…And God saw the light…And God set the firmament… And God saw everything…" The majestic tone stands unassailable, like it or not. All the same, as the passage is thought through with an eye for third grade stylistics and puzzlement at the trivial construction, it must be a surprise to discover that its prodigious character depends entirely on the unconscious experience of the otherwise proscribed "And." For the conjunction used in this manner turns out to be an extraordinarily ingenious technique, perhaps ages in the making, for prescinding from any claim of the mere creature to comprehend the creator's intention and purpose.[2] It is "And…" that effects the infinite disproportion between a self-effacing speck of dust and the divinity and thus projects the awe-filled vastness of creation that the passage achieves. The profundity of this cosmic projection indicates that the act of self-diminishment that inheres in "And…" is by no means a sign of helplessness, but on the contrary internally comprises a gesture that authoritatively arrogates to itself the obliterative intention of the divinity toward any conjunction that would logically assert a capacity for subordination. Implicitly, paratactical "And…" condemns to extinction any hypotaxis—e.g. "Because"—that would presume, in flagrantly heretical despair, to conjoin sacred verses, as if it possessed the causal high ground and could answer the question why, and was perhaps even prepared to argue about it.

Parataxis, then, is a technique—possibly devout—for self-subordination to its own content. In its modern development, however, especially in the essay as form in philosophy and in psychoanalytic listening and treatment in psychology,[3] parataxis has been more important for what is beneath the heavens than beyond them since, for centuries, whatever the claims pro or contra, there is no alternative

2 Eric Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar," in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953).

3 Theodor W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form," trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor and Frederic Will, *New German Critique*, no. 32 (Spring/Summer 1984): 151-171. Apposite to the discussion of parataxis as style, Adorno wrote to Peter Suhrkamp, "Aber das einzige, woran ich wirklich Freude habe, ist eben doch die Herstellung 'heiliger Texte.'" ("But the only thing I really enjoy is still making 'sacred texts.'"). Psychoanalysis does not generally use parataxis in theory construction or employ the term in describing the psychoanalytical technique, but from a vast literature; see, for instance, Theodore Reik, *Listening with the Third Ear: The Inner Experience of a Psychoanalyst* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983).

to the primacy of nature. Yet even in its modern development, it can sometimes be found allied with the West's primordial paratactical work. Here to read, for instance—below—is a passage that could only have been written post world war. The passage, obviously, is not to be *Genesis* but it is a genesis, probably the last one. And while "or" substitutes for "and," the unprepossessing paratactical articulation once again arrogates to itself the force of what it is itself subject to, though this time self-consciously, as an individual voice in full self-possession. And while no trace whatsoever of awe in the universe can be located, this perception has not exactly vanished but, in the form of terror, become internal to the mind of the writer who, in confrontation with this force, is reduced to considerably less than a speck of dust, the immediately experienced source of its own lyrical tone. The passage is an epigram taken from Wallace Stevens' "Adagia":

> If the mind is the most terrible force in the world, it is, also, the only force that defends us against terror. (or)
> The mind is the most terrible force in the world principally in this that it is the only force that can defend us against itself. The modern world is based on this pensée.[4]

Whatever slightest inkling of syllogism this adage may bear, a construction along the lines of "all men are mortal" cannot be articulated by a non-subordinating conjunction. And Stevens has placed "(*or*)" in external proximity to the two phrases, prominently, and certainly not as an afterthought. The result is spatial form.[5] Something in the passage is more there to be seen than what can be directly concluded. This is not a rejection of the capacity for drawing conclusions, however, even if judgement is no longer immediately sequential. But neither are conclusions relativized as plural, since the adage itself is a definition, if of an unusual kind. The standard of truth to which it appeals is fulfilled when, in an aesthetics reaching back to Dante, what is seen cannot be unseen. That whiff of syllogistic thus gives way to the puzzle of discerning and comprehending the difference between two broadly similar sentences—engaging the mind's simplest, most distinctive and compelling power, that of comparison—as the condition for understanding the last line of the adage, its *pensée*.

When parsed apart and reconstructed, then, the adage in whole is seen to present an alternative without choice. For if the "*mind is the most terrible*"—terrible, not in the sense of the worst but of the most fearsome—"*force in the world*;" and if the mind is all that can *also* defend us against *terror*, as if there might be another terror in this world; "(*or*)" if the mind is above all—that is, *principally*—the only force that can defend us against *itself*, then the mind is this *terror*. Logic has become

4 Wallace Stevens, "Adagia," in *Collected Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1997), 911.

5 Joseph Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

a capacity for voice, how the adage speaks, not its negation. It leaves nowhere else to turn in this world except to what is most fearsome, to the terror that is the only defense against itself. This choiceless choice—says Stevens—is the *pensée* on which the modern world is based, call it its primordia, its premise and its definition no less than a conclusion. And what else would there be to say about this adage, at this point, except perhaps that Pascal's well known *pensée*—elsewhere quoted by Stevens that "the eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me," a phrase that is itself sometimes held to be the very first glimpse at what modern means—here receives its decisive amendment in a realization first convincingly achieved only in the universal cognition of the abbreviation *WW* as it awaits full numeric tabulation. And, if so, if Stevens engages Pascal's *Pensées* not just as a learned reference, then the stance of the adage itself is not that of a commentary on its perception; it is not a reference to its topic that then comes to various conclusions along the way. It is itself conceived in recognition of its own thinking that here is mind in its self-possessed solitude writing and as an expression of the only defense we have against our ownmost force. One thus understands not only why it is said that to be modern is necessarily to be anti-modern, but why every development of radical modernism emerged in some permutation of this idea, now evidently inaccessible to us. One even understands that Stevens, who thought that poetry, itself necessarily composed of what is most fearsome, should "help people live their lives"—in distant and even unrecognized kinship to Matisse and Mondrian—and had no choice but to become a master in the repurposing of logical particles, sometimes in the penumbra of syllogism; as is familiar to anyone who has laid in bed night after night and, "nothing himself, beholds/ Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is."[6] Which no less explains why important critics including R. P. Blackmur and Yvor Winters, not exactly unintelligent themselves, decided that Stevens' thinking was fundamentally unsound. Perhaps they never read Stevens' adage? And with absolutely nothing else in this discussion to add here, but since parataxis is more than a rhetorical technique and gains its ownmost potential only when it becomes a rhythm of constant finding, not just of looking, there might be something left to say—if not in the form of a commentary—for the adage that immediately follows next on the same page in Stevens' collection of epigrams, as freely binding as parataxis can be, by hiatus alone, that "the poet represents the mind in the act of defending us against itself."[7]

6 Wallace Stevens, "The Snowman," in *Collected Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1997), 8.

7 Stevens, "Adagia," 911.

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# Adorno, Critical Theory, and Ordinary Language Philosophy

Martin Shuster

Ever relevant, Adorno stresses that "we may not know what absolute good is or the absolute norm, we may not even know what man is or the human or humanity—but what is inhuman we know very well indeed."[1] In the background here is the potential critique of critical theory's lack of normative foundations. On what grounds do we even know the latter? Perhaps the best way to answer this question is to embrace the problem: take critical theory to start wherever the critical theorist finds herself. Each of us who recognizes suffering is an expert. What if that is all the justification we might need? Take critical theory to be a sort of practical enterprise where I aim to communicate my expertise about the world: the world is such that it produces *this* suffering in *this* way. This may be one way to understand Horkheimer's suggestion that the critical theorist and her "specific object are seen as forming a dynamic unity with the op-

1 Theodor W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Schröder, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 175.

pressed class."[2] Equally, we might cite here Marx's claim, in his famous 1843 letter to Arnold Ruge, to see critical philosophy as the "self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age." Various sites of oppression—and even cynical or brutal misuses of claims to oppression—allow us to register the full scope of suffering in the world. There are other experts than us. There are also those who would betray or make a mockery of such expertise. And still, we are each potentially an expert. As Adorno writes, we "must find the words that are alone legitimized by the state of truth in them," these words must hit upon where "truth dwells at the historical hour."[3]

I would draw here an analogy to the "ordinary language philosophy" practiced by philosophers like J. L. Austin and Stanley Cavell (which is not the sort of ordinary language philosophy criticized by Marcuse in *One Dimensional Man*). For Austin and Cavell, we are each authoritative when we speak. Our speech is also a kind of act, inviting others to see what we see. Austin goes so far as to claim that, "when we examine what we should say when, what words we should use in what situations, we are looking again not *merely* at words (or "meanings," whatever they may be) *but also at the realities we use the words to talk about*: we are using a sharpened awareness of words to sharpen our perception of, though not as the final arbiter of, *the phenomena*."[4] Take the notion of practice seriously: just as an expert in, say, plumbing may initiate you into seeing the—quite real—malfunction of your pipes, so too the critical theorist may initiate you into seeing the—equally, quite real—malfunction of society. Speech in this case is a claim to community. As with plumbing, any such speech may be rejected, for reasons compelling or not. In such cases, though, "we have to conclude that on this point we are simply different; that is, we cannot here speak for one another. But no claim has been made which has been disconfirmed."[5] Cavell notes that it is not the case that something false has been said, rather we have learned "that there is no us (yet, maybe never) to say anything about. What is wrong with his statement is that he made it to the wrong party."[6]

Seeing critical theory in close proximity to this sort of ordinary language philosophy is a way to inflect Adorno's claim that "cognition needs not less

2 Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 215.

3 Theodor W. Adorno, "Theses on the Language of the Philosopher," in *Adorno and the Need in Thinking: New Critical Essays*, eds. Donald Burke et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 36. Translation modified.

4 J. L. Austin, "A Plea for Excuses," in *Philosophical Papers*, eds. J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 182.

5 Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 20.

6 Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 20.

subjectivity, but more."[7] Even with (we might say exactly because of) the Frankfurt School skepticism about subjectivity, being a self means that I "do not know in advance how deep my agreement with myself is, how far responsibility for the language may run."[8] The full import of my claims may even emerge only in the context of others. Nonetheless, if I am to be a self, no matter how damaged, I must acknowledge that I am always speaking for others, and likewise them for me. In this way, the "alternative to speaking for myself representatively (for *someone* else's consent) is not: speaking for myself privately. The alternative is having nothing to say, being voiceless."[9] Speech is not solely the transmission of information, nor merely the circulation of exchange (although it can be and oftentimes just is exactly this). This need not mean we can no longer speak of justification or objectivity or truth. To return to the tired image, when a plumber tells you how to see your pipes, you may come to see them as he does (if the plumber, say, initiates you into seeing them in that way by means of explanation and education). When a mathematician explains a feature of mathematics to you, you also come to see that feature in the world; when a musician teaches you a scale, you now come to hear what they hear, and so forth. Objectivity need not be divorced from, let alone incompatible with, human interpretation or human sensibility. Still, to grasp such objectivity you may need certain training. This does not impugn the objectivity at hand. Rather it is to acknowledge, as Adorno does, that "direct communicability to everyone is not a criterion of truth."[10] Think equally here of John McDowell's analogies to color perception—just because some people divvy up the color spectrum differently (or perceive color incorrectly) does not mean that human sensibility isn't crucial to a proper understanding of color. What if the (moral) truths claimed by critical theory are of a kind?

Critical theory is then a distinct way of viewing the world. It is a practice into which one may be initiated. We are each of us potentially a critical theorist, each one capable of bringing particular insights to bear on this practical tradition. Critical theory is thereby transformative and constantly transforming. The relation between critical theory and praxis, then, is ultimately settled by our practices. Sometimes the struggle against oppression will involve one kind of activity: we must do something to reduce this kind of *suffering*. Other times, it will involve another kind of activity: we must come to see the world properly in order to understand *this* kind of suffering. Each one of us is then

7 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 40.
8 Cavell, *The* Claim *of Reason*, 24.
9 Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 28.
10 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* 41.

potentially at the center of the practice of critical theory (but not only us, since all speech is to and for someone). And that is all the objectivity and justification that we need.

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# The End of the Individual

Fabian Freyenhagen, Anastasios Gaitanidis, Polona Curk

Over 70 years ago, Theodor W. Adorno suggested the following diagnosis of his time:

> If such a thing as a psycho-analysis of today's prototypical culture were possible; [...] such an investigation would have to show that the sickness proper to the time consists precisely in normality. The libidinal achievements demanded of an individual behaving as healthy in body and mind, are such as can be performed only at the cost of the profoundest mutilation, [...] The regular guy, the popular girl have to repress not only their desires and insights, but even the symptoms that in bourgeois times resulted from repression.[1]

To be considered normal—"behaving as healthy in body and mind"—in the mid-20th century's Western societies required from the individual the "profoundest mutilation"; and thus constituted a *sick* normality.

1 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1951), 165–66; Theodor W. Adorno, "The Health unto Death," in *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. Edmund F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), §36; Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann et al., vol. 4 of 20 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970–1986), 188-89.

We encounter in this passage—as in other work by Adorno—an ambivalent reference to psychoanalysis. From his Marxist viewpoint, the psychic life of individuals can never be sufficient for explaining what happens at the level of society. He is also concerned that currents of psychoanalysis (he is presumably thinking here of "ego psychology") have become complicit in "social hygiene,"[2] contributing to maintaining (sick) normality by helping people adapt to it, rather than resist it.

Nonetheless, Adorno also recognizes that psychoanalysis can alert us to the hidden dynamics of sick normality—that it requires the repression of desires for people to become "regular," and how this is itself obscured. Psychic life can reveal something important about society; it can be an index of society's health or a symptom of social pathology. Attention to what emerges in the clinic can function like a kind of seismograph of the tremors running through society, of the earthquakes to come.

An example of such use of psychoanalysis is when Adorno unpacks the idea of mid-20th century sick normality further:

> No science has yet explored the inferno in which were forged the deformations that later emerge to daylight as cheerfulness, openness, sociability, successful adaptation to the inevitable, an equable, practical frame of mind. [...] The very people who burst with proofs of exuberant vitality could easily be taken for prepared corpses, from whom the news of their non-quite-successful decease has been withheld for reasons of population policy.[3]

Adorno explicates sick normality by exposing supposedly positive characteristics of people as deformations, suggesting that rather than signs of vitality, they are covering up deadened people who are not actually flourishing. The normal is sick; and in proper psychoanalytic vein, this pathological fact is not just covered up—but *covered up by its own reversal*: decease and corpses obscured by (purported) vitality and exuberance.

Importantly, in Adorno's uptake, psychoanalytic insights are historicized. Instead of reflecting a transhistorical, anthropological structure of human beings, Adorno suggests that what presented itself in Freud's clinic was a particular configuration in which society and individuals were intertwined at that time, whereby the pressures of 19th century restrictive sexual mores resulted in repressive sublimation and neuroses. This was not some kind of mark of alienation from or discontent with civilization as such; not some kind of existential *Unbehagen* human beings would experience in any society. Rather, it reflected a particular socio-historical juncture of Freud's time, in which the problem was a punitive superego.

2 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 165-66; *Gesammelte Schriften*, 4:188–189.
3 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 165-66; *Gesammelte Schriften*, 4:188–189.

What had happened—at least according to Adorno—by the mid-20th century was a change in how the society-individual relation was configured. And we can detect that change with the help of psychoanalysis. Adorno hints at that much by saying that the mutilations typical of his time "are laid down at even earlier phases of childhood development than are neuroses," resulting not "from a conflict in which instinct is defeated," but incapacitating "the opposing forces before they come to grips with each other."[4] Instead of the repressive sublimation of Freud's time, the (sick) normality of the mid-20th century—being a regular guy or popular girl—required repressive *de*sublimation, to use Marcuse's later phrase.[5] The punitive superegos had tended to give way to weak egos, in which even the symptoms of the repression of desires are repressed because conflict itself is prevented by the available prefabricated gratifications.

What, then, is the structure of *our* current neoliberal age, and how has the society-individual relationship changed since Adorno's mid-20th century writings?

Therapists are encountering new personality types—different from both the ones plagued by the unacceptable wishes that society demanded be repressively sublimated (as in the old neurotic types treated by Freud and his early followers), and their subsequent mid-20th century opposites compelled to "enjoy" in order for everyday suffering to be repressively desublimated into an artificial mask of "happiness."

What is showing up in the psychoanalytic clinic today suggests a loss of the self that is more extensive than Adorno ever contemplated in the 1940s. Barely able to maintain the façade of "normality," analysands plough through their neoliberal circumstances of various kinds; feeling constantly burnt-out, overwhelmed, and fragmented, mostly employing at least one, if not a variety of addictions (drugs, alcohol, sex, porn, internet, etc.) to simultaneously alleviate their suffering and self-destruct. Increasingly, they feel compelled to use different diagnostic categories of psychiatry to name their plight, believing that they can overcome their psychic suffering by using psychopharmacology, which could "fix" what is wrong with their brains.

This is a condition in which the main characteristic is not repressive (de) sublimation anymore: we might be experiencing the wholesale lifting or erasure of repression as a defensive structure, and its replacement by circumstances so overwhelming and overstimulating that external measures (diagnosis, medication, short-term therapies, addictions of various sorts) are

4 Adorno, *Minima Moralia,* 165-66; *Gesammelte Schriften,* 4:188–189.

5 Herbert Marcuse, "The Obsolescence of the Freudian Concept of Man [1963]," in *Five Lectures: Psychoanalysis, Politics and Utopia* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 44-61.

progressively required to keep the new personality types functioning at any cost. This shift has not just been noticed in the clinic, but also in cultural analyses of our "burnout society."[6]

The mid-20th century therapist's work was often criticized as focusing on "normalizing" individuals to get them back into the workforce. Nonetheless, there was a modicum of importance that individuals then could still have been felt to have for liberal society, even when the latter was crippling them.

Today's predominant modes of existence embody—literally, rather than consciously—the awareness that one's importance as an individual to the economy of unhinged shareholder capitalism is gone. The experience of the majority is one of increased replaceability, even disposability. As a result, one's individuality is gradually dismantled. Persons feel like ghosts, zombies, neither alive nor dead. The mode of existence in higher echelons is hardly better. Fancying themselves more important on the individual level, they are submitted to 24hr-availability, maddening competition, and a perpetual push towards self-improvement to increase their value to the system, until they are, ultimately, only able to keep going with the help of extreme distractions and various addictions. They too sense that there is no safety net, leaving everyone a misstep away from seeing their quantifiable "value" in the neoliberal system depreciated.

In such an environment, the self loses its integrity and becomes like "jelly" that needs a scaffolding to maintain its composure and function: this comes not only in the form of pills or other addictions but also relationships (with therapists, life coaches, yoga teachers, multiple partners, etc.), which eventually leads to more instability and self-destruction. The parts of the self that must be continuously destroyed to "carry on living" call for mourning, a feeling often deadened with ever-more pills. Therapy itself becomes about *management* of this state, of self-structure, of perpetual and continual crises: an active intervention rather than psychoanalytic work proper.

The clinic highlights the symptoms of the current social pathology: the huge discrepancy between the refrains of the society that "everything is possible" and "the world is your oyster" (depending only on your entrepreneurial spirit, ambitions, discipline, and grit), on the one hand, and the nonsensical reality of a society that pushes people to self-destruct to survive, on the other. The individual disintegrates at impact with such a society; for nothing else is possible. It is now normal to be sick—to self-destruct, to take pills, to have a diagnosis, to be in therapy. If you still *care* under these

6 Byung-Chul Han, *Müdigkeitsgesellschaft* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2010); *The Burnout Society*, trans. Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

conditions, you burn out—this is true as much of the analysands as of the analysts. For survival, you must play the game, for you can only maintain any semblance of "normality" by using its approved handrails.

Adorno's thesis of the end of the individual might be, if anything, truer to reality now than when he wrote about it in the mid-20th century. He might have been right, too, that psychoanalysis can at least help us recognize the features of the "normal sickness" inherent in the society-individual relationship, including—we suggest—those of neoliberalism that demolish the individual as the proper object of psychoanalysis. In other words, psychoanalysis is called to articulate the present conditions that are responsible for its own seeming obsolescence.

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# Below the Level, or Adorno's Posture of Thinking

Qianfan Zhao

"You can't even say that this individual is below the political cultural level of his country. Trump is permanently destroying that level."[1] Thus, Jürgen Habermas once ascribed the destructive effect of Donald Trump and his followers partly to the imbalanced development of the internet and social media. Chinese readers who attempt an analogous critical analysis of the unspeakable political culture of their own country would feel stung by the expression "below the level" and obligated to ask themselves: at what level of political and social reality are *we*?

As witnesses to the unparalleled collapse of the distinction between public and private domains within the "Great Firewall," while also having poor experiences of the "bourgeois political public sphere," they have to try to start out from the other side, as Adorno once did regarding the degeneration of human commu-

1 Jürgen Habermas, "For God's Sake, Spare us Governing Philosophers!" interview by Borja Hermoso, trans. Heather Galloway, *EL PAIS*, May 25, 2018, https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2018/05/07/inenglish/152568361 8145760.html.

nication in daily life: "The private relations between human beings seem to form themselves according to the model of the industrial 'bottleneck.' Even in the smallest community, the level is determined by the most subaltern of its members."[2]

Far from being elitist contempt for those at the lower level, Adorno's complaint asks for an inquiry into objective social conditions which lower it. The term "the model of the industrial bottleneck" alludes to the inevitable imbalance in capitalist industrialization on the basis of commodity exchange that is itself imbalanced. It is this imbalance that has invaded the innermost relationship between individuals and caused what Adorno names the "privation of [the] private," with which, according to him, the archaic inhuman under human beings has a chance to test its capability to "hijack" (*verschlagen*) human speech:

> For the sake of humanity, the conversation is restricted to what is nearest, most dull-witted and banal, even if only one inhuman visage is present. Since the world has hijacked speech from human beings, those who cannot be talked to are in the right.[3]

Although Adorno's tone could easily lead readers to believe that he would rather turn his back on "those who cannot be talked to," he does not actually personalize the argument against them, which is to say, identify those peevishly dependent on their self-identities. Instead, he reminds us that it is "for the sake of humanity" (*der Humanität zuliebe*) that the opportunity is given to the inhuman, and that we—"who are more differentiated, who do not wish to perish"—have to "remain strictly constrained to the consideration of everyone who is inconsiderate."[4]

Here, as he always does, Adorno exemplifies a paradoxical stance insisting on the nonidentical and incommunicable moments in human communication, which is concomitant with, as Habermas put it, "the paradoxical structure of thinking as totalizing critique"[5] in his philosophical discourse. But if we pay more precise attention to the postural moment than the declarative content of the "totalizing critique," it seems less a final denunciation than an endeavor to cling—"remain strictly constrained"(*bleibt...strikt verhalten)*—to thinking. Adorno demonstrates a posture of and toward thinking which is

2 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London/New York: Verso, 2005), 183; *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 208-209.

3 Adorno, *Minima Moralia,* 183-184.

4 Adorno, *Minima Moralia,* 184. Translation modified.

5 Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1987), 119.

both prepared for and enforced by a more desperate "ideal speech situation." In *Negative Dialectics,* he writes:

> But when a man can do nothing that will not threaten to turn out for the worst even if meant for the best, he will be bound to start thinking (zum Denken verhalten) – and that justifies him as well as the happy spirit. […] The horizon of such happiness need by no means be that of a transparent relation to a possible practice to come. […] Paradoxically, it is the desperate fact that the practice that would matter is barred which grants to thought a breathing space it would be practically criminal not to utilize.[6]

According to Adorno, a reference to some normal or normative standard (or its opposites such as an endemic convention, state of exception, or social pathology) is relevant only when it is applied to a test to find to what extent it cannot be counted as a standard anymore. Thinking varies its posture in response to each test—"test of the turn to nonidentity"[7]—and thus keeps adjusting to the shifting constellation in every "breathing space." This requires a dialectical combination of "speculative skill" with a micrological "immersion in particularity,"[8] which Adorno sees in Benjamin's *Das Passagen-Werk* (*Arcades Project*) and develops in his own way. While it seems that Benjamin fails to avoid a convergence of the metaphysical and the poetic stratum in his work, which, according to Adorno, is due to his "acceptance of materialistic dialectics as Weltanschauung,"[9] Adorno insists on the threshold between philosophy and aesthetics by carrying out dialectics as a mental posture penetrated by physical impulses. The impulses, as the sensational across the threshold, are stimulated bodily and at the same time stimulate thinking across its threshold, namely, thinking adjusts its posture and prepares itself for the unthinkable: "Without a practical visa, thinking should go as much against the façade as possible, should move as far as it is capable of moving."[10]

A way of thinking that could only—willingly or compelled—validate itself based on a certain discursive level is going to find its consolation in the role of "secondary critique." I model this term after Adorno's "secondary superstition"[11] to denote a simulated critique acting in the place where the original critical impulses, albeit embedded in individuals' own pri-

6 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London/New York: Routledge, 1973), 245; *Negative Dialektik. Jargon der Eigentlichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 242-243.
7 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* 154.
8 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* 28, 83.
9 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* 18.
10 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* 245.
11 Theodor W. Adorno, *Adorno: The Stars Down to Earth: And Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture*, ed. Stephen Crook (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), 36-37.

mary experiences, are organized and institutionalized by either political censorship or an administrative performance standard. As a result, thinking loses its posture as well as the capability to adjust itself to what is unthinkable. A secondary critique is contented to match with an ordered channel, according to which the incompatible parts of reality are left out of sync and outside the scope of what can be heard.

But reality has its own unidentified frequencies consisting of ceaseless, scarcely audible noises which could suddenly elevate themselves into roars and screams at events such as the triumph of Donald Trump or Shanghai's lockdown. The latter, even for those accustomed to living in a post-authoritarian regime, seems as much below the level as the former for those in a democracy. In the three months of lockdown, life was at the same time collapsed and condensed into a negative image of the question, "who is worthy of life?" just as a scream should be heard as language in its extremely expressive moment. Adorno's teaching is of crucial significance in the sense that it is this negative image and its expressive moment that demands thinking to ask, not "how should we think about this," but "what is that which still constrains us to think?" The question, seeking no propositional answer, is only to stir thinking into its posture, which looks as meaningless as the question itself, but with its minimal adjustment, impulses are triggered in a totally different direction: "All mental things are modified physical impulses, and such modification is their qualitative recoil into what not merely 'is.'"[12]

The shock and rage caused by an unexpected event, which are qualitatively the same as daily bodily impulses, constrain one to thinking of "their qualitative recoil" precisely because the "quantitative" one, as we saw, could be so easily borne down by the compression which seems endlessly endurable. It is not thinking's shame to imitate the compression in itself to transform the surplus of the impulse, which means, keeping its posture in being exposed to the objective preponderance that "can be experienced crassly day after day."[13] Every posture originates from the unendurable moment in endurance. This is the nonidentical moment of posture that we can experience in our own body. A posture of and toward thinking is an exposure of and to what seems unthinkable in everyday life. Its negative image, as Adorno claims, bears a light "reflecting transcendence."[14] This is an improbable promise for those who still hope to climb beyond—as the verb *transcendere* originally means in Latin—with most improbable postures.

12 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* 202.
13 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 300.
14 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* 404.

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# The Lure of Madness

Alastair Morgan

Since the early 1990s, the field of philosophy of psychiatry has developed and produced a range of interesting and important work.[1] This work can be broadly and rather crudely divided along analytic/continental lines. Analytic philosophy of psychiatry has been concerned with clarifying and interrogating key areas of contestation within psychiatric practice. There has been a focus on the nature of mental illness, clarifications of fundamental concepts such as the question of belief versus delusion, and the status of psychiatry as a medical science. Continental approaches have mostly drawn upon the rich history of phenomenological psychopathology and renewed that tradition through a turn to enactivist and embodied approaches in the philosophy of mind.[2] Attention here has been on understanding and outlining mental illness as an anomalous pre-re-

1 The following book series has published a lot of the important work in this area: https://global.oup.com/academic/content/series/i/international-perspectives-in-philosophy-and-psychiatry-ippp/?cc=us&lang=en&

2 A recent very fine example of this work is Sanneke De Haan, *Enactive Psychiatry* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

flective experience, focusing on themes of embodiment, lived time, and being-in-the-world. Up to now, there has been little attention to the first generation of the Frankfurt School when thinking about the philosophy of psychiatry. However, I think that Adorno's negative dialectical philosophy has a great deal to offer when thinking through questions of the relationship between madness and reason.

Phenomenological work in the philosophy of psychiatry begins with an encounter of strangeness, one of puzzlement and an inability to understand. There is a negative transcendental approach in phenomenology that outlines an understanding of the core pre-reflective conditions for existence through their absence in madness. This approach has much to say about the departures from reason and life in madness (lack of a sense of lived embodiment, lived time and being at home in the world). However, it tends to view madness as only a radical absence, a lack of life. Part of the problem for phenomenology is that it doesn't question the historical construction of its own concept of normality.

A positive dialectics of reason and madness involves a deeper interpretation of the difference between reason and madness that reveals an identity; within madness there lies purpose, survival, and adaptation. Justin Garson has recently termed this approach "madness-as-strategy"; an understanding that underlying the negative experiences of mental illness there is a kind of purpose and meaning, function and not dysfunction.[3] The ostensible difference between reason and madness is sublated in an identity.

One tradition that views madness as purposive is a strand of critical psychiatry that takes its inspiration from Thomas Szasz's famous assertion that mental illness is a myth. Such a tradition is a form of identity thinking. Madness can only be understood by translating it into a dominant concept of rationality; madness as survival, coping, adaptation, and self-preservation. One of the problems with such an approach is that madness is completely dissolved into a dominant form of rationality that itself remains unquestioned. Ultimately, the experience of madness is normalized as a form of instrumental reason. There is no such thing as madness, or even mental illness, only understandable and purposive reactions to negative life events.

A negative dialectical approach adds a different perspective, one that stresses the importance of heterogeneity and difference. However much one can assert and develop an identity of reason and madness beneath their ostensible difference, there remains a final non-identity, something recalcitrant to the demands of reason. For Adorno, philosophy begins with attention to this

3 Garson's wonderful book contrasts "madness-as-strategy" with "madness-as-dysfunction" as two paradigms across the history of madness, see Justin Garson, *Madness: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2022).

non-identity, this difference. There is always something nonidentical to reason in the experience of madness. This non-identity is not an absolute otherness. Negative dialectics requires a moment of identity between reason and madness. Approaches that search for purpose and meaning within madness respect this moment of identity. However, this identity itself is dialectical. Madness is not only understood as a form of reason, but reason too has its own pathology, its own history. The difference between madness and reason is constituted by a history of violence and suffering.

There is a twofold sense of contradiction in the negative dialectical relationship of reason and madness.[4] First, the concept of madness cannot be dissolved into reason without a remainder. There always remains something nonidentical to reason in the experience of madness. Second, contradiction also refers to an antagonism within society, the historical forms through which reason constitutes and reconstitutes itself through its own limit-experience of madness, but these historical formations of reason are characterized by violence and suffering. This approach enables an understanding of madness as illness (immediately a radical problem of individual flourishing/being-in-the-world) but at the same time madness is always a political as well as a clinical question. It is such an approach that I construct in my recent book on *Continental Philosophy of Psychiatry*.[5]

One of the important consequences of a negative dialectics is a changed concept of reconciliation. Reconciliation does not lie in an identity of differences but with a final sense of being at home with that which is alien. Negative dialectics attempts an anti-systematic philosophy, one that will always turn against itself, insist on an attention to the singular, on a priority of that which escapes a complete interpretation. In such an insistence on micrological philosophy, as Adorno terms it, there is a humility towards grand claims and a resistance to master narratives. There is also a belief that those instances that don't conform to systematic reason offer a space for an idea of care that lies in attention to difference.

Such an attention to difference is the mark of critical approaches in the philosophy of psychiatry that diverge completely from Szasz's problematic formulation of mental illness as myth. These new critical approaches view neurodivergent and mad experiences as providing a resource for resistance. They affirm difference as the blueprint for a "new sensibility" that can move

4 For this twofold nature of contradiction see Theodor W. Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), 1-2.

5 See Alastair Morgan, *Continental Philosophy of Psychiatry: The Lure of Madness* (Cham: Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2022).

beyond identity thinking and the dissolution of madness into reason.[6] It is in this stress on an attention to difference and an emphasis on heterogeneity that Adorno's concept of negative dialectics will find a new life in different forms of critique in the philosophy of psychiatry.

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6 The reference to a "new sensibility" alludes to Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969). For a brilliant reflection on questions of madness and recognition, see Mohammed Abouelleil Rashed, *Madness and the Demand for Recognition: A Philosophical Inquiry into Identity and Mental Health Activism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019). For a reflection on neurodiversity and Marxism see Robert Chapman, *Empire of Normality: Neurodiversity and Capitalism* (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2023).

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# *Durcharbeitung*: Adorno after Freud

Lydia Goehr

It is a mistake to pass over the term "durch" without pause. We need to ask after the work of the word to grasp the terms of a critical analysis that eschews neither the mediation of the dialectic nor the working or unfolding form of the aesthetic. The present remarks contribute to my current project on the mediating terms of analysis, of how "gender" and "race" from one perspective and "art" and "aesthetic" from another serve as mediating terms when sandwiched between "critical" and "theory" to prevent the outer terms from falling into stasis. By "analysis," I mean the three types that so dominated at least the first half of the twentieth century: logical analysis, music analysis, and psychoanalysis. Here, I ask only what it has meant to work through the losses of dialectical movement that may occur often in translation or in isolating sentences for the purposes of quotation. Many sentences, when set in relation to each other, as Horkheimer and Adorno insisted, prove true and false at the same time. What makes a sentence true is not exhausted by the logical form or grammar that joins words into meaningful wholes: what counts as much are the relations of the elements that

work in truth and falsity to make and break ideologies without which world-orders of power cannot do.

In 1959, in his popular address "The Meaning of Working Through the Past," Adorno recorded a finding from the post-war group experiments carried out at the Institute for Social Research: "[M]itigating expressions and euphemistic circumlocutions were chosen in the reminiscences of deportation and mass murder, or […] a hollow space formed in the discourse."[1] In German, the talk's title "Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit"—with its colon, its sense of provocation and questioning, and with its implied use of quotation marks—suggested that Adorno was going to rescue a proper way of working-through from what had been wrongly turned into a fashionable slogan, a way of working over or off a past situation to ensure that it left no troubling shadow in the present. "Aufarbeitung," as he used the slogan, was set against the term I believe he preferred but did not use—"Durcharbeiten." Whereas the *auf* of "aufarbeiten" modified the work as a reworking, rehabilitating, refurbishing, reprocessing, reconsidering, or recycling, the "durch" could keep the "auf" in check. Consider then retranslating the title: "The wrong meaning of…" or "The wrong way of working through the past." Or, better: "what it means "to work […] the past" with a suggestive ellipsis for the missing (and almost untranslatable) preposition. And consider next how well the ellipsis would suit the key sentence where an "or" brings the phrases "mitigating expressions" and "euphemistic circumlocutions" into precisely the troubled relation that allowed Adorno to describe the dominating tendency in post-war Germany to fill the hollowed space that had emerged in the public discourse with milder terms that could slide off the tongue quickly, easily, and without effort. Either we get the hollow space—the "Hohlraum" that suggests a cavity or lacuna, but then also an x-rayed space of vibrations beneath the surface—or we get the comforting filler. Contrary to the euphemisers, Adorno hoped to give the hollow space back to a public as a correlative of the terrifying blankness of the pages over which the history of mass murder was being wrongly written. Filling the pages quickly with the wrong words was how and why past actions and attitudes were coming into view not as true or new, but as false. What sort of work, now, was at stake when the stakes of speaking and writing, or remaining silent, were so high? The answer was the critical work of analysis, a "working through" of the distortions and deceptions in the many mirrors of reflection to expose the false fillers by which

1 Theodor W. Adorno, "Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, vol. 10:2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 555–572; "The Meaning of Working Through the Past," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 90.

persons individually and collectively went on as normal. Normality was arguably most at stake in the aftermath of catastrophe. Failing to work through a situation because one believed one had already worked it over left one with only a perfectly false identity between one's face and image in the mirror—an identity, that is, that left no living room for a proper work to be done.

In his 1914 article, "Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten," Freud described the dynamic in analysis, the psychic process, as a filling in of the gaps of a repressed memory that emerges given resistances built up. Filling in the gaps meant first, but not last, a transformational process of altering the state of memories from their being unconscious or unknown to their being conscious or known. There is nothing easy or smooth in altering a state of the mind. Freud described the dynamic process as necessitating displacements and transferences because the repressed memories as repressed cannot by definition or analysis be accessed directly. He called up the dreamwork, the interpretive enterprise, by which the resistance to the sort of remembering that results in the repression of memories begins to be broken down or dissolved. But what is left over after the dissolution? Not memories but an awareness of a special sort of experience for which "no memory can as a rule be recovered."[2] Moving away from remembering, Freud now assessed the repetition, the compulsion to act over and over again in a way that, despite any apparent satisfaction, does not satisfy. A patient does not remember anything of what has been forgotten and repressed, but acts it out "without, of course, knowing" that it is a repetition.[3] Because the analysis is designed to reveal the deception in the repetition, it must bring attention to the unwanted accompanying feelings of unease, confusion, defiance, shame, self-denial, and self-contempt. Were those feelings entirely absented, the patient would not come to the couch. It is precisely the inconsistency between one's action and one's reaction that leaves one with that uncanny nervousness that one is living doubled up or masked even though, when questioned, one holds one's tongue so as not to give the secret of one's discontent away. Having displaced the impulsion to remember by the compulsion to repeat, Freud noted the pathological character-traits, the repressed material of inhibitions and unserviceable attitudes that, showing themselves only as symptoms, disclose the protective armory worn so as to conceal what one safeguards in secret. The embattled terms suggest a test of one's mettle, as when the ego becomes weaponized against the id. The war is waged in a field constructed as though on solid ground but which in truth

2 Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis II)," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 12 (London: Hogarth Press, 1950), 149.

3 Freud, "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through," 150.

is sinking mud. Dismantling the weapons one by one is then the analytical work that paves the way toward a recognition and reconciliation, a path for something concealed by the symptoms to come far more to expression than to explicit articulation. (Here is the gesture toward the much needed indirection of the aesthetic.) The recognition is an uneasy toleration that one's compulsive habits and repetitions are not normal so that one cannot go on as one hitherto has done. Here, from Freud (alongside Hegel and Marx), emerges the condition (intrinsic also to a critical gender, race, and class analysis) of a tense normality premised on a split or divided consciousness.

For his always revisionary path of analysis, Freud used the term "durcharbeiten," to work-through, where the "through" necessitates not a direct route but the indirection of displacement and projection. This was the indirection that Adorno found in his many passages of mediation, but where the logical or formal unfolding of any idea does much more than yield a straightforward clarity or transparency. "Durchsichtigmachung," being another term to connote the work toward illumination and transparency, conceals the darkness or obscurity in the "durch" that goes into the analytical work of *Durcharbeitung*. To stress the concealment, we are led to a world of art-making and imagination where the normal is revealed as anything but, under the topsy-turvy conditions of a "verwalteten" world. Borrowing from the aesthetic domain, Freud described the waiting game, the suspensions and postponements of everyday life where actions have consequences. In a field of "useless" play, all literally life-changing decisions are set aside to give the mind the time and space to displace, project, and transfer—to work in waiting through the mirrors or reflections of the self to a point where one becomes conversant with the hold or protective armor of one's resistances, as though a door were opened to the repressed impulses or instincts that feed the resistances in the first place. But the door always being "as though" opened, less cures the patient than leaves the now patient more conversant and comprehending.

Years later, in 1937, having perhaps had too much time to reflect, Freud wrote his "Analysis Terminable and Interminable."[4] He wondered whether the "time-consuming" exposure, to render patent the latent material is really of the essence. Having begun with the burial of repressed memories, he arrived at the foundation of human instincts, the sex and death drives that, because they are biological, no amount of recognition and reconciliation can resolve. One works not to erase the drives but to live with them in their permanent tension. Freud's skepticism toward the working-through of analysis was a response in part to those analysts of mind whom he condemned as being in

4 Sigmund Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 18, (1937): 373–405.

too great a hurry to declare a cure or victory, a hurry that he identified with the tempo of American life to move quickly past the post-First World War misery of Europe. If working-through had turned to an efficient assessment or overcoming of the past, what better than to describe the loss of wealth, as Freud did, on the part of patients too willing or able to pay? Before Adorno, Freud refused the analysis that sells magic potions or is designed only to tame, discipline, or institutionalize the necessarily conflicted expressions of drives. He worried about a growing inertia, passivity, or easy acceptance literally in "letting sleeping dogs lie." He condemned an analysis of what is actual if the actual masks the potential or latent possibilities of altering current states of affairs. He further proposed a provisionality to counteract hardened solutions, or the sort of censorship that reinforced blind spots of error, or the noisy claims of an ego strength that was but a cover up for its weakness. Seeking the kernel of truth in the unresolved oppositions of competing and contradictory drives, he traversed a dynamic middle ground between life and death, homo- and heterosexuality, pulía (love) and veixos (strife)—to arrive at a working-through to a bedrock that finds no final settlement in either the bed or the rock.

When Adorno dismantled the post-war avoidances in working through the past, he silently displaced the "auf" with a "durch." Where the former suggested a work indifferently done in haste as a sort of reluctant duty, the latter took the time to locate the potential to break the hold, the fascination and enthusiasm, of fascism. Time, however, was again as much the issue as the space of a new estrangement, a discomfort that, in his 1945 remarks "What National Socialism Has Done to the Arts," allowed Adorno, with Horkheimer, to describe the barbarism in the cultural expression that the Nazis had paraded around as a social "massage," a promise with clear and direct rewards: "Kraft durch Freude."[5] He saw the unmediated "durch" as affirmed by a culture industry that traded an unmediated mass art, delivered with an American streamlining and efficiency and triumphalism. He proposed a counter-resistance to the massive resistance of a society to refuse the delivery of false promises. Only in a work (Arbeit) and in an art-work (Kunstwerk) that turns inward to its form, to its through-composing, through-construction, through-formation, does one reach the non-identifying moment of non-recognition and non-reconciliation to the social edifice of repression so well capitalized on in the massive industrial complex that is culture or mind. Mediating the "durch" enabled a power to disable the slogan that lies in the dominant ideology: "Ar-

5 Theodor W. Adorno, "What National Socialism Has Done to the Arts," in *Theodor W. Adorno: Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie et al. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 385.

beit macht frei." The thought of enlightenment—with the "auf" of *Aufklärung* demanding always more revisions of enlightenment's progress—came with a critical response to the mediation of the mind that was working through the times with the haste of urgency, so that, well-tempered, the mind might decide rather to slow down.

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# No Refuge for the Homeseekers

Sebastian Tränkle

Questions regarding the actuality of Adorno's thinking often ring hollow, posed time and again at various conferences and colloquia, which neatly comb through his oeuvre. Their aim is to identify the contemporary pertinence of his thinking, isolated from those aspects which appear to be of no more use. This tendency has informed a currently widespread attitude, which is articulated in the warning: one may only ever think with Adorno if one also always thinks against him. In short, Adorno's thinking is measured against what is considered actual, timely, present in theory and practice. One could hardly do more violence to him. For Adorno's thinking, above all, considers what is actual, timely, and present to constitute the very object of critique, and aspires for what is potential, untimely, and absent. This is the movement that animates his *critical* theory.

Adorno's critical theory is trenchant precisely where it appears to be offensive, irritating, or challenging. This is no coincidence. Instead of presuming that something is gained for all possible critique in the solidification of a normative foundation, his is a critical theory that

assumes the form of a negative moral philosophy. If the latter were not averse to all principles, unfolding instead in close contact with its socio-historical objects, one of its first principles would read: "[E]s gehört zur Moral, nicht bei sich selber zu Hause zu sein."[1] As in many other instances, this sentence, from the aphorism "Refuge for the Homeless" found in *Minima Moralia*, cannot be translated exactly. The English translation renders it as: "[I]t is part of morality not to be at home in one's home."[2] It thereby misses the crucial tension between the literal and the figural meaning. Adorno produces this tension by use of the German idiom "*bei sich selber* zuhause," which in the given context may mean both "at home *in one's home*" and "at home *in one's own self*." The aphorism is infamous for its final sentence about living rightly in the wrong life, maybe the most abused of all of Adorno's sentences. But it is also a prime example of his exemplary thinking, sustained by a playful ambiguity.

On the one hand, the aphorism deals, quite literally, with habitation, which has become precarious under conditions in which economization has stretched into the most intimate corners of private life. On the other hand, habitation is also evoked as a metaphor already established in social theory: its stated precariousness expresses a condition that Siegfried Kracauer, concretizing Georg Lukács' cultural-critical diagnosis by analyzing the late Weimar salaried masses, specified as "spiritually homeless."[3] There is a factual connection between the two meanings: what appears as a spiritual or cultural malaise is the implication of a social organization that, despite material abundance, systematically fails to satisfy basic needs such as housing.

Adorno's sentence, implying the immorality of being at home, exhibits the same twofold meaning. On the one hand, it refers to making oneself at home within one's own four-walled domicile, retreating into "a genuine, but purchased, stylish apartment."[4] Admittedly, such a retreat, which today defines the form of life of a post-bourgeois affluent milieu, is the luxurious variant of a wrong habitation. Adorno already had this in mind as he concurrently mentions a majority forced to dwell in trailer parks and slums. On the other hand, its more general meaning of being at home *in one's own self* turns the sentence into a maxim. However, within the framework of a negative moral philosophy, any maxim can only be formulated as a negation. Thus, the sen-

1 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 43.

2 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London/New York: Verso, 2005), 39.

3 Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, trans. Quentin Hoare (London/New York: Verso, 1998), 88. Adorno's aphorism reuses the title of the chapter containing this quote.

4 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 38. Translation altered.

tence spells out a rejection of subjective escapes out of objective, social misery. Such attempts are precisely the order of the day, and not only when it comes to habitation.

A materialist theory of society reveals such attempts to be modes of reaction to experiences of social crisis. The impossibility of being at home in the world fuels the urge to at least be at home in one's own self. Such a constellation, already described by Adorno, determines our present: all individuals experience their individual particularities as irrelevant for society; everyone is replaceable and interchangeable. At the same time, there is growing pressure to assert oneself, to throw everything one is and has into the struggle for self-preservation, that is, into the market and competition. The neoliberal activation of the individual seems above all to valorize its particularities.[5] They are declared to be an economic resource and treated as "human capital." Yet such an activation engenders a thorough adaptation of all individuals to the demands of the social whole. Consequently, the often politically motivated valorization of categories such as particularity, difference, and identity reveals its ideological quality.

The morality criticized by Adorno, which calls for being at home in one's self, can be deciphered as a striving for identity. In this context, it is of secondary importance how identity is defined, as an individualistic or, as can often be observed today, as a collectivistic category. What is decisive is the way it functions: an alleged particularity is held up against a universal perceived as an abstract external power. In the process, the former takes on an equally abstract, reified form: that of absolute difference demanding unconditional recognition. On the one hand, materialist critique emphasizes how meagerly particular such a particularity is, how much it is itself socially determined in form and content. It is no coincidence that the categories utilized today are mostly collective ones, those of cultural or even ethnic identity. On the other hand, dissolving their semblance also reveals that being identical with oneself is, if not outright impossible, hardly desirable. To be "wholly oneself," Adorno counters with Marcel Proust, would rather mean "being absolutely differentiated"[6]; in other words, precisely not permanently at home in one's self.

Practicing critique in the spirit of Adorno, one has to aim for all current promises of meaning or identity. It is not enough to target ideologies and movements that are obviously reactionary. Forms of thought and practice

5 See e.g., Ulrich Bröckling, *The Entrepreneurial Self: Fabricating a New Type of Subject* (London: SAGE, 2015).

6 Theodor W. Adorno, "Zu Proust," *Noten zur Literatur*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 11 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 669–675. My translation.

declaring their progressive aspirations are not to be taken at face value. They too must first be subjected to the scrutiny of ideology critique. That means conceiving them as part and parcel of the existing and thus of a current ideological constellation. For thought claiming to be materialist, this also entails always interpreting cultural and political phenomena with reference to the critique of political economy. Such a critique of ideology gains its strength from withstanding the pressure to profess and identify with any of the socially established alternatives. Whoever refuses to get involved in any pregiven theory and practice is not only never at home in oneself; they are also never at home in the present. Their thinking is therefore untimely, not actual, but aimed at actualizing what is here and now merely as a potential: a habitable society.

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# Thwarted Possibilities and Subjunctive Moods

Fumi Okiji

> What transcends the ruling society is not only the potentiality it develops but also all that which did not fit properly into the laws of historical movement. Theory must needs deal with cross-gained, opaque, unassimilated material, which as such admittedly has from the start an anachronistic quality, but is not wholly obsolete since it has outwitted the historical dynamic. This can most readily be seen in art.[1]

The problem of black actualization is often framed as a problem of recognition, a deficit to be addressed within the "order of politicality,"[2] a problem solved by more equitable representation in civil society. If we're feeling optimistic, a war of position that, at best (for us), ends in an impasse; that terminates in a caesura of unpro-

1 Theodor W. Adorno, "Bequest," in *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 2005), 151.

2 Cedric J. Robinson, *The Terms of Order: Political Science and the Myth of Leadership* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1980), 7. See Rei Terada, "Impasse as a Figure of Political Space," *Comparative Literature* 72, no. 2 (2020): 144-158; and Frank Wilderson III, "Gramsci's Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?" *Social Identities* 9, no. 2 (2003): 225-240.

ductive contradiction, irresolvable under present socio-economic conditions (irresolvable under the, perhaps, perennial conditions of a world dependent on black liminality). The world of real possibilities, locked into closed actuality, as it is, cannot accommodate black orientation or is structurally incapable of diversification and transformation by way of vagaries beyond its historical dynamic. From the perspective of the white West, black humanity is not a "thwarted" or yet to be fulfilled possibility, but rather the "fantastic unreal possibilities of our imagination gone wild."[3] The ever-repressed potentiality of the colonized African and black slave might feature, alongside the worker ("deactualized to the point of starving to death"[4]), and could even be said to epitomize it. But as a way to world, a "structure…of the mind" established from the contradictory position of *willful thing*, black life is, furthermore and more significantly, a fantastic possibility.[5] To make this point, I draw upon Iain Macdonald's exploration of Adorno's "modal utopianism." An illumination of alternate realities, of possibilities that lie somewhere between formal and real, and whose coming to fruition relies on upturning the priority of the actual. This class of possibility is one that lays dormant within a world that has not progressed according to the openness of its dialectical promise. The reactionary bourgeois intransigence that Adorno identifies as native to such failings is not merely a personal shortcoming of the all-too-human philosopher who could "not resolve the contradiction between his dialectic and his experience."[6] More broadly, it reflects the gerrymandering of a society that in its flinty enlightenment maintains that there is "nothing new under the sun, because all the pieces in the meaningless game have been played out, all the great thoughts have been thought, all possible discoveries can be construed in advance."[7] Hegel, Adorno tells us, "stopped at that boundary [of what is real]

3 Iain Macdonald, *What Would be Different: Figures of Possibility in Adorno* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 101-102.

4 Karl Marx, quoted in Rocío Zambrana, "Actuality in Hegel and Marx," *Hegel Bulletin* 40, no. 1 (2018): 6.

5 Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 169. I have previously discussed this, drawing from Nahum Chandler's seminal work. See Fumi Okiji, *Jazz as Critique: Adorno and Black Expression Revisited* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018). See also Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt* (London: Sternberg Press, 2022).

6 Theodor W. Adorno, "The Experiential Content of Hegel's Philosophy," in *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 80.

7 "The principle of immanence, the explanation of every event as repetition, which enlightenment upholds against mythical imagination, is that of myth itself. The arid wisdom which acknowledges nothing new under the sun, because all the pieces in the meaningless game have been played out, all the great thoughts have been thought, all possible discoveries can be construed in advance, and human beings are defined by self-preservation through adaptation—this barren wisdom merely reproduces the fantastic doctrine it rejects: the sanction of fate which, through retribution, incessantly reinstates what always

because he saw no real historical force on the other side of it."[8] The historical dynamic, with its dialectical impulse, is ridiculed by this constraint on its freedom of movement toward the more radical outcomes contained in the conditions available to it, such as a world in which no-one would go hungry, or be without health care and somewhere to live. These are real possibilities undone by the "false necessity…of contemporary reality," possibilities denied by a "self-perpetuating actuality that has become an unquestioned and nearly unquestionable second nature."[9]

But what about those sentient beings of ontological incoherence that I mentioned at the start? What of these descendants of willful things that feign "ontological resistance"? Of those things of the world that appear human? Things that act as though they could extend through the world, as though the conditions of their actualization could be marshalled, but have yet to find the mechanism for such. Willful things that are not (primarily) deactualized but, rather, patently unreal. What sort of possibilities emerge from such a profoundly aporetic state of being? These questions go to a founding predicament of black life, and its accompanying *Weltanschauung*. The "identity" or "identification" that moves by way of "double consciousness," not simply a being "Negro" and "American" but, "the *sense of being* of the Negro… as richly and fundamentally double," that throws into doubt the grounding certainties of the pre-speculative European outlook, namely the law of non-contradiction and self-same identity necessary for individuation. This common "sense of being" is what Frantz Fanon previews in his phenomenology of being "an object in the midst of other objects" rather than the anticipated meaning-maker—this denial ultimately setting him on the path of invention. This compulsion to "self-consciously pose [one's] unreality"[10] finds its contemporary exemplar in Frank Wilderson's writing an autobiographical account of a position of/from noncommunicability.[11] As these instances and the writers who supply them show, the black thinker is an excellent site from which to observe this aporetic constitution. This figure registers the constraints or rather the impossibilities that mark their "position of noncommunicability," even as they

was. Whatever might be different is made the same. That is the verdict which critically sets the boundaries to possible experience." Quoted from Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 8.

8 Adorno, "The Experiential Content," 80.

9 Macdonald, *What Would Be Different*, 127.

10 Jay M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 435.

11 Nahum D. Chandler, "Of Exorbitance: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought," *Criticism* 50, no. 3 (2008): 367; Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 82; Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2020).

appear to leap across the abyss.[12] The black scholar writes *as though* they had the capacity for relation; they chart a path of thought *as if* this could be legible to the world, and *as though* their formulation might come to hold some authority (and let's keep the sphere of influence local: authority within, say, the seminar room). This subjunctive comportment of the figure, this being without standing that acts as though it had your ear, suggests a mode of possibility distinct from that inherent in Adorno's modal utopianism, although it *does* bear resemblance to what Jay Bernstein has called the modal anomaly of the artwork.[13] Indeed, as I have written elsewhere, negotiating the irresolvable contradictions of being black is "necessarily an artistic undertaking."[14] In the semblance of this human-like character, in it making "something appear that does not exist," in it not "fit[ting] into this world" (Adorno) but acting as though it did, black life is shown to be an exorbitance in a world of strictly determinate possibilities.[15] We might say, at the risk of the charge of optimism, following Adorno on the artwork, that black life, in positing an unreality in the present, not only contributes a critique of what exists but, in that break with what exists, also embodies a promise of "what could be different."[16]

There is a convincing case for considering actualized blackness as only fantastic possibility, falling short of the required inherence. It is not only that the course of the world and its actualized reality cannot admit black life or black sociality or genuine black participation, it is also the case that no prudent European world could allow for the spread of possibility that this contradictory being and its social life generates. A blackened world would require more than actualization (if such were possible for black life in all its logical exorbitance).[17] It would be the promotion of a full spectrum of possibility, from the real possibilities contained in the actual through to the fantastic. Macdonald characterizes Adorno's understanding of the task of philosophy as a "critique and unmask[ing] the general and particular structures of the ideological fiction of the 'force of the whole' in such a way as to open up the possibility of determinate alternatives."[18] We might say that black study, while

12 The "meaning of Blackness not—in the first instance—as a variously and unconsciously interpellated *identity* or as a conscious social actor [animated by legible political interests], but as a structural *position* of non-communicability in the face of all other positions." Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2008), 58.

13 Bernstein, *Disenchantment*, 437.

14 Okiji, *Jazz as Critique*, 4.

15 See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: A&C Black, 1997), 82; 59; Alongside the Bernstein (*Disenchantment*), already referenced, see also Michael Kelly, *Iconoclasm in Aesthetics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

16 Adorno, "The Experiential Content," 83.

17 See Chandler, "Of Exorbitance."

18 Macdonald, *What Would Be Different*, 2-3.

sympathetic to such, is more concerned with finding ways to share, model and perform the "cross-grained, opaque, unassimilated material" (Adorno) that opens up the possibility of the non-determinate, showing how that which is not, can be.[19]

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19 Adorno, "Bequest," 151.

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# (Non-)Identity Politics[1]

Samir Gandesha

Profoundly sensitive in its own way to a specific constellation of biographical and historical experiences, Adorno's negative dialectics—as an exemplary instance of what Edward Said calls the "contrapuntal thinking" of the exile—may help us articulate an immanent critique of an increasingly influential position on the Left that has come to be known as "identity politics." The origins of identity politics are commonly associated with the Black lesbian socialist-feminist Combahee River Collective (CRC) in the early 1970s, but can, in fact, be traced to anti-colonial struggles decades earlier. Fittingly, the CRC took its name from a heroic military operation on the Combahee River planned and led by abolitionist Harriet Tubman in 1863. Identity politics can be succinctly defined as the idea that the interests of persons are tightly indexed to: (a) collective historical experiences of suffering, exclusion, and marginalization; (b) the epistemic claims

1 This is a greatly condensed version of a chapter in the forthcoming Oxford Handbook to Adorno, edited by Henry Pickford and Martin Shuster.

these experiences generate; and (c) the idea that the articulation of such claims transforms objects of historical processes into subjects with the agency to make history rather than be made by it.

An Adornian approach to identity politics would pose the following question: Is it possible to understand identity politics as a logic of *integration* or a logic of *disintegration*? The former is the core of Hegel's project which, as he defines it in the early *Differenzschrift*, is to show the "identity of identity and non-identity" in the contradictory trajectory of an unfolding historical reason. The latter lies at the heart of Adorno's *Auseinandersetzung* with Hegel, the core of which aims to show how the logic of integration is undermined in the process of its very realization.[2] Negative dialectics aims, as it were, to lay bare precisely the ineluctability of the *non-identity* of identity and non-identity. The question an Adornian approach to identity politics would pose, then, is the following: *Does identity politics foster continued domination or the emancipation of the "non-identical"?*

Central to the intertwining of Adorno's biographical and historical experience was the Holocaust. For Adorno, this historical caesura represented the culmination of the dialectic of enlightenment centering on the liquidation of the non-identical, and consequently constituted an unassimilable historical and civilizational trauma. The Holocaust was, itself, the culmination of the theory and practice of colonialism—combined, of course, with a new "scientific" form of anti-semitism—applied to Europe.[3] Fascism was, in Frantz Fanon's words, "the whole of Europe transformed into a veritable colony."[4] Adorno's thoughts about the domination of the non-identical, then, are especially germane to identity politics even if his thinking manifested, in common with other Western Marxists, what Enzo Traverso has suggestively called the "colonial unconscious."[5]

Adorno's challenge to what he calls in *Negative Dialectics* "the philosophical imperialism" of the concept is important here because identity politics could be said to have first emerged, as previously suggested, as a form of anti-colonial resistance in the name of what remained *non-identical* to the identifying logic of European colonialism, the imperialistic imposition of the value

2 It is for precisely this reason that negative dialectics is taken to be proto-deconstructive. See Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London: Verso, 1987).

3 I refer to this as "endo-colonialism." "Posthuman Fascism," LA Review of Books, Aug 22, 2020, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/posthuman-fascism/.

4 Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Atlantic, 2007), 101.

5 Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 174.

form, in particular, whose own subsumptive logic is homologous to that of the philosophical concept. As a self-described *mission civilisatrice*, colonialism was based upon the dehumanization of subject populations and the violent effacement of their non-identity through its reduction to Western concepts and practices or what Said, an attentive reader of Adorno, calls "Orientalism."

Yet, at the same time, the reclamation of a distinctive human form of life against such a civilizing mission, amounting to the revalorization of ethnocultural difference, often entailed the sacrifice of difference to these resurgent identities struggling for recognition. Collectively, anti-colonial movements battled the imperial drive to subsume difference and generated resistance to what might be called, with Michel Foucault, the dividing, classifying, and disciplining modes of colonial governmentality. However, these new forms of collective identity, which typically took the form of emergent nation-states, reproduced a subsumptive logic of their own.[6] One may speak, therefore, of a post-*colonial* dialectic of enlightenment according to which struggles for autonomy turn into their opposite; emancipatory political reason reverses into conservative cultural re-mythologization.[7] Rather than challenging the colonizing logic of subsumption as such, identity politics unconsciously repeats it, as it substitutes an ethnonational identity for those identities forcibly imposed by the colonizer (Fanon's "nationalist bourgeoisie"), whose proxy it inevitably becomes.

An Adornian critique of identity politics would emphasize that, because of its abstract negation or undialectical disavowal of self-critical reason, its refusal of mediation and consequent anti-intellectualism, identity politics is ultimately unable to escape the dialectic of enlightenment of which it is profoundly symptomatic. Identity politics is the scar tissue of the blocked universalism of the historical Enlightenment, as was apparent in Napoleon Bonaparte's war on the "Black Jacobins"[8] of San Domingo, not to mention the continued existence of slavery within Jeffersonian democracy. The anti-intellectualism of contemporary identity politics and consequent refusal of argument and dialogue (the root of *dialectical* thinking and critique) makes identity politics, at its heart, authoritarian. Here it uncannily and quite tragi-

6 One case in point is of course Idi Amin's expulsions of the "Asians" in 1972. Quite literally, this was an extirpation of the non-identical, in the name of an authoritarian identity politics called "Africanization," as if the Asians could not count as Africans. One also sees this rather starkly in contemporary Zionism, which reviles, ostracizes or worse those members of the Jewish community who are sceptical of or oppose Zionism and stand in solidarity with Palestinians.

7 As Ato Sekyi-Otu does in *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 29.

8 Hence Enzo Traverso's speculations of what a meeting between Adorno and the author of *The Black Jacobins*, C.L.R. James, might have been like. See Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia*.

cally repeats the failed anti-colonial national liberation struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. In this, it also echoes the dogmatism of the militant wing of the West German student movement that Adorno criticized in his exchange of letters with Herbert Marcuse in the final months of his life.

Identity politics, then, purports to open a space for the non-identical, which is to say, the abjected individuality of the de-differentiated colonized masses. However, insofar as it elides the non-identity at the heart of these very excluded and marginalized identities it supposedly "re-centers," it cancels itself out. To put it somewhat differently, in seeking inclusion for the historically disparaged and marginalized, identity politics negates the very difference it purports to empower and finds itself in an unbearable aporia. Identity politics is grounded in the epistemic position of the "oppressed," which affords it with a voice. The prospect of transcending the conditions of oppression, however, threatens to undermine precisely this "standpoint," potentially leaving the oppressed voiceless.

In contrast to the contemporary identity politics with which it has much in common, Adorno's (non-)identity politics contains a utopian promise of the negation of negative identities and the violent natural-historical conditions that produce them. Rather than seeking recognition for bearers of experiences of suffering, exclusion, and marginalization, which would constitute the reified historico-transcendental conditions for the possibility of their truth claims, negative dialectics demands that these conditions come to an end. This necessitates reflection on historical catastrophe.

Civilizational—as opposed to individual—trauma can be understood as occurring at two distinct though related levels. The first we may term *first order* trauma, which happens at the level of the event itself: for example, colonization, chattel slavery, war, and genocide. *Second order* trauma, in contrast, occurs at the level of the *hermeneutics* of the event: a crisis of interpretability or narrativizability of first order historical trauma. In other words, second order trauma results from the impossibility of integrating first order historical traumas into existing frameworks of intelligibility.

The dominant framework of intelligibility of European modernity was historicism or the philosophy of historical progress in the idea of universal history articulated by Kant and Hegel. The genius of such a philosophy was that it recognized the requirement of relating two orders of trauma through the notion of contradiction which, ultimately, was understood to lead, via a logic of integration, to reconciliation or what Hegel explicitly calls, as I previously mentioned, "the identity of identity and non-identity."[9] This is ultimately an

9 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, eds. and trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris (Buffalo, NY: SUNY Press, 1977).

apologia for historical violence and suffering which overlaps in important ways with the historical justification of colonial domination.

Here we are faced with two stark alternatives: The first is the often violent re-imposition of historically superseded frameworks of intelligibility as, for example, in a militant attempt to "reinvent" obsolete traditions specifying racial and/or ethnonational differences and hierarchies, gender roles, sexualities, etc., paired with the most advanced technical means of domination. The second, in contrast, insists on the necessity of articulating reinventing such frameworks, both theoretically and practically, in response to historical catastrophe. The first option is fascism, the second constitutes its antithesis, a kind of anti-fascist philosophy. This is why "Auschwitz" necessitates, for Adorno, the articulation of a "new categorical imperative," namely, that we organize our thoughts and actions in such a manner as to avoid the compulsive repetition of genocide. Insofar as categorical imperatives are universalizable maxims, the imperative "Never again!" applies to all peoples. In the current context, this must, of course, include Palestinians.

A sympathetic reading of identity politics would suggest that, like Adorno's own post-war writings about the ethico-political significance of the Holocaust, it registers a second order trauma produced by the bloody, even terroristic, colonial histories of Western modernity. Identity politics therefore registers the profound, perhaps irreversible damage to existing universalistic frameworks of intelligibility. In contrast to Adorno, such histories are, however, disavowed *in toto*, because rather than being understood as resulting from natural-historical dynamics, i.e., capital as self-valorizing value, they are attributed to a mystical "Whiteness" and/or "Eurocentrism." It is precisely here that identity politics throws the *rational* baby out with the *colonial* bathwater and, consequently, turns mythical and therefore deeply authoritarian.

As previously suggested, Adorno's negative dialectics embodies a logic of *dis*-integration, a logic that seeks to push Hegelian reconciliation, based on the "philosophical imperialism" of the concept, to the point where a space is opened up for the non-identical. Negative dialectics is the attempt to reanimate––and this is why it is a genuinely *immanent* critique––a dynamic that is inherent to Hegel's thought itself. Hegel's honest admission of the irresolvable negativity of the rabble (and by extension the proletariat) is a case in point. The rabble is produced by a capitalist order that defies *recognition* and *affirmation* within it and demands its own *abolition* and *negation* along with the privative social conditions that give rise to it. It is not too much of an audacious exaggeration to suggest, then, that despite his "colonial unconscious," Adorno's identification of a negative-dialectical logic of disintegration is a contribution to a kind of *philosophical anti-imperialism*.

Identity politics in the form of the transformative socialist-feminist politics of the CRC sought a liberation of non-identity from a society in which the identifying logic of abstract labor remained the dominant form of social mediation and as such reduced all difference to identity.[10] As Angela Davis has recently written in her foreword to a book on Herbert Marcuse's notion of the "Great Refusal": "Zora Neale Hurston reminded us that the Black woman is the mule of the world. What if the mules of the world become the very height of humanity?"[11] In contrast to the affirmative, liberal-democratic politics of recognition of Charles Taylor or Axel Honneth, Davis implies that for Black lesbian workers to be truly included, society would have to be radically transformed in the process of such an inclusion. We might add that such a social transformation would also radically transform the nature of such "intersectional" identities in unimaginable ways.

In contrast with Davis' vision, identity politics today has subsequently devolved into what could be called a melancholy attachment to victimization and victimhood insofar as it takes oppression to be the transcendental condition for the possibility of the articulation of its truth claims. In psychoanalytic language, identity politics *enjoys* the symptoms of the historical trauma it purports to address. As a result, contemporary identity politics foregoes the negativity alluded to by Angela Davis and was embodied most clearly in the early work of the CRC. It fails to register the historical and therefore transitory nature of identity and succumbs as a result, as critics such as Olúfémi O. Táíwò have suggested,[12] to a logic of integration, incorporation, and capture whereby identity politics, betraying its early radical promise, becomes a form of "identity-thinking." It thereby embodies the promise of the liberation of difference while tightening the hold of a reified social order that deepens and consolidates a stifling sameness.

But the question remains an open one as to whether, like the dialectic itself, identity politics is amenable to a radical reanimation in a revised version of a form of the radical emancipation of the "non-identical" that takes aim at the real source of the logic of identity, namely, the "real abstraction" of the commodity form that lies at the heart of a society unaware of itself. Only then can we imagine the possibility of what Adorno calls a "reconciled condition" which "would not be the philosophical imperialism of annexing the alien.

10 Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

11 Angela Davis, "Foreword," in *The Great Refusal: Herbert Marcuse and Contemporary Social Movements*, eds. Andrew T. Lamas, Todd Wolfson, Peter N. Funke (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2017), x.

12 Olúfémi O. Táíwò, *Elite Capture: How the Powerful Took Over Identity Politics (And Everything Else)* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2022).

Instead, its happiness would lie in the fact that the alien, in the proximity it is granted, remains what is distant and different, beyond the heterogeneous and beyond that which is one's own."[13] Such reconciliation can only be regarded as the *telos* of dialectics decolonized.

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13 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 2007), 191.

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# Adorno in the Anthropocene

J.M. Bernstein

The Anthropocene marks the acknowledgement of capitalism's driven pursuit of wealth creation, its profligacy, its structural indifference to environmental damage, and capitalism's rationalized social violence, the constellation that Horkheimer and Adorno identify as instrumental rationality. The Anthropocene is accepted as having risen to become an ecocidal force beginning in 1950, the period of the post-war economic explosion denominated as the "Great Acceleration." Most importantly, the Anthropocene marks the destruction of the 11,700-year reign of Holocene nature. The Holocene's climatic stability and moderate temperatures—following the nearly three million years of unstable glaciations and warmings of the Pleistocene epoch—enabled the resilient benefic fecundity of the living Earth that made historically progressive civilization possible, beginning with the agrarian revolution. Whether or not the geological community finally accepts the Anthropocene as an epoch,[1] no one is de-

1 The concept of the Anthropocene remains contested amongst geologists, a matter discussed in a front-page story in the *New York Times*: "The

nying the catastrophic destruction of the Holocene's self-regulating climatic stability, temperature moderateness, and resilience. Holocene self-regulation is forever eclipsed by capitalism's destruction of innumerable ecological habitats and the emissions of $CO_2$ into the atmosphere that have caused increasing global warming with all its consequences: spreading desertification, increased forest fires, "sea-level rise, ocean acidification and spreading oceanic 'dead zones'; rapid changes in the biosphere both on land and in the sea, as a result of habitat loss, predation, explosion of domestic animal populations and species invasions,"[2] and an approaching sixth mass species extinction that could destroy more than 75% of the Earth's species. Human social action has become equivalent to the great forces of nature, capable of altering not just the surface features and textures of the living Earth but, beyond the imagination of earlier generations, constitutive structural features of nature: already the destruction of some of the boundary conditions regulating Holocene nature, with more now vulnerable.[3] *Everything* historical humanity had confidently called "nature" was, in fact, only an historical formation of nature; all nature—setting aside the petrifying idea of Newtonian nature—was in fact only Holocene nature. In its integral shape, Holocene nature has been shattered. Through this shattering, contemporary historical humanity has been abruptly deposited in the Anthropocene, and all future humanity, for as long as the human species continues, will live in the Anthropocene—unless all planetary boundaries are transgressed so thoroughly that humanity loses whatever capacities for ecological restoration it now enjoys.

While Adorno lacked the precise conceptual tools necessary to either elaborate or explain systematic structural transformations of living nature—the very idea of geological epochs and ages as constitutive of formations of the living Earth—he nonetheless intended his accounts of instrumental reason and domination to approximate that level of destruction and devastation denoted by the ruination of Holocene nature bequeathing the Anthropocene. Henceforth, and most emphatically for the next several centuries, all human reflections on the states of human living will be "reflections from damaged

Next Epoch Of Planet Earth Might Be Today," December 18, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/17/climate/anthropocene-age-geology.html?searchResultPosition=1.

2 Working Group on the "Anthropocene," Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy. May 2019. http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/working-groups/anthropocene/. This is the report recommending the preliminary acceptance of the Anthropocene as an epoch with a 1950 start date.

3 For the original statement of planetary boundaries, see Johan Rockström et al., "Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity," *Ecology and Society* 14, no. 2 (2009): 32. http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss2/art32/. For the most recent statement, see Katherine Richardson et al., "Earth Beyond Six of Nine Planetary Boundaries," *Science Advances* 9, no. 37 (September 13, 2023), https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.adh2458.

[Holocene] life."[4] Decrying the Enlightenment's optimistic idea of progressive universal history, recall how Adorno urged the construction of the unity that cements the discontinuous, chaotically splintered moments and phases of history—"the unity of the control of nature, progressing to the rule over men, and finally to that over inner nature. No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb. It ends in the total menace which organized mankind poses to organized men, in the epitome of discontinuity."[5]

It is a distinctive feature of Adorno's critical theory that it genealogically theorizes the drive for self-preservation becoming institutionalized in *scientific*, *technological*, and *economic practices* of instrumental rationality about nature. Capitalist modernity is the synthetic fulfilment of that instrumental rationality constellation; and, continuous with this impetus, it was for the sake of enhancing control over nature that there occurred increasingly complex structures of social domination. By beginning with the institutionalization of the drive for self-preservation, Adorno's materialism makes all human history itself an evolving formation of natural history, an evolving product of natural drives in their institutional formation. As a consequence, capitalism's brutalizing forms of social domination—of men over women, of slavery, of colonizers over the colonized, of bourgeois over proletariat, of the Global North over the Global South—remain rationalized by being necessary for the continuing exploitation of and control over living nature: the epitome of identity thinking necessitates reducing living nature to *quantifiable utilities* all the way down without remainder, all is solely for the sake of purposeless economic growth without end. As a consequence, capitalism cannot rationally "count" environmental degradation and destruction, or massive species extinction; it cannot rationally "count" the foreclosing of the possibilities of environmental stability for future generations; it cannot and does not rationally "count" its obligations to today's children and their children; capitalism cannot rationally "count" the consequences of its current practices even for the medium term, for the next fifty years, say. Capitalism is a present of an ever-expanding structure of violation to the biosphere, to the living earth, without a meaningful past or justificatory future goal. Hence, even as the means of direct violence have progressed to burgeoning nuclear arsenals, which remain ever-menacing, the true *menace* to humanity today is the ongoing destruction of a habitable living nature, the Anthropocene as the actuality of "mutilated

4 See Tim Luke's "Reflections from a Damaged Planet: Adorno as Accompaniment to Environmentalism in the Anthropocene," *Telos* 183 (Summer 2018): 9-14.

5 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), 320.

nature,"[6] as a world "radiant with" a new, post-Holocaust formation of "triumphant calamity."[7]

*Thesis one: the actuality of Adorno and his critical theory today is as a thinker of the Anthropocene*.[8] His critical naturalism, his so-called "vulgar" materialism, however, found no followers in second or third generation critical theory. Hence, *a second thesis*: Although it would require a full essay to demonstrate, it has become increasingly plausible to argue that it is, rather, *the tradition of ecofeminism that significantly converges and overlaps with the argumentation of Adorno's critical theory.* In its convergence and extension of Adorno's critical theory, ecofeminism provides a more compelling account of our present than does "official" critical theory. It is ecofeminism's critical naturalism that is the proper inheritor of Adorno's—and Horkheimer's, and Benjamin's, and Fromm's, and Marcuse's—critical theory, their post-Marx critical naturalist materialism.[9]

Implicit in my listing of what capitalist instrumental reason cannot rationally "count" is ecofeminism's core thesis, namely, that the overriding and *primary contradiction* of Anthropocene capitalism is its structurally mandatory pursuit of economic growth in *systematic indifference to the demands for social reproduction as such*—the business of social reproduction historically being mere "women's work." It is *because* capitalist production is laser-focused on profit— M-C-M'—that it places into the background the material conditions of reproduction, both in biological and social terms. Apart from the disregard for the environmental costs to Holocene nature that have caused the fall into the Anthropocene, there is also the continuing and permanent actualization of what Marx called "primitive accumulation"

6 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetics: 1958/59*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 77.

7 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1.

8 Deborah Cook, *Adorno on Nature* (Durham: Acumen, 2011) anticipates the argument; as does Alison Stone, "Adorno and the Disenchantment of Nature," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 32, no. 4 (2006): 231-53; Tim Luke's "Reflections from a Damaged Planet" makes the argument explicitly.

9 For a singular elaboration of critical theory and ecofeminism, see Ariel Salleh, "Epistemology and the Metaphors of Production: An Eco-Feminist Reading of Critical Theory," *Studies in the Humanities* 15, no. 2 (December 1988). Other central documents include: Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1990 [1980]); and *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010 [1989]). Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Master of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993); and *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2002). I attempt offer a first go at defending this thesis in "Adorno and Ecofeminism," in *Oxford Handbook to Adorno*, eds. Henry W. Pickford & Martin Shuster (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

in the exploitation of women's bodies, slave bodies, colonized bodies, racialized bodies, which today appears most emphatically through the continuing exploitation of the peoples of the Global South by those in the waste-producing and irresponsible Global North.[10]

Adorno insisted upon the finitude of philosophy, that no philosophy could be anything other than its own time in thought. Adorno remains actual today because his philosophy drilled down into the conceptual depth of an instrumentally rational capitalist modernity crystallizing in the industrial slaughterhouses of the Nazi genocide and the successors to it that appeared in the presumptively benign forms of post-war liberal capitalism—the culture industry, et. al. Today those very same structures are working themselves out in the Anthropocene as a capitalism without past or future, the Anthropocene thus revealing capitalism's drive for wealth as a death drive. Of course, understood aright, Horkheimer and Adorno had capitalism's death drive clearly in view:

> Animism had endowed things with souls; [industry] makes souls into things… The reason that represses mimesis is not merely its opposite. It is itself mimesis: of death. The subjective mind which disintegrates the spiritualization of nature masters spiritless nature only by imitating rigidity, disintegrating itself as animistic. Imitation enters the service of power.[11]

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10 Although this argument appears in the writings of all the major ecofeminists, for an exemplary statement see Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Zed Books, 2014 [1986]).

11 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 21; 44-5.

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# "Total Disaster": Primitivism and Progress

Kathy Kiloh

So many global events of the last decade seem to call for an Adornian perspective: mass migration of people seeking refuge, often turned away by governments refusing them asylum; the global rise of right-wing populist movements, whose leaders fit Adorno's description of "the great little man" all too well;[1] political mobilization of a seemingly contradictory nostalgia for both Imperial and Soviet Russia that calls to mind Adorno's concerns about irrational identifications with the collective;[2] and, perhaps above

1 A partial list would include America's Trump, Brazil's Bolsonaro, Hungary's Orbán, "a person who suggests both omnipotence and the idea that he is just one of the folks…" Theodor W. Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 2000), 118-37. Also see Samir Gandesha, "'A Composite of King Kong and a Suburban Barber': Adorno's 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda,'" in *Spectres of Fascism: Historical, Theoretical and International Perspectives*, ed. Samir Gandesha (London: Pluto Press, 2020), 120-41.

2 Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," 118-37; Theodor W. Adorno, "Opinion Delusion Society," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 105-22.

all, the rapidly worsening climate crisis that disproportionately effects Indigenous peoples, the poor, and the racialized. The climate collapse we are living through is not the "total disaster"[3] that Adorno envisioned in his post-atomic texts *Minima Moralia* and *Negative Dialectics*, but his reflections on the devastating effects of human domination over nature remain, nonetheless, instructive for us.[4] Adorno's thinking is persistently insightful, yet his philosophy, dedicated to self-reflectively addressing everyday life in the present, is firmly rooted in its own historical moment. From this, we can infer that we denizens of the neoliberal twenty-first century have not yet escaped the "dialectic of enlightenment" that Adorno theorized with Max Horkheimer in the 1940s. Liberalism regresses to authoritarianism and Adorno's thinking speaks not only to its own time, but ours as well. It is deeply regrettable that Adorno's thinking now seems more obviously relevant to more people than it was perceived to be only fifteen or twenty years ago.[5]

But whoever chooses to study Adorno today must listen carefully to the voices that question whether his thought can address our present needs: to address the sources and the psychological effects of the climate crisis (and its pandemics), the persistence of the "coloniality of power,"[6] and the violence inflicted upon global Indigenous and racialized peoples—a violence exacerbated by the social and political effects of the latest economic crisis. These are deeply interrelated problems and cannot be addressed without critically assessing how the Western concept of humanity sanctions racial hierarchies, separates humans from nature, and thereby threatens life itself. This means that we must seriously consider whether Adorno's thinking is too bound to the humanistic European Enlightenment project. Does his eurocentric perspective perpetuate what Sylvia Wynter refers to as "the overrepresentation of man," or what Derrida calls the innocent "autobiography of the human species" that Western philosophy writes?[7] Perhaps Adorno's reliance on a developmental model of "humanity," and his continued insistence on the need

3 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 190.

4 Please see the special issue of *Adorno Studies* devoted to Adorno and the Anthropocene, eds. Camilla Flodin and Sven Anders Johansson, *Adorno Studies* 3, no. 1 (2019).

5 Stuart Jeffries, "Why a Forgotten 1930s Critique of Capitalism is Back in Fashion," *The Guardian*, September 9, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/sep/09/marxist-critique-capitalism-frankfurt-school-cultural-apocalypse.

6 Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533-80.

7 Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257-337; Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 2 (Winter, 2002): 398.

for a transformation that cannot yet be positively figured—a radical change of the subject, the political, the social, the economic—requires renovation.[8]

Such criticism cannot be dismissed as entirely unfounded. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, for example, is a truly weird text. It is full of insightful observations about the domination of nature, but these insights seem to be buttressed by a dubious anthropology taking primitive man and his animistic magic as its object of study. And the essay "Progress" is unremittingly critical of what is commonly taken to be "progress"—what Adorno identifies as a negative universal history of domination. Yet he claims that progress—redefined as "averting…total disaster"—is the species' only hope for survival and that the possibility of progress is entirely dependent upon whether "humanity" in the form of a "self-conscious global subject" develops.[9] What are we to make of these commitments today? The fantasy of primitive man and what appear to be lofty philosophical claims about a unified humanity-to-come might appear to be entirely irreconcilable with the urgent need for decolonization.

But appearances can deceive. With all due respect to Adorno's critics, I contend that as Critical Theorists committed to thinking from our contemporary needs, we should follow Adorno in continuing to think from the fantasy of primitive man toward the dream of a universal humanity. I say this because we see evidence of unbridled primitivism everywhere. Whether it is celebrated or vehemently denounced, the notion that we humans bear a deep-seated primal urge toward violence is ubiquitous, and this notion, unexamined, manifests in material instances of rage. I propose we consider in this light the storming of the Capitol Building in Washington D.C. in 2021 and the vehement calls for those rioters to face retributive justice. If we read *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as I think it is meant to be read, or it may be more appropriate to say as we are certainly able to read it today—as an attempt to work through primitivism, treating it as a projection onto the notional past of the modern liberal subject's own barbarity—then that book, and

8 See for instance, Amy Allen, *Critique on the Couch: Why Critical Theory Needs Psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia Press, 2021), 199. Allen suggests that Adorno's thinking is over-reliant upon rationalism and developmentalism and that this leads to political resignation. She suggests that critical theorists would be better served if they abandoned Adorno's Freud-inflected use of drive theory and engaged in its place a Kleinian model, in which maturity or progress is measured by one's capacity to make reparations to others. I contest her depiction of Adorno's philosophy and I am concerned that the shift she advocates does not fully address our needs. Reparations are valuable but insufficient to the task of creating a world in which our survival does not necessitate pain and suffering for others.

9 Theodor W. Adorno, "Progress," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 144..

Adorno's philosophy as a whole, continues to speak to us in deeply important ways.

Adorno agrees with Benjamin's claim in "Theses on the Philosophy of History" that, as Adorno puts it, "progress would be the very establishment of humanity in the first place."[10] He thus negates the definition of progress as movement along a developmental path toward Hegel's World Spirit. As Adorno has it, "progress is resistance at all stages, not the surrender to the steady ascent" of Spirit.[11] One may protest that the ethical potential of the human entangled with the "more-than-human" has always already been achieved in innumerable non-Western cultures in ways that surpass the aspirations of "humanity" as envisioned in modern Western thought. That claim is indisputable. But, following Adorno, I would also argue that this ethical potential has not been universally actualized because much of the world's human population continues to live under the spell of domination—conforming to a logic that reacts to the need for housing and health care with policing and punishment, and the need to end our reliance on fossil fuel with carbon off-setting, protecting the private self and its (property) interests above life itself. Because wrong life predominates, pockets of good relations between humans and the rest of nature exist under conditions of extreme precarity, constantly threatened by modern forms of subjectivity, reified sociality, and political despotism disguised as self-determination. The primitivism at work in Western culture, bringing about the regression from autonomy to authoritarianism, remains a threat to dignity and decency wherever they might be found. Motivated by need and hope, our thinking should continue to progress toward establishing "the whole society as humanity,"[12] not at the expense of difference and diversity and not at the expense of the non-human world. Today, Adorno's thought is still indispensable to the task of undoing "the European notion of man"[13] and to the desire to end unnecessary suffering.

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10 Adorno, "Progress," 145.
11 Adorno, "Progress," 160.
12 Adorno, "Progress," 144.
13 Emmanuel Levinas, "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism," in *Difficult Justice: Commentaries on Levinas and Politics*, eds. Asher Horowitz and Gad Horowitz (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 7.

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# Adorno Today

Andrew Bowie

Adorno's concern with how history affects the very nature of philosophy raises the question of how our own understanding of Adorno is affected by historical changes. We are, after all, now further from Adorno, when he died, than he was from the end of the First World War, so using his ideas to analyze contemporary issues necessarily involves considerable mediation. One can here only very briefly sketch a few responses to this issue, but how we think about certain developments in philosophy, about the role of art, and about how to understand key social and political developments can profit from a critical contemporary reflection on Adorno's work in these areas.

Adorno says of Kant's philosophy that it is a "force-field," where "behind the most abstract concepts which come into conflict with each other … stand what are in reality extraordinarily vivid forces of experience."[1] In today's indeterminately diverse philosophical landscape it would be hard to single out such a philosophy

1 Theodor W. Adorno, *Kants "Kritik der reinen Vernunft"* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), 13.

in this way. At the same time, seeing influential parts of this landscape, not predominantly in terms of the validity of their substantive claims, but rather as expressions of the experience of social and political tensions, offers a way of responding to what Adorno suggests. The revival of analytical metaphysics since Kripke and others can, for example, be understood in these terms as another rear-guard action against the increasing occupation of the territory of metaphysics by the sciences. Exploring "what fundamental kinds of things there are and what properties and relations they have"[2] in metaphysics seems in this light peculiarly otiose in the face of the discoveries of contemporary science, and of the notable lack of any serious consensus among philosophers about "fundamental kinds of things." Putting it bluntly: what difference would a philosophical account of "fundamental kinds of things" make, compared with the very evident ways in which the accounts given by physical sciences change how we act in the world, and change the world itself?

Dewey, whose thought is sometimes close to that of Adorno in ways that have yet to be fully explored, argued that metaphysical conceptions—of the kind that Williamson pursues—involve "the complete hold possessed by the belief that the object of knowledge is a reality fixed and complete in itself, in isolation from an act of inquiry which has in it any element of production of change."[3] Focusing metaphysics in Williamson's manner arguably also conspires with the failure of contemporary philosophy to adequately respond to questions, already posed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, about how the cumulative practical effects of the sciences can become so destructive. This can be seen as part of a wider failure, particularly of analytical philosophy, with its predominant focus on epistemology, to take adequate account of the differing ways in which humankind relates to nature, which are not exhausted by cognition. Such failure results not least from a lack of reflection on Adorno's insistence that nature and history cannot be definitively separated. One simple way of seeing this is to ponder the fact that with the rise of the commodity form, as Adorno suggests, what things *are* radically changes, and metaphysical attempts to get at fundamental kinds of things cannot do justice to such changes. Indeed, they can function as ideology and occlude the significance of such changes. As the ecological crisis deepens, Adorno's insights into how we think about nature and history here gain in importance, but need now to be developed in relation to the specific forms capitalism takes in the era of new media.

Adorno's interpretations of aesthetic modernism, in contrast, can at times lead to dead-ends. As Albrecht Wellmer puts it, for Adorno art is the "pres-

2 Timothy Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 19.
3 John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 19.

ence in the forms of semblance of a state which does not yet exist,"[4] and this leads him to a—in some ways historically understandable—'Gnostic' rejection of artistic attempts to communicate in terms that seek to make sense of a world that produced the Holocaust. But this restricts the kind of sense art can make in a manner that ties it too exclusively to a historico-philosophical judgement on the modern world as a whole. Wellmer suggests, against Adorno, that one has to "grant to art *a function in connection with* forms of non-aesthetic communication, or with a real change of relationships between self and world," and points to "the growing capacity for aesthetic processing of what, precisely by dint of its becoming language in the work of art, is no longer merely negated, i.e., excluded from the realm of symbolic communication."[5] While the aim of interpreting art such that "form, the aesthetic connection of everything individual, represents the social relationship in the work of art,"[6] can be a productive way of approaching art in some situations, it can neglect the ways art still functions as a vital participatory practice in widely varying social contexts.

The idea of a 'state of the material' that has to be lived up to by true art, which dominates much of Adorno's aesthetic thinking, particularly about music, now seems hard to defend, in the face of the diversity of contemporary musical production. The simple fact that the music which develops out of free atonality and serialism tends to play a relatively marginal role in contemporary musical life suggests the problem. That innovation is crucial to keeping music and other art alive goes without saying, but innovation, albeit often in very different ways, can play a role in any music that is more than just a product of the culture industry. Adorno's linking of the story of Western philosophy to the history of modern music produces many insights, but does little to account for the central role of music in contemporary culture all over the globe because it does not engage with some dimensions of musical practice which are extraneous to that link. This does not, one should add, by any means invalidate all he says about the ideological effects of the means of cultural production on the music industry.

Adorno's work seems in some respects to have sustained its actuality most emphatically in relation to the analysis of social and political pathologies. What might have seemed perhaps rather overblown in the increasingly prosperous period in the West after the War before the rise of neoliberalism now feels disturbingly prescient. When he says, in relation to the value of psychoa-

4 Albrecht Wellmer, *Zur Dialektik von Moderne und Postmoderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), 29.
5 Wellmer, *Zur Dialektik*, 29.
6 Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann et al., vol. 7 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 379.

nalysis for social analysis, that the "overwhelming majority of people puts up with relations of dominance, identifies with them, and is induced by them to adopt irrational attitudes whose opposition to the most simple interests of their self-preservation is completely obvious,"[7] one is these days irresistibly reminded of examples from the COVID pandemic. Consider this, reported in *The Independent* newspaper: "Emergency room patients in the USA often don't want to believe Covid-19 is real even after testing positive for the virus, according to a South Dakota nurse: 'they don't want to believe that Covid is real … their last dying words are, 'This can't be happening, it's not real.'"[8] The links between far-Right politics and such COVID denialism suggest how the notion of a "context of delusion," despite its frequent over-totalization by Adorno, is alive and well in contemporary neoliberal economies. In this respect his warning that "the social veil is constituted by the fact that social tendencies assert themselves over the heads of people, that they do not know those tendencies as their own"[9] suggests, in a world where fascism is once again infiltrating the politics of ever more countries, why a continuing engagement with the resources Adorno offers for trying to break through the social veil is more necessary than ever.

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7 Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 8:331–2.

8 Mayank Aggarwal, "Covid Nurse Says Some Dying Patients are Still Refusing to Believe Virus is Real: 'This Can't be Happening,'" *The Independent*, November 17, 2020. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/covid-us-cases-latest-nurse-patients-biden-virus-b1724026.html

9 Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 8:54.

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# Aesthetic Unity

Camilla Flodin

Despite Adorno's criticism of straightforward reconciliation in the sphere of art, he does not abandon the idea of the artwork's exemplary unity and the way it points to the possibility of reconciliation. He argues that the artwork's reconciliatory power is to be found in its achievement of unity. But this unity is not the integrative harmony advocated by traditional aesthetics, like in the conception of beauty as unity in diversity. Such a conception turns aesthetic unity into a "triumph over the heterogenous,"[1] according to Adorno. That kind of unity would be no better than the way nature-dominating rationality effects unity in the diversity of nature, which Adorno argues is manifested in Kant's conception of cognitive synthesis (*Einheit in der Mannigfaltigkeit*).[2]

1 Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, vol. 7 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 236; *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 157.

2 Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysik: Begriff und Probleme* [1965], in *Nachgelassene Schriften: Vorlesungen*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, vol. 14 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), 56; *Metaphysics: Concept and Prob-*

Authentic artworks achieve unity in a qualitatively different manner, according to Adorno, and Kant himself admits as much in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*: "Kant subordinates artworks to the idea of something purposeful in and of itself, rather than consigning their unity exclusively to subjective synthesis through the knower."[3] The reason or logic of art, the way art synthesizes, allows for another kind of unity to emerge: "The aesthetic unity of the multiplicitous [*Einheit des Mannigfaltigen*] appears as though it had done no violence but had been chosen by the multiplicitous itself. It is thus that unity […] crosses over into reconciliation."[4] The artwork is an exemplary unity because it appears to develop from out of diversity itself, rather than being enforced from without. Aesthetic unity approximates utopia, which in *Negative Dialectics* is described as "a togetherness of diversity [*ein Miteinander des Verschiedenen*]."[5] But aesthetic unity is not *real*, it is not realized reconciliation or utopia: "No artwork is an undiminished unity; each must simulate it, and thus collides with itself. Confronted with antagonistic reality, the aesthetic unity that is established in opposition to it immanently becomes semblance."[6] The artwork has to renounce influence over reality in order to be art, but only thus is it able to constitute a reminder of the unreconciled state of reality. This does not mean, however, that aesthetic unity is free from guilt and domination: "[…] even in the greatest works of aesthetic unity the echo of social violence is to be heard."[7] The artwork wants to give duration to what is fleeting, form to what is dispersed, structure to sensuous expressiveness, and this cannot be done without a certain violence. Even so, "the act that binds the mimetic and diffuse in the artwork not only does harm to amorphous nature. The aesthetic image is a protest against nature's fear that it will dissipate into the chaotic."[8]

In no way, then, is this alternative unity of the artwork naïvely upheld as the complete negation of the nature-dominating practice of society at large. However, the fundamental forms of controlling and structuring nature, of

*lems*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 34. Compare: "By synthesis in the most general sense […] I understand the acting of putting different representations together with each other and comprehending their manifoldness [*Mannigfaltigkeit*] in one cognition." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 210 [B103].

3 Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, 166; *Aesthetic Theory*, 109.

4 Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, 202; *Aesthetic Theory*, 134.

5 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann et al., vol. 6 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 153; *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1990), 150. Translation altered.

6 Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, 160; *Aesthetic Theory*, 105.

7 Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, 202; *Aesthetic Theory*, 134.

8 Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, 202; *Aesthetic Theory*, 134.

transforming it into a measurable thing—first and foremost space, time, and causality[9]—are in their turn "themselves controlled and freely disposed over" in art, according to Adorno.[10] Thus, the artwork's reflection of these forms is able to break the domination of nature: "Through the domination of the dominating, art reverses the domination of nature to the core."[11] In mastering what is outside the sphere of art used for mastery over nature, art is able to show that these forms can be used differently: "As a musical composition compresses time, and as a painting folds spaces into one another, so the possibility is concretized that the world could be other than it is."[12] The alternative unity of the artwork and the way it uses space, time, and causality dissociates these formative categories from their dominating purpose, and shows us that they are not ahistorical invariants, but possible agents of liberation.

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9 These are "Schopenhauer's *principia individuationis*." Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie,* 207; *Aesthetic Theory*, 137.
10 Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie,* 207; *Aesthetic Theory*, 138.
11 Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie,* 207; *Aesthetic Theory*, 138.
12 Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie,* 207–208; *Aesthetic Theory*, 138.

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# The Gesture of Release

Gertrud Koch

In Adorno's famous essay on "Schoenberg and Progress" from his *Philosophy of Modern Music*, one finds radiant, emphatic praise of the somatic power of music. This praise plays with the topos of fluidity and metaphorical extensions of the flux of time, just like Hades, and the river of no return which divides the living and the dead. Eurydice, Orpheus' dead lover, is a figure signifying a return, even if an unsuccessful one, that Orpheus initiated. And so she becomes a certain promise: "The gesture of returning, not the feeling of waiting, describes the expression of all music, even in a world worthy of death."[1] The dead come back through a "gesture of return"—emphasizing the vital power of music to reanimate.

This model of reanimation situated between the realm of the dead and the utopian return of life and vitality points to the somatic side in all human nature that links the figure of return with the figure of progress as two modes of being:

1 Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 99.

> As at its end, so the origin of music reaches beyond the sphere of intentions, that of meaning and subjectivity. It is a gestural art, closely akin to crying. It is the gesture of dissolving. The tension of the facial muscles yields—the tension that, while the face directs itself pragmatically toward the world, separates it from this world. Music and crying open the lips and bring delivery from restraint.[2]

The central figure in the above quoted passage is the face that is opposed to the world when performing through its muscular contraction and hence communicative signs and meaning to others. In this regard the visage is, as the later Levinas would have it, a dialogical relation between faces. But the face is also the screen where meaning and signs are liquified: "The man who surrenders to tears in music that no longer resembles him at the same time allows the stream of what he himself is not—what was dammed up back of the world of things—to flow back into him. In tears and in singing, the alienated world is entered."[3] A reality that is alienated equally from nature and from subjectivity.

Adorno's musical close-up of the face unveils the presupposed intertwinement of human beings: they are tied at the same time to the physical environment and to society where symbolic forms become second nature. This intertwinement is not binary, "either nature *or* society," but a continuous process of materializations of the imaginary. Tears are an organic manifestation of fluidity steered by emotions and perceptions, singing forms elemental material such as air into symbolic communication. Music is the medium of this intertwinement: singing and weeping come together hand in hand. This anthropological theory of music focuses on the motif of return rather than expectation: it leads back into the hall of the dead from where the wish to live takes its motive and motivation to return. A re-turn has two poles, in contrast with the U-turn or the loop, it encloses a moment of progress as stepping into the future; the musical re-turn therefore enshrines a moment of reconciliation, a way of deepening the understanding of the natural history of subjectivity stemming from natural history without entirely dissolving in society and manmade history. In an enlightening essay, Alexander Garcia Düttmann asks, "Can There Be Reconciliation with Nature?" by referring to the organic theory of music based in "singing" and "weeping." Düttmann quotes a note Adorno added to the republication of the book on Kierkegaard in 1966: "In the imagination, nature transcends itself, nature whose impulse is imagination's source, nature that contemplates itself in the imagination, nature that exposes itself as rescued because the imagination has submitted it to the most insignificant shift—to the most insignificant

2 Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 99.
3 Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 99.

shift since imagination is not contemplation that leaves beings as they are but an intervention. In the course of contemplation, imagination intervenes imperceptibly in beings, achieving their configuration into an image."[4] What Adorno refers to here is an image that is a becoming, it is set at the interplay of contemplation and imagination. Imagination stems from the liminal touch between the material and the symbolic. It doesn't take long to recognize in this thought a broader concept of the philosophy of nature, that is, in itself thinking, the environmental space as a constant exchange between the material, physical world and the imaginative worldbuilding power of the spirit, that comes out of it with tears and singing.

If one reads Adorno as a thinker of the philosophy of nature as a conjoining of the environmental and the social, as we have suggested, then there opens a perspective here on similarities, where one would least expect them: A similarity to Kracauer's "curious realism,"[5] that turns out to be a materialism in the former sense. Kracauer's aim in *Theory of Film*, to think filmic realism as an inner link between the camera and the environment, follows a similar concept of nature, of physicality as social environment: The camera is in the same space that it records, ready anytime by a simple move or turn to open to the space surrounding the filming.[6] The technology of the camera liquifies space and at the same time captures images that enter into the symbolic world. Adorno's critique of Kracauer hides these similarities in the concept of nature that is thought as socio-natural environment. In those senses, they both share a sense for curious realism that turns out to be a materialist concept of nature.

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4 Alexander García Düttmann, "Can There Be Reconciliation with Nature?" *MLN: Inheriting the Frankfurt School* 133, no. 3 (April 2018): 715. The quote is translated by Düttmann.

5 Theodor W. Adorno, "The Curious Realist: On Siegfried Kracauer", trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, *New German Critique*, no. 54 (1991): 159–77, https://doi.org/10.2307/488432.

6 Gertrud Koch, "A Curious Realism: Redeeming Kracauer's Film Theory Through Whitehead's Process Philosophy," *Screen* 61, Issue 2 (Summer 2020): 280–287.

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# Adorno's Conception of Tradition Revisited

Peter Uwe Hohendahl

There is sufficient evidence that the public sphere of advanced Western societies is in the process of a fundamental structural transformation, equal to that of the early modern age.[1] Driven by new electronic media, older modes of public communication such as print media have lost their dominant position. Especially, the rapid rise of social media has changed the format and nature of public debates and thereby transformed the character of public culture. This means that the question of tradition, raised by Adorno in the 1960s, has become urgent again. It is worth revisiting Adorno's response.

For Adorno, the point of departure was the transition from a premodern (feudal) to a modern society. Following Max Weber, he emphasizes the growing weakening of tradition under the conditions of a modern society based on a capitalist economy. However, while Weber and Marx emphasize the positive aspect

1 Jürgen Habermas, *Ein neuer Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit und die deliberative Politik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2022).

of this transition, highlighting the disadvantages of older societies and traditional cultures, Adorno stresses the loss of tradition as a serious problem for modern societies. They paid a heavy price for technological progress. Especially in the sphere of culture, Adorno considers the advanced stage of the capitalist mode of production a serious threat to the creation and reception of genuine artworks.

To be sure, Adorno is completely aware that his own understanding of the crisis is historically determined. As he argues in "On Tradition," early modern societies considered tradition an impediment to progress.[2] It was only at a later phase of this process that the disappearance of tradition was perceived as a loss, raising the question if and how tradition could be restored. It was at the stage of aesthetic historicism during the later 19th century that the return to older styles became a dominant response to the question of tradition. For Adorno, as he points out in his essay on functionalism, it was the wrong answer.[3] The return to older forms of aesthetic production resulted in false traditions. Modernist aesthetic theory had to expose them as fake.

Nonetheless, for Adorno this necessary critique does not eliminate the problem. The pervasive destruction of tradition in the context of the 20th century culture industry points to a substantial loss. For Adorno, the culture industry defines a mode of aesthetic production and reception in which the authentic character of the artwork is threatened. This potential loss concerns elite culture no less than popular culture. The potential commercialization of all artworks deflates their aesthetic value. Under these conditions the critical question is: Is a genuine reception of artworks of the past possible at all? Put differently, can we still have a reliable tradition?

Adorno's theoretical reflections, responding to and competing with scholars and theorists like Ernst Robert Curtius and Hans-Georg Gadamer, focus on moments of memory and potential redemption. While Curtius' postwar project emphasized the restoration of a common European tradition, grounded in a shared medieval Latin culture, Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1960) not only reframed the method of the humanities by updating hermeneutic theory but simultaneously rearticulated the understanding of tradition, accentuating the critical importance of the classical as the stable ground for our historical orientation. What Curtius and Gadamer had in common was the unspoken rejection of the political and cultural rupture caused by National Socialism. They foregrounded continuity through the availability of tradi-

2 Theodor W. Adorno, "Uber Tradition," in *Ohne Leitbild. Parva Aesthetica* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967), 29-41.

3 Theodor Adorno, "Funktionalismus heute," in *Ohne Leitbild. Parva Aesthetica* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967), 104-127.

tion. While Adorno called for working through (*Aufarbeitung*) recent German history, conservative thought wanted to minimize the break, using the concept of tradition as a cornerstone for their argument.

Still, Adorno's literary essays make it clear that he was unwilling to eliminate the idea of a literary tradition. When he approaches poets like Goethe, Eichendorff, Heine, and George he touches on the question of tradition. In fact, in some of his essays the search for a sustainable tradition is the very center. In the essay "On Tradition," he suggests that the recuperation of tradition in the present can succeed only dialectically through determinate negation. Both the notion of historical continuity and the duration of the classical have to be sacrificed. Unlike Georg Lukács, Adorno does not trust the notion of a "heritage" (*Erbe*) that can be securely transferred from the past to the present, because he refuses to share Lukács' belief that state socialism in the East created a society free of repression that can heal the suffering of the past.

For Adorno access to tradition, while considered essential, is no longer secure. His reflections distinguish two perspectives. For the contemporary artist tradition can be reached only by way of rigorous refusal. His model is Beckett's *Endgame* where tradition is invoked in order to be mocked. The presence of tradition is legitimate only in the mode of parody. However, retrieving artworks of the past relies on a different procedure. Success depends on detecting elements outside the accepted "message" of the work, finding forgotten, seemingly insignificant moments. Adorno's interpretation of Goethe's *Iphigenie* is a good example for rereading a classical work. By shifting the emphasis from Iphigenie to King Thoas, from a European to a colonial perspective, Adorno rescues the play from its affirmative function within a Eurocentric world view.

More than half a century has passed since Adorno's essay. From the perspective of an advanced electronic media system the notion of a stable cultural tradition has become considerably more fraught. Structures that Adorno took for granted are no longer secure, among them the institution of criticism that contributed to the preservation of traditions in fields like music and literature. The revolutionary changes of digital media have established the equality of the participants, turning the masses into authors, but thereby also undermining the role of the expert critic whose familiarity with present and historical artworks was indispensable for the upholding of cultural traditions. The preservation of literary traditions appears to be tied to the survival of print media and the structure of higher education. The increasing marginalization of the humanities at the university level has negatively affected the continuous critical discussion necessary for an active and effective cultural tradition. What makes Adorno's intervention valuable today is its critical im-

petus, reminding us of the fundamental unresolved problems involved in the concept of tradition and of the need for its preservation.

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# Truth, Aura, Eros

Stefano Marino

> It's a nice bit of sexual utopia not to be yourself […]. It shakes that invariant of bourgeois society in the widest sense, which since time immemorial has always aimed at integration: the demand for identity. […] What is merely identical with itself is without happiness.[1]

Apropos of the role played by the erotic dimension in Western philosophy, Jean-Luc Nancy has spoken of "philosophy's abandonment of Eros," arguing that "sex played a major and exemplary philosophical role at very beginnings of philosophy but was soon abandoned and then nearly forgotten or limited to almost nothing."[2] However, in the twentieth century, various thinkers (with an important role played by feminist scholars) have gradually favored a rediscovery of the philosophical significance of eros, and this discourse also includes some authors belonging to the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory.

1 Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 75.
2 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Sexistence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), 10-11, 14.

1.

In *Negative Dialectics* Adorno defines truth as "the constellation of subject and object in which both penetrate each other (*die Konstellation von Subjekt und Objekt, in der beide sich durchdringen*)."[3] Adorno's conception of truth aims to overcome the tendency of traditional epistemologies to reductively conceive of knowledge and truth either from the subject's side or from the object's side, thus following an undialectical "either/or" logic, rather than a more dialectical, relational, and inclusive "both/and" logic (yet with a materialist accent on the "object's primacy"). What Adorno suggests is that from the perspective of traditional epistemologies, subject and object are necessarily destined to be merely opposed to each other, and thus incapable of "penetrat[ing] each other," profoundly relating to each other, and mutually influencing each other—although it is important to add that Adorno's dialectical logic also implies that they are not merged but can be together in their distinctness. As we read in *Negative Dialectics*:

> Utopia would be above identity and above contradiction; it would be a togetherness of diversity (*Utopie wäre über der Identität und über dem Widerspruch, ein Miteinander des Verschiedenen*). […] Traditional philosophy believes that it knows the unlike by likening it to itself, while in so doing it really knows itself only. The idea of a changed philosophy would be to become aware of likeness by defining it as that which is unlike itself (*des Ähnlichen innezuwerden, indem sie es als das ihr Unähnliche bestimmt*).[4]

Adorno ambitiously aims to outline the possibility of "[a] changed philosophy" that is capable of overcoming what he generally called "traditional philosophy"[5] and is thus capable of conceiving the concept of truth in a different way. It is possible to suggest that Adorno's conception was inspired not only by purely epistemological reasons, but also by what one can learn from experiences related to the erotic dimension. For example, the aforementioned definition of truth as "the constellation of subject and object in which both penetrate each other" may remind us of a description of what happens in the actual experience of partners involved in sexual intercourse: namely, the fact that the latter, if adequately conceived in its genuinely relational character, must be understood as a sort of mutual "interpenetration" or reciprocal "fusion" between two persons.

3 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 2004), 127.
4 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 150.
5 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 13.

At first sight, it might seem philologically questionable and philosophically implausible to establish a connection between the abstract and sophisticated concepts that are at the center of a theoretical work like *Negative Dialectics*, on the one hand, and the actuality and concreteness of the erotic dimension of human life, on the other hand. However, what the Italian translator of *Negative Dialectics*, Pietro Lauro, has argued is noteworthy in this context: that Adorno sometimes used erotic metaphors precisely to express the fundamental aims of his negative-dialectical way of thinking. For example, in *Negative Dialectics*, we read that "in philosophy we literally seek to immerse ourselves in things that are heterogeneous to it (*in das ihr Heterogene sich versenken*), without placing those things in prefabricated categories. We want to adhere […] closely to the heterogeneous."[6] The German expression used by Adorno in this passage is *nah sich anschmiegen*, translated into English as "adhering closely to." Adorno's particular use of this concept in the aforementioned quotation suggests a sort of "amalgamating oneself with the other," inasmuch as (following Lauro's observations)[7] an *anschmiegende Umarmung* is an "amalgamating embrace," like the one that characterizes the union of two persons in a sexual encounter (although it could also be in an encounter that is not explicitly sexual). According to Lauro, in using the verb *sich anschmiegen* Adorno aimed to show precisely that "an erotic metaphor was able to express the fundamental question of non-identity."[8] As he observes, "just as in sexual intercourse the individuals are united together but still different from each other, without canceling their individuality," in a somehow comparable way *Negative Dialectics* promotes a form of non-coercive union with the non-identical, without aiming to arrive anymore at "a Hegelian form of synthesis."[9]

If this is true—or, at least, if this is a plausible interpretive key—then we can say that Adorno's negative-dialectical perspective not only explicitly promotes a critical rethinking of the traditional concept of truth, but may also implicitly suggest a parallel critical rethinking of certain traditional views of sex. For example, the adoption of a relational and dialectical perspective of this kind can lead us to observe that sexual intercourse should *not* be understood as a one-sided activity of penetration, but rather as a form of reciprocal "interpenetration" and "amalgamating oneself with the other": that is, as a sort of dialectical relation of simultaneous "entering in" and "being-received in" (or "being-welcomed in"), in which each of the partners involved takes

6 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 13.
7 Pietro Lauro, "Glossario," in Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialettica Negativa* (Torino: Einaudi, 2004), 370.
8 Lauro, "Glossario," 370.
9 Lauro, "Glossario," 370-371.

part in an exciting dialogue and may exchange their roles in spontaneous and pleasurable ways.

It is interesting to compare Adorno's aforementioned observations on the reciprocal interpenetration of subject and object with a remark by Marcuse. In *Counterrevolution and Revolt* Marcuse observes that "the publicity with the body (at present, the female body) as object is dehumanizing, the more so since it plays up to the dominant male as the aggressive subject for whom the female is there, to be taken, to be laid."[10] Then, Marcuse brilliantly captures what we may call the dialectics of lovemaking, arguing that "[i]t is in the nature of sexual relationships that both, male and female, are object *and* subject at the same time."[11] In claiming that it is characteristic of sexual relations that two human beings are "object *and* subject at the same time," Marcuse uses terminology that has characterized modern epistemology (i.e., the subject/object relation) in order to outline an original philosophical view of sex. Marcuse's observation is important and insightful on many levels, not least because it discloses the fruitful possibility of developing a critical rethinking of what Foucault called "the penetration model,"[12] a model that has often characterized the conception of sex in a limited, narrow, and androcentric way that has been predominant in the Western tradition (as well as in other traditions, I fear).

As noted by Foucault, Western culture—deeply influenced by the Greco-Roman tradition—made ample room for "the question of the sexual act, but [...] *only from the point of view of the male*,"[13] often understanding the "act of penetration" as "*the* core of sexual activity," as "*the* very essence of sexual practice."[14] If viewed in this context, Marcuse's aforementioned statement seems to critically challenge the hierarchy that has been traditionally established between the different roles in sexual intercourse, thus promoting a sort of dismantling of the common association of the act of penetrating (and, conversely, of being penetrated) with, respectively, the "two poles of activity and passivity," "superiority and inferiority," "domination and submission," "vic-

10 Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 77.

11 Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt,* 77. Marcuse's statement only mentions men and women in the dialectics of sexual relations. However, there is no reason to limit only to "male and female" this view of the reciprocity, complementarity, and interchangeability of roles in lovemaking. We can broaden the picture and claim that "[i] t is in the nature of sexual relationships" that all the persons involved "are object and subject at the same time."

12 Michel Foucault, *The Essential Works 1954-1984*, vol. 1 (New York: The New Press, 1997), 183.

13 Foucault, *The Essential Works 1954-1984*, 1:180. In Greek sexual ethics, for Foucault, "sexual relations [were] not reciprocal: in sexual relations you can penetrate or you are penetrated. [...] The Greek ethics of pleasure is linked to a virile society, dissymmetry, exclusion of the other, an obsession with penetration [...]. All that is quite disgusting!" (257-258).

14 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 3 (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 29-30 (emphasis added).

tory on one side [and] defeat on the other."[15] Such a critical dismantling of "the penetration model" is a key first step toward a more relational, dialogical, and dialectical view of sex as "something more joyful, more equal, freer,"[16] in which there is no space anymore for fixed and pre-established categorizations in terms of superiority or inferiority, except as part of a mutually pre-determined, consensual script as in certain particular sexual practices. In regard to this, it is noteworthy that feminist scholars have recently arrived at the suggestion of complementing and counterbalancing (if not replacing) the traditional—and, in their view, "phallocentric" and "hegemonic masculinity-related"—notion of penetration with a new concept: circlusion.[17]

## 2.

In the previous section I used a quotation from *Negative Dialectics* as the starting point for my argumentation. In that quotation, Adorno connects the concept of the mutual penetration between subject and object to the idea of truth, ambitiously defined as "supreme among the metaphysical ideas."[18] It is interesting to establish a connection between that passage of *Negative Dialectics* and an aphorism from *Minima Moralia*, where Adorno observes that "he [or she] alone who could situate utopia in blind somatic pleasure, which, satisfying the ultimate intention, is intentionless, has a stable and valid idea of truth."[19] What this passage of *Minima Moralia* suggests is that the "intentionless" nature and the blinding intensity that characterize the experience of sexual pleasure are able to satisfy the "ultimate intention" of life, namely, happiness and the achievement of non-suffocating, non-coercive and therefore liberating forms of unity between different (or, more precisely, non-identical) human beings.

A clear connection between eros, truth, and utopia is established here by Adorno. These ideas can be interestingly connected to something that he explained to his students in the 1958 lecture course *An Introduction to Dialectics*,

15 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 3:29-30.

16 Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex* (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 95 (ebook edition).

17 See Ilka Quindeau, "Sexualität und Geschlecht: Why Bodies Matter," in *Kritische Theorie und Feminismus*, eds. Karin Stögner and Alexandra Colligs (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2022), 326-327. The term "circlusion" was originally introduced by Bini Adamczak as "the antonym of penetration": "it refers to the same physical process, but from the opposite perspective." Bini Adamczak, "On Circlusion," *The New Inquiry*, August 22, 2022, https://thenewinquiry.com/six-years-and-counting-of-circlusion.

18 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 401.

19 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (London/New York: Verso, 2005), 61.

recently published in his *Nachgelassene Schriften*. Here, in introducing the basic features of dialectical thinking to his students, Adorno makes precise (and thus not accidental, but intentional and strategic) reference to the experience of love. As Adorno observes in his 1958 *Vorlesung*, "the recognition of difference represents *a kind of utopia* […]. That the heterogeneous may coexist with the heterogeneous without each destroying the other, that one heterogeneous thing may leave room for the other to unfold as well, and that—we may also add—*the heterogeneous may love and be loved*, this would be the very dream of a reconciled world."[20] This observation reveals the secret but nonetheless decisive relation that Adorno envisions between dialectics—as a form of thinking that attempts to understand in a critical and disillusioned way the unreconciled world, but at the same time keeps the faith in the possibility of reconciliation—and the erotic dimension, in this case exemplified by the phenomenon of love.

After having cursorily analyzed the connection between eros, truth, and utopia, it is also intriguing to note a potential connection between love and another fundamental concept of Adorno's philosophy: aura. Aura is one of the most famous notions often associated with the aesthetic theories developed in the context of the Frankfurt School, especially thanks to Benjamin's and Adorno's influential treatment of it. In this context, a passage of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is particularly noteworthy, because here the very origin of the phenomenon of aura is traced back to a complex dialectics between magic, nature, experience, mimesis, and expression. As Horkheimer and Adorno observe, "the nature […] of aesthetic illusion" consists of re-enacting "the duplication by which the thing," in the "magic of primitives," appears as "something spiritual," as "a manifestation of *mana*": it is "the appearance of the whole in the particular," for them, that "constitutes its aura."[21]

Given the questions at the center of the present contribution, it can be insightful to cite a passage from Stefan Müller-Doohm's biography of Adorno that informs us of an extramarital affair Adorno had with Charlotte Alexander, the wife of his friend Robert Alexander. In particular, Müller-Doohm cites a letter sent by Adorno to Hermann Grab in May 1946, in which he openly talked of "his love for Charlotte," and wrote: "[t]he term 'fornication,' which by the way refers to something the reverse of contemptible, is a far from adequate description of what has taken place—terms such as 'aura' or 'magic' would be more apt. It was as if the long-forgotten childhood promise

20 Theodor W. Adorno, *An Introduction to Dialectics* (Cambridge-Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2017), 71 (emphasis added).

21 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 14.

of happiness had been unexpectedly, belatedly fulfilled."[22] What emerges here is a constellation of aura, magic, and *promesse du bonheur*: that is, a constellation of ideas that, in general, plays a fundamental role in Adorno's entire thinking and that he fascinatingly connected to the erotic dimension in this letter. This delicate biographical episode can be connected to the contents of another aphorism from *Minima Moralia*, in which the experience of falling in love is emphatically defined as "not letting immediacy wither under the omnipresent weight of mediation."[23] Here, Adorno stimulatingly uses rigorous epistemological terminology and conceptuality (i.e., the dialectics between immediacy and mediation)[24] to offer an original comprehension of an erotic phenomenon: namely, love.

On the basis of the relation between the capacity to not let immediacy in human relations wither under the omnipresent weight of mediation in social life (especially in the "administered world" that we live in) and the aforementioned idea of the appearance of the universal in the particular (which is masterfully exemplified by the manifestation of the most universal among human feelings in one's unique relation with a particular beloved person), one is tempted to interpret the experience of love as one of the hidden sources of Adorno's notion of aura. If so, can we suggest that the phenomenon of aura offers us a promising interpretative key to try to understand the enigmaticalness of love? And, conversely, can the experience of love help us to try to understand the indefinable and atmospheric phenomenon of aura? Of course, just like it is probably impossible to conceptually grasp and define the elusive atmosphere of aura, it is probably equally impossible to establish once and for all whether the *promesse du bonheur* embodied by the experience of love is real or is only a semblance, i.e., a promise that appears like the most real of all things in the moment but in the long-term is ultimately destined to remain unfulfilled. From this point of view, one is tempted to suggest that an ephemeral phenomenon like that of fireworks is not only "prototypical for artworks,"[25] as Adorno claims, but also for love, which (like artworks and fireworks) is "not only the other of the empirical world" but, rather, "everything in [it] becomes other."[26] Finally, all this clearly reminds us of the idea of happiness, which, in the context of Adorno's thinking, holds together the dimensions of knowledge, aesthetics, and ethics. The origin itself of the idea

22 Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography* (Cambridge-Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005), 61-62.
23 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §110, 172.
24 For Adorno, "dialectic is the philosophy of universal mediation." Adorno, *An Introduction to Dialectics,* 18.
25 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London/New York: Continuum, 2002), 81.
26 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 81.

of happiness is explicitly traced back by Adorno to the experience of "being encompassed" ("an after-image of the original shelter within the mother"[27]) and the experience of "sexual union."[28] In the end, for Adorno, "[t]o happiness the same applies as to truth" (and, *mutatis mutandis*, also to love): "one does not have it, but is in it. […] The only relation of consciousness" to these phenomena "is gratitude: in which lies [their] incomparable dignity."[29]

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27 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §72, 112.
28 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §139, 217.
29 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §72, 112.

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# Idiosyncrasy and Primary Experience

Iain Macdonald

The notion of "primary experience" (*primäre Erfahrung*), to which Adorno refers on occasion, is a bit of a riddle. Is it not mere superstition and the hallmark of mythological thinking to insist on what is primary?[1] In this vein, Adorno generally considers the superficially similar notion of "primal experience" (*Urerfahrung,* referring to Husserl's use of the term) to be highly problematic. Should the dialectician not be more interested in "spiritual" experience (*geistige Erfahrung*)?

However, in a passage from the introduction to *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno accords striking importance to primary experience, noting in passing that even the phenomenological *Urerfahrung* "points to something true, while pompously doing damage to it."[2] His point is this: "Not every experience that surges up as primary is to be denied point-blank. …

1 Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie I und II*, ed. Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2016), 191–92.

2 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), 39; *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 6, ed. Rolf Tiedemann et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970–1986), 49–50.

Whatever part of the object goes beyond the determinations imposed on it by thinking first turns up as something immediate for the subject; and conversely, the subject is least of all a subject where it feels most certain [*gewiß*] of itself, in primary experience."[3]

The reference to subjective certainty may suggest that we should associate Adorno's primary experience with the Hegelian critique of "sensory certainty" (*sinnliche Gewißheit*). To be certain of the immediacy of the given is the first error of consciousness; and its first lesson is that this immediacy is, in fact, mediated. Primary experience would then be a synonym of false immediacy. However, Hegel's point—at least in the first chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—is that grasping sensuous singularity requires the universality of concepts, whereas Adorno anticipates later stages of the dialectic of spirit. He stresses the presence of an objective, non-intentional surplus that is non-discursively enciphered into primary experience. This objective surplus "turns up as something immediate for the subject."

In this regard, primary experience might be seen as a medium of the "priority of the object," understood not as an objectivity independent of us, but as something constitutive that happens "behind the back of consciousness."[4] As such, primary experience would point to the objective conditions of visceral existence in the moment of their weighing most heavily and incomprehensibly upon the subject. It would point to something in need of critical attention.

However, visceral existence is not yet knowledge, let alone critical. In many cases, its objective content may only be discernible obliquely, *e.g.,* at the level of blind somatization, as the physical or emotional inscription of objectivity. The insomniac's perception of time may betray their unconscious sense that life's potential is constantly being transformed into irretrievable loss.[5] The lover's neurotic reaction to an imagined slight may also register, unbeknownst to them, a very real social coldness.[6] In such cases, primary experience would seem to be the expression of a problem, not its solution.

But as Adorno also points out, primary experience is something of which we should be "capable." "To what extent," he asks, "are people who live under conditions of centrally controlled mass culture, and who tend to adapt to these conditions, still generally capable of having genuine, primary experienc-

3 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 39; *Gesammelte Schriften*, 6:49–50.

4 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Michael Inwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 41; *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 9 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968–), 61.

5 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1978), 165–66; *Gesammelte Schriften*, 4:188–189.

6 Theodor W. Adorno, "Anhang [zu *Minima Moralia*]," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 294–295.

es [*noch fähig, echte, primäre Erfahrungen zu machen*]?"[7] What would it mean to be "capable" of anxious or neurotic immediacy?

It is here that the fundamental ambiguity of primary experience comes into view. Adorno does not only see it as the expression of a problem (of false immediacy), but also as the real, material condition of "advanced consciousness"—understood as a progressive "consciousness that is able to sublimate idiosyncratic reactions or experiences [*idiosynkratische Reaktionen oder Erfahrungen*] into theory."[8] Idiosyncrasy is therefore at the heart of experience. It names the seemingly irrational subjective impulses that register exactly those objective forces which theory has to decipher. To be capable of primary experience would mean being capable of feeling "innervation or timely nervous reactions, such as those of the artist—which should also be those of the scientist, or in any case of the philosophical scientist."[9] More specifically, being capable of primary experience would mean not deflecting nervous reactions, thereby making their social content legible.

However, strictly speaking, there is no "science of the idiosyncratic experience of consciousness" and the question of capability may come down to whether, in the absence of such a science, we can read anything at all out of the reality of primary experience. For this, we may require outside assistance.

This aspect comes out clearly in a well-known anecdote. When Adorno, in the company of Charlie Chaplin, absent-mindedly shook Harold Russell's prosthetic hook at a party in Malibu, his surprise and awkwardness inadvertently showed us how we can stumble back into the very coldness that we would most wish to escape: "When I shook his right hand and felt it return the pressure, I was extremely startled, but sensed immediately that I could not at any price reveal my shock to the war casualty. In a split second, I transformed my frightened expression into an obliging facial contortion that must have been far ghastlier."[10] Chaplin's prompt and clownish imitation of the scene provided its dialectical counterpoint: the artist's spontaneous reaction, over against the philosopher's, publicly reveals that things ought to have unfolded differently. We may even viscerally cringe at the mortifying scene precisely because things ought to have unfolded differently. Of course, the mockery does not solve the problem it puts on display, but it at least suggests that we stand in need of a solution. It puts the spotlight on the "ought."

7 Theodor W. Adorno, "Einführungen in die Darmstädter Gemeindestudie," in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 20.2: 637.

8 Theodor W. Adorno and Peter von Haselberg, "Zeitadäquates Bewußtsein statt Vorurteil und Ideologiebefangenheit," *Akzente: Zeitschrift für Literatur* 12, no. 6 (1965): 494–95.

9 Adorno and Haselberg, "Zeitadäquates Bewußtsein," 493.

10 Theodor W. Adorno, "Chaplin Times Two," trans. John MacKay, *Yale Journal of Criticism* 9, no. 1 (1996): 60; *Gesammelte Schriften*, 10.1:365.

What should not be overlooked is that this "ought"—the incomplete transcendence that laughter may evoke and which progressive theoretical consciousness may also register—is already that of "spiritual" experience. We might even say that primary experience "is" (speculatively) spiritual experience, as the latter is viewed from the uncertain standpoint of its materially, somatically given possibility.

In this configuration, primary experience is primary only because spiritual experience must "pre-suppose" it and thereby become its reflection. But they are torn halves; and so, more generally, the riddle of primary experience is not so much that it is primary, but rather that spiritual experience, once it leaves the path to systematic totality, has no way of knowing in advance whether the failure of a socially disfigured grin will ever meet with the success of its critical mimesis.

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# Over the Rainbow

Henry W. Pickford

In crucial and poignant passages in some of his central works Adorno invokes the image and experience of the rainbow. In the third "model" in *Negative Dialectics*, "Meditations on Metaphysics," for instance, he writes:

> What metaphysical experience might be […] is most readily similar to how Proust imagined it, in the happiness that is promised in the names of villages such as Otterbach, Watterbach, Reuenthal, Monbrunn. One believes that if one goes there one would be in what is fulfilled, as if it existed. When one really is there, what has been promised recedes like a rainbow. And yet one is not disappointed: rather one feels as though one were too near, and for that reason does not see it …[1]

And in the posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* we read:

> Connoisseurship of art is the combination of an adequate comprehension of the material and

1 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, vol. 6 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970–1986), 366; *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 373 (translation modified).

> a narrow-minded incomprehension of the riddle; it is neutral to what is cloaked. Those who peruse art solely with comprehension make it into something straightforward, which is furthest from what it is. If one seeks to get a closer look at a rainbow, it disappears.[2]

In both cases, the image of the rainbow, "at first glance" as it were, appears to be used superficially, to suggest that the rainbow's and its analog's appearance (*Erscheinung*) is mere illusion (*Schein*), a *fata morgana* without substance, import or purport: a subjective seeming revealed or unmasked—"if one seeks to get a closer look" —to lack any objectivity. And yet Adorno valorizes the sense of wonder and promise in the experience of the rainbow, and of colors more generally, as in childhood scenes depicted in *Minima Moralia*, for example in §146 (Toy Shop): "Disenchantment with the world of intuitions [*Anschauungswelt*] is the sensorium's reaction to its objective role as a 'world of commodities.' Only when purified of appropriation would things be colorful [*bunt*] and useful at once: under universal compulsion the two cannot be reconciled."[3] Here Adorno associates the colorful or multi-colored with those qualitative features experienced in intuition which have been "stripped away from things" as they exist in a world that has wholly become, in Marx's famous judgment, "the world of commodities." Furthermore, these childlike or aesthetic experiences of color, of the rainbow, are representative emissaries of an undiminished world.

As in many of Adorno's thoughts, Benjamin's thought is hiding in the shadows here. As Howard Caygill and Eli Friedlander have demonstrated, in early notes, fragments, and essays, Benjamin developed a theory of speculative metaphysics in answer to Kant's restrictive notion of experience as conditioned in receptive sensibility by the a priori forms of intuition—space and time—and conditioned in active intellection by the categories of the understanding (causality, substance, etc.) so as to secure epistemically the intersubjective validity or objectivity of empirical scientific knowledge.[4] Kant thereby, however, relegated ideas of reason such as God, immortality, and free-

2 Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, vol. 7 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970-1986), 185; *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 122 (translation modified).

3 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, in *Gesammelte Schriften,* ed. Rolf Tiedemann, vol. 4 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970-1986), 260; *Minima Moralia*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1978), 227–228 (translation modified).

4 Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London: Routledge, 1998); Eli Friedlander, "Learning from the Colors of Fantasy," *boundary* 2, vol. 45, no. 2 (2018): 111-137; Eli Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin: A Philosophical Portrait* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). Especially important in this regard is Walter Benjamin, "On Perception," in *Selected Writings*, eds. M. Bullock and M. Jennings, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 93-96.

dom to the noumenal realm of the thing-in-itself, beyond the finite world of phenomenal appearances (*Erscheinung*) as structured by and experienced in space, time and the categories. The infinite, the possibility of transcendence beyond the transcendentally conditioned and delimited world of appearance, the subject matter of speculative metaphysics, could perhaps be thought consistently as ideas, but could not be experienced, could not be known; at best they could be indirectly felt in the mind's travails before objects of sublimity.

However, Benjamin argued, color, and especially the rainbow as an image of childlike color in its plenitude, constitutes an *immanent bounded totality of potentially infinite gradations*; as such, one can experience transcendence toward infinity, the absolute, a quintessentially speculative metaphysical concept:

> Color is something spiritual, something whose clarity is spiritual, so that when colors are mixed they produce nuances of color, not a blur. The rainbow is a pure childlike image. In it color is wholly contour; for the person who sees with a child's eyes, it marks boundaries, is not a layer of something superimposed on matter, as it is for adults….
> … the rainbow refers not to a chaste abstraction but to a life in art. The order of art is paradisiacal because there is no thought of the dissolution of boundaries – from excitement – in the object of experience. Instead the world is full of color in a state of identity, innocence, and harmony. Children are not ashamed, since they do not reflect but only see.[5]

"The rainbow. Look at it; it is only color, nothing in it is form," says a painter in Benjamin's short dialogue "The Rainbow: Conversation about Fantasy [*Phantasie*]."[6] Suggesting a fundamental distinction between natural and art beauty, Benjamin claims that color is experientially, metaphysically prior to any spatio-temporal form that is imposed by the transcendental conditions of knowledge and likewise imposed by a mimetic painter: "The standard of colorfulness [*Farbigkeit*] of a painting lies in how much the color develops the substance of infinity [*Unendlichkeitsgehalt*] out of the spatial form of the object [*räumliche Gegenstandsform*], how much it places an object in the surface, lends it depth from itself."[7] Rather than being an attribute of objects, for Benjamin color is itself a *medium* that is perceptible independent of concrete

5 Walter Benjamin, "A Child's View of Color," in *Selected Writings*, eds. M. Bullock and M. Jennings, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 51. Other texts relevant to this complex in Benjamin's thought include *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, "A Glimpse into the World of Children's Books," "Painting and the Graphic Arts," and "Painting or Signs and Marks," and two unpublished fragments on the rainbow, discussed below.

6 Walter Benjamin, "Der Regenbogen: Gespräch über die Phantasie," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, vol. 7 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 24 (my translation).

7 Walter Benjamin, "Der Regenbogen oder die Kunst des Paradieses," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, vol. 7 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 563 (my translation).

forms in which it may derivatively inhere. Here he follows Goethe, of course, whose famous study of the medium of color also speaks of the rainbow:

> 814. […] we may assert that the chromatic scale, as given by us, produces an agreeable impression by its ingredient hues, we may here remark that those have been mistaken who have hitherto adduced the rainbow as an example of the entire [colour] scale […] since in this phenomenon, as well as in the ordinary prismatic series, the yellow-red and blue-red cannot attain to a union.[8]

From color-as-medium's metaphysical quality of formlessness, Benjamin extrapolates and interprets the experience of color phenomenologically as a limit case of *mimetic comportment*, in which mind resembles world, or rather, the subject-object epistemic relation is dissolved into a "pure seeing": "… I was nothing but seeing. All other senses were forgotten, vanished. Even I myself was not, not my understanding, which deduces [*erschließt*] the things from the images of the senses. I was not someone seeing, I was only seeing [*ich war nur Sehen*]. And what I saw was not things…., only colors. And I myself was colored [*gefärbt*] in this landscape."[9] Children's games and play with colorful objects, which Benjamin lovingly describes in several texts of this period, and which find echoes in childhood vignettes described in *Minima Moralia*, easily move in and out of pretense, performative mimetic enchantment and reflective distance, anticipating the dialectic of semblance (*Schein*) that Adorno will elaborate in *Aesthetic Theory*.

By invoking Benjamin's philosophical ruminations on the rainbow within a theory of metaphysical and aesthetic experience that grounds a sense of possibility and transcendence beyond the confines of the commodified world of appearances, Adorno, who as an adolescent barely beyond his own childhood read the *Critique of Pure Reason* weekly with his early mentor Siegfried Kracauer, like Benjamin would have recognized the subtext of those ruminations. In section §8 of the *Critique*, entitled "General remarks on the transcendental aesthetic," Kant uses the analogy of the rainbow to describe his picture of empirical realism and transcendental idealism. Common belief will draw the distinction between phenomenal appearance and thing-in-itself *within* empirical experience, and thereby lose the transcendental distinction at work in Kant's project. Kant illustrates the misstep with the example of a rainbow:

8 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, trans. Charles Lock Eastlake (London: John Murray, 1840 [reprint Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970]), 319-320; Original: *Werke. Hamburger Ausgabe*, ed. Erich Trunz, vol. 13 (Munich: Beck, 1981), 502-3.

9 Walter Benjamin, "Der Regenbogen, Gespräch über die Phantasie," 20. Cf. also the section "Colors" in Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900*.

> Thus, we would certainly call a rainbow a mere appearance of a sun-shower, but would call this rain the thing in itself, and this is correct, as long as we understand the latter concept in a merely physical sense, as that which in universal experience and all different positions relative to the senses is always determined thus and not otherwise in intuition. But if we consider this empirical object in general and, without turning to its agreement with every human sense, ask whether it (not the raindrops, since these, as appearances, are already empirical objects) represents an object in itself, then the question of the relation of the representation to the object is transcendental, and not only these drops are mere appearances, but even their round form, indeed even the space through which they fall are nothing in themselves, but only mere modifications or foundations of our sensible intuition; the transcendental object, however, remains unknown to us.[10]

Benjamin's account of color, and his recasting the rainbow as the experience of a bounded infinite totality in intuition but independent of form, can now be seen as a 'critical redemption' (*kritische Rettung*) of Kant's illustrative model, to show the possibility of experiencing the absolute, the transcendent, immanently. That there is no more powerful model of utopian thought Adorno clearly recognized, when he began the final section, "Finale," of *Minima Moralia* with the following thought: "The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption [*Erlösung*]. Knowledge has no light but that which shines [*scheint*] on the world by redemption," that is, light as the undiminished medium of infinite color.[11] Or, as he writes in *Negative Dialectics*: "The utmost distance alone would be proximity; philosophy is the prism that catches its color."[12]

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10 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A45-46/B62-63, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 187.

11 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 4:283; *Minima Moralia*, 39 (translation modified).

12 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik, Gesammelte Schriften*, 6:66; *Negative Dialectics*, 57 (translation modified).

(Springer Verlag); editor and translator of Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (Columbia University Press) and *Selected Early Poems* of Lev Loseff (Spuytenduyvil Press); and author of over thirty articles and book chapters. He is currently co-authoring the book *Adorno: A Critical Life*, co-editing the *Oxford Handbook to Adorno*, and editing and translating Adorno's *Graeculus: Selections from the Notebooks*. More information about his work can be found at academia.edu.

# Essays

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# "I will leave that to you for further thought": On Adorno's Lectures[1]

Michael Schwarz

Translated by Thomas Bell

To write about Theodor W. Adorno's lectures means, above all, taking into account his impact in the West German Federal Republic of the 1950s and 60s. Indeed, Adorno gave most of his lectures after his return from years of exile in the United States, in the two decades between 1949 and 1969. He dealt with topics ranging from music and sociology to pedagogy, politics, and literature. The lectures delivered during the post-war years, up to 1954, often relate to the situation in Germany, ravaged by war and culturally desolate. At issue are questions of reconstruction, the rediscovery of the discipline of sociology after its suppression by the National Socialists, developments within new music, and the writer

1 The term "lecture" is a translation of the German word "Vortrag," which refers not only to academic lectures but also to public talks. Indeed, the current article focuses mainly on Adorno's often improvised public lectures, which are collected in the volume *Vorträge 1949-1968*, edited by the author; see Theodor W. Adorno, *Vorträge 1949-1968*, ed. Michael Schwarz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2019). The English translation of Adorno's *Vorträge* will be published by Polity Press in due course.

Marcel Proust, whose works, Adorno claims, never received the reception they deserved in Germany.[2] Later lectures, such as those from the 1960s, also draw on the problem of the break with tradition. Adorno wanted to work against the prevailing amnesia in Germany. He spoke about conceptions of education during the period of German Idealism, about the young Karl Marx, about Frank Wedekind, about the Viennese School and the *Pierrot Lunaire* by Arnold Schoenberg.

These were hidden, dismissed, or repressed topics. Adorno's ambition was to bring such topics back into the discussion within the cultural climate of the Federal Republic during the Adenauer era. What was this climate? As Germany achieved economic stabilization, there were many attempts to return to tradition, *i.e.*, to a putatively undamaged tradition. The intoxication of reconstruction was matched by a frenzy of rediscovery, a faith in tradition and culture, that also served to cast off the experience of catastrophe and to repress individual guilt. In this context, Adorno asserts that cultural life is "characterized by its hollowed-out moment, its unfinished aspect, which is comparable to the not quite convincing, not quite true character of rebuilt cities."[3] This culture remains implausible, that which has arisen from the ruins remains unreal and shadowy, and the recognition of this is being drowned out by a bustle of activity.

Adorno wanted to oppose the decline of education (*Bildung*) and historical consciousness. But, for him, that project could not take the form of a restoration. There could be no appeal to anything venerable or to any fixed traditions. What had come before could not continue unabatedly. To reproduce traditional forms of culture and education would be to fall short of their very substance and meaning. The lectures follow an idea of tradition that does not consist of imitation and lifeless copying, but instead demonstrates a certain fidelity and living relationship to the past, but a past precisely in the process of transformation. Adorno already expresses this view in his first lecture after his return to Germany—on the problems of modern city planning.

Much space in the lectures is given over to reflections on education. This is especially so with those lectures between 1957 and 1963. They bear the following titles: "Individual and Society Today," "*Kultur* and Culture,"[4] "The Dependence of Educational Training Goals on Students and their Expectations," "The Unity of Research and Teaching under the Societal Conditions of

2 Adorno, *Vorträge*, 55ff.
3 Adorno, *Vorträge*, 468.
4 "Culture" occurs in English in the original.

the 18th and 19th Centuries," "Musical Education Today," and "The Concept of Political Education."

Why education? The insistence with which Adorno returns again and again to this topic indicates that it had become a problematic notion. One of the most disturbing revelations and one of the most poignant lessons from the time of National Socialism was that a "good education" does not necessarily protect against reversions to inhumanity. The Nazis were not simply a gang of barbarians, as the Swiss author Max Frisch had noted—a comment to which Adorno occasionally refers. Frisch mentions, for example, the National Socialist politician Reinhard Heydrich, who played a decisive role in the overall planning of the destruction of the Jews. But, as Frisch writes, he was also an excellent and extremely sensitive musician, who could converse eloquently, knowledgeably, and even admirably about Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven. Nevertheless, this fine aesthetic education did not prevent him from devoting himself to brutal, murderous practices. Consequently, what type of education should be promoted, what modifications should existing education undergo, in order to prevent a repetition of mass murder and a relapse into barbarism? That is the question.

What, then, are the ends of education? Wilhelm von Humboldt regarded it as an end in itself, as "humanity's true purpose." He spoke, for example, of the "highest and most proportional formation of human powers into a whole."[5] This idealistic concept of education suffered increasing attacks during the 1950s, particularly among educators who were under the influence of a "realistic turn." Technical education became the focus of attention. Humboldt was accused of being out of touch with reality. His educational ideal was no longer viable; it had nothing to do with the real demands of the modern working world, and with those strict requirements necessary for high-level specialization and for obtaining qualifications for specific employment opportunities. While Adorno mentions certain limitations to the Humboldtian notion of education, he is not interested in simply scrapping the idealistic concept of education, which, indeed, implies a critique of society based on the division of labor.

Education, patiently and sustainably acquired over long periods of time, stands in tension with the established division of labor and its allocation of tasks. This is well-documented by Adorno's lectures, which are more than simply "wide-ranging" in scope. His overarching goal is to overcome the division of disciplines.

5 Willhelm von Humboldt, *Werke in fünf Bänden*, ed. Andreas Flitner and Klaus Giel, vol. 1 (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1960), 64.

With an emphasis on transcending individual disciplines, developing interconnected perspectives, and breaching the borders between philosophy and the individual sciences, Adorno was a popular contributor to the "studium generale." In this context, he spoke at the universities of Freiburg, Mainz, Braunschweig, and (most likely) Heidelberg. For the "studium generale," study groups were established or lectures were offered, particularly on topics that fell between academic disciplines. For example, when Adorno lectured within the "studium generale" program at the Johannes Gutenberg-Universität in Mainz on November 8, 1961, and addressed the problems involved in connecting research and teaching, he spoke specifically about the necessities and dangers of scientific specialization, employing, as his intellectual source, the era of Idealism— Goethe, Hegel, and Humboldt.

However, the wide-ranging character of Adorno's lectures, which would lead him to the disciplines of pedagogy, visual arts, and city planning, had its limits. Adorno did not want to speak uninhibitedly on every imaginable topic, crossing over into dilettantism, and the numerous invitations he received only strengthened his awareness of what he wanted to avoid. In fact, Adorno often appealed to his own lack of experience and knowledge when justifying his refusal of invitations to speak on topics outside his areas of expertise.

Adorno's correspondence with event organizers was filed under the heading "Invitations" in his papers. In these folders, from "Aarhus" to "Zürich," one finds correspondence on lectures and public conversations, in which Adorno either participated or was invited to participate. In contrast to his radio broadcasts—for which Adorno frequently provided ideas to the editors or program managers—the initiative for speaking invitations typically came from local organizers. The character of these events varied: public, partially public, or for a private circle of participants.

In 1957, Adorno spoke about "Human Society Today" in the context of a continuing education series organized particularly for civil servants. Here, he addressed the consequences of globalization. It had created new dependencies between countries:

> If, a hundred years ago, there were dynastic wars in a country like Afghanistan, then those were essentially Afghan matters that had little impact on other powers. When something like that happens in Afghanistan today, then we can be certain from the outset that it is either a Soviet plot or about American oil interests, and that what happens apparently independently in such a country is, in reality, a function of the major power conflicts existing throughout the whole world.[6]

6 Adorno, *Vorträge*, 195.

A few years later, in 1961–62, the Cold War reached its apex. The arms race, which Adorno referred to as "insanity," moved the world to the brink of an abyss. Even if tendencies toward *détente* began to emerge in the following years, global dangers remained, and the problems facing human survival were so present and pervasive that working on art and culture became questionable for Adorno.

By 1960, West Germany had economically regained its footing, and at this time political culture began to change as well. There was progress in the development of a critical public sphere, as it reshuffled its system of values and began to challenge authorities and hierarchies. It was during these years that changes were already in the making that would lead to the political ferment of 1968.

In the context of these upheavals after the 1950s, a number of political-pedagogical lectures by Adorno had a very strong impact in the public sphere. Adorno was intensely interested in putting the issue of "Working Through the Past" on the agenda in Germany. He warned of a fascism that exists latently in contexts where democratic ways of life are not firmly established. If people do not make democracy their own, then fascist tendencies will continue to develop within outwardly democratic countries. Adorno pursued this topic in his lectures on "The Authoritarian Personality" (1960) and the "Concept of Political Education" (1963). But, a few years later, he found himself forced to address openly anti-democratic, fascist movements, both old and new. In 1967, he spoke about the right-wing radicalism that had virulently manifested itself in the election victories of the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD). Founded in 1964, the party had representation in state parliaments starting in 1966. With his lecture on *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism* (2020) Adorno reacted to the successes of the party—victories that had shaken trust in the democratic development of the Federal Republic.

Justifiably, Adorno was regarded as the great "Nay-Sayer" among German philosophers. He was suspicious of affirmative acquiescence and of apologetics. He believed that it was his task to actively avoid venerating values, providing recipes for improvement, and following the expectations of "constructive critique." Yet, his thinking did not lose itself in negativity. As little as he considered himself responsible for saying what needed to be done, and as skeptical as he was of particular reforms, he did not shy away from occasionally offering proposals and advice of practical significance. Several of his lectures formulate suggestions or serve as attempts at intervention, which gainsay his notorious negativism. In 1962, he provided concrete proposals on the connection between research and teaching in philosophy and sociology. Avoiding humanitarian or moralizing pleas, Adorno, in 1967, gave realistic recommendations for dealing with right-wing radicals. The accusation of be-

ing a theoretician lacking in practical relevance—or of being resigned to the circumstances—overlooks this aspect of his lectures, namely, their practical effectiveness. The lectures reveal instances of a reflective engagement that stands opposed to defeatism and cold indifference. And, insofar as they also oppose an "observational relationship to reality,"[7] they go far beyond theory.

Frequently, Adorno, as philosopher and intellectual, resisted universally dominant positions. In one lecture, he speaks against what he calls "bleating with the herd," and against the "tremendous clutter of clichés and stereotypes" associated with new music. In another place, he contends he wants to counter "the habitual ways of thinking that today are generally widespread in the German milieu."[8] Adorno saw it as his task to attack stale conventions and models of opinion. Consequently, it is all the more surprising when he sides with common sense, with pre-scientific human understanding:

> If I may give you a piece of advice, it is the following: you should not allow yourself to be particularly swayed by science; but instead, in God's name, you should rely on your own healthy human understanding, which today no longer, by any means, automatically agrees with science. […] Do not allow yourself to become stupid; above all, do not be persuaded that that which thrives in the academic world now automatically represents higher knowledge; but, instead, realize that—in opposition to the official world of education—there is always at work among people a tradition of skepticism, of irony, of awakened consciousness, which is perhaps the best source humanity has at its disposal today to change the world.[9]

It may strike us as strange that Adorno should refer to an alternative "tradition," based on "awakened consciousness," that might have greater transformative potential today than the academic world of education. However, this is no exception; this view indicates—against stereotypes promoting the contrary view—just how distant Adorno is from elite conceptions and from hostility towards the masses.

Adorno's educational praxis, as manifested in his lectures, was particularly pertinent to non-academic audiences. From 1954 to 1962, he took part—eight times in total—in the "Hessian Collegiate Weeks for Continuing Education in Political Science." This series was intended as advanced training for civil servants. During these collegiate weeks, Adorno gave talks to laypeople and also spoke with them directly. More specifically, he addressed themes that were in no way associated with the areas of work represented by those government officials who were in attendance. Adorno was sometimes surprised by the lively participation and intellectual openness of his audience. One could

7 Adorno, *Vorträge*, 467.
8 Adorno, *Vorträge*, 111, 118.
9 Adorno, *Vorträge*, 214f.

speak there without decreasing the level of conversation, without reducing intellectual demands, and without improper pedagogical approaches to the material. Adorno was convinced that he could contribute to fundamentally promoting the listeners' understanding, *e.g.*, of difficult works of new music.

Adorno understood his improvised lectures, above all, as a foundation for discussion. The lecture was not to be perceived simply as a monologue or condescending pontification, but instead, it was intended to require critical thinking that would arise in the course of conversation. Adorno did not want a learning environment free from contestations. He wanted participants to provide commentary and to give answers. He was not disturbed, in any way, by contradictions and criticism. He writes:

> It is precisely that person, who seemingly speaks freely—as in a discussion, but without allowing it to actually become a discussion, without the other side finding the possibility to answer—it is this person who, in this manner, very quickly occupies this usurped position; and, with this type of lecture, I myself am never able to get rid of the feeling of embarrassment and inappropriateness, without, however, considering it better to simply brandish a manuscript and to read the audience to sleep.[10]

Adorno regarded the monologue as the occupational sickness of the university instructor. Furthermore, he understood his lectures as, first and foremost, stimuli to critical, autonomous thinking and as guidelines for further discussion. He believed that they should help listeners develop their abilities to make independent connections. For Adorno, therein also lay the liveliness of philosophical reflection. He quoted one of Immanuel Kant's ideas: one can "never learn philosophy, at the most one can learn to philosophize."[11] Adorno himself did not want to disseminate any type of ready-made educational content, but instead he encouraged people to use their own reason: *"I will leave that to you for further thought*."[12]

Regarding the problem of Adorno's comprehensibility, what can be said is that too frequently the problem itself is not properly grasped. For Adorno, the listeners' comprehension was vital. His lectures do not speak the language of exclusivity. For the most part, they are easier to grasp than his published writings. Concern for the audience's understanding and the lecture's effectiveness are more pronounced. There is a kind of situational deference at work here, a pragmatic approach to the audience, and a deliberate decision to begin with the consciousness of the listeners. For example, Adorno says to his audience that

10 Theodor W. Adorno, "Zum Problem des akademischen Unterrichts" (call number Ts 52304), Theodor W. Adorno Archiv, Frankfurt am Main.

11 See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998) A837, B865.

12 Adorno, *Vorträge*, 343. Emphasis added.

he wants to start "from your position, as I conceive it to be. I would like to try to develop answers from your own state of consciousness."[13]

Many of his lectures have an introductory, familiar, mediating or synoptic character. They require less prior knowledge, which consequently facilitates their reception. And, as Adorno was well aware, they also achieved their goal through the lighter element of spontaneity. In one letter, Adorno writes: I "repeated—most recently with my free improvisational Wagner-Lecture in Berlin—the experience that my things—as one says—'come across' better when I do not read according to a manuscript, which would simply be unavoidably dense and armored."[14]

What does Adorno mean when he speaks of his lectures as "free improvisations"? They were not completely unprepared. His art of lecturing is that of organized spontaneity: Adorno developed the lectures while speaking, relying on keywords that served to order or pre-structure his thoughts; they were reminders and guidelines. His notes sometimes also contain a detailed plan, a collection of quotes, or a more comprehensively outlined concept. The materials left behind testify to the type and degree of preparation.

"Improvisations on Wedekind" was the title Adorno gave to a lecture held on April 28, 1962, in the Darmstadt regional theatre on the occasion of a performance of Frank Wedekind's farce *The Love Potion*. Two days prior he prepared a few notes for his talk. A secretary typed out, and then augmented and amended them by hand. In this way, he produced a kind of template that functioned as a foundation for improvisation. "To pull out a manuscript and to read something about Wedekind would have something unspeakably ridiculous about it," Adorno says at the beginning of his lecture. But at the same time, he admits that he was not unprepared: "It will, indeed, be improvisations, and if I have written down something here, then, truth be told, it was only because I would have feared letting myself be so carried away that I would have inordinately stretched your patience."[15] Adorno knew that keywords provide a limiting function; they help maintain a trajectory and offer anchor points, so as to limit digressions, particularly on topics important to him and capable of spurring rhetorical *élan*. He sought only to avoid the erratic-associativeness of oral speech, insofar as it tends towards misleading detours and digressions.

Adorno cultivated a carefully articulated manner of speaking. Every syllable received its due. It is frequently said that Adorno spoke "like a book," that is, in publishable prose. He spoke fluently and in a relaxed manner, rich in paren-

13 Adorno, *Vorträge*, 78.
14 Theodor W. Adorno, *Correspondence* (call number Ru 85/1), Theodor W. Adorno Archiv, Frankfurt am Main.
15 Adorno, *Vorträge*, 330.

theses, building, every now and then, long arcs and periodic sentence constructions. He fascinated his audience through his rhetoric, his power of speech, and his passion for thought. In what is said there is hardly a trace of intellectual exertion; there is rather an appearance of effortlessness, as if what is said stemmed from a place of assured fluency.

That said, did he really speak "like a book?" Adorno's own answer: Never! He resolutely separated the spoken from the written word. For him, an improvisational lecture was radically different from a text prepared for publication. With regard to the spoken word, he once said: one "may lay claim to a certain liberality […] one may take things with a pinch of salt."[16] The free—or better: half-free—lecture did not have to obey the strict linguistic and stylistic demands to which his essays and articles were subjected in advance of publication. Adorno's published texts went through multiple revisions, resulting, ultimately, in a finished and polished product. Of written works he demanded of himself conscientiously precise formulations, literary coherence, and rigorously enhanced textual density, all of which followed the principle of the work and his stylistic will. Lectures, on the other hand—measured by such standards—lacked something, for Adorno. He says, referring to himself: "But nothing that he says can satisfy what he demands from a text."[17] Authorial ethos and consciousness of form, as well as language-critical considerations, led Adorno to place slightly less importance on his lectures. Additionally, these authorial demands impelled him to hesitate to publish anything that had not been previously subjected, in repeated iterations, to the possibilities of refinement and correction inherent in writing. In general, Adorno refused to publish his lectures. He did not want something said in a fleeting moment to become permanently established. He did not want to accept authorial responsibility for anything that was intended to have an immediate effect, and in which he saw a great deal of insufficiency, roughness, imprecision, clumsiness, clunkiness, with the appearance of something dashed off. Precision of thought depends on formulation, and Adorno's precise linguistic thinking obtains its measure in and through the written text. The lectures, in his estimation, were of lesser importance. He always maintained a "*parti pris*" (partiality) for the written work.

Fortunately, the majority of his lectures have been preserved in the Theodor W. Adorno Archive, in the form of audio recordings and transcripts. The core collection of audio material belongs to Adorno's literary estate. Over the years, the archive has continually added to this material. Approximately thirty years ago, Rolf Tiedemann, the longtime director of the Adorno Archive who passed

16 Theodor W. Adorno, *Erich Doflein, Briefwechsel. Mit einem Radiogespräch von 1951 und drei Aufsätzen Erich Dofleins* (Hildesheim and New York: Olms, 2006), 237.

17 Adorno, *Vorträge*, 640.

away in 2018, developed plans for Adorno's *Posthumous Writings.* The project, as he conceived it, included plans for individual volumes containing Adorno's lectures, as well as conversations, discussions, and interviews. Tiedemann was, of course, conscious of the fact that it would be problematic to collect lectures and conversations under the label of posthumous "writings." Nevertheless, Suhrkamp Verlag and the Hamburg Foundation for the Promotion of Science and Culture made it possible to include all this spoken, improvised, and unwritten material in the posthumous edition.

For the publication of the lectures, the basic plan was to organize and archive everything in Adorno's literary estate related to the lectures or connected with them in any way. The idea was to provide an overview of when, where, and about what Adorno had spoken. The next step involved gathering together materials not already in the archive. To this end, research was conducted in radio archives, with a view to compiling the most complete collection possible of audio recordings in which Adorno participated. In this manner, it was possible to develop a detailed plan for a volume of lectures.

Insofar as it was possible, the preparation of texts for publication followed from the transcription of audio recordings. However, where only a written document was available, it was this that had to be accepted as the basis for the resulting text. In addition to the lectures, the volume also contains the keywords with which Adorno equipped himself and upon which he improvisationally relied. Furthermore, included are a comprehensive apparatus of annotations, an editor's afterword, and an index of names.

The manuscript containing the volume of lectures went to Suhrkamp Verlag, where Eva Gilmer suggested the idea of publishing Adorno's lecture on right-wing extremism first, as a separate volume. *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism* appeared in Germany in July 2019 with an afterword by the historian and journalist Volker Weiß.

The tremendous reception of this publication can be explained, at least partially, by the current widespread concern about a political situation that has greatly stimulated right-wing populist tendencies in Germany, in other European countries, and in America. Reviews have shown, sometimes strikingly, that there are far-reaching resemblances between the themes of the lecture and the present. There is quite a bit—for example when Adorno analyzes right-wing rhetoric—that could be correlated with today's right-wing populism, and in particular with the extreme wing of the "Alternative for Germany" (AfD), a party that, over the last years, has been on the rise. The timeliness of this lecture's publication has been repeatedly emphasized, although some commentators have also spoken about the limits of the lecture's actuality. In any event, the small book on *Right-Wing Extremism* has rocked the boat and triggered an important discussion. It was on the *Spiegel* Best-

seller List for six months; in that time almost 70,000 copies had been sold. Moreover, the public reception of this small text was in no way limited to the German context: Suhrkamp Verlag has already issued many foreign licenses for translation and publication around the globe, frequently in countries in which there are strong currents of right-wing populism. Hopefully, the entire volume of lectures, which helps to correct a one-sided image of Adorno and thereby achieve a better understanding of his intellectual endeavors, will also experience broad international reception.

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# Beautiful Passages (*Schöne Stellen*): Translators' Introduction

Shierry Weber Nicholsen, Jeremy J. Shapiro

Adorno begins this text[1] with a theoretical statement that he characterizes as a "heretical" counterpart to his usual emphasis on structural hearing—hearing that is oriented to the integrity of the whole. Here instead he will focus on the contribution of the detail; hence the heresy. Indeed, Adorno also published this first section separately under the title "Little Heresy."[2] From this perspective, it is the detail, the beautiful passage, from which the whole is built up—composition from the bottom up, so to speak, something he emphasizes in his book on Mahler. This is especially important, Adorno notes, in the era of progressive modern music with its dissociative tenden-

1 Adorno gave "Schöne Stellen" as a radio talk in August 1965 on the Hessischer Rundfunk. Some excerpts were performed by a pianist at the studio; for others, recordings were used. This translation is of the text as printed in the following collection: Theodor W. Adorno, *Musikalische Schriften V*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, vol. 18 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 695–718.

2 Theodor W. Adorno, "Little Heresy," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2002), 318–324.

cies. Adorno is concerned with the musical dialectic of the particular and the general and their mediation with each other. This dialectic fails when the general is merely general, amounting to a simple repetition of schemata, especially those of the tonal system, and the detail becomes merely an implementation of those schemata. For the listener the musical dialectic fails when the particular is heard in one or the other of two non- or anti-musical modes of listening: what Adorno calls the "atomistic," in which the detail or passage is heard in complete isolation rather than in its musical context within the piece, and what he calls the "culinary," in which the listener is focused on the purely sensuous quality of the note or notes.

"Beautiful Passages" offers us a brief introduction to the aesthetics of listening. In musical listening, as opposed to atomistic or culinary listening, one hears the beauty of the detail in its musical context. Adorno will present us some passages chosen to demonstrate beautiful details, particular favorites of his own in a systematically organized chronological order (from Bach to Schoenberg), and he will try, he says, to show what makes each of these passages beautiful. But precisely what that is—at least for Adorno—we are to discover through his description of the passages as heard in his experience of listening. This musical experience, Adorno says, is the product of the listener's exercise of *exakte Phantasie,* or exact imagination. (We have used "imagination" rather than "fantasy" here because the English "fantasy" suggests a scenario driven by the subject's desire, rather than an imaginative subjective response aroused by the music itself). Exact, in that it follows the contours of the music itself; imagination, in that it gives rise to a subjective experience integrating an inner experience of the senses with musical meaning.

How to articulate such an experience? With emotionally-tinged metaphorical or figurative descriptions of the inner experience of listening. Adorno precedes each of the passages he has chosen with a commentary including such a description, as well as some of what one might find in conventional musicological commentary. But when the musicological comments are linked with the experiential descriptions, they transcend pedantry or platitude. Of Mozart's Violin Sonata in A Major, Köchel 526, for example, Adorno says:

> It has become a cliché to attribute to Mozart divine playfulness. In this sonata a theme appears that rescues this attribute from its cliché status and really sounds as though, with its unexpected improvisatory expansion, music had abandoned all controls, the ignominy of all bonds, and floated off the earth with cherubic bliss.

Here Adorno has given us the experiential meaning behind the cliché. At other times the description is so precise and yet so experientially evocative that we know we are in a different realm of commentary altogether. For example, of the theme of the variations movement, the second movement of

Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 23, Op. 57, the Appassionata, Adorno notes that the theme "only really speaks when one hears it directly after the coda of the first movement, a fully composed catastrophe." This is how he describes what we then hear:

> After that explosion and collapse [the end of the first movement], the theme of the variations movement sounds as though it were bent over under a giant shadow, an oppressive burden. The muffled character of the sound seems to musically elaborate this sense of burden.

If "Beautiful Passages," with its focus on the particular, was a heretical move for Adorno, the proponent of structural listening, as a display of exact imagination in listening to the beautiful detail, it was heretical in another way as well. Elsewhere, he had focused on other dimensions of listening, such as the regression of listening under conditions of reification in advanced capitalism in "*On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening*" (1938),[3] the different social types of listening in *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* (1963),[4] and its almost microscopic structure in his guidelines for listening to new music, "Anweisungen zum Hören neuer Musik" (1963)[5]. "Beautiful Passages," in contrast, demonstrates the role of the subjective listening experience in establishing musical objectivity. At the same time, it is important to remember that Adorno's underlying goal here is not to improve one's "music appreciation," a concept that Adorno detested and critiqued. Rather, it is to 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.

3 Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2002), 288–317.

4 Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1988).

5 Theodor W. Adorno, "Anweisungen zum Hören neuer Musik," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, vol. 15 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 189–248.

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# Beautiful Passages (*Schöne Stellen*)

Theodor W. Adorno

Translated by Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Jeremy J. Shapiro[1]

For Dieter Schnebel

Conceived as something more humane than the mere business of information, musical understanding and musical cultivation [*Bildung*] amount to the capacity to perceive musical relationships—and ideally, elaborated and articulated music—as a meaningful whole. This is what is intended by the notion of structural listening, which is emphatically called for these days in critical opposition to listening that merely grasps at the present moment, which is naive in the bad sense. Atomistic listening that loses itself effortlessly and passively in the charm of the moment, the pleasant individual sound, the melody that is easily grasped and retained, is pre-artistic. Because the subjective

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capacity for synthesis eludes such listening, it also fails when it comes to the objective synthesis that all more highly organized music brings about. An atomistic orientation, still the most common and certainly also the one that so-called light music relies on and cultivates, passes over into the naturalistic-sensuous pleasure of delectation, taking the art out of art. Art certainly had enough trouble distinguishing itself from this orientation over the course of centuries, always with the possibility of its autonomy being revoked. Given that music cannot be grasped by concepts, a person who listens atomistically is not capable of perceiving something sensory as a matter of spirit. This is the *modus operandi* of dilettantes, who snatch really or allegedly beautiful melodies, perhaps second themes from Schubert, out of long movements with their complex architecture, and rather than following the impulse of the music and moving forward with that impulse make infantile demands that they be repeated and repeated, like the aesthetically inclined Austrian gentleman who admitted that he had played the Torero March from *Carmen* repeatedly for a whole evening without ever getting tired of hearing it. This form of response is tailored in advance to the hits of popular music, even though listeners of this type consider themselves especially musical for seeking out what they consider to be special pearls. The history of the music of the nineteenth century met them halfway. In the later Romantic period and with the folkloristic school's interest shifted increasingly to what started out with Schubert as the subjectively lyrical melody [*Einzelmelodie*]. It became established as this music's trademark, to the detriment of the objective, constructive nexus [*Zusammenhang*] of the musical whole. A music history that is not merely content with the distinction between the high and the low but understands that the lower is a function of the higher would need to trace the path that leads from Tchaikovsky's most drastic formulations, such as the second theme from *Romeo and Juliet*, through the harmonically spiced favorite melodies from Rachmaninoff's piano concertos to Gershwin and from there down into the bad infinity of entertainment music. In view of the latter's overwhelming quantitative predominance, musical cultivation must work against all of this. I have certainly been trying to do so for a long time, even introducing the concept of atomistic listening.

But if musical insight and experience do not want to merely dumb themselves down to take pride in their own sophistication, they cannot stop at that critique. For in the highly organized music that such insight is concerned with—indeed, all the more so, the more highly organized the music is—the whole is something in the process of becoming, not something thought out beforehand in the abstract, not a template to be simply filled in part by part. Rather, the musical whole is one essentially through the meaningful succession of its parts. Only thereby is it a whole. The parts are determined in this

way by the constraints of any possible grasp of music itself, that is of the whole as something extended in time of which one can only become aware in its successive sections. The whole is articulated through relationships extending forward and backward, through anticipation and recollection, contrast and proximity. Without being articulated and divided into parts, the whole would disintegrate in its mere self-sameness. Grasping music appropriately requires hearing what is appearing here and now in relation to what has come before and, through anticipation, to what will come afterwards. In this process the moment of pure presence, the here and now always retains a certain immediacy without which the relation to the whole, the mediated, can no less be brought about than the other way around.

To be able to withstand the entertainment music that is drummed into us by the culture industry and loudly applauded by compliant teenagers, musical education has been forced to one-sidedly emphasize listening to the whole at the expense of its articulation through details. The anti-Romantic developmental tendencies of serious music pushed in the same direction. Today, however, given the neoclassical and historicist ideal of mechanistic objectivity, things have reversed themselves. The focus on the whole has become one-sided and threatens to let the individual moments, without which no whole can live, atrophy. From this perspective the interpretations of the so-called youth music movement[2] can be regarded as repressive measures favoring the whole against the details. The latter are equated, not wholly without reason, with the role of the subject in music, and the fact that no musical objectivity can be successfully produced, except through the subject, is not recognized. A whole perceived without regard to its partial moments and the relationships among its divisions is not whole but rather abstract, schematic, and static. Corresponding to this reactive mode of perception, which is not receptive to spontaneous musical impulses but rather immediately subjects them to discipline, is a great body of undifferentiated, schematic music from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which is not improved by the historically informed stance of pundits who explain that the category of individual style is not appropriate for it. The reactionary cultural ideology of the musical youth movement of yesteryear took up this orientation. Today, now that this ideology has been exposed and has crumbled, it is urgent to look long and hard at the individual musical moment as the complement of structural listening and its concretion.

This turn is required by the truth content of the historical movement that music has made since the Baroque period. It can be regarded, with unavoidable oversimplification, as the dialectic of the musical general [*Allgemeine*]

2 Translators' note: the *Jugendmusikbewegung* was an early 20th-century German movement emphasizing the choral singing of folk songs.

and particular: as the by no means conscious effort of the objective spirit to overcome the divergence between form and specific musical content, which more or less corresponds to the divergence between society and the individual, and to reconcile them. One does not need powerful interpretive skills to understand the detail as representing the individual in this dialectic, and the whole as the general, that is, what is socially approved, no matter how much, at the height of Viennese classicism and before that with Bach, the forms themselves may have seemed to arise from a free subject. It took a very long time for the subject to take part, to speak in Hegelian terms, in the constitution and architecture of the whole. Only in the modern era did the ideal of a music in which the two extremes would be fused with one another become delineated. One may well ask, however, whether this truly is an ideal; whether, instead, both moments might not be obliterated in this complete integration without, as the idea had been, at the same time being transformed into something higher. Contemporary music is not lacking in constructions, or programs—and in many cases the constructions have become their own programs—in which impulses no longer have any place in a structure that is preorganized in dictatorial fashion, the structure itself being merely something posited, lacking in the objectivity of a musical language that would extend beyond the individual work as did the language of tonal forms in their day. Integration, the longed-for reconciliation of the general and the particular in aesthetic form, is probably impossible so long as the reality outside the work of art remains unreconciled. That which in works of art rises above society is immediately overtaken by the poverty of reality; as long as reconciliation is only reconciliation within an image, it retains something powerless and unconvincing, even as image. It follows that the tension in great works of art must not only be balanced out in their course—and even Schoenberg wanted to limit it to that—but must equally be sustained in their course. This means nothing less than that it is precisely in legitimate works that the whole and the parts cannot dissolve into one another, as an aesthetic idea that is by no means limited to classicism would have it. Spontaneous awareness of the non-identity of whole and parts is as much a part of true music-listening as the synthesis that unites them. Even with Beethoven, balancing out that tension—something no one succeeded in doing as he did because the tension was greater in him than in anyone—required a compositional tour de force [*Veranstaltung*]. It is only because with him the parts are already tailored to the whole, pre-formed by it, that identity, balance, is achieved. The cost of this is on the one hand the decorative pathos with which identity is invested, and on the other hand the carefully planned insignificance of the individual idea [*Einzelerfindung*], which drives the individual moment beyond itself from the outset so that it can become something, awaiting the whole that the individ-

ual moment will become and that will annihilate it. The medium that made this tour de force possible was tonality, that form of the general whose typical manifestations in Beethoven already match the particular, the themes. With the irreversible decline of tonality this possibility no longer exists; nor, once its principle became transparent, was it any longer to be desired.

Thoughts like these inspire me to heresy against what I have otherwise championed, although I tell myself that I made the dialectical relationship between the totality and the detail a central focus of structural analyses like those in the *Der Getreue Korrepetitor*. If I now, again one-sidedly and not without irony, draw attention to particulars, I know myself to be in accord with the unmistakable dissociative tendencies in great music since late Mahler. Dieter Schnebel pointed out to me convincingly that they are also at work in the most progressive modern music. If something that is a genuinely musical whole does not exercise a blind dominance by means of so-called form but is instead result and process at the same time—closely resembling, by the way, the metaphysical conceptions of great philosophy—, then one would think that the way to an understanding of the whole would have to proceed upward from the individual moment as well as downward from the whole. And musical experience is impelled in this direction even more, given that all-encompassing forms to which listening could blindly surrender no longer exist. The means to this kind of experience is exact imagination [*exakte Phantasie*]. It lingers on the individual moment and opens its riches instead of hurrying past it to the whole with the anxious impatience to which the good musician has been trained and which spoils so many interpretations today. Because, however, the whole and the moment do not merge to become one, the individual moment also gains a standing of its own that transcends the whole. So much of substance is brought together in it, just as music, in its very idea, is more than culture, order, synthesis. There is color to much musical detail that does not evaporate within the whole—and it is not only since the Romantic period, as historicism would have it, that this has been true. At times one is tempted to look to such details for what is best. Details of this dignity are the seals that attest to what is authentic in a text; one can liken them to its name. The extent to which music is indebted to them becomes apparent where they are absent, as for instance in the musical flow of the ingenious Max Reger, in which the unremitting chromatic gliding essentially tolerates no details. With them what is inextinguishable and unrepeatable disappears.

In presenting you with a series of beautiful passages, commenting on them, and trying to explain on what basis they can be called beautiful, I am not merely trying to rescue them from the vulgar notion of the beautiful passage, which does need to be critiqued. I also want to refute clichés, to carve a path

through to the heart of the matter, to break through the wall of conventional musicological formulations. In Walter Benjamin's *One-Way Street*, we find this aphorism; "The quotations in my work are like highwaymen who spring forth fully armed and rob the idler of his convictions." Musical quotations too have some of this polemical force; this is why Alban Berg once thought up a musical journal that would cite passages from compositions in the punitive way Karl Kraus dealt with the press in [his journal] *Die Fackel*. The correlate of the punitive force of the musical stupidities he quoted is the radiant power of the musical Name being cited. Once perceived, the light of the beauty of particular details wipes away the illusion with which culture has cloaked music, and which is all too complicit with its dubious aspect: the notion that music already constitutes the happy totality of which humanity has been hitherto deprived. That image is better captured by the detail in a single measure on its own than by the triumphant totality.

The selection I have made has the incidental character of biographical fate. It depends on the beautiful passages that have especially remained with me since my very earliest musical memories. Others may well love quite different passages, and there is no arguing over their rank. I would propose that, from an impersonal standpoint, in music that is itself beautiful in the emphatic sense, purified of schematic padding, there are in fact innumerable beautiful passages. But in order to be sure of such beauty, it is necessary to immerse oneself without reservation in the particular, in that for which there is no substitute. It is of these particulars that I wish to speak.

I will begin with Bach. There is something provocative about the notion of the beautiful passage in Bach. The idea of a musical cosmos that is tightly closed and averse to any momentary impulse has become associated with him and has almost made any different view taboo, despite serious concern about the interpretation of Bach in theological terms that Friedrich Blume has recently voiced within established musicology. It is wise to remember that the time span between Bach's death in 1750 and Schumann's publications that gave birth to the musical miniature, the "little piece," is about the same as that between the present and the symphonic poems of Richard Strauss, in other words, quite small. To be sure, one must take into consideration that the tempo of musical development has greatly accelerated during the last two hundred years. In fact, there are pieces by Bach that have the appealing quality of genre pieces, much like those of his French contemporaries, without their status as great music being put into question in the slightest. Here is such a passage, which is not only beautiful but also pretty, the aristocratic forebear of innumerable gavottes in the elevated entertainment music of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. It is from one of the suites called "French" in accordance with the taste fashionable at the time.

*Example*: the first 8 measures, including the upbeat, starting with the third beat of the first measure from the Gavotte of the fifth French Suite in G Major.

Technical analysis could show that, despite their entertainment value, figures of this kind in Bach can nevertheless claim excellence. With their strong sense of *basso continuo*, they do sound thoroughly harmonic-homophonic like their Romantic descendants. Nevertheless, the discreetly backgrounded accompanying voices are composed as independent melodies rather than just filling in a figured bass, thus tightly structuring the piece's *galante* quality. Listen now to the middle and bass voices of those same eight measures:

*Example*: first the middle voice and then the bass voice of the passage, alone.

Now listen to the whole passage again attentively and you will not fail to notice how perfectly playful melodic grace and completely worked out contrapuntal structure are connected in this eight-bar phrase:

*Example*: repeat example 1.

Bach, however, by no means reserved such beautiful passages for peripheral secondary creations. In a highly charged work like the so-called *French Overture*, a suite printed at Easter in 1735—thus from the period of Bach's maturity—there is a passepied that combines an almost Romantic mordent and an easily graspable, song-like instrumental texture with a highly organized, often four-part texture.

*Example*: Passepied from the *French Overture*; either complete, or, in the case of insufficient time, up to the double bar; if possible also the Passepied II (trio) that goes with it.

One of the legends of historicism is that the attainment of full songlike quality in instrumental music first arises in the post-Bach era, and especially with Mozart. As proof that it is a legend I will adduce another passage, which seems to me among the most beautiful in Bach's instrumental work: the close of the Fugue in E Major from Book 2 of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Its theme does not even stem from Bach but rather from Johann Caspar Fischer, an older contemporary of Bach. But Bach turned it into a work of a consoling power that has been irrevocably lost to music. The theme of the fugue, with its slight evocation of the archaic, goes:

*Example: The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book 2, Fugue in E Major, measures 1 and 2, finish with E.

At the entry of the response the first voice continues on with a countersubject:

*Example*: the same fugue, from the entrance of the B in the second measure to the theme's concluding B in the fourth measure.

This countersubject now becomes, after a deadly serious descent in the middle section, a melody in the upper voice that is inspired and eloquent beyond all concepts. Hearing it, one completely forgets that it is accompanied by a *stretto* of the main theme.

*Example*: the same fugue, measure 35 from the B-natural in the alto voice to the end of the fugue.

The moving quality of the end of this fugue refutes better than anything else the objectivistic conception of Bach as hostile to expression. The concluding passage frees itself from the objective structure [*Gefüge*] and outshines it. Bach handles the fugue form—the form he himself had brought to its authentic nature—with inimitable freedom, precisely because it had passed so completely through his own subjectivity.

One last example of this, from the Fugue in F# Major from Book I *of The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Here is its theme:

*Example*: *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book I, Fugue in F# Major, from the beginning of measure 1 up to the A-sharp in the third measure.

This theme is answered in an orthodox manner, tonally, and then developed. In the subsequent episode Bach avails himself of the one option that academic rules provide for such sections: he uses the theme's characteristic leap of a fourth but invents a new motif to add on to it.

*Example*: The same fugue, measures 7 to 9, finishing with the chord formed on D-sharp.

But this new motif has so much driving force and at the same time, in its dance-like nature, corresponds so exactly to the fundamental character of the piece, that Bach does not, as the rules would have it, restrict himself to bringing it out in the episodes. Instead, it carries over into the development sections and appears immediately in the second one.

*Example*: The same fugue, measure 11 with the return of the main theme (beginning with the upbeat to the last quarter-note) and ending with measure 13 with the return to the tonic triad on the third beat.

The whole form is moved by this impulse. In terms of the academic schema, this would be something intermediate between a single-themed and a double fugue. But these categories themselves are abstracted from the living composition and have no authority over it as long as, with Bach, it remains alive. In a work like this, and with Bach by no means only in such a work, the need for expression that gives the work its character shapes its form and dissolves the architecture that Bach himself erected. This refutes the Bach legend that has become so ingrained today. It is only at the end of the fugue that Bach takes what came together in its process of becoming and lets it come apart again. The last repetition of the theme does without this counterpoint, but with the irresistibility of the trickster it returns in the coda and ends the piece.

*Example*: The same fugue, measure 31, the entrance of the theme in C-sharp, from the upbeat to the last beat through the end of the fugue.

I am resisting the temptation to go into Haydn, one of the greatest composers, but I will mention in passing one passage that has remained unforgettable to me since childhood, from an aria from *The Seasons*, where, without any cheap illustration, the curve of the voice follows what the text describes, the long furrows in the field, doing this with the discretion to which Haydn owes his most extreme effects, and also with a barely visible smile:

*Example*: Haydn, beginning of the aria "Schon eilet froh der Ackersmann" from *The Seasons*, from the line "in langen Furchen schreitet er dem Pfluge flötend nach" with all its repetitions, ending with the C major chord before the turn to minor.

In Mozart, the beautiful passages are obvious in the famous melodies of his operas, such as "Voi che sapete" or the rose aria from *The Marriage of Figaro*, and all of the song-like pieces in *The Magic Flute*. Instead, I will draw on his instrumental music. In the rondo of the famous "Dissonant Quartet," after the actual second theme has already dissolved into a virtuoso cadence-like part, there follows, completely unexpectedly, in E-flat major—a key quite remote from the main key—an interpolation, something apparently new, a songlike theme in octaves, with that indescribably

diaphanous quality that gives some works of the mature Mozart their seraphic tone. Immediately afterward the figured cadential part is taken up again. One can do justice to this inspired passage only if one hears it in context, that is, with the preceding and subsequent measures of sixteenth notes.

*Example*: Mozart, "Dissonant Quartet" (C Major), K. 465, Peters edition p. 31, third system, first measure, beginning with the C-sharp-to-D figure through p. 33, fourth measure, ending with the D in the first violin.

The interpolation is characteristic not only of the fact that in the great instrumental music of Viennese classicism beautiful passages become such only within their context. For this beauty also transcends that context, becomes as it were autonomous—an artistic means most decidedly employed later by Beethoven. Finally, in this type of beautiful passage, as something surprising, we can almost always observe an affinity with the main material, however loose and indirect it may be: in this instance a sort of turning of the lead motif within the new theme, with a completely altered rhythm.

*Example*: From the same passage in the "Dissonant Quartet" play only the upper voice from its beginning on page 29, concluding in the third measure on the E, and then the new theme on p. 32.

We can see that Mozart's much-acclaimed richness by no means consists only in melodic invention but equally in transformations of form, which then enhance the beautiful passages. The Piano Trio in E Major, Mozart's masterpiece in this genre, already contains a wonderfully devised and melodic song-like theme, first in the violin and then twelve measures later in the piano. In the twelfth measure of this melody, as though a measure too early because of impatience, the cello comes in with the same theme, and at the same time an energetic modulation to the subdominant region ensues. After two measures the instrumental entries become condensed, as in a *stretto*. At the first entry of the theme, it seemed self-contained, like a song. Only in this section does the theme unfold its expansive force. The delight it produces lies in the feeling that can hardly be expressed in any other way than, "Now we're really beginning to make music." What had been merely present now becomes freed for the living effects of its force. Listen to the whole second theme group from the first movement of this trio, paying attention to the suddenly released music-making.

*Example*: Mozart, Piano Trio in E Major, Peters edition, first movement, p. 62, from the B major entrance in the third measure after the grand pause to p. 64, the ending on the B of the third measure.

It often seems to me as though in every genre of instrumental music, as here with piano trios, Mozart deliberately produced an unsurpassable masterpiece as a paradigm. Among the sonatas for violin and piano it is the one in A major, Köchel 526. It has become a cliché to attribute to Mozart divine playfulness. In this sonata a theme appears that rescues this attribute from its cliché status and really sounds as though, with its unexpected improvisatory expansion, music had abandoned all controls, the ignominy of all bonds, and floated off the earth with cherubic bliss.

*Example*: Mozart, Sonata in A Major for Violin and Piano, Peters edition p. 193, with the violin upbeat from the letter C to the final E at letter E.

Perhaps through these examples from Mozart's instrumental works you have become receptive to some of the beautiful passages from Mozart's operas that would otherwise easily remain overshadowed by the well-known showpieces, especially when the performance glides over them. I want to point out at least one of them to you. In the finale of *Figaro*, the Count asks his wife for forgiveness, it is granted to him, and there follows a short ensemble number of that simultaneously mundane and sacred nature that only Mozart, at a point between and beyond mysticism and Enlightenment, had at his disposal. But I want to draw your attention in particular to three purely instrumental measures that lead from the pathos-free festive section to the joyful resolution. Mozart's sense of form tells him that that section has to sing itself out and cannot end abruptly; it is as if it is feeling its way into open space. He accomplishes this with a motif that, lightly evoking the style of church music, unites the sublime and the completely inconspicuous in a way that no music since Mozart has been able to do.

*Example*: Mozart, *The Marriage of Figaro*, from the beginning of the Count's "Contessa, perdono" up to the close with the dominant seventh chord in C major, at the beginning of the Allegro assai.

You will remember that I talked to you about the preformed quality of many of Beethoven's musical inspirations [*Einfall*] and their relatively subordinate character, which Paul Bekker has commented on. That idea needs to be made more precise by taking into account that Beethoven always had access to what is called a melodic inspiration whenever he had need of one. Much of what his

strict discrimination did not tolerate because he wanted to keep his distance from emerging Romanticism for the sake of objectivity is nevertheless retained as an element in his work. Thus, one could conceive of the first movement of his Op. 27, popularly known as the *Moonlight Sonata*, as the prototype of the nocturnes that Chopin would come to write. But there are also passages in Beethoven characterized by the beauty of the inspiration as is later the case with Schubert. I will cite one from the slow movement of Beethoven's third *Razumovsky Quartet* from 1806, written when Schubert was still a child.

*Example*: Beethoven, op. 59, no. 3, Eulenburg edition p. 15, second system from the bottom, starting after the double bar, with the second ending, up to the bottom system, measure 2, ending with the A minor chord.

The most extreme opposite to this type, and characteristic of Beethoven, are those beautiful passages—if one wants to call them that—whose beauty is produced by relationship. I will give you two extreme examples of this type. The theme of the variation moment of the *Appassionata* sonata begins:

*Example*: Beethoven, Piano Sonata op. 57, Andante con moto, the first eight measures.

But this theme only really speaks when one hears it directly after the coda of the first movement, a fully composed catastrophe.

*Example*: Beethoven, the same sonata, the end of the first movement, from "piu allegro" on, and then the theme of the variation movement.

After that explosion and collapse, the theme of the variation's movement sounds as though it were bent over under a giant shadow, an oppressive burden. The muffled character of the sound seems to musically elaborate [*auskomponieren*] this sense of burden.

The Piano Trio in D Major, op. 70, no. 1 is usually known as the *Ghost Trio* on account of the *Largo assai ed espressivo*, one of Beethoven's conceptions in which he came closest to the Romantic imago. Now feel the effect of the beginning of the *presto* last movement following immediately upon the end of this movement:

*Example*: Beethoven, Piano Trio in D Major, op. 70, no. 1, Peters edition p. 170, last system, from the letter S to the fermata over the fourth measure of the Presto.

In isolation this *presto* beginning might not sound very substantial. After the end of the *Largo*, which is darker than classical restraint would allow, the beginning has something of the weakly consoling dawn of a day that promises to make up for all past misfortune: the sound of morning bird calls, without Beethoven imitating birdsong in any way.

The consoling passages in Beethoven are those in which something arises, soars above, and distances itself from the thickly woven and apparently inescapable musical nexus of immanence, doing so with a power that makes it hard to believe that what such passages say could not be the truth and could be subject to the relativity of art as something made by human beings. These are the passages that correspond to the sentence from Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, "Like a star hope descended earthward from the heavens," perhaps the most exalted gift that has been granted to the language of music—not even to its individual works. Beethoven was writing such passages early on. After a few introductory bars, the Piano Sonata in D minor, Op. 31, no. 2, expounds a theme of this nature:

*Example*: Beethoven, Piano Sonata op. 31, no. 2, Adagio, measures 27–38, ending quietly with the F major chord.

I would also like to call your attention to the fact that, upon its repetition, a variant is introduced into this theme:

*Example*: from the same passage play first measures 31 and 32, then 35 and 36 directly after one another, the upper voice alone.

Through the addition of the almost vocal eloquence of the second descending from C to B♭, the virtually ethereal theme is humanized, answered by the tears of one whom the earth has reclaimed.

Beethoven's music most perfectly bears the character of rising hope in the transition to the reprise of the adagio of the first *Razumovsky Quartet*, one of the greatest chamber music works in the entire literature. Since this passage, for which language simply provides no other concept than that of the sublime, is equal in its sublimeness as in its simplicity, it is necessary to follow along with the preceding development in order to feel it fully. I will play you the passage without commenting on it:

*Example*: Beethoven, String Quartet op. 59, no. 1, Adagio, Eulenberg score p. 36, 3rd system, last measure (46) to page 40, measure 84, ending with the entrance of F minor.

The counterpart of the character of hope in Beethoven is that of deadly seriousness [*Ernstfall*], where music seems to throw off the last trace of play. I will show you two models of this. One is the truly remorseless conclusion of the short intermezzo-like Andante of the G major piano concerto:

*Example*: Beethoven, Piano Concerto in G Major, the last 11 measures of the Andante, beginning with the arpeggio chord of the "a tempo."

This passage speaks for itself, although the characteristic motif in the basses articulates the sense of the whole piece. But the following example once again is one that requires context. It comes from the first movement of the *Kreutzer Sonata*, and, like the one from Op. 59, no. 1, starts with the measures leading up to the recapitulation. Perhaps one might say that since in Beethoven the recapitulation is the most schematic part of the sonata form and thus the part that in each case has to be justified by the autonomous nature of composition, the transition to the recapitulation is often the most concentrated locus of his compositional craft. As though the schematic remainder of the composition requires recompense, Beethoven engages his productive imagination to the utmost. After the development has transitioned to a kind of cadence and aroused the belief that now we could go right ahead and start from the beginning again, Beethoven, with a chord containing a very menacing bass sound on the fourth scale degree of the key of the subdominant, tears open for one second the abyss of passion that the sonata had earlier unleashed. The transition to the recapitulation, then the moment of crisis, and then the beginning of the recapitulation goes like this:

*Example*: Beethoven, *Kreutzer Sonata* op. 47, Peters edition of the violin and piano sonatas, p. 189, seven measures after letter I (starting with E in the violin in the left hand of the piano part, up to the fermata preceding letter M on page 190).

Schubert is so famous for his flights of inspiration in a way that is divorced from everything contained in his work other than abundance of song melody, that I will content myself with two passages whose qualities at least the musical layperson would hardly associate with the name of Schubert. If we understand the idea of the symphonic in its fullest Beethovenian sense, the capacity to concentrate whole developments in short, extremely striking and clear stretches, then this conception is valid for Schubert to the highest degree. It is connected with harmonic perspective, with a shifting of points of view that gives rise to a feeling of almost

spatial depth. But in Schubert, a symphonic spirit of this kind reigns not only in instrumental compositions but also in his songs. The following lines from the composition of Goethe's poem "An Schwager Kronos" are symphonic in this way.

*Example*: Schubert, "An Schwager Kronos," from the words "Weit, hoch, herrlich..." to "ahndevoll."

By contrast, in his instrumental works, there are passages that are like songs without him using thematic material from his songs. But in these cases, there is an immediate movement from the sphere of the song into that of objectified chamber music. Simply in terms of its melodic form, the trio in the scherzo of the String Quartet in G Major is certainly among Schubert's most beautiful inspirations.

*Example*: Schubert, String Quartet in G Major, op. 161, the whole trio, pp. 34 and 35 in the Philharmonie score.

But I have chosen this passage for you not for the sake of the melody but rather because of the harmonic shift in the second part of the trio, where, by using the so-called relationship of a third, B major surprisingly follows G major and puts the fabric of voices onto another more brightly illuminated plane. Schubert comments, as it were, on the idea behind such shifts: he writes precisely the same thing in his composition of Goethe's "Musensohn":

*Example*: Schubert, "Musensohn," from the first instrumental interlude up to "Blüten am Baum."

What is intended is the element of something distancing itself from mere existence and enchanting the spirit, the element that in Goethe's poem defines art itself. The effect of the B major is then also repeated where the poet's song by the linden trees, as he says, stirs the young folk. In that spirit listen once again to the shift in the G major quartet:

*Example*: Schubert, the last measures of the String Quartet in G Major, op. 161, before the double bar, perhaps from the upbeat to measure 165 on, up to the upbeat before the first violin's D# in measure 170.

I will give you only one example from High Romanticism, one that should not be too familiar, from a little song by Mendelssohn, "An die Entfernte," after a poem by Lenau. The first and second verses, with the second identical

to the first, are quite regular, and, if the whole remained so, would scarcely be more than pretty.

*Example*: Mendelssohn, "An die Entfernte," op. 71, no. 3, first and second verses.

The third and fourth verses, however, in contrast to the circumscribed structure of the first two are taken up into a great swinging melodic arc, which the harmony molds itself to by omitting to form a break. At the end, in the last four measures, on the words "oder als ihr süßer Schall," a two-measure unit is extended into three measures, an artful irregularity very characteristic of Mendelssohn's relation to meter. It carries the song way beyond the limited region in which it begins.

*Example*: Mendelssohn, the same song, from "Nie soll weiter sich ins Land" to the end.

In contrast, I want to present you with several examples from Brahms, in fact from his earlier works. The originality and compositional power of the young Brahms is even today hardly seen correctly in its own right and to its full extent. My late friend Eduard Steuermann pointed this out very emphatically. First the coda from the slow movement of Brahms's Op. 1, the Piano Sonata in C Major, a few measures of an enchanting sonority and harmonic complexity that in 1853 anticipated all the achievements of impressionism. It is a complex that one would not normally think of in relation to Brahms. We can learn from this how, even in the case of very important figures, musical nuclei emerge and remain on the margins, only to return and move to a central place at a completely different time with completely different composers.

*Example*: Brahms, the last 14 measures of the Andante from the Piano Sonata op. 1.

Moreover, one also sees in the young Brahms measures that could be from Wagner in his maturity, such as the following ones from the slow movement of the Piano Quintet, a transition developed from a motif of the main theme.

*Example*: Brahms, Piano Quintet, Andante un poco adagio, Eulenburg score p.29, the last two measures before the entrance of E major and then the E major transition. End with the chord one, in the next to last measure of the page.

In such details, that store up musical feeling in themselves like cells, composers who by and large stand as diametrically opposed to one another as Brahms and Wagner nevertheless come into contact**.** Compare this with the summer night motif from the second act of *Die Meistersinger*.

*Example*: Wagner, *Die Meistersinger*, the first entrance of the summer night motif, following the horn call of the night watchman, to "mäßig," three measures before the words "Geliebter, spare den Zorn," ending with the measure before Walter's question "Du fliehst?"

As different from the almost painful sweetness of Wagner's motif as Brahms's is, only modestly hinting at itself and immediately vanishing, so related are they nevertheless in the voice-leading especially of the chromatic middle voices. What is specifically Wagnerian, however, is the fate of Wagner's motif, the way in which at the end of the act, after the night watchman's last horn call, it pales and yet returns once more with a gesture of unbelieving melancholy remembrance.

*Example*: Wagner, *Die Meistersinger*, close of the second act, once again from the horn call at "sehr ruhig im Zeitmaß" to the end.

In contrast to Wagner, the young Brahms compels one with the fullness of musical forms that are always fresh and renew themselves out of themselves, often with a metrical freedom that makes the kind I showed you in Mendelssohn into the principle of a manner of composition thoroughly unconventional in its very fiber. Listen to another such melody of the young Brahms, from the intermezzo of the Piano Quartet in G Minor, Op. 25.

*Example*: Brahms, Piano Quartet in G Minor, op. 25, Eulenburg score, p. 28, second to last system, first measure, beginning with the C major, top. 29, 3rd measure, ending with the F minor chord.

I have juxtaposed passages of special luster from Brahms and Wagner. Now let me present one more from Wagner. It sheds a completely different light on one of the most famous themes in Tristan. It is a question of the motif that goes by the name "Parting Song" that in the second act's great love scene, to the words "so stürben wir, um ungetrennt," anticipates Isolde's *Liebestod*, although with a modified rhythm. Here there appears a counterpoint to the motif in eighth notes that lends it the character of surging rapture that, if I am not mistaken, is not attained again in the opera's closing. Please direct your attention first to this counterpoint.

*Example*: Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, Act II, the middle voice in eighth notes of "So stürben wir," first in the alto, later in the tenor, to be played on the piano.

And now the passage with all its voices as it is shaped by this counterpoint.

*Example*: Wagner, Tristan, Act II, now with *all* of the voices, from an orchestral recording of "So stürben wir […] in Liebe umfangen."

Perhaps this is the place, after Wagner, to present a couple of passages from Bruckner. First the F-sharp Major middle section of the funeral march from the Seventh Symphony:

*Example*: Bruckner, Symphony No. 7, E Major, Eulenburg score p.63, from letter D (moderato) to the return of the 4/4 measure in C-sharp minor at letter G, p. 67.

The question arises, what gives this field, whose form idea, a melody in ¾ time elaborated as a contrast to a symphonic adagio, is obviously taken from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, its particular beauty. Only a detailed analysis of the construction of the melody, the harmony, and the formal structure could fully answer that question. For now, we might say that this passage, with unusual harmonic force and its own inner impulse, resists the trap provided by the roots of the chords, pulling away from them even while the bass line adheres to them. The melody's upward drive, with its blessedly unrelenting quality, is no doubt what gives it this character. Here music is brushed against the grain and is yet not in the least violent or artificial; it is as though its own impulse has sprung free of the spell of the banal, untouched by the composer's hand. In the coda the passage acquires some of the quality of a backward glance at distant villages, a glance that knows that complete happiness must lie there, even if it is never to be found when one gets there.

The second passage from Bruckner that I want to take you to is no less beautiful, even though less obviously so. It is a beauty not of saying but of keeping silent. In its second strophe, the main theme of the first movement of the same Seventh Symphony rises up powerfully to the most complete fulfillment. Then as though the music itself, from modesty, could scarcely bear the word it speaks, or as though it fears that, if it were to insist on it, it would not measure up to what is granted only in a flash, the symphony abandons those heights in a speedy diminuendo and recedes to measures of murmuring tremolo before the second theme enters.

*Example*: Bruckner, Symphony No. 7, Eulenburg score, first movement p. 4, from letter A to page 7, letter B, ending with the B major chord.

The Bruckner passages suggest some from Mahler. Once again, I will select two. One of them Mahler wrote in his youth: the second middle section from "Der Schildwache Nachtlied," after a text from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*.

*Example*: Mahler, *Wunderhornlieder*, Philharmonie score, vol. I, p. 5, from "LiebeKnab...", p. 7, measure 30, ending before the entrance of the drums and basses.

In this strophe the metrical irregularity of the old folk song, as we know it for example in "Prinz Eugen,"[3] that is from the era prior to the establishment of the eight-measure period, is fused with the modern tendency toward the most differentiated asymmetry in the colorful alternation of three- and four-beat measures, which is itself linked to the strengthening of dissonance. The large blocks of intervals in the vocal part correspond in the syllables "Garten" to a chord consisting of five different notes, with a double collision of minor sevenths arising involuntarily from the voice-leading and harmonic progression, and yet already, 75 years ago, a sound used in the new music, with a penetratingly endearing expression.

Similarly progressive, and with the same luster, now markedly colored with melancholy, are a couple of measures from Mahler's mature period, from the serenade-like second *Nachtmusik* of his Symphony No. 7.:

*Example*: Mahler, revised edition of the score of the Symphony No. 7, Bote und Bock, p. 181, the last measure, beginning with the upbeat in the solo violin p. 192, ending with the F major chord at the beginning of the fourth measure, after the number 218.

This is how close the generation that is called the Neo-Romantic and impressionistic came in its boldest moments to the new music. Another piece of evidence for this, from a sphere of music quite distant from that of Mahler, is the beginning of the *Forlane* from Ravel's *Tombeau de Couperin*, nine measures that, with the most clear and transparent harmonic progression in E minor, contain not a single unclouded triad until the cadence. This is accomplished through a technique of layering suspensions and neighboring tones. The measures consist solely of dissonances, but these are not, as is so often the case in so-called moderate modern music, arbitrary additions to

3 Translators' note: a German folk song from the early 18th century.

the bass line but rather most carefully and thoroughly heard. The passage captivates with a fragrance of falling withered petals.

*Example*: Ravel, *Forlane* from *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, the beginning, ending with the E minor chord at the beginning of the ninth measure.

The dominant bias about genuine new music in its radical form, as it comes from the Second Viennese School of Schoenberg, is that it excludes the notion of the beautiful passage. The primacy of the dissonance, or rather the abolition of the distinction between consonance and dissonance and the construction of melodies that give preference to wide intervals thought to be unsingable, are considered ugly by ears that react to music on culinary grounds. On the other hand, the constructive principles—the primacy of form as a whole and its impetus over the individual moments—seem to forbid any kind of extraction of detail, particularly in correct listening. But since by now dissonances have lost their terror, it is possible to recognize how much the force of the whole structure communicates itself to the individual events, and conversely, in Schoenberg's own words, how much that force is shaped in turn by individual events and inspirations. So today particular moments stand out from the Viennese school's compositions, even though they are constructed with equal thoroughness in all their layers. In art even the notion of sensuous beauty is a function of something spiritual, and it grows with the meaning that accrues to the individual phenomena from their context.

Beautiful passages are immediately evident with Alban Berg, who unashamedly worked a connection with traditional music into his compositional process and in whose work a large role is played by what is currently called "suavity," mellifluous sound, as it characterizes the passage from Ravel that you just heard, and which Berg no doubt learned from the French. For Berg suavity is not an end in itself. It justifies itself spiritually at the constructive level as well as through expression. Berg rescues the expressive values of tonality but arouses them to a second life, as it were, through extraordinarily complex layering, which is constantly rupturing the old tonal colors. This is not dissimilar to Ravel's way of proceeding in the *Forlane*. Such a passage, whose beauty is admittedly first and foremost that of a melodic inspiration, one that is free and not at all twelve-tone, is presented as the beginning and the main theme of the second movement of the *Lyric Suite* for string quartet, a rondo:

*Example*: Alban Berg, *Lyric Suite*, Andante amoroso, Philharmonie score, p. 11, measures 1 through 4.

The gentle luster of this theme is fully manifested only when it returns in the first reprise of the rondo after the exposition of some uncommonly rich thematic material. When it returns, the theme, which was originally in two voices, is given counterpoint through imitations by the cello and by the second violin that draw into themselves the motivic content of the second main theme of the movement, which has been presented in the meantime. The ornamentation provided by the surrounding voices has the function of giving a sharper profile to the main theme through contrast.

*Example*: Alban Berg, *Lyric Suite*, the same movement, p. 19 measures 81 to 86, ending with the a in the first violin.

The same movement contains in its third main theme an utterly inspired model of Berg's use of a tonality that is neither conjured up as autonomous nor plopped into the atonal fabric but rather fully connected with that fabric.

*Example*: Berg, the same movement, p. 17, measures 56 through 61 inclusive.

Shortly before his death Berg excerpted a symphonic suite from the opera *Lulu*, which he had not yet finished composing. It is in the beginning of this suite that you can see how his suavity is married to his expressive intention and how colorfully the accompanying harmonic complexes are overlaid in the process. Here the alluring and the painful are mingled to become the image of the heroine, of the beauty that brings ill. The literally stupefying measures of the introduction need to be redeemed through the beginning of the following rondo, a fervent violin theme that rises up out of the introduction. As you now listen to the introduction and the beginning of the rondo theme, I ask you to pay attention to how the theme finally allows the preceding introduction to fully blossom.

*Example*: Alban Berg, *Lulu Suite*, study score, Rondo, measures 1 through 15 (p.4) inclusive.

Many of you will ascribe such passages to the ostensibly moderate character of Berg's modernity. Be that as it may, passages of the same beauty are found in the ascetic Webern as well, someone who has always been accompanied by the reputation of intransigence. His song cycle Op. 4, after poems by Stefan George, altogether a work of a dreamlike dark tone, starts with a motto-like thematic form that proves how much Webern, too, was capable of what is called inspiration on the model of song melody.

*Example*: Webern, Op. 4, I, up to the first eighth note of the second measure, ending with the fermata.

Here too, by the way, and not so differently from Berg as one might like to think, it is a matter of tonal chords in the accompaniment with alienating additions.

Webern's purely instrumental work also has an abundance of such inspirations. Among the short forms that he preferred up until his late phase are whole pieces that correspond to the idea of the beautiful passage. Please listen to the second of the *Five Movements for String Quartet* Op. 5, which lasts for only thirteen measures, music characterized by the utmost immersion in its own silence.

*Example*: Webern, the entire second movement from the *Five Movements for String Quartet* Op. 5.

Today some people would like to write off Schoenberg, the teacher of Berg and Webern, as a half-baked theoretician or even as the inventor of the twelve-tone technique, to the detriment of what he composed but which has not yet been truly received. Schoenberg would not have been the great composer that he was if he had not possessed the capacity to concentrate his vision into short moments. For it was he who first crystallized out the extremely short form. There is a truly inexhaustible richness of such moments, however, contained in the pieces of his youth, which, as we know, still operate with the means of tonality, and share many stylistic features with the Neo–German Wagnerian school. Not the least of the ways in which those pieces differ from the other products of that school is their human, empathic warmth. Perhaps this was the force with which Schoenberg recast what had become formulaic and rigid into a new idiom. A theme from the later part of the string sextet *Verklärte Nacht* will show the way this warmth inspires melodic invention.

*Example*: Schoenberg, *Verklärte Nacht*, op. 4, small score, p. 32, from the upbeat before "im Zeitmaß" ("sehr innig und warm"), up to p. 34, last system, the entrance of the 4/4 measure.

Schoenberg remained faithful throughout his entire *oeuvre* to this kind of invention through warmth. Even the revolutionary works, the first ones in free atonality, radiate it. Thus, the beginning of the fifth George song from the *Buch der Hängenden Gärten*, Op. 15.

*Example*: Schoenberg, *Fünfzehn Gedichte aus dem Buch der Hängenden Gärten*, "Sagt mir auf welchem pfade," from the beginning to "vorüberschreitet," measure 4, ending before the upbeat.

For more than one reason it seems to me appropriate to select as a final example the introduction and the vocal entry from the finale of Schoenberg's String Quartet #2, Op. 10. The breakthrough from tonality to free atonality takes place entirely within this quartet. With the words in the text "Ich fühle Luft von anderem Planeten," it is something like a manifesto of all new music, which in its history up to now has scarcely done justice to this manifesto and surely not gone beyond it. The passage is of an originality and a power of vision in view of which the phrase "unheard of" finds its true place: nothing like this had never been heard before. Today the introduction has retained a force that in art characterizes only what opens up wholly untrodden ground and with its own realization sets before our eyes the possibility of what is still to be realized. Let me point to moments like the completely foreign flitting sound of the muted strings, woven into the lightest lines; to a birdlike motif in the viola that no one who has ever heard it will forget; and also to the stiff, almost ritual duet of the viola and cello, in the lowest range, which renounces their usual mellowness; but above all to the composition of the first words of the vocal part. When the great C-sharp of the cello adds itself to the final syllable of "Planeten," the speculative ear has an almost physical feeling of having crossed over abysses and reached a ground that is light-years away and yet offers the most secure reception.

*Example*: Schoenberg, String Quartet no. 2, op. 10, fourth movement, "Entrückung," from the beginning up to and including measure 26.

1965

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# Polemics and Encounters

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# Positivism–Polemics–Politics: On the Failed Dialogue Between Critical Theory and Logical Empiricism

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## *Critical social theory versus affirmation*

Polemics may start with the use of terms, for the members of the Vienna Circle and especially its protagonist in the dispute in question, Otto Neurath, never claimed the term positivism for their approach. On the contrary, Neurath clearly distinguished himself from the positivism of the 19th century and ultimately preferred the term "logical empiricism," as his unpublished reply to an essay by Max Horkheimer, written in 1937, also shows.[1] Max

1 Max Horkheimer, "Der neueste Angriff auf die Metaphysik," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 6, no. 1 (1937): 4-52. Translated as "The Latest Attack on Metaphysics," in Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 132-187. Otto Neurath, "*Einheitswissenschaft und Logischer Empirismus. Eine Erwiderung*," Typoscript (1937), K 63, 203, Wiener Kreis Archief, Haarlem (NL). Translated as "Unity of Science and Logical Empiricism: A Reply," in *Otto Neurath and the Unity of Science*, eds. John Symons, Olga Pombo, and Juan Manuel Torres (Dordrecht/Heidelberg/London/New York: Springer, 2011), 15-30.

Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, on the other hand, did not use the term exclusively, but repeatedly for their counterpart, both in internal correspondence and in published texts. In response to Max Horkheimer's antipositivist essay "Der neueste Angriff auf die Metaphysik" (The Latest Attack on Metaphysics) in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Walter Benjamin wrote approvingly to the latter that philosophical critique, as soon as it steps out of the framework of a historical treatise, "today has most chance (...) of doing justice to its task in polemical form."[2] So was this polemical form the adequate stylistic device in a struggle between antagonistic intellectual groups?

The thesis of seemingly irreconcilable opposites between logical empiricism and critical theory has been relativized by research. In his key work on the subject, Hans-Joachim Dahms worked out that the positivism controversy of the 1960s had already been preceded in the 1930s by a dispute between members of the Frankfurt School (above all Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno) and the Vienna Circle (above all Otto Neurath).[3] He pointed out parallels and similarities between the two intellectual groups, in their academic traditions, forms of institutionalization, their scientific doctrines and, not least, in their political attitudes.[4] Among other things, it turned out that the polarization between a socially critical versus an affirmative (social) philosophy was by no means accurate. In fact, the polemic was not least ignited by this, by the political stance, or more precisely by the actual or supposed political implications and consequences of scientific approaches. Thomas Uebel and John O'Neill took up this debate again in the 2000s and explored possibilities for a constructive dialogue between critical theory and logical empiricism. Without downplaying differences, they too indicate many points of contact.[5]

The focus of this essay, however, is different. It does not deal with philosophical differences and commonalities between the two groups or with the question of possibilities for dialogue between logical empiricism and critical theory. These questions have been dealt with in detail in the publications mentioned earlier. The focus is rather on polemics as an instrument of dis-

2 Walter Benjamin to Max Horkheimer, November 3, 1937, in Hans-Joachim Dahms, *Positivismusstreit. Die Auseinandersetzungen der Frankfurter Schule mit dem logischen Positivismus, dem amerikanischen Pragmatismus und dem kritischen Rationalismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), 146.

3 The Vienna Circle was a discussion group centered around philosopher Moritz Schlick. The name probably came from Neurath, who wanted to evoke positive associations such as the Viennese waltz or Viennese apple strudel.

4 Dahms, *Positivismusstreit*, 22-43.

5 John O'Neill and Thomas Uebel, "Horkheimer and Neurath: Restarting a Disrupted Debate," *European Journal of Philosophy* 12, no. 1 (2000): 75-105; John O'Neill and Thomas Uebel, "Logical Empiricism as Critical Theory: The Debate Continues," *Analyse & Kritik* 30 (2008): 379-398.

cussion and debate: Why did arguments about possible cooperation take on polemical forms and from which side did these polemics emanate? What consequences did these polemics ultimately lead to?

## *From first contact to termination*

The decisive factor for the first contact between the two groups was that the Frankfurt Institute was looking for cooperative partners after it had had to leave Germany due to the National Socialists' seizure of power in January 1933. After European stopovers, it was then in New York. Otto Neurath had also fled Austria because of the threat of political persecution and had built up a new professional existence in the Netherlands. In January 1936, Horkheimer visited him in The Hague, where Neurath's Mundaneum Institute was located. Meetings and discussion evenings followed in early October and mid-November 1936 in the rooms of the Institute for Social Research in New York—on the occasion of Neurath's trips to America. Horkheimer and Neurath both took part and interpreted these meetings differently. While Neurath basically held on to the perspective of cooperation and welcomed it, Horkheimer's interests seemed to move away from cooperation towards his anti-positivist essay.

The essay "Der neueste Angriff auf die Metaphysik" appeared in the spring 1937 issue of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. It can almost be considered a collaboration between Horkheimer and Adorno,[6] for the two exchanged ideas extensively while Horkheimer was working on it and Adorno passed on numerous suggestions. After reading the completed essay, he confessed to knowing hardly any other text by Horkheimer that he "could subscribe to so unconditionally," even mentioning passages that had "truly enthused" him.[7]

Another meeting, which took place on the fringes of the Third International Congress for the Unity of Science in Paris in the summer of 1937, ended without a concrete result. With Adorno's choice as envoy and rapporteur to Horkheimer, who was not present—Adorno referred to Horkheimer as his "Ribbentrop"[8]—the chances of reaching an understanding did not seem to increase. Moreover, the atmosphere of the discussion was already strained by the published text of the Institute's director. The fact that Max Horkheimer

6 Dahms, *Positivismusstreit*, 86-87.

7 Theodor W. Adorno to Max Horkheimer, March 23, 1937, in *Max Horkheimer. Gesammelte Schriften. Band 16: Briefwechsel 1937–1940*, eds. Alfred Schmidt and Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1995), 97.

8 Theodor W. Adorno to Max Horkheimer, August 7, 1937, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:211.

finally refused to print Neurath's reply to his article in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* sealed the definitive end of the cooperation efforts.

### *Polemic and reply: The essays of Horkheimer and Neurath*

In his essay, which he had written around the turn of the year 1936/37, Horkheimer criticized the superficiality of positivism, its "identification of thought with the special sciences," the "hypostatization" of an only apparently objective science and a resulting affirmation of the status quo. The fact that Ernst Mach, as well as members of the Vienna Circle, "was himself a progressive and many members of his school embraced liberal ideas" was pure coincidence, because the "empiricist doctrine offers no remedy for political and spiritual superstition. The intellectual honesty of individual personalities and the acute mental vision of certain of their scientific achievements does not make their philosophies any better," Horkheimer stated.[9]

To illustrate the positivists' alleged inability to distinguish between essence and appearance, surface and core, he used the example of a group of visitors opposed to vivisection. They were deceived by the head of a laboratory about the suffering of laboratory animals: their vocal cords were surgically removed before experiments, and since no cries of pain could be heard from the tortured creatures, the animal rights activists left reassured. "The pleasure [...] derived from the gullibility of those good people," Horkheimer concluded, was "a perfect example of the pleasure to be derived from naïve empiricism in a world in which everything is attuned to deception."[10] If, on the other hand, one wanted to understand what is at stake in each case with the facts as well as with science in general, one must have "the key to the historical situation, the right social theory," he remarked elsewhere.[11] That this could only be the dialectical theory of society was unquestionable for the author.

In some places, Horkheimer also pointed to connections between positivism and fascism. In a footnote to his article, for example, he made a connection between the approval of relativism on the part of the "positivist" Neurath and the relativism to which Mussolini referred.[12] He also criticized a "superficiality and presumption" among the new empiricists towards products of cultural heritage and intellectual activity, which reminded him of "nationalistic uprisings and the bonfires associated with them."[13] Science, as understood by

9 Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:184.
10 Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:152.
11 Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:159.
12 Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:165 n.1.
13 Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:174.

the positivists, was welcomed by powerful economic forces; their ideology leads "to the perpetuation of the *status quo*."[14]

Uncritical belief in science, hypostatization of exact science, no better than metaphysics, affirmation of the status quo, precursor of fascism—the accusations against "positivism" were not insignificant.

A version of Neurath's allusive reply to Horkheimer's contribution (it is a typescript with handwritten corrections) can be found in Neurath's partial estate in Haarlem (NL). We do not know whether it is the version he sent to Horkheimer. Overall, Neurath's text was clearly less polemically formulated. He obviously wanted to find the appropriate tone for a scientific debate, above all to correct "misunderstandings and distortions."[15] In doing so, he also distanced himself from his opponent, whose "style of writing" and "overly rarefied similes" showed his "emotional involvement."[16] After some general remarks on scientific work, Neurath explained the terms unity of science, logical empiricism, and physicalism, noting where Horkheimer had not interpreted them correctly in his view. In addition, he pointed to the ambiguity of the concept of dialectics, which was central to Horkheimer, and to the fact that Horkheimer insisted on the need for a "correct" theory without giving criteria for how such correctness could be established. Repeatedly, he also criticized its "meta-scientific" or "extra-scientific" method.[17] He commented ironically on the vivisection example: "does Horkheimer believe that an empiricist, trained in biology and sociology, and hence immodest, who would even be somewhat skeptical in this case, will have more trouble discovering the act of surgery than a critic schooled in Horkheimer's dialectic?"[18]

In view of the very heavy—not least also political—accusations, it was a relatively matter-of-fact reply, which did not, however, refrain from certain pointed remarks, such as when he noted Horkheimer's "emotional phrases," wrote of his "metaphorical and simile ridden accounts" and noted the numerous "metaphysical expressions." He also questioned his concept of reason. "An empiricist can engage himself in the unitary science with unwavering determination without need for some kind of 'reason' to proclaim that one and only one way is correct, and he is the one who knows which one it is," he noted.[19]

Neurath's essay "Inventory of the Standard of Living" also appeared in the same issue of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* in which Horkheimer's text was printed. It had been translated into English by the Institute and

14 Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:179.
15 Neurath, *Einheitswissenschaft und Logischer Empirismus*, 17.
16 Neurath, *Einheitswissenschaft und Logischer Empirismus*, 17.
17 Neurath, *Einheitswissenschaft und Logischer Empirismus*, 21/22.
18 Neurath, *Einheitswissenschaft und Logischer Empirismus*, 27.
19 Neurath, *Einheitswissenschaft und Logischer Empirismus*, 28.

placed apart from the German-language contributions. While Neurath interpreted this as a positive gesture towards Horkheimer himself, but also towards Philipp Frank, Horkheimer gave completely different reasons for this step. In a letter to Adorno, he explained that he had only allowed Neurath's "awfully boring remarks on *Lebenslagenkataster*" to be printed "because we really recognise individual politically decent acts and some professional endeavors of these people."[20] Through his remarks on German as the basic language of the journal, he had taken the opportunity to distance himself from this contribution (and also from that of Paul Lazarsfeld).[21] Adorno, in turn, expressly welcomed this: the essays by Lazarsfeld and Neurath in the same issue testified to "a soundless irony." It was also "characteristic" that "the gentlemen, who certainly know less English than we do, write in English—out of sheer eagerness to adapt themselves to the new juste milieu."[22] This is also interesting because Neurath wrote almost exclusively in English after his flight from Austrian fascism, which can be interpreted as both Anglophilia and explicit dissociation from National Socialism and fascism in Germany and Austria.[23]

### *Correspondence with each other*

Between the two discussion meetings in autumn 1936 in New York, Neurath wrote to Horkheimer that he would be "sincerely obliged" if he told him which of his texts he should read in preparation for the next meeting so as not to be "embarrassed" by him.[24] He showed himself convinced of a possible cooperation between the two intellectual groups, even if he saw "terminological discrepancies" and offered the director of the New York Institute "to transform even your most precarious turns of phrase with your help first into the general scientific language as we propagate it."[25] Whether this offer sounded attractive to Horkheimer remains to be seen.

After the second meeting in November 1936, Horkheimer wrote to Neurath that the two stimulating evenings had also "strengthened the desire" in

20 Max Horkheimer to Theodor W. Adorno, April 6, 1937, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:108.
21 Horkheimer to Adorno, April 6, 1937, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:108.
22 Theodor W. Adorno to Max Horkheimer, May 12, 1937, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:149.
23 Günther Sandner, "The German Climate and Its Opposite: Otto Neurath in England, 1940–45," in *Political Exile and Exile Politics in Britain after 1933*, eds. A. Grenville and A. Reiter (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), 67-85.
24 Otto Neurath to Max Horkheimer, November 15, 1936, in *Max Horkheimer. Gesammelte Schriften. Band 15: Briefwechsel 1913–1936*, eds. Alfred Schmidt and Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1995), 725-726.
25 Neurath to Horkheimer, November 15, 1936, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 15:726.

him to "continue to deal with logical empiricism."[26] Although he questioned Neurath's concept of science and its form of demarcation from metaphysics, he emphasized that there was "more agreement between us" (...) "than it might at first seem." The existing "divergences" should be "formulated in a way that we can both recognise."[27] At this point, however, he had already begun working on his essay and was probably no longer thinking of a cooperation with Neurath and his circle, whose exact form had not been determined very precisely anyway.

After Neurath had read Horkheimer's contribution in the spring issue of 1937, he first thanked him for the reprint of his English-language essay in the same issue, which he said would make it easier for him to obtain the necessary funding for a project on *Lebenslagenforschung*. Admittedly, he found Horkheimer's arguments against logical empiricism to be "blows with a club" ("under affectionate encouragement") and came to the conclusion that the latter wanted to "send his group to the scaffold after close examination and personal questioning."[28] Neurath already contradicted Horkheimer's arguments on some points, but did not want to go into detail yet. Instead, he suggested another meeting to clarify misunderstandings but also to record differences, where approximately the same number of representatives from each side should take part. He suggested Rudolf Carnap and Philipp Frank for "his" side and finally greeted "Pollock and the other hostile friends."[29]

We know about this next meeting mainly through Adorno's letter report to Horkheimer, which is briefly discussed in the next section. Neurath finally sent his reply to Horkheimer a few months later in a letter dated December 8, 1937, referring to an agreement with him (Horkheimer) and Pollock. The tone had changed: "I would be happy to have your articles for our library, since we collect not only the separata of our friends, but also of our opponents," Neurath wrote in the accompanying letter.[30] "Hostile friends" had thus become opponents, and cooperation with opponents was now probably ruled out from this side as well. Neurath was a passionate letter writer, who as a rule corresponded much more voluminously than his respective counterparts. Very often he interspersed personal remarks even in a professional context, always sought dialogue despite his steadfastness in content and signed his letters with self-drawn, always slightly varied elephants. For this reason, it is particularly noteworthy how concisely and distantly he formulated his letter to Horkheimer.

26 Max Horkheimer to Otto Neurath, November 24, 1936, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 15:743.
27 Horkheimer to Neurath, November 24, 1936, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 15:744.
28 Otto Neurath to Max Horkheimer, June 21, 1937, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:178.
29 Neurath to Horkheimer, June 21, 1937, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:179.
30 Otto Neurath to Max Horkheimer, December 8, 1937, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:319.

In his reply, Horkheimer positively emphasized the "lack of bitterness" that characterized Neurath's "reply" and also noted "a certain agreement in our aims." Somewhat patronizingly, he mentioned Neurath's "statistical pictorial technique," which could "provide highly valuable services," but noted how "affected" he was when the latter turned to ideological questions—he could not call this philosophy at all. "There you are just as perceptive, but infinitely more limited than usual."[31] He did not want to know anything about publishing a reply of Neurath's, especially since the journal would be "no platform for mutually contradictory views."[32] Instead, he suggested to Neurath that he publish his reply in *Erkenntnis*. This was the joint journal of the Ernst Mach Association and the Berlin Group for Scientific Philosophy, which at that time could only be published in Germany under difficult conditions for political reasons, and shortly afterwards not at all.[33]

In a January 12, 1938 letter, Neurath finally insisted that the article be published in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* and stated that he had already agreed on the publication date with Pollock. A refusal was "out of the question."[34] Horkheimer, on the other hand, summed up in his reply that he had written an essay against Neurath's "philosophy," "which in your opinion is miserable, in my opinion not quite so miserable," and stressed that he had shown both in the essay and by publishing Neurath's work in the same issue that "I have the highest respect for your research as well as for your attitude."[35] It should at least be mentioned that this highest respect is not compatible with his remark to Adorno on this very essay ("awfully boring remarks," which had explicitly not been included in the issue because of its quality of content). He again refused to publish Neurath's reply. What finally followed was certainly one of Neurath's shortest letters ever: "Dear Mr. Horkheimer! Please send me my manuscript. Yours sincerely, Otto Neurath."[36]

How little interest Horkheimer had in a contradictory exchange was also shown by the fact that he not only rejected Neurath's reply, but also a contribution by Emil Walter—an acquaintance of Neurath's and fellow campaigner in the unity of science movement—who also criticized Neurath, but above all contradicted Horkheimer's critique of logical empiricism.[37]

31 Max Horkheimer to Otto Neurath, December 29, 1937, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:348.
32 Horkheimer to Neurath, December 29, 1937, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:348.
33 Reinhard Hegselmann and Günter Siegwart, "Zur Geschichte der Erkenntnis," *Erkenntnis* 35 (1991): 461-471.
34 Otto Neurath to Max Horkheimer, January 12, 1938, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:365.
35 Max Horkheimer to Otto Neurath, January 30, 1938, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:373-374.
36 Otto Neurath to Max Horkheimer, February 21, 1938, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:395.
37 Günther Sandner, *Otto Neurath. Eine politische Biographie* (Vienna: Zsolnay, 2014), 250.

*Correspondence about each other*

At the time of the dispute with the emigrated members of the Vienna Circle, Adorno was in Oxford for study purposes. Like Neurath a few years later, he lived on Banbury Road. It was also during this time that the plans to bring Adorno to New York and integrate him into the Institute's work there took concrete shape. In autumn 1937, Horkheimer and Adorno—who was about eight years younger—switched to addressing each other by their first names ("Dear Teddie," "Dear Max"). Their correspondence at this time was characterized by admiration and esteem, and the mutual assurance that they were pursuing a common intellectual project that had to be resolutely defended and enforced against their opponents. These opponents could—politically speaking—be on the wrong side, but also on the "right" side. What is striking is the extremely polemical, sometimes sarcastic tone towards third parties. If someone else was given the task of reviewing writings critically evaluated by the two in the Institute's journal, then they had to "forego the sadistic pleasure" of "literally murdering" the authors in question.[38] Mannheim, whom Adorno was working on at this time, was "simply stupid,"[39] indeed he told Horkheimer of the "violence of his stupidity," he simply wanted to "let him talk and destroy him with the quotation."[40] The Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinger, in turn, was "an opponent of fascism," but his book was the "epitome of naïve professorial claptrap," which belonged to "that sort of well-meaning literature," "with which we should clean up," Horkheimer said again. They should also use their "independence to mark the filth as such even when it comes from that side."[41] Walter Benjamin, on the other hand, who was after all an employee of the Institute, we must imagine, according to Adorno, as a "Wandervogel gone mad."[42] The examples could go on.

Interestingly, the problem of scientific philosophy or positivism was always talked down, despite considerable intellectual effort. For example, Horkheimer wrote to Adorno that, in addition to this essay, he wanted to deal "with a much more urgent theoretical problem" (about the dialectical interpretation of the relation of substructure and superstructure).[43] "I have now

38 Theodor W. Adorno to Max Horkheimer, June 25, 1936, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 15:570.
39 Theodor W. Adorno to Max Horkheimer, December 15, 1936, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 15:788.
40 Theodor W. Adorno to Max Horkheimer, February 28, 1937, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:60.
41 Max Horkheimer to Theodor W. Adorno, February 4, 1936, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 15:452
42 Theodor W. Adorno to Max Horkheimer, March 21, 1936, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 15:499.
43 Max Horkheimer to Theodor W. Adorno, November 14, 1936, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 15:721-722.

finished the work very quickly because it is basically not worth spending too much time on it," he then wrote to him after its completion.[44]

At the first meeting with the "positivists" in October, Horkheimer thought he had observed a "miserable rearguard action of the formalist epistemology of liberalism," "which also in this field passes over into open lovemaking against fascism." It was a "pre-stabilised harmony between specialist science and barbarism."[45] Adorno thus agreed with Horkheimer when he diagnosed logical positivism as "a desperate retreat of bourgeois philosophy." He had already sketched out in relative detail to the director of the Institute how the essay should be argued and, after a few remarks on topics and structure, recommended treating "the better ones, like Russell and Whitehead and also Moore" and not, for example, the "morons à la Karnap [sic] and Schlick."[46] Horkheimer did not subscribe to this selection principle, but elsewhere he summarized his political assessment of positivist philosophy and its representatives, who for him were nothing other than "genuine petit bourgeois."[47] "The identification of this abstract moment of exactitude, which on closer inspection proves to be its opposite, with the concept of truth in general is only the transfiguration of the silence of these last liberals, with which they sanction and help to spread further the horror that has come into the world through their totalitarian successors."[48] Petty-bourgeois liberals, who on the one hand reinforce the social status quo and prevent social progress, but who on the other hand pave the way for fascism, even come to terms with it.

In any case, political allies look different. In fact, many of the members of the Vienna Circle—in addition to Neurath, for example, the already mentioned Philipp Frank and Rudolf Carnap—had a clearly left-wing political profile. The concept of a left-wing in the Vienna Circle has long been established in research.[49] The term "liberals" does not seem very appropriate and is not correct for those involved in the dialogue. Neurath's politically effective work extended to numerous fields: from political economy, in which he emerged as one of the most important socialization theorists after the First World War, to workers' education and pictorial statistics. In the years of Red Vienna, he published regularly in left-wing, social democratic newspapers and journals.[50] That someone like him, who was driven out of Austria by the

44 Max Horkheimer to Theodor W. Adorno, February 22, 1937, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:48.
45 Max Horkheimer to Theodor W. Adorno, October 22, 1936, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 15:689.
46 Theodor W. Adorno to Max Horkheimer, November 28, 1936, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 15:761.
47 Max Horkheimer to Theodor W. Adorno, February 22, 1937, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:48.
48 Max Horkheimer to Theodor W. Adorno, December 8, 1936, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 15:770.
49 Thomas Uebel, "Political Philosophy of Science in Logical Empiricism: The Left Vienna Circle," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 36 (2005): 754-773.
50 Günther Sandner, "Science and Socialism: Otto Neurath as a Political Writer (1919–

Austro-Fascist regime and had to flee from Holland a second time to escape the National Socialists, should have prepared the totalitarian ideology of his persecutors is nevertheless difficult to comprehend.

In a letter to Karl August Wittfogel, another facet of the dispute becomes clear. Horkheimer and Adorno repeatedly refer to the rising popularity of scientific philosophy in the United States, especially among "enlightened students who, for understandable reasons, want to have nothing to do with metaphysics" but who would be "confused by this sophistry" and believe it to be "the only anti-metaphysical school of thought."[51] His remark to Adorno after he had finished the essay was also in line with this. Horkheimer wrote of a "mumbo-jumbo of unified science, encyclopaedism, unified language, etc.," of "thin phrases" that were "made into a panacea in a genuinely obsessive neurotic manner" and of a "spell" that was "ultimately aimed at academic positions and chairs."[52]

In intellectual discourse, Adorno and Horkheimer liked to look down on others, emphasizing that their attention alone honored them. Mannheim, for example, reported Horkheimer as being "quite sincerely" pleased to be noticed by people like them, and he congratulated Adorno on the "mastery" of his "polemics."[53] Adorno commented in a very similar way on the Paris meeting with the group around Neurath: the latter had merely demonstrated how "they are pleased to have been taken seriously by us at all," since "they do not want to spoil it with us at any price for reasons of academic business."[54]

Neurath believed, especially in the period before Horkheimer's essay, that there was a great willingness to cooperate on the other side, and he tried to involve Philipp Frank and Rudolf Carnap, in particular, in the intellectual exchange. Neither was particularly informed in social science, and they knew little or nothing of the exiled representatives of the Frankfurt Institute. Neurath wrote to Carnap after the two meetings in October and November 1936 that there was "great interest in our cause in the Horkheimer seminar." He told him that the director of the Institute wanted to invite him (Carnap) and pay his travel and accommodation expenses. He said that Carnap should accept this and that he would also invite other companions who were friends of his, "so that we do not sit isolated in the electric chair when Horkheimer lovingly criticises us

1933)," in *Neurath Reconsidered: New Sources and Perspectives*, eds. Jordi Cat and Adam Tamas Tuboly (Cham: Springer, 2019), 67-87.

51 Max Horkheimer to Alexander Wittfogel, December 8, 1936, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 15:777.

52 Max Horkheimer to Theodor W. Adorno, February 22, 1937, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:48-49.

53 Max Horkheimer to Theodor W. Adorno, February 22, 1937, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:51-52.

54 Theodor W. Adorno to Max Horkheimer, August 7, 1937, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:210.

with his friends."[55] He used almost the same formulation as he had used towards Horkheimer after the latter's anti-positivist essay, which can also be taken as an indication that he was playing with his cards on the table.

"Who is Horkheimer? I suppose someone in the New School of Social Research. And what is his journal in which he wants to treat our whole movement?" were Carnap's clueless questions in his reply letter.[56] Neurath enlightened him and added that Horkheimer was writing "something about us" and Carnap could in turn "influence him in the sense of higher truth."[57] However, since Horkheimer's contribution was completed shortly afterwards, the possibilities of influence were probably already extremely limited at this point. Carnap was finally unable to come to New York for health reasons,[58] which Neurath at least regretted very much. Even after the publication of Horkheimer's contribution, Neurath tried to include Philipp Frank in the discourse, even in response to his critical request.[59]

In any case, we do not find internal polemics against the other side's discussants, which are strikingly different from the qualifications used in direct epistolary exchanges in Neurath's work. Only after the end of the intellectual encounter was he to find somewhat clearer words against critical theory and its dialectics in letters to Kurt Grelling.[60]

## *Polemics and the end of dialogue*

Andreas Droschel's assessment that polemical texts emerge "when dialogue has broken down"[61] would have to be modified in our example. For Horkheimer was already writing his polemical text while at the same time conducting a dialogue with Neurath about cooperation—and exchanging even more polemical views with Adorno about Neurath, his group, and their ideological-philosophical program simultaneously.

But where did this polemic come from, and why did the dispute become so exclusionary and ultimately lead to the "severance of diplomatic relations"[62]?

55 Otto Neurath to Rudolf Carnap, December 22, 1936, in *Rudolf Carnap/Otto Neurath. Briefwechsel*, trans. Johannes Friedl and Ulf Höfer (FWF, 2022), 692, https://doi.org/10.48666/872268.
56 Rudolf Carnap to Otto Neurath, December 28, 1936, *Carnap/Neurath Briefwechsel*, 694.
57 Otto Neurath to Rudolf Carnap, January 24, 1937, *Carnap/Neurath Briefwechsel*, 703.
58 Rudolf Carnap to Otto Neurath, January 27, 1937, *Carnap/Neurath Briefwechsel*, 706.
59 Dahms, *Positivismusstreit*, 182-186.
60 Dahms, *Positivismusstreit*, 173-174.
61 Andreas Dorschel, "Polemik und Schadenfreude," *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte* 13, no. 3 (2019): 117-122, 120.
62 Dahms, *Positivismusstreit*, 174.

Apart from undoubtedly existing and by no means insignificant philosophical differences, the stylistics and tone of voice point to other issues.

Horkheimer and Adorno saw the "positivists" as endangering their role as a critical, intellectual avant-garde, which they also wanted to be in the United States. European academics like Rudolf Carnap and Philipp Frank met with a positive response there and were eventually to establish themselves. Otto Neurath's activities around unity of science (the encyclopedia as well as the congresses), but also his visual language Isotype, were also relatively widely received, including in leading print media. The fact that they were socialist-oriented refugees from fascism and National Socialism, threatened with persecution for political reasons and because of anti-Semitism, did not make matters any better. The "positivists"—even if, with the exception of Neurath, they had no social science profile—stood for a program of social progress and modern science, which Horkheimer and Adorno probably interpreted as competition, also in regard to university and academic spheres of influence.

This, too, prevented a longer-term, well-founded, and conflicting intellectual exchange that certainly would not have made differences and opposites disappear, but could have brought mutual inspiration and stimulation. Cooperation—in whatever form—would certainly not have been easy, even in view of philosophical differences. However, the chosen form of confrontation, polemics, shows that the interest in such cooperation was not present on either side at all. Above all, the polemical criticism of logical empiricism facilitated the rejection of cooperation, because the presentation of the other side in the form of polemics prevented the view of what was common. Polemics, it can be concluded, eventually destroyed possible alliances.

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# Book Review

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# Adorno and Marx: Negative Dialectics and the Critique of Political Economy

Emile Ike

Theodor W. Adorno's apparent aversion and repulsion to matters of economy have been well-documented within Anglophone critical-theoretical literature. In a philosophical-political profile written shortly after the death of his former mentor, Jürgen Habermas goes so far as to suggest that "Adorno was not bothered with political economy."[1] Of course, the inverse image of this tends to be associated with Karl Marx, who is often said to have introduced a vulgar base-superstructure model and hence a form of economic reductionism into social critique and cultural analysis. Whereas Adorno is charged with paying *too little* attention to economic issues, Marx conventionally stands accused of dealing *too much* or even solely with the economy. These conventional interpretations and standard images of both thinkers

1 Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, trans. F.G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 109, cited in: Niko Bobka and Dirk Braunstein, "Adorno and the Critique of Political Economy," trans. L. Fischer, in *Adorno and Marx: Negative Dialectics and the Critique of Political Economy*, eds. Werner Bonefeld and Chris O'Kane (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 35.

are taken to task, challenged, and destabilized in a new and vital book titled *Adorno and Marx: Negative Dialectics and the Critique of Political Economy*, edited by Werner Bonefeld and Chris O'Kane. In the pages of this volume, an altogether different picture of both thinkers emerges, as we get to know an Adorno who is particularly attentive to the subtleties of Marx's critique of political economy, as well as a Marx that is decidedly less dogmatic and economistic than is still commonly assumed, even within the established circles of Critical Theory.

The introductory chapter of the collection, co-written by the editors, sets the stage for the rest of the book by elucidating what is at stake in *thinking the critique of political economy as a critical social theory*. This particular phrasing—critique of political economy as critical social theory—already captures the programmatic intent of the book as a whole, running as a guiding thread through its individual contributions.[2] The intellectual origins of this project date back to the late 1960s, when some of Adorno's former students, most prominently Hans-Georg Backhaus and Helmut Reichelt, inaugurated what subsequently came to be known as the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* (New Reading of Marx, or NRM).[3] As Backhaus points out in his seminal essay "On the Dialectics of the Value-Form," Marx's mature project is engaged with a *critique* of political economy rather than the construction of a critical political economy or alternative economic theory.[4] Accordingly, some commentators have pointed out that Marx's theory of value might be more accurately described as a value theory of labor rather than a Ricardian or substantialist labor theory of value.[5] In this reading, Marx distinguishes himself from the discourse of classical political economy, to which his corpus is often so easily and wrongfully assimilated, precisely through his analysis of the *social forms* that wealth and labor assume under the historically specific social relations of capital. Such an analysis in terms of social forms has subsequently been taken up in the Anglophone world by various so-called value-form theorists like Simon Clarke, Moishe Postone, Patrick Murray, and Tony Smith. This subterranean strand of critical theory—as

2 The phrase "critique of political economy as critical social theory" can already be found in Bonefeld's earlier writing, cf. Werner Bonefeld, *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy: On Subversion and Negative Reason* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 2.

3 Riccardo Bellofiore and Tommaso Redolfi Riva, "The Neue Marx-Lektüre: Putting the Critique of Political Economy Back into the Critique of Society," *Radical Philosophy* 189 (2015): 24-36.

4 Hans-Georg Backhaus, "On the Dialectics of the Value-Form," *Thesis Eleven* 1, no. 1 (February 1980): 94-98.

5 Diane Elson, "The Value Theory of Labour," in *Value: The Representation of Labour in Capitalism*, ed. Diane Elson (London: Verso, 1979), 123; cf. Michael Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert: Die Marxsche Kritik der politischen Ökonomie zwischen wissenschaftlicher Revolution und klassischer Tradition* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2006).

O'Kane proposes to call it at one point, setting it up against hegemonic critical theory—shares a rejection of what more traditional Marxist accounts took to be transhistorical givens, such as the primacy of economic forces, class struggle, and the conception that labor as such is the ontological source of wealth. Instead, these theorists pursue the Marxian project along the lines of a thorough critique of economic categories by revealing them as historically specific rather than transhistorical, and of economic reality as such by pointing out its socially constituted nature, despite appearing as "first nature."

The book's remaining essays are divided into three parts, the first part being devoted to Adorno and his relation to the NRM, taking a broadly reconstructive angle. Bonefeld's contribution to this section (one of his four contributions to the volume overall) cuts right to some of the core issues that are subsequently developed and discussed within this collection. In Bonefeld's account, the task of critical theory is oriented to dissolving the natural appearance of capitalist society as an expression of "economic nature." Such a subversive critique of economic objectivity draws upon concepts like "real abstraction"—a notion coined by Alfred Sohn-Rethel—and Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism. In capitalist society, individuals are governed by alien economic laws and external objects that appear to reproduce themselves independently behind the backs of individuals. The alienated existence of capitalist social structures vis-à-vis individuals, however, is not simply a subjective illusion. Instead, it is an objective and socially necessary illusion, one that is rooted in real practices of commodity exchange, as Adorno points out in a remarkable seminar transcript from 1962 on "Marx and the Basic Concepts of Sociological Theory," which is included as an appendix to the book.

What are we to make of this "conceptuality which holds sway in reality itself," as Adorno put it in a famous passage from "Sociology and Empirical Research?"[6] In order to clarify what is at stake here, it is useful to look more closely at the equivalent exchange of non-equivalents implicit in the capitalist practice of commodity exchange. What remains obscured and hidden from view in the apparently free and equal act of exchange is the fact that commodity labor-power possesses the unique capacity to create more value than it receives in the form of the wage. Adorno was well aware that the realization of value in the sphere of circulation is hence fundamentally premised on the creation of surplus value in the sphere of production.[7] As Niko Bobka and Dirk Braunstein point out in their richly detailed and insightful contribution to the book, it is

6 Theodor W. Adorno, "Sociology and Empirical Research," in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, eds. T. W. Adorno, H. Albert, et al. (London: Heinemann, 1977), 80.

7 Adorno even goes so far as to suggest that the doctrine of surplus value is "the centerpiece of Marxian theory," cited in Bobka and Braunstein, "Adorno and the Critique of Political Economy," 37.

precisely "the equality in the process of exchange [that] reproduces the inequality of classes and individuals."[8] Against the standard interpretation of Adorno's writings, and especially its reception in the Anglophone world, the essays collected in the first section of the book demonstrate quite clearly that Adorno engaged seriously with the nuances of Marx's critique of political economy. It is particularly interesting to observe in this context that—for Adorno as much as for Marx—the vertical relations of class domination and horizontal relations of value, under which all members of society are subsumed, are in fact distinct yet interrelated, in the sense that neither of them is immediately reducible to the other.[9] Whereas the aforementioned value-form theorists are frequently accused of neglecting class struggle, the contributions collected in this section—those by Bonefeld and Charlotte Baumann in particular—illustrate how class domination and human suffering remain the non-conceptual premises of the economic categories of bourgeois discourse.

The second section of the book revolves around the contemporary relevance of thinking of the critique of political economy as a negative dialectic of society and contains some of the most original and thought-provoking essays in the book. Picking up on some of the themes and concepts discussed earlier in the book, Charles Andrew Prusik's essay turns to Adorno's critique of positivism in order to illuminate and criticize the neoliberal phase of capitalism. Even though Adorno did not live long enough to witness the emergence of neoliberalism in the 1970s, Prusik does an impressive job of rendering Adorno's insights on society as a dialectical process of subject-object mediation intelligible and adequate for a critique of neoliberalism, both as theoretical discourse and as political practice. Whereas Adorno has oftentimes been read as a critic of the totally administered industrial society, levelling a criticism that is then supposed to have limited validity only for the post-war era of the Fordist-Keynesian class compromise, all the essays comprising this section of the book run against the grain of such interpretations. As O'Kane points out in his important contribution on negative totality and permanent catastrophe, "the very technological developments Adorno discussed in 'Late Capitalism' led to overaccumulation and the inflation he indicated, laying the groundwork for an economic slowdown in the early 1970s."[10]

8 Bobka and Braunstein, "Adorno and the Critique of Political Economy," 37.

9 Although initially coined by Robert Brenner, this distinction between horizontal and vertical relations is taken from another recent brilliant intervention in Marxist scholarship, see Søren Mau, *Mute Compulsion: A Marxist Theory of the Economic Power of Capital* (London: Verso, 2023), 175ff.

10 Chris O'Kane, "'Society Maintains Itself Despite All Catastrophes that May Eventuate': Critical Theory, Negative Totality, and Permanent Catastrophe," in *Adorno and Marx: Negative Dialectics and the Critique of Political Economy,* eds. Werner Bonefeld and Chris O'Kane (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 173.

One of the clearest expressions of this "dynamic of disintegration through growing integration"—as O'Kane has it, alluding to Adorno's *Philosophical Elements of a Theory of Society*—is perhaps to be found in the rise of surplus populations, i.e., those who are rendered obsolete and superfluous to the requirements of capital.[11] This brings us directly to Fabian Arzuaga's outstanding contribution to the volume, wherein he analyzes Marx's notion of surplus populations alongside Adorno's thesis on the liquidation of the individual. The core argument of this highly original and creative contribution is that "the liquidation of the individual applies not only to the superfluity of bourgeois individuality as anthropological type but also to actually living individuals."[12] Lacking both the jobs to survive within capitalism and the means to survive outside of it, these surplus populations are increasingly dependent on the informal economy to acquire their means of living and are continuously exposed to conditions of vulnerability, precarity, and ultimately fungibility. Arzuaga clearly ties the phenomenon of surplus populations to the temporal dynamics of capitalist value production, yet the exact relationship between the latter's reproduction through the mute compulsion of economic relations and the extra-economic and direct violence exercised in the management and containment of surplus populations remains undertheorized, as it lies beyond the scope of this chapter.

This draws attention, however, to a more general question that remains somewhat conspicuously absent throughout the volume as a whole: how should we think of the unfolding of the value-form and the "inner" dialectics of capitalism in relation to its "outer" dialectics, expressed in the ongoing necessity of primitive accumulation, the history of colonialism, the rise of informality, and the persistence of slavery within the capitalist world economy? Such questions have been at the center of Marxist debates since Rosa Luxemburg, at least, and continue to play a role in current discussions surrounding David Harvey's notion of "accumulation by dispossession." The thrust of these arguments is that the accumulation of capital systemically requires non-capitalist "outsides" in order to realize surplus value, thereby establishing a necessary and conceptual rather than contingent and historical connection between capitalism, on the one hand, and colonialism and imperialism, on the other.[13] Although it might be questionable to conceive of

11 Adorno touches on the phenomenon of superfluity via a discussion of automation in his lecture on "Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism," see Theodor W. Adorno, *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), 5.

12 Fabian Arzuaga, "The Liquidation of the Individual as Critique of Political Economy," in *Adorno and Marx: Negative Dialectics and the Critique of Political Economy,* eds. Werner Bonefeld and Chris O'Kane (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 131.

13 Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (London: Routledge, 2003), 332; David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 138ff.

these hinterlands as unmediated externalities to the capitalist social totality, these approaches nonetheless raise important questions concerning core and periphery dynamics in today's global capitalism.[14] Furthermore, more recent debates have moved to understanding how the homogenizing tendency of the value-form actually works in tandem with the production of social difference along racialized and gendered lines.[15] The observation that capitalist history moves in two contradictory directions at once would not have been a surprise to Marx, nor would the idea that capitalist identity simultaneously presupposes its non-identity have been alien to Adorno.[16] For this reason, the relatively meagre engagement with these pressing issues is a missed opportunity, not only in light of these systematic debates, but especially in view of current feminist, anti-racist, and abolitionist struggles.[17]

The rather bleak and pessimistic diagnosis that transpires throughout the pages of the first two sections of the book then ultimately begs the question as to what sort of political practice is required to bring capital and its regressive tendencies to a halt. In a world overdetermined by capital, how can we break the spell of reified society? Although the third part of the book is dedicated to questions of social praxis, the reader who is looking for ready-made political prescriptions does so in vain here, which certainly comes as no surprise to those familiar with both Marx's and Adorno's methodological commitments to negativity in social theory. What is equally clear, however, is that the stakes for any political practice confronting the abject misery of contemporary capitalism are dizzyingly high. As O'Kane and Kirstin Munro so brilliantly point out in their chapter on Postone's critique of Marxian economics, such a political practice must move beyond distribution-centered conceptions of capital-

14 Cf. Phil A. Neel, *Hinterland: America's New Landscape of Class and Conflict* (Chicago: Reaktion Books, 2020); and Martín Arboleda, *Planetary Mine: Territories of Extraction Under Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2020).

15 See the contributions to the special issue of *Historical Materialism* on "Race and Capital," *Historical Materialism* 31, no. 2/3 (Jan 2024), https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/journal/issue-3123-race-and-capital/. Lukas Egger points to the neglected work of Peter Schmitt-Egner, whose attempts to develop a value-form theory of racism in the 1970s are documented in Lukas Egger, "Reduced to Brutish Nature: On Racism and the Law of Value," in *Historical Materialism* 32, no.2 (Jan 2024).

16 In a letter to Walter Benjamin, Adorno touches on the relationship between the world market and imperialism through a brief discussion of the arcade and the bazaar, see Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin et al., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 2007), 118. For an alternative Adorno-inspired account that focuses on the permanence of primitive accumulation, see Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *History and Obstinacy*, trans. R. Langston (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

17 It should be noted that Bonefeld has elsewhere convincingly argued that capitalist accumulation contains the violence of primitive accumulation in its very concept, see Werner Bonefeld, "Primitive Accumulation and Capitalist Accumulation: Notes on Social Constitution and Expropriation," *Science and Society* 75, no. 3 (2011): 379-399.

ism as well as conceptions of socialism that are focused on the realization of labor rather than its abolition. Neither Adorno nor Marx ethically privileges the standpoint of labor, in a limited or expanded sense. As such, the book represents an important intervention in contemporary debates on critical theory and capitalism, and offers a stimulating counterpoint to both Rahel Jaeggi's practice-theoretical articulation of "a wide concept of economy," as well as Nancy Fraser's insistence on the need for an expanded conception of capitalism.[18] The true genius of Adorno's interpretation of Marx perhaps lies precisely in this: that the categories of Marx's critique of political economy are never purely or merely economic but are always already about society writ large. Adorno therefore elucidates what it means *to engage in the critique of political economy as critical social theory*. Together with the *SAGE Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory* (2018), which was edited by O'Kane, Bonefeld, and Beverley Best, this edited volume provides invaluable resources for those interested in thinking, criticizing, and contesting the present political conjuncture—with Adorno and Marx.

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18 Rahel Jaeggi, "A Wide Concept of Economy: Economy as Social Practice and the Critique of Capitalism," in *Critical Theory in Critical Times: Transforming the Global Political and Economic Order*, eds. Penelope Deutscher and Cristina Lafont (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 160-179; Nancy Fraser, "Behind Marx's Hidden Abode: For an Expanded Conception of Capitalism," in *Critical Theory in Critical Times: Transforming the Global Political and Economic Order*, eds. Penelope Deutscher and Cristina Lafont (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 141-159.

# Obituaries

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# Hans Magnus Enzensberger: A Great Poet and Political Harlequin

Gerhard Schweppenhäuser

What an ending: During a hospital stay in Munich, 90-year-old Hans Magnus Enzensberger narrowly escapes an assassination attempt. The perpetrator is a nurse who has a habit of sedating his elderly patients with overdoses of tranquilizers when he has a hangover and wants to have his peace in the ward room. Enzensberger's doctor, in agreement with his wife, overrides his living will and initiates resuscitation measures. Enzensberger survives and subsequently spends about two more years peacefully at home in Munich.

What a start: at the age of 27, Enzensberger, who had shortly before received his doctorate in literary studies, is celebrated as the most important German-language poet of the present day. His book *Verteidigung der Wölfe* causes a sensation. Alongside echoes of Brecht, there are echoes of Gottfried Benn, the master of form with Nazi leanings. When Enzensberger receives the most important German literary prize, the Georg Büchner Prize, he is only 33 years old.

In the late 1950s he plays a leading role as a critical journalist and essayist in the restorative Federal Republic. In terms of content and

thought, his works, primarily for radio, are not original; he takes his motifs and arguments from Adorno, Kracauer, Brecht, and Benjamin. Linguistically and stylistically, however, they are unique and outstanding.

When Enzensberger's subject is language, gems of the critique of ideology emerge that have retained their radiance to this day, such as his 1957 critique of the "language of *Der Spiegel*." Decades after Enzensberger's 1957 analysis, the Hamburg-based magazine was still doing everything it could to confirm the South German critic's findings about that organ's jargon and storytelling compulsion. "It is a language of poor universality: it considers itself competent in every case," Enzensberger notes. *Spiegel* writers use "rapidly applied terminology," "buzzwords," and the "slang of the season." They flirt "with their own shrewdness." The inevitable transformation into a "story" transforms the news "into a pseudo-aesthetic entity whose structure is no longer dictated by the matter at hand."[1]

Enzensberger acts in that period as a bold plagiarist, but as if it were in the service of a good cause, of sharp and intransigent enlightenment. In 1957, he delivers an analysis of the cinema newsreel on the radio entitled "Scherbenwelt: The Anatomy of a Newsreel."[2] His critique paraphrases Siegfried Kracauer's 1931 analysis of the newsreel format, without citing the source.[3] Measured against its own standards, Enzensberger says, the newsreel is "journalistically worthless. It is an instrument for paralysis, not for the development of consciousness"[4]; it drags National Socialist forms and racist stereotypes into the present. A reform of the genre under the conditions of the public broadcasting system seems to him to be the way out. In newsreels, history is always "experienced unhistorically,"[5] Enzensberger says, almost in Kracauer's words.

At the end of the 1950s, it would have been not only honest but also strategically important to make Kracauer known again in West German discourse. Kracauer, however, apparently does not take offense. In 1962, in a letter to Adorno, he remarks laconically: "I would like to have a long talk with Enzensberger [...]. It was worthwhile. But he still has a lot to learn (and some to unlearn)."[6]

1 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Die Sprache des *Spiegel*," *Einzelheiten, Bd. I: Bewußtseins-Industrie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 80 et seq.
2 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Scherbenwelt. Die Anatomie einer Wochenschau," *Einzelheiten, Bd. I: Bewußtseins-Industrie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979) 106–133.
3 Siegfried Kracauer, "Die Filmwochenschau," *Kino. Essays, Glossen und Studien zum Film*, ed. Karsten Witte (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), 11–14.
4 Enzensberger, "Scherbenwelt," 128.
5 Enzensberger, "Scherbenwelt," 116.
6 Theodor W. Adorno and Siegfried Kracauer, *Briefwechsel 1923–1966,* ed. Wolfgang Schopf (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008), 535.

At the beginning of the 1960s, Enzensberger publishes the fruits of his reading of the culture industry chapter from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* under the title "Consciousness Industry." He wants to distinguish himself against Adorno's critique of the culture industry, whose basic theses he more or less adopts without even mentioning their author. He claims that the term "culture industry" is insufficient. He accuses the authors of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* of not having gone beyond the tradition of bourgeois cultural criticism and of not having seen that culture is only a part of what Marx deciphered as socially produced consciousness. The "name culture industry," according to Enzensberger, "trivializes the phenomenon and obscures the social and political consequences that result from the industrial mediation and transformation of consciousness."[7] To accuse the authors of such a thing, who made Marx's critique of political economy the basis of the complete subjugation of the cultural sector to the capitalist value system, is not without unintentional comedy. It seems that Enzensberger has not studied his older philosopher friend's texts as thoroughly as one might expect from a perceptive reader.

Adorno, however, has no grudge against Enzensberger. He is too important to Adorno as a public and private interlocutor. "I do not want to soften the sentence that writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric [...]. But Enzensberger's retort also remains true, that poetry must withstand this verdict, must be such that it does not surrender itself to cynicism by its very existence after Auschwitz,"[8] Adorno confesses in 1962. He did not often make such concessions to his critics. In the same year, he writes to Kracauer that Enzensberger is, like Alexander Kluge, a "tremendously gifted person."[9]

In the course of the 1960s, Enzensberger becomes radicalized. My father once told me about long tavern evenings in Frankfurt, where Enzensberger and he made plans for a left-wing anti-*Bild* newspaper that was to become an enlightened counterweight to Axel Springer's ideological agitation (which, however, did not come to pass). Enzensberger wants Adorno to subject the "Godesberg Program," in which the SPD had abandoned its radical critique of capitalism, to a critical analysis in his left-wing avantgarde journal, the *Kursbuch*. After a long back and forth, Adorno's scruples about following in Marx's footsteps prevail. He does not want to lash out at the SPD, from which, despite all his reservations, he hopes for an improvement of the social climate in the FRG.

7 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Bewußtseins-Industrie," *Einzelheiten, Bd. I: Bewußtseins-Industrie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1979), 9.

8 Theodor W. Adorno, "Engagement," *Noten zur Literatur*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, eds. Rolf Tiedemann et al., vol. 11 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1974), 422 et seq.

9 Adorno and Kracauer, *Briefwechsel 1923–1966,* 557.

The fact that ideological media formats are not really reformed under the conditions of the public broadcasting system has not escaped Enzensberger. In 1970, he publishes a theory of mass communication media that follows Brecht and Benjamin and adapts their theses to current developments. Since almost everyone has audiovisual, electronic devices and networking, universal communication could now be realized. Thus the "egalitarian" character of the consciousness industry could be harnessed. The "memory" provided by the new media is "social. The stored information is open to the access of all [...]. It is enough to compare the model of a private library with that of a socialized storage device to see the structural difference between the two systems."[10]

The clear-sighted Enzensberger anticipates Web 2.0 here: "The new media are action-oriented and not contemplative [...]. Their time relationship is completely contrary to that of bourgeois culture, which wants possession, that is, duration, preferably eternity. The media do not produce objects that can be hoarded and auctioned off. They dissolve 'intellectual property' par excellence."[11] Like the anarchic internet euphorics from California, he expects the spread of new media to have "mobilizing power": it can "make people more mobile than they are. Free like dancers, quick-witted like soccer players, surprising like guerrillas."[12]

Of course, Enzensberger quickly realizes that nothing will come of this. But he does not draw the consequence of intensifying the criticism of the ideological media and state apparatuses in deregulated capitalism. Always on the trail of positions that can win a majority, he switches to casual irony. This does not make his cultural criticism any less lucid. "An economy whose problem is no longer production but sales," Enzensberger notes in 1985, "needs qualified consumers."[13] Educational programs are being replaced by television programs, especially those of the private stations recently permitted in Germany. The ideal of the universally educated person pales before the reality of a new cultural type. He is perfectly adapted to a socio-cultural environment in which historical awareness, the ability to concentrate, and poetic obstinacy are not important and are not demanded. "The ideal medium for the secondary illiterate is television."[14] It has taken over from radio the function of a background medium and,

10 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Baukasten zu einer Theorie der Medien," *Kursbuch Medienkultur. Die maßgeblichen Theorien von Brecht bis Baudrillard*, eds. Claus Pias et al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt DVA, 2000), 272.

11 Enzensberger, "Baukasten zu einer Theorie der Medien," 272.

12 Enzensberger, "Baukasten zu einer Theorie der Medien," 265.

13 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Lob des Analphabetentums," *Mittelmaß und Wahn. Gesammelte Zerstreuungen* (Frankfurt am Main/Wien: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1991 [Suhrkamp, 1988]), 68.

14 Enzensberger, "Lob des Analphabetentums," 68.

like radio once did, creates a series of purposeful illusions: One does not feel alone, feels a connection to the environment, can relax as nowhere else. This is what Enzensberger calls the therapeutic benefit of the "zero medium"[15] of television.

As sharp as his cultural criticism remains, it becomes less and less critical of society. Over the years, Enzensberger repeatedly proves himself to be a political renegade. In 2003, he joins the chorus of supporters of the war in Iraq and equates Saddam Hussein with Hitler.

In 1968, at a student congress in Frankfurt, Jürgen Habermas insulted Enzensberger as a "harlequin at the court of the pseudo-revolutionaries," who, "because for so long he had to borrow implausible metaphors from the language of the twenties for poems that were inconsequential at the time, now quickly sets himself up as the poet of the revolution – but still in the posture of the irresponsible, who does not care about the practical consequences of his triggering stimuli."[16] There is no more talk of this in Habermas's respectful obituary in 2022. There he boasts that Enzensberger "embodied the plasticity of the human spirit in a literarily unique way."[17] That is really a nice euphemism for the opportunism of the criticism that Enzensberger has exemplified since the 1970s. "There is the brother lightfoot story of the one who goes along everywhere and constantly changes his conviction," Enzensberger himself stated in 1995. This, he wrote, is probably a "legend"—but "there is something to it."[18]

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15 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Das Nullmedium oder warum alle Klagen über das Fernsehen gegenstandslos sind," *Mittelmaß und Wahn. Gesammelte Zerstreuungen* (Frankfurt am Main/Wien: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1991 [Suhrkamp, 1988]), 89 et seq.

16 Jürgen Habermas, "Scheinrevolution unter Handlungszwang," *Der Spiegel*, June 9, 1968.

17 Jürgen Habermas, "Der Elektrisierende. Meine Erinnerungen an Hans Magnus Enzensberger," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 26/27, 2022.

18 "Zwischen den Zeilen. André Müller spricht mit Hans Magnus Enzensberger," *Die Zeit,* February 10, 1995.

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# In Remembrance: Deborah Cook (1954-2020)

Jeff Noonan

On Wednesday, October 7th, 2020, I was in my study at home getting ready for a department meeting. Our spring of remote working discontent had given way to an autumn of Teams meetings and classes. I decided to check my email before logging on to the meeting. Strangely, there was a message from the Toronto police. I opened the email, thinking it was some sort of hoax, but just to be sure I phoned the number in the message. The constable informed me that my friend and colleague, Deborah Cook, had died the day before.

I had spoken to Deborah about a week previously. During the summer months, the lockdown rules had been relaxed and she was able to stroll and stop for drinks and chats in her Riverdale neighborhood in Toronto. As the cold weather returned, she worried that she would face a lonely and isolated winter. November to March in Toronto is dreary and grey enough; a return to full lockdowns was a depressing thought. But we chatted about the situation with as much humor as we could muster. There was no indication that our phone call would be our last.

Deborah's death was completely unexpected. She smoked a few du Mauriers every day but loved long walks and was apparently in good health. But the heart is a fickle organ and hers gave out on October 6th.

The first time that I met Deborah, strangely enough, was during a video interview for a limited-term position in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Windsor. Deborah came to Windsor in 1989, after limited-term positions at Queen's and the University of Victoria. She also taught for one year in the CEGEP system in Quebec. In 1998 Skype or Teams did not exist, so I had to go to the University of Toronto, where a video link had been set up. I sat alone in a huge room while Deborah and two other members of the department interviewed me. I had just come back to Toronto from the University of Alberta where I had taught on contract for two years. I needed this job, so I worked hard to say whatever I thought they wanted to hear, including how well I could teach a class on medieval philosophy. Thinking back, I think I remember a little gleam in Deborah's eye, laughing to herself knowing I was, how should we say, stretching the scope of my competence.

But I got the job and Deborah and I became friends from the moment that I arrived in Windsor. For two years we would have dinner every Wednesday, drink wine, kvetch about the administration, and talk philosophy.

We had been friends and colleagues for a couple of months before I made the connection between the Deborah Cook I was now working with and the Deborah Cook who wrote *The Subject Finds a Voice*, a reappraisal of the late works of Foucault which I had read and used to help build part of the argument in my doctoral dissertation.

*The Subject Finds a Voice* (1993) was Deborah's first book. It was followed in 1996 by *The Culture Industry Revisited.* These two early works set out the poles within which her research would subsequently develop. Of her many contributions, perhaps none is more important than the surprising links that she was able to establish between Foucault and the Frankfurt School, and in particular, Adorno (*Adorno, Foucault and The Critique of the West*, 2018). *Adorno and Foucault* was her follow up book to *Adorno and Nature* (2011) and *Adorno, Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society* (2004). Deborah's reading of Adorno was notable for her championing of a more positive and hopeful interpretation against the generally prevailing view of him as a dour and pessimistic critic disengaged from the hopeful struggle for a better world. This interpretation had been foreshadowed by her argument in the 1996 book on the culture industry that there was a progressive dimension to popular culture which the main theorists of the first generation of the Frankfurt School understood and celebrated, but which was ignored by the standard interpretation of their works.

From the first to the last her work was defined by meticulous attention to textual detail and a knack for reading the works of seminal twentieth-century critical theorists against the grain. Her conclusions were controversial amongst Adorno scholars, but there can be no intellectual growth without conflict and argument. If there was anything that Deborah enjoyed, it was serious philosophical discussion and debate. Whether at conferences or in her classroom, Deborah exemplified the scholarly commitment to challenging established thinking while being willing to (graciously) defend her position against her critics.

Most of the philosophical world knew Deborah as a scholar, and she was rightfully proud of her achievements. But she was also a deeply committed teacher. While she could be intimidating to students, she also approached her teaching practice with a sense of its practical importance. "Ideas matter" she would tell her students: philosophers do interpret the world, but since we act on interpretations, we have to ensure that those we act upon are true. No student who stuck with her demanding classes would come away unchanged for the better (although perhaps not with as high a grade as they would have liked). She imparted the determination that carried her from London, ON, to doctoral studies at the Sorbonne to all of her students. Several of them have gone on to graduate school themselves and some are now making their mark as young scholars.

Deborah was a citizen of the intellectual world, and she brought that world to our peninsula at the southwestern end of Ontario. Her scholarship helped put Windsor on the philosophical map and her retirement was a huge loss for the department. However, for Deborah herself, retirement was a liberation from the grind of the institution. She looked forward to a newfound freedom that would give her more time to finish her latest manuscript, to travel, and to speak to the critical theory conferences she regularly attended.

Sadly, she only enjoyed a few months of retirement before her death.

She signed my copy of *Adorno, Foucault and the Critique of the West* with the simple, yet poignant, inscription: "*ad infinitum*." Good materialist that she was, she knew that our time on earth is finite, but that ideas live on. They open new doors as they inhabit new minds who put them to work in new contexts, stretching their effects across the open-ended future of the human project. Her books and her lectures live on in the minds of scholars and students, and her mischievous humor, sharp wit and, I might add, her spirit lives on in those of us who were fortunate to count her not only as a colleague but as a friend.

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