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Introduction

Since its beginnings in 1968, *Telos* has repeatedly turned to the work of Theodor Adorno, asking how his version of Critical Theory could cross the Atlantic and make sense in the United States. The extraordinary attention paid since to Adorno's American experience, like that of Alexis de Tocqueville and Gunnar Myrdal, derives in part from a constant fascination with the spectacle of the critical European intellectual's encounter with the antithetical culture of a resistant America. In this classic meeting of Old World and New, misunderstandings abound. Americans regard the European intellectual as biased and arrogant, spinning grotesque caricatures of America from imagination. The European intellectual, in turn, theoretically inclined, immersed in high culture, and skeptical of American empiricism, generalizes from a narrow, unrepresentative slice of American culture.

Yet, if the object does not go into its concept without remainder, as Adorno argues in *Negative Dialectics*, the skeptical view of the outsider reveals a great deal about American society, much of which is too intertwined with the culture to be readily visible to insiders. At the same time, the American experience greatly alters and deepens the European's *Weltanschauung*, serving in the end as a career-defining event. This is certainly true for Adorno. The past tendency to read Adorno as entirely negative about America derives from the popularity of writings in which he is hypercritical of America and American culture, such as the seminal *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Minima Moralia*. But other, less prominent texts, such as his *Letters to his Parents*, his *Dream Notes*, his essay "Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America," and his untranslated lecture "Kultur und Culture," suggest a more sanguine assessment of American culture and society. It is easy to draw the wrong conclusion from the manifest contradiction between simultaneous approval and disapproval and to claim that "Adorno offers two pictures of America that simply do not go together and are each as unconvincing as the other."[1]

However, the tension created by Adorno's contradictory appraisals of America is genuinely productive, for it provides a model for the relationship between Adorno and America and it demands rigorous scholarship, sensitive to biographical detail, textual nuance, and historical context. In place of reductive anecdotes intended to disparage Adorno as a European mandarin, we must carefully examine the complex American dimensions of his thought, without restricting the

1. Claus Offe, *Reflections on America: Tocqueville, Weber and Adorno in the United States*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), p. 92.

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evaluation to only one or two texts. The whole cannot be abstracted from the part. It is therefore impossible to attribute to Adorno a single position, pro- or anti-American.

This issue seeks to challenge the ingrained views about Adorno and America by turning the topic's conventions on their head, dialectically, of course, unearthing new archival material, and treating conventional questions from divergent disciplinary perspectives. In his general discussion of Adorno's American reception, Joshua Rayman rehearses this familiar terrain critically, examining the rise of Adorno's academic reputation, changing scholarly views on his opinion and knowledge of America, the reasons for his own institutional standing in America, his political position under McCarthyism, and his long-standing battle with empiricism and positivism over the way to do social science. For Rayman, Adorno's internal destruction of the positivist, empirical research project, in *The Authoritarian Personality* and the Princeton Radio Research Project, constitutes his lasting message for contemporary social science.

Adorno's work on the Princeton Radio Research Project remained largely unpublished until the recent appearance of his tome *Current of Music*. David Jenemann uses the text's insider accounts of the radio industry both to dismantle critiques of Adorno as ignorant of America and to set forth an Adornian philosophy of ambivalence. Implicit within Jenemann's reading of Adorno's analysis of plugging, the practice of paying radio stations to play a label's songs, is a general defense of Adorno against empiricist critiques. Plugging was significant not because of the particular content of plugged songs, which Adorno neglected, but because what was being plugged was the social structure at large. Hence, Adorno's neglect of the particular content of plugged songs, films, and magazines was a result of his recognition that the individual commercial phenomenon both derived from and exhibited the culture industry's universal structure.

Adorno's influential writings on music also include at least two insufficiently credited collaborations, with Hanns Eisler on *Composing for the Films* and with Thomas Mann on *Doctor Faustus*. In his article on Adorno and Eisler, James Parsons relies upon a newly discovered archive of Oxford University Press documents to demonstrate and provide details of their collaboration on *Composing for the Films*. The extent to which Thomas Mann's novel *Doctor Faustus* depended on Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music* is now well known. But John Wells argues that the status of Adorno's philosophy within the novel becomes troublingly ambivalent, in much the same way as does the Schoenberg material. Both become susceptible to misappropriation in a fictional force field in the shadow of fascism. Where living work grows stale, it inevitably becomes appropriable for antithetical purposes.

Perhaps the most popular, calcified view of Adorno is of the unredeemable pessimist. By offering redemptive and liberatory readings of Adorno on literature,

film, and philosophy, Matt Waggoner, Antonio Y. Vázquez-Arroyo, Ulrich Plass, and Ryan Drake set the record straight. From Adorno's reading of Franz Kafka's *Amerika* (*Der Verschollene*), Waggoner traces elements of a philosophy of dwelling, of home and homelessness. Against a standard reading of Kafka's unfinished text, according to which the ragtag band of train passengers bound for "The Nature Theater of Oklahoma" is on its way to death or permanent exile, Waggoner adopts what he takes to be Adorno's redemptive reading of this dream-like, carnivalesque passage of angels and devils. Vázquez-Arroyo develops and defends his emancipatory reading of Adorno in what he calls a *minima humana* or critical humanism that stands for universal human freedom without importing anything like a thick conception of human identity into the universal sphere.

Adorno's view of film is often thought to be entirely negative. Yet, by looking at his relation to the German-American director Fritz Lang, Plass and Drake uncover a more complex view of film's potential for a necessary regression and a critical emancipation. Plass argues for the necessity of insinuating the dialectical view of Adorno's attitude toward America further into *each* side of his dialectic of enlightenment in demonstrating that Lang's late orientalist films, as a return to youthful, somatic immediacy, exhibit the positive side of a dialectic of regression that Adorno had viewed in negative terms in his critique of the culture industry. Drake's Adornian reading of shock effects in Lang's great American film *Fury* recovers the emancipatory potential of film for Adorno from the weight of his pessimism and his many negative remarks about Hollywood films. The stunning images of the mob's descent into violence, the individual's consequent fall into revenge, and the restoration of individual autonomy through cinematic technology provide a powerful example of the democratic and critical potential of film to resist irrational rule.

Finally, Shannon Mariotti constructs from an Adornian perspective a lacerating genealogy of the contemporary medical model of American psychology and corporate pharmacology. She reminds us that while the psychoanalytic models dominant in Adorno's America were quite different from today's "Prozac society," Adorno long ago anticipated and provided a theoretical critique of the present model through his analysis of the destruction and reification of human subjectivity.

Russell A. Berman, Ulrich Plass, and Joshua Rayman

Adorno's American Reception

Joshua Rayman

The main events of Theodor W. Adorno's American experience are so familiar that, as David Jenemann[1] points out, Martin Jay's groundbreaking 1973 text, *The Dialectical Imagination*,[2] which essentially *introduced* the Frankfurt School to an American audience, already describes these events as well-known. Max Horkheimer's Institut für Sozialforschung (the Institute, for short), which in its exile had been affiliated with Columbia University since 1935, arranged with the Austrian émigré sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld and the Rockefeller Foundation to bring Adorno to New York in 1938 to direct the musical section of the Princeton Radio Research Project, in exchange for financial support. In 1940, unhappy with Adorno's critical intransigence, the Foundation cut the project's musical section, resulting in his dismissal.[3] Adorno followed Horkheimer to California in 1941.[4] From 1944, Adorno led the Institute's collaboration with the Berkeley Public Opinion Study Group on the *Studies in Prejudice*, including *The Authoritarian Personality*, funded by the American Jewish Committee.[5] In 1949, he rejoined Horkheimer's Institute in Germany after its triumphant return to Frankfurt, eventually rising to Director of the Institute, although he spent time in the United States in 1952–53, briefly working as research director for the William F. Hacker Foundation, a psychological

1. David Jenemann, *Adorno in America* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2007).

2. Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1973).

3. Martin Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1984), p. 34.

4. Jenemann, *Adorno in America*, p. xxiii.

5. Jay, *Adorno*, p. 39.

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institute in Southern California,[6] before leaving the United States permanently. Adorno's time in America was by far the most productive of his life. Although he spent only about twelve years in the United States, during this time he wrote *Minima Moralia*, *Philosophy of New Music*, "The Stars Down to Earth," and the massive radio study *Current of Music*, he co-wrote *Dialectic of Enlightenment* with Horkheimer and *Composing for Films* with Hanns Eisler, and he served as co-director on *The Authoritarian Personality*. But this is only a fraction of his American production. In "Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America,"[7] Adorno writes that ninety percent of his work published in Germany had been written in America.

My concern here is not to revisit this history or to analyze Adorno's writings in or about America. Instead, I want to examine Adorno's American reception in order to understand why his work was marginalized for so many years and to argue that it should not have been marginalized because its message was directly relevant to an America in which it was still possible to constitute resistance or even to envision alternatives to the totalizing, scientific-cultural complex known as the culture industry. This article, then, is a critical history of American attitudes toward Adorno's work for the purpose of determining that and why it is relevant to understanding both mid-century America and contemporary American society.[8]

The approach I am taking to understand Adorno's American reception is relativist or relationalist in a Nietzschean sense. That is, I address this issue from multiple perspectives, recognizing that attempts to resolve particular questions will always be guided by certain assumptions and, hence, will be hypothetically valid, at best; I do not hold the self-refuting claims that there is no truth or that no arguments are better than any others. To the extent that our solutions are partial, limited, dependent for their truth on assumptions that cannot themselves be demonstrated in the course of our inquiry, but which can be evaluated in their success or failure by reference to diverse practical and theoretical criteria, the most honest approach to resolving a question seems to be to recognize the hypothetical character of each partial solution and to gather together a range of distinct perspectives,

6. Jenemann, *Adorno in America*, p. 193n7.

7. Theodore W. Adorno, "Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America," trans. Donald Fleming, *Perspectives in American History* 2 (1968): 338–70.

8. I would like to thank the National Endowment for the Humanities and Stanford University for their generous support in an exciting 2007 summer seminar on German exiles in California, conducted by Russell Berman.

topics, and methods, as a means of producing a broader picture of the many partial solutions, even if this means that no final synthesis is attainable.

Hence, I proceed by examining how Adorno was received in different quarters at different times and criticizing this reception by reference to his history and arguments. My critique of his American reception incorporates disciplinary, political, and empirical spheres. I argue that philosophical dismissals of Adorno assume unnecessarily limiting constructions of the discipline to a priori conceptual and linguistic analysis, as well as false distinctions between facts and values. The McCarthyist political critique of Adorno as "Stalinoid" neglects the historical context of his work and the distinctions among the many forms of left politics, reducing everything to Stalinism. The left political critique of Adorno as quietist[9] and anti-Marxist—leveled primarily in Europe, not the United States, prior to the 1970s[10]—overlooks the importance of theoretical-practical analysis and resistance to "blindly pragmatic" thought, as well as the significance of a critical thinking that is merely negative and does not offer systematic Marxist alternatives. The empiricist critique of Adorno as a purely speculative thinker fails to recognize either the depth of his experience of the culture industry or the complexity of his theoretical-practical stance, which acknowledges the importance of empirical research without accepting its autonomy, its claimed disinterestedness, or its uncritical constructions.

Let us first assess Adorno's scholarly reception in the United States. During his stay in the United States, Adorno was read primarily by empiricist sociologists, whose stance ranged from supportive to harshly critical. Like the rest of the Institute, Adorno seems to have been almost entirely ignored by American philosophers until the 1970s, even though he was originally trained as a philosopher. He wrote that "in the narrow professional sense, I am defined as a philosopher,"[11] and he became a philosophy professor in Frankfurt upon his return. In *The Philosopher's Index*, which provides a broad, though certainly incomplete, cataloguing of work in philosophy since 1940, I have found only two references to Institute members prior to the late 1950s: Adorno's own article "Husserl and the Problem of

9. Russell Berman, "Adorno's Politics," in *Adorno: A Critical Reader*, ed. Nigel Gibson and Andrew Rubin (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), p. 110.

10. Martin Jay, "Adorno in America," *New German Critique* 31 (1984): 166–67.

11. Letter to Berthold Bührer, January 31, 1950, in Theodor W. Adorno, *Letters to his Parents: 1939–1951*, ed. Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz, trans. Wieland Hoban (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006), p. 382.

Idealism," in the prestigious *Journal of Philosophy* in 1940;[12] and a 1947 review of Horkheimer's *Eclipse of Reason*. There are just fifteen references to Adorno prior to 1970: two articles by him that were translated into English, which appeared in the journal *Diogenes* in 1961 and 1968; eleven German language articles about him, dating to 1967; and a single English secondary source reference, a 1968 article by Howard Parsons in *Praxis*, which refers in the same breath to the empirical sociological research of Adorno and Talcott Parsons.[13] Fredric Jameson's 1971 *Marxism and Form* and Jay's 1973 *Dialectical Imagination* marked a turning point. Academics began for the first time to read Adorno's work widely and sensitively in the United States.[14] Yet, prior to 1980, *The Philosopher's Index* still lists only 97 references to Adorno, as against a staggering 1193 references from 1940 to the present. Hence, the vast majority of Adorno scholarship, like that of Marcuse, de Beauvoir, Heidegger, and other continental philosophers, has been written in the past thirty years. However, very few Anglo-American philosophers have worked on Adorno. This neglect can be attributed to several causes, such as his rejection of positivism and empiricism, his paratactic style and dialectical arguments, his cultural and sociological subject matter, the scarcity of English translations of his work,[15] his criticism of liberal democracy, and the Marxist political content of his writings during the Cold War.

But for revisionist Adorno scholars such as Detlev Claussen, Ulrich Plass, David Jenemann, and Russell Berman, the original sin of Adorno scholarship is the tendency to overstate his high European cultural preferences and ignorance of America. Examples of this tendency abound. The

12. Articles on pragmatism dominated the *Journal of Philosophy* until the early 1960s, since which time it has been devoted entirely to analytic philosophy.

13. Talcott Parsons, a systems theorist, participated in early discussions on the project that became *The Authoritarian Personality* and enjoyed friendly relations with Horkheimer in the 1940s, prior to Adorno's 1955 attack on his form of psychological sociology, "Zum Verhältnis von Soziologie und Psychologie," published in a Festschrift for Horkheimer's sixtieth birthday (Uta Gerhardt, "Worlds Come Apart: Systems Theory versus Critical Theory: Drama in the History of Sociology in the Twentieth Century," *The American Sociologist* 33, no. 2 [2002]: 1–35; see pp. 16–20 for a discussion of Adorno's critique of Parsons).

14. *Telos* gave a prominent position to Adorno, beginning in the early 1970s.

15. Few Anglo-American or "analytic" philosophers outside of Europe, aside from some recent analytic "historians," read philosophy not originally written in English, let alone untranslated work. Indeed, there are often no language requirements for analytic graduate programs, such as "top-rated" NYU.

pathbreaking scholar Martin Jay, according to David Jenemann, argued that Adorno was a "mandarin cultural conservative";[16] Peter Hohendahl wrote that Adorno's "European and German *Weltanschauung* and his critical humanism . . . motivated him to reject modern America: its political order, its economic system, and particularly its culture'";[17] and even as late as 2002, Andrew Rubin argued that Adorno "was deeply Eurocentric and possessed no real knowledge of a world outside of Europe."[18] This view of Adorno as conservative cultural mandarin remains popular. The implication for many is that Adorno's cultural critiques of the United States are uninformed, biased, methodologically naïve, and hence inaccurate. In this criticism, there is a heavy strain of the original positivist critique of Adorno, for he is taken to task for his unscientific approach, his theoretical prejudices, his ignorance of the facts of American society, and his breathtaking generalizations from particular, usually imagined cases.

In recent years, revisionist Adorno scholars have begun to correct many of these misapprehensions by uncovering Adorno's deep engagement with the American culture industry. They have shown convincingly that, far from being ignorant of the United States, "Adorno immersed himself fully in American culture,"[19] both externally as an observer and internally in working within the radio, television, and film industries and coordinating massive sociological survey projects. Hence, as Jenemann writes, "we might reconsider Adorno's criticisms of cinema and television as deriving not (as conventional wisdom would have it) from Adorno's aloofness and elitism but rather from his intimate knowledge of the practices and personnel of the U.S. film industry."[20] Throughout his American experience, Adorno immersed himself in the study of American society and the culture industry. From 1938 to 1940, on the propagandistic Princeton Radio Research Project, he experienced the radio industry from within. After the Institute's move west, he studied the uses of music in the film industry in his project with Eisler, and together with Horkheimer pitched a screenplay to film studio executives. While he was living in Pacific Palisades, California, he socialized with Hollywood writers, actors, composers, directors,

16. Jenemann, *Adorno in America*, p. xvi.

17. Andrew Rubin, "The Adorno Files," in Gibson and Rubin, *Adorno: A Critical Reader*, p. 172.

18. Ibid.

19. Jenemann, *Adorno in America*, p. xv.

20. Ibid., p. 109.

and producers, including many within his émigré circle. He collaborated with the popular author Thomas Mann on the novel *Doctor Faustus*. As important, his engagement with numerous empirical research projects in the United States provided him a solid foundation for his accounts of American beliefs. So, there is a great deal of evidence in favor of the view that Adorno was deeply engaged in American society and the culture industry. His work on empirical research projects and his experience working in the culture industry do not corroborate his much-criticized generalizations about American culture. However, they make nonsense of the view that he lacked adequate experience of American culture.

At times, however, these revisionist readings have themselves strayed into merely positive, one-sided, undialectical accounts of Adorno's relationship to America by over-stressing the significance of a few stray positive comments about American society within the great body of his contempt for the aesthetics and politics of the culture industry. It would be wrong to downplay just how negative his attitude tends to be toward American culture or to forget that his positive exemplars are almost always European. Look, for instance, at the cultural references in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* or *Aesthetic Theory*. Virtually all of the negative references in the former are to Americans and Hollywood, and virtually all of the positive references are to Europeans. Adorno and Horkheimer refer negatively to Mickey Rooney, Victor Mature, Chesterfield Cigarettes, *Mrs. Miniver*, Donald Duck, Ernest Hemingway, the Lone Ranger, Bette Davis, Guy Lombardo, Leni Riefenstahl, and Yale Locks, and positively to Mozart, Beethoven, Picasso, Betty Boop, Greta Garbo, Charlie Chaplin, the Marx Brothers, Plato, Shakespeare, Balzac, Kant, Hume, Dadaism, Expressionism, Romanticism, Tolstoy, and Schoenberg. This imbalance was rightly noticed in Adorno's own time and in the first generation following his death. But it is at times downplayed by Adorno revisionists. From the beginning through the penultimate chapter, Jenemann's outstanding book provides a careful, dialectically sensitive treatment of Adorno's complicated attitudes toward America. However, the last chapter of *Adorno in America* heavily oversells the view that, far from hating America, Adorno loved America. As evidence, Jenemann cites various immigration and naturalization documents in which Adorno describes his love affair with America. But as remarkable as it is that Jenemann was able to find these documents, we cannot take them seriously, since they were written specifically for the purpose of convincing the American government to allow him

to remain at a time when he was not yet ready to return to Germany. Adorno was well aware that he was under government surveillance, that the U.S. government was intolerant of dissent during this McCarthyist period, and that he depended for his livelihood on government and virtually parastatal organizations. Hence, there is no reason to credit his writings in government documents, or even the positive words of interested parties such as Robert MacIver (named as an informant in FBI files and probably also the "Robert M." named elsewhere) of Columbia's sociology department, who attested in FBI files to Adorno's loyalty to America. Adorno's attitude toward America was always ambivalent.

Interestingly, the most specific, theoretically sophisticated corrective to these one-sided positive and negative readings is provided by Martin Jay, contra Jenemann. Jay accepts the analogy of the Frankfurt School to conservative cultural mandarins in several important respects, namely, that Adorno and other Institute members held a certain distrust for the Enlightenment, were apolitical, "wrote works permeated more with a sense of loss and decline than with expectation and hope . . . shared the mandarins' distaste for mass society and [its] utilitarian, positivistic values . . . [and] opposed the spirit of specialization that seemed to pervade modern intellectual life."[21] Yet, Jay goes on to argue that "the members of the Frankfurt School defy simple categorization as latter-day mandarins in exile," because for a long time they dissociated themselves from academic life, criticized its "smugness and elitism," adopted left-Hegelian rather than neo-Kantian models, rejected "vulgar idealism as an antidote to vulgar materialism" in favor of a dialectical overcoming of the distinction, integrated psychoanalysis into critical theory, refused to reify conservative cultural values as necessarily superior to material values, and dismissed reconciliatory utopianism.[22] Indeed, in his 1984 article, "Adorno in America," from which Jenemann took the name of his book, Jay argues that "[r]ather than reduce Adorno to any one star in his constellation, be it Western Marxism, elitist mandarin, aesthetic modernist, or whatever, we must credit all of them with the often contradictory power they had in shaping his idiosyncratic variant of Critical Theory."[23] Adorno's stance

21. Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, p. 294.

22. Ibid., pp. 294–95. This complexity explains how, in a blurb for Jenemann's book, Jay can praise Jenemann for subverting the view of Adorno as a conservative, cultural mandarin, despite Jenemann's criticism of Jay for allegedly holding this position.

23. Jay, "Adorno in America," p. 161.

toward America was complex, dialectical, critical, largely negative but occasionally admiring, and both informed and invigorated by thorough study of the culture industry.

Given Adorno's immersion in American popular culture, his extraordinary productivity, his diverse American subject matter, and his supposed love affair with America, it is important to address why he never reached a broad American public, never was hired at an American college or university, and never returned to the United States after 1953.[24] It seems odd to entertain the idea of Adorno reaching an American popular audience. But Herbert Marcuse demonstrated that such an achievement was eminently possible for a critical theorist in 1960s America. Moreover, Adorno's ideas did reach a fairly wide American audience through his work on *The Authoritarian Personality* and *Doctor Faustus*. So, it is not as if his ideas were in themselves inscrutable or unappealing, despite his difficult style and critical attitude. Hence, I would argue that if Adorno himself did not become well-known, it is likely because he did not *desire* to be known. As Jay makes clear, during its time in America the Institute wrote primarily for itself or perhaps for an imagined postwar German audience,[25] making little attempt to reach an American audience, writing and publishing in German, withholding many works from publication, in many cases from political cautiousness, refusing or not pursuing American academic positions, and refraining from public lectures. In his October 15, 1941, letter to Horkheimer, Marcuse reports that Robert Lynd of Columbia's sociology department, in nearly an hour-long spiel, repeated "the same old story,"

> that we've squandered a really great chance. We've never carried out a truly collaborative project in which we confronted our European experiences with American conditions and applied them to an analysis of monopoly capitalism, of fascist tendencies and so on. First, we made the "fatal mistake" of publishing the journal for years in German. . . . [To Marcuse's comment that he thought that his objections were to abstract theoretical approaches, Lynd said] they'd had enough concrete-empirical research in America; what is lacking is precisely a grand theoretical work . . . presented in such a way that it appeals to Americans. He had

24. In the wake of his several, relatively fond 1960s reminiscences of America and after experiencing his own student uprising, it is perhaps unsurprising that just before his death in 1969, he was preparing to return to give the Christian Gauss lectures at Princeton (ibid., p. 181).

25. Thanks to Allison Moore for reading this essay and emphasizing this point.

> the greatest respect for your [Horkheimer's] theoretical work and had already advised you back then to publish it, but you were always afraid of being viewed as a Marxist and therefore always presented things in a way that was incomprehensible and mangled. . . . [Lynd resisted Marcuse's requests] to be more concrete with the declaration that it's entirely irrelevant *what's* being worked on as long as collaborative work is being done. Beyond that, we're not always supposed to wait for American assistance but for once produce something on our own and with our own resources.[26]

Contra Thomas Wheatland, this criticism is deeply flawed, for the entire project of the Institute in exile was arguably to engage in interdisciplinary collaborations in which its European experiences and ideas were brought to bear on American conditions. Yet, it is certainly the case that the Institute lost an extraordinary opportunity to influence American society amid the early construction and dissemination of an unchallenged, positivistic dogma in social science, even as its fellow German-Jewish émigrés, the logical positivist and logical empiricist economists, sociologists, and philosophers, helped to cement this very dogma. And Adorno himself made few attempts to reach a popular audience, other than the failed screenplay, some radio lectures, and his unacknowledged collaborations with Mann and Eisler. I have little doubt that had he remained in America, written in English, and written about sex, like Marcuse, he could have gained an equally large, if undesired, popular audience, just as he has now gained a large academic audience.

Similarly, I would argue that despite the Institute's affiliation with Columbia University's sociology department, Adorno was never hired by an American college or university primarily because he did not want such a position. It is surely a scandal to American academia, or at least to American philosophy, that one of the great philosophers of the twentieth century was never given an academic position during his time in America. It is possible that he was never even offered an academic job. Yet, it seems likely that such a job would have been attractive, since for years after its arrival in New York, the Institute eked out a relatively marginal existence, short

26. Max Horkheimer, *A Life in Letters: Selected Correspondence*, ed. and trans. Evelyn M. Jacobson and Manfred R. Jacobson (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2008), p. 200. See Thomas Wheatland, "Critical Theory on Morningside Heights: from Frankfurt Mandarins to Columbia Sociologists," *German Politics and Society* 22, no. 4 (2004): 72–73.

on money, dependent on external grants, and apparently unemployable by American universities. However, if Institute members were slow to take or to be offered university jobs in the United States, many Institute members subsequently obtained them. Marcuse was eventually hired by the University of California, San Diego; Leo Löwenthal was hired by the University of California, Berkeley; Franz Neumann and Otto Kirchheimer became professors at Columbia University; Gerhard Meyer was hired at the University of Chicago; and Paul Massing, Joseph Maier, and M. I. Finley were hired at Rutgers University.[27] Thus, while none of the Institute members was immediately embraced by major philosophy departments (or other academic departments, for that matter), in contrast to the analytic philosophers, logical positivists, and logical empiricists, many were able to get academic work over time. Moreover, there is a strong possibility that Adorno could have worked at the University of Chicago, as Horkheimer suggested in 1953, for Horkheimer himself worked there periodically from 1954 to 1959, and at least two authors of Institute projects—Bruno Bettelheim (educational psychology) and Morris Janowitz (political science)—were professors there.[28] The Institute had clearly established itself sufficiently in the United States to appeal to mainstream American academia. Indeed, in 1949, Adorno was himself adequately well-connected to lecture at UCLA and to arrange lectures there and at UC Berkeley for Frankfurt University Rector Walter Hallstein.[29] It seems, then, that Adorno simply did not want an American university job. Hence, it is otiose to explain his lack of such a job by reference to his anti-empiricism, his anti-positivism, his dialectical method, and his political proclivities.

Nevertheless, just these factors largely explain both his scholarly reception and his return to Germany. In the past, scholars such as Jay and Jenemann have neglected overtly political reasons for his return to Germany, citing his homesickness, his eagerness to write again in his own speculative German language, with its alleged affinity to philosophy (as claimed already by the German idealist tradition), and his resentment toward American publishers.[30] Jay writes that "[w]hen an American publisher in 1949 balked at translating his *Philosophy of Modern Music*

27. Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, pp. 284–85.

28. Ibid., p. 236.

29. Adorno to his mother, May 16, 1949, no. 245, in *Letters to his Parents*, p. 360.

30. Jay, "Adorno in America," p. 158. Jay derives these claims from Adorno's lecture "On the Question: 'What is German?'" Interestingly, the publisher was apparently an émi-

[*Philosophie der neuen Musik*] into English because it was 'badly organized' and a well-meaning editor of an American journal recast one of Adorno's essays to clarify its argument, Adorno decided it was time to return to his native Germany."[31] There is no doubt that this resistance embittered Adorno, for he refers to it in such a tone even in his surprisingly generous memoir, "Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America." But the fact remains that he still returned to the United States after 1949 and even accepted a position with the Hacker Foundation in 1953. The real reason for his departure was political. According to Uta Gerhardt, he left the country permanently in 1953 only after reading the influential University of Chicago sociologist Edward Shils's *anti-communist* critique of *The Authoritarian Personality*. Shils's now famous essay[32] was to appear in a collection on *The Authoritarian Personality*, edited by Richard Christie and Marie Jahoda,[33] Paul Lazarsfeld's ex-wife. Shils criticized *The Authoritarian Personality* for sharing assumptions with Stalinists, communists, and fellow travelers: "The positive items on the P.E.C. Questionnaire [items such as the notion that the entire society has the responsibility through government to provide guaranteed housing, income, and leisure] are Wallaceite clichés to which at the time communists and fellow travellers gave their assent as well as persons of humane sentiments who did not share the more elaborate ideology of the Stalinoid and fellow-travelling followers of the Progressive 'line.'"[34] While Shils is critical of *The Authoritarian Personality* precisely for its failure to distinguish among the various non-fascist positions, a failure he likens to that of McCarthyite "Authoritarians of the Right," he himself fails to make such distinctions in associating the project with communism and

gré German. See Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Question: 'What is German?'" in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia UP, 1998), p. 210.

31. Jay, *Adorno*, p. 12.

32. Notably, Shils repeats the same charges many years later in his posthumously published memoir, where he says that "crypto-Marxist" Frankfurt School members tried to suppress the article because they did not like being portrayed as sympathetic to communist totalitarian ideology. See Edward Shils, *A Fragment of a Sociological Autobiography: The History of My Pursuit of a Few Ideas*, ed. Steven Elliott Grosby (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), pp. 91–92.

33. Edward Shils, "Authoritarianism—'Right' or 'Left'?" in Richard Christie and Marie Jahoda, eds., *Studies in the Scope and Method of "The Authoritarian Personality"* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1954), pp. 24–49.

34. Ibid., pp. 29–30.

the fellow traveler.[35] Shils calls *The Authoritarian Personality* the product of non-Stalinist Leninists (yet somehow also sympathizers of the New Deal *and* Henry Wallace's Progressive Party) and argues that the authors' failure to distinguish between ideologies "flows from the authors' failure to perceive the distinctions between totalitarian Leninism (particularly in a period of Peoples Front maneuvers), humanitarianism and New Deal interventionism."[36]

Although Shils's article is well-known, few are aware of Adorno's reaction to it. Gerhardt argues that after Jahoda shared with Adorno a copy of the article in manuscript form, its McCarthyist charges against *The Authoritarian Personality* led him to leave the country swiftly and permanently, abandoning his plans to remain in the United States long enough to become a citizen.[37] Citing letters, Gerhardt reports that "Adorno, upon reading Shils's accusations in the manuscript ready for publication, became alarmed," protesting to Jahoda on June 22, 1953, that the project's failure to discriminate between communist and fascist ideologies derived from the American alliance with Russia in 1944–45 and that methodological, rather than political, issues were to blame.[38] Adorno wrote:

> The fact that less attention was given in the volume to the authoritarian communist party-liner than to the potential fascist is solely due to the historical situation. At the time the questionnaire and interview schedules were set up and the material was gathered (1944–1945), the National Socialists were our enemies and the Russians our allies. In the atmosphere then prevailing, the common denominator of anti-Nazism did not yet allow the difference between autonomous thinking and its perversion by the communist dictatorship to crystallize as clearly as later on. Furthermore there were fewer, if any, communists in our sample of potential fascists. This may be due to the sample, the construction of which has rightly been criticized, although this criticism somehow misses the point because nowhere the claim of representativeness has been made.[39]

35. Ibid., p. 30n3. "Fellow-traveler" was a slur used to describe a wide variety of anti-McCarthyists, meaning a communist sympathizer or a leftist who shared some goals of communism, and thus allegedly posed the danger of legitimizing collectivist policies.

36. Ibid., p. 30.

37. Gerhardt, "Worlds Come Apart," pp. 18–19.

38. Ibid., p. 19.

39. Ibid., citing Adorno to Jahoda, June 22, 1953, Horkheimer Papers VI, 1E, pp. 178–79.

Jahoda would not retract the essay and could not make Shils change his essay, but she defended Adorno against the charge in her introduction and footnoted Shils's essay, "asserting that 'democrats' had indeed been distinguished from 'pseudo-democrats.'"[40] Gerhardt writes that

> Adorno, nonetheless, feared the witchhunt directed against presumed Communists that could start as soon as the book would hit the market. He had already made arrangements to travel back to Germany in August 1953. Now he began to fear that he would be refused a passport and could not even leave the United States. He had announced termination of his appointment with the Hacker Foundation already in April and had no intention of working there a day longer than necessary. In a flood of letters to Horkheimer he expressed his anxiety about getting stuck in Los Angeles without passport or job. . . . The situation in 1953 appeared . . . threatening. In the summer of 1953, he longed to return to Germany, not least to escape being questioned before a Board of Investigation. After two months of anxious waiting, he and his wife could travel back to Frankfurt where Horkheimer had been able to negotiate a secure position for Adorno, as Professor of Philosophy and Sociology.[41]

Horkheimer suggested that Adorno teach at the University of Chicago (Shils's own institution!) for the time being; when Adorno refused, Horkheimer found a position for him in Frankfurt.[42]

Thus, arguably the most important philosopher in the Frankfurt School left the United States permanently for McCarthyist reasons. Had he stayed, he might not have faced any difficulties. We have seen that many Institute members, despite their idiosyncratic brand of Marxism, were able to work unmolested at American colleges and universities during this period, including Horkheimer, who taught periodically at the University of Chicago for the remainder of the 1950s. The Institute's return to Germany in 1949 and its continuing projects were heavily underwritten, both politically and financially, by the United States government, particularly the U.S. High Commission in Germany (HICOG), despite continuing FBI investigations in the United States. Moreover, to attack *The Authoritarian Personality* was not simply to attack Adorno, since the book was a collaborative project and Adorno was not named by Shils. However, Adorno was the project's senior

40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., pp. 19–20.
42. Ibid., p. 33n21, citing Horkheimer Papers, VI 1E, esp. pp. 149–210.

author and Shils makes clear in his memoir that the Institute was the target of his criticism. Shils's essay seems to have been the only McCarthyist critique of his work, much of which at the time was either unpublished, untranslated, unintelligible to the intelligence community, or consciously censored by Adorno or Horkheimer. Moreover, McCarthyism was a viable threat. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) compiled and enforced blacklists of suspected communists in academia, Hollywood, and elsewhere from 1947 until at least 1964 (when biologist Leon Wofsy was hired at UC Berkeley over the objections of California HUAC). Communists had been banned from employment at the University of California since 1940, and nationally, many academics, including at least a dozen philosophers, were fired on suspicion of communist sympathies.[43] The error-filled political philosophy sections and reading lists of each report of the California Senate's Joint Fact-Finding Commission on Un-American Activities in California made it clear that philosophical study of Marx *and* Hegel (perhaps the primary Institute activity),[44] inter alia, as well as, say, communist party membership, guilt by association, or membership in civil rights organizations, was itself problematic. Institute members, along with many of their fellow émigrés, had been investigated by the FBI, HUAC, and other government organizations since the 1930s.[45] After being subjected to federal questioning about their links to communism, fellow exiles Bertolt Brecht and Hanns Eisler,[46] both called before HUAC in 1947, left the country, as did Institute member M. I. Finley, called before the McCarran Internal Security Subcommittee in 1951. In 1954, following Adorno's departure, *Authoritarian Personality* co-director R. Nevitt

43. See Ellen Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford UP, 1986) and John McCumber, *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy in the McCarthy Era* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2001).

44. See the California Senate's Joint Fact-Finding Commission on Un-American Activities in California, 1st Report (1943), pp. 21, 69, 75; 2nd Report (1945), pp. 75–82; 3rd Report (1947), p. 73; 5th Report (1949), pp. 190–91 (A "Red Reading List").

45. Marcuse (File #121-24128), Horkheimer (61-7421), Adorno (100-106126-12; 100-106126-24; 100-106126-30), and Fromm (105-112622) all have FBI files (Wheatland, "Critical Theory on Morningside Heights," p. 82n14).

46. "Hans Eisler" (*sic*) is linked to Friedrich Pollock and Horkheimer in the latter's FBI file, June 16, 1948. Thomas Mann's support of Eisler's Defense Committee and his participation in an American Youth for Democracy Congress, were used as cause for placing him on a California anti-communist watch list (California Legislature Senate Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities in California, 3rd Report [1947], p. 96; 5th Report [1949], p. 305).

Sanford, a psychologist, was dismissed from UC Berkeley for refusing to sign a loyalty oath.[47] At the end of the same year, the FBI secretly reopened an investigation of Horkheimer and other Institute members, based on the possible Marxist content of a New York informant's translation of early issues of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* from 1933–34 (vol. 2, no. 3 [1933] and vol. 3, no. 3 [1934]).[48] Plans for a possible "re-interview" of Horkheimer and Pollock were abandoned only when it was found that Horkheimer was no longer in the United States. Even well over a decade later, the anti-communist California governor Ronald Reagan was able to drive Marcuse from his tenured position in philosophy at the University of California, San Diego, by instituting a mandatory retirement age for university faculty. Hence, it is fair to say not only that Adorno's fears of anti-communism were justifiable at the time, but that subsequent events more than corroborated them.

Even without invoking actual prison, blacklists, second exiles, or forced unemployment, American political concerns, including but not limited to anti-communism, had significant and obvious effects on the work of Adorno and other Institute members from their arrival in America to well after their return to Germany. The McCarthyist climate led them to expunge Marxist elements from their writings, to suppress the publication or dissemination of potentially subversive or controversial work, and to avoid politically threatening projects entirely. As Director of the Institute, Horkheimer led the way in this program. His concern to prevent discovery of the Institute's Marxism led him to conceal most 1930s issues of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* from the American and even the postwar German public (back issues were eventually locked in the basement of the Institute in Frankfurt). Adorno too practiced self-censorship in response to American political pressures, particularly anti-communism. He accepted Horkheimer's suppression of potentially Marxist or anti-American work; he moderated or censored his own published writings for their Marxism; he removed his name from *Composing for Films*, his collaboration with the HUAC victim Hanns Eisler, to avoid becoming "a martyr for a cause that was not . . . [his] own";[49] and he accepted without protest the suppression

47. Alan Wolfe, "'The Authoritarian Personality' Revisited," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 7, 2005.

48. This summary of the investigation is from Horkheimer's FBI file, January 10, 1955.

49. Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970–86), 15:144.

of the politically explosive studies in American antisemitism as well as the censoring of anti-capitalist terminology from the 1947 first edition of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: for instance, "capitalism" became "existing conditions" and "capitalist bloodsuckers" became "knights of industry."[50] This euphemistic language successfully snowed the FBI into believing that Adorno and Horkheimer did not express their attitude toward communism.[51] Fear of anti-communism significantly affected Adorno throughout his time in America, and probably for the rest of his life, given the Institute's dependence on American and West German government support. And as we have seen, this fear was justified, though hardly in the courageous spirit of the philosophical tradition.

But if anti-communism affected Adorno's writings and set the timing for his departure, his American reception for many years was dominated by empiricist critiques.[52] Ignored by philosophers, Adorno's initial American scholarly reception came from sociologists, led by the positivist Paul Lazarsfeld, the Columbia professor and director of the Princeton Radio Research Project (PRRP). Lazarsfeld argued that Adorno had a "disregard for evidence and systematic empirical research," "confus[ing] ethical and esthetic judgments and questions of scientific fact."[53] Because of Adorno's alleged theoretical "bias" and his resistance to positivist, empirical methods in the project, in addition to his perceived arrogance and Eurocentrism, Lazarsfeld ended Adorno's participation in the PRRP and even recommended in 1946 that Columbia's sociology department sever its affiliation with Adorno and Horkheimer's "theoretical" wing of the Institute, retaining only the Institute's empirical, quantitative arm.[54] Lazarsfeld's critique of Adorno, with its assumption of a rigid fact-value distinction and its failure to account for the social forces determining allegedly unmediated "evidence," showed little understanding of his work; as Jenemann and Rubin argue, Adorno was correct to criticize the use of empirical science to maximize propagandistic functions for domination and manipulation, as exemplified by Lazarsfeld's own work.[55] In the PRRP, Adorno argues that Lazarsfeld's reduction of multiple parameters to a single parameter

50. Rubin, "The Adorno Files," p. 174.

51. Ibid.

52. A variant of the empiricist critique is the criticism, discussed above, that Adorno was ignorant of America.

53. Quoted in Rubin, "The Adorno Files," p. 175.

54. See Wheatland "Critical Theory on Morningside Heights," pp. 76–78.

55. Rubin, "The Adorno Files," p. 175; Jenemann, *Adorno in America*, p. xxxii.

necessarily eliminates the subjectivity of the measured audience. Moreover, Lazarsfeld did not recognize that the apparent immediacy of audience reactions masked the influence of the total social process over popular tastes. If music quality was defined solely by popular taste, then there was no possible sphere for critical reflection on the meaning and political significance of radio music. Adorno's collaboration with Lazarsfeld, in so far as it was principled, *could not* have succeeded, because the two represented radically different approaches. As Jenemann details, Lazarsfeld was a positivist and a pioneer in administrative research, which ideologically claimed to subject itself to popular attitudes, as if such attitudes were not already affected by social and commercial forces, even as it worked to further control those attitudes and to bridge the gap between academic and economic interests. Yet, Lazarsfeld's positivistic critique set the paradigm for Adorno criticism. To this day, Adorno critique is dominated by similar arguments that his high-cultural prejudices and privileging of theory to empirical praxis prevented him from understanding or correctly describing American society.

Following his dismissal from the PRRP, Adorno worked on many other empirical research projects with positivist sociologists. After heading the music section of the PRRP, Adorno was assigned to study art and music in the Institute's *Cultural Aspects of National Socialism* project (February 1941 prospectus), which never received funding.[56] On the Institute's *Anti-Semitism in American Labor* project (four volumes, 1300 pages, in 1944), which the Institute withheld because of its damning contents and, by 1953, its superseded methods, he "wrote frequent memoranda, methodological and substantive, throughout its progress."[57] Adorno was co-director with UC Berkeley's R. Nevitt Sanford and responsible for much of the groundbreaking methodology on *The Authoritarian Personality*,[58] an instant classic in sociology that integrated critical theory with quantitative methods[59] and resulted in a re-thinking by Paul Lazarsfeld of his attitude toward Adorno and empirical research. Lazarsfeld later wrote, "I have an uneasy feeling…that my duties in the various divisions of the Princeton project

56. Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, p. 169.

57. Paul Lazarsfeld and Allen Barton were to write the introduction to the report, in 1949, indicating that Lazarsfeld had been won over by the Institute's continued empirical projects (ibid., p. 225).

58. Ibid., p. 239.

59. Ibid., p. 224.

may have prevented me from devoting the necessary time and attention to achieve the purpose for which I engaged Adorno originally."[60]

Indeed, the work that Adorno began in the PRRP and developed further in *The Authoritarian Personality* was devastating in its significance for positivist empirical research. To understand this, we need to look at his often overlooked methodological role in *The Authoritarian Personality*. In a letter cited by Jenemann, Horkheimer praised Adorno for exposing prejudiced attitudes through indirect questions, a method that recognizes the ideological character of direct determinations of popular attitudes. Adorno's contribution, the famous F-scale, was groundbreaking in its use of such indirect methods, because they exposed the naïveté of positivistic methods in academic sociology. Few would admit directly to prejudiced attitudes; hence, it was impossible to discover the extent of prejudice through the direct questions favored by positivistic sociology. Thus, Adorno not only worked with numerous empirical researchers, from Erich Fromm and Paul Lazarsfeld to members of the Berkeley Research Group, but he also contributed fundamentally to the forms of research at issue in positing problems basic to the Princeton Radio Research Project and constructing methods of exposing both political and survey-based ideologies in *The Authoritarian Personality*. Adorno was not rejecting the utility of quantitative research in sociology, but rather exhibiting and accounting for the marked differences between the "objects" of the natural and the human sciences in a way foreclosed to the varieties of positivism, with their claim to uncover the object in itself. The approach was not unprecedented, but it can be traced directly to Adorno's major influences, all of which were anathema to positivists. From Hegelian dialectic, he derived his critique of the isolation of subject and object; from Marxist materialism, he derived his recognition of the power of social and economic forces on the constitution of the subject; and from Freudian psychoanalysis, he derived his recognition of unconscious and irrational motivations, to be discerned only indirectly. His critical transformation of positivistic sociology must be recalled when we read that Adorno and Horkheimer brought empirical methods back to a resistant German academic community after the war and even sold themselves to funding organizations precisely as experts in American empirical research methods, an approach that alarmed Louis Wirth enough to warn the Rockefeller Foundation, in a memo discovered by Jenemann, that Adorno and Horkheimer were conducting a full

60. Ibid.

campaign to gain support in Frankfurt from the United Nations, UNESCO, the German government, American occupying forces, and foundations, by representing themselves as the latest in American social science. Wirth sees that there is something wrong with the claim, for their work does not quite fit the American model, yet he admits that Adorno and Horkheimer know something about American social science and that the Frankfurt School is one of only a few potential avenues for developing this type of research in postwar Germany.[61] What Wirth only dimly recognized was that Adorno and Horkheimer had adopted the methods of American social science in such a way as to destroy their positivist aspirations, eliminating their generalizability (in *The Authoritarian Personality*, as we saw above in Adorno's letter to Jahoda), rejecting their claim to direct knowledge of their objects, and preserving critical and material standards for judging the ideology of their subjects.

The extent, if not the significance, of this destruction of positivist methods was discerned clearly by Herbert Hyman and Paul Sheatsley in Jahoda's edited collection on *The Authoritarian Personality*.[62] Hyman and Sheatsley criticize the project precisely for its novel combination of "quantitative, statistical, or survey methodology in social psychology and intensive clinical case-study of psychodynamics."[63] Instead of sustaining the virtues of both, the precision, rigor, and generalizability of the former, and the depth, insight, and understanding of the other,[64] the data fail to support the theory and neither the statistics nor the clinical approach are best employed, for the sample is unrepresentative and "incautiously generalized from."[65] Regardless of the validity of these criticisms (and we have noted that Adorno resists any claim to generalize from the study), it is not immediately clear what their stance is on Adorno's own contributions. On the one hand, it seems that they are implicitly criticizing Adorno in saying that the qualitative analysis of ideology is detached from the scientific method;[66] on the other hand, however, they implicitly praise Adorno's work in lauding the insight into the study's formulation and expressing their wish that the six-page critique of the study's methods,

61. Jenemann, *Adorno in America*, pp. 2–3.

62. Herbert Hyman and Paul Sheatsley, "*The Authoritarian Personality*: A Methodological Critique," in Christie and Jahoda, *Studies in the Scope and Method*, pp. 50–122.

63. Ibid., p. 53.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., p. 119.

66. Ibid., p. 120.

included at the end, were longer and integrated throughout the thousand-page study. Interestingly, this praise of *The Authoritarian Personality*'s general theoretical work on the part of positivist social scientists correlates with Robert Lynd's comments to Marcuse above, that what the Institute needed to do was *more*, not less, theoretical work. Nevertheless, according to Alan Wolfe, Hyman and Sheatsley's critique was so effective that in sociology departments in the 1960s, *The Authoritarian Personality* was treated as a textbook in how not to do sociology. By the terms of positivist sociology, everything was wrong with it. But what this really meant was that the positivist research program in sociology was (or should have been) moribund. The complexities of human analysis made it impossible to gain objective data from direct questions, to generalize from population samples, to harmonize the necessary depth of individual case studies and the generalizability of quantitative research, or to eliminate so-called objective, social forces from individual testimony and so-called subjective biases from survey questions.

For Adorno, the general critique of positivism was a preoccupation throughout his career. Much of his work, from the PRRP, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and *The Authoritarian Personality* to the *Positivismusstreit* ("Positivist Dispute") in Germany in the 1960s, involves a critique of the sort of positivistic sociology practiced in the Princeton Radio Research Project.[67] He argues that theory arises from reflection on practical experience and this relationship to experience is missed even in positivism, for "the positivist commitment to positive data does not grant access to the concrete relationship of music [in this case] to human beings."[68] Hence, for all its glorification of empirical data, positivism effaces individual experience through its quantificational procedures. At the same time, conventionalist, positivist sciences eliminate all critical modes of thought transcending individual data: "Insights and modes of procedure which, instead of remaining within valid science affect it critically, are banished *a limine*."[69] In this respect, Adorno, like Horkheimer in "Traditional and Critical Theory" and Marcuse in *One-Dimensional Man*, correctly saw positivism as driving critical theory to the margins, for it is clear that positivists and analytic

67. Rubin, "The Adorno Files," p. 177.

68. Theodor W. Adorno, "Music and Technique," in *Sound Figures*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1999), pp. 206–7.

69. Theodor W. Adorno, introduction to Adorno, ed., *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 17.

philosophers dismissed critical theorists on precisely the same grounds as the critical theorists claimed. On the analytic and positivist readings, critical theorists abandoned logic for dialectic and replaced valid, objective, scientific procedures with subjective speculation.

However, it is questionable whether either side really understood the other. Notably, the *Positivismusstreit*, whose main protagonists were Adorno, Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, and Karl Popper, was neither a *positivist* dispute nor a real dispute, as Kant would define the term, because the debate did not feature any real positivists and Adorno and Popper agreed on several substantial points. At the same time, the Frankfurt School vision of positivism and analytic philosophy was overly reductive and of somewhat limited applicability to analytic philosophy in its post-positivist incarnations, while Popper lacked even a cursory understanding of critical theory. Popper considered himself an anti-positivist,[70] because he rejected verificationism (in favor of the very similar falsificationism) and Adorno acknowledges that Popper would prefer the term "scientism" to positivism.[71] Indeed, by the 1960s, "analytic" philosophers such as Herbert Feigl, W. V. O. Quine, Popper, and even A. J. Ayer had rejected key tenets of logical positivism, ranging from verificationism (and in some cases falsificationism) to the analytic-synthetic distinction. Even prior to the 1960s, as Richard Rorty pointed out, many analytic philosophers, including Ludwig Wittgenstein, Otto Neurath, J. L. A. Austin, Wilfred Sellars, and Quine, had questioned the ahistorical, positivist notion of the given.[72] Moreover, the historical heirs to the wider positivist tradition already move toward the incorporation of empirical and theoretical or rationalist elements, as in critical theory.[73] The Frankfurt School understanding of positivism was far more historical than contemporary, despite Adorno's thorough knowledge of positivism in empirical sociology, because it depended largely on nineteenth-century definitions that maintained their influence, even as philosophers in the twentieth century revised and ultimately rejected these definitions. Thus, Habermas defines positivism by reference to August Comte's five uses of the term "positive": (1) knowledge depends on sense certainty secured intersubjectively through systematic

70. Frisby, introduction to the English translation of Adorno, *The Positivist Dispute*, p. x.

71. Adorno, introduction to *The Positivist Dispute*, p. 3.

72. James A. Good, "The 'Eclipse' of Pragmatism: A Reply to John Capps," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 39 (2003): 77.

73. Frisby, introduction to Adorno, *The Positivist Dispute*, p. xi.

observation; (2) scientific reliability depends as much on methodical certainty as sense certainty; (3) exact knowledge depends on constructing formally cogent theories from which law-like hypotheses are deducible; (4) scientific cognition enables technical domination or control of natural and social processes by rationalist principles, rather than "the blind expansion of empirical research"; and (5) knowledge is "in principle *unfinished and relative*."[74] The conflicting elements taken here from rationalism and empiricism engender further conflicts between later schools of positivism.[75] By contrast, in Adorno's contemporary, G. H. von Wright (Wittgenstein's editor), the three tenets of positivism are: (1) methodological monism, which entails a single scientific method for the different sciences; (2) the standard for which is established by the exact natural sciences, namely, mathematical physics; and (3) "[c]ausal scientific explanation" defined by subsuming individuals "under hypothetically assumed general laws of nature."[76] These views were hardly representative of analytic philosophers of the 1960s. Yet, radical differences remained between analytic philosophers and critical theorists. Dialectic was no more in fashion among analytic philosophers in the 1960s than among logical positivists and empiricists in the 1930s, and few analytic philosophers were willing to question the notion of objective truth, to consider the role of theory-construction in science, or to think about ideology, social forces, or problems in the subject-object distinction. Thus, to dismiss these differences on the grounds that contemporary analytic philosophers had abandoned historical tenets of positivism, is to miss the forest for the trees.

The basic problem in the empiricist critique of Adorno, whether this critique is called "positivist," verificationist, or falsificationist, is that it fails to grasp his understanding of the relation between theory and praxis. Empiricists argue that Adorno imposes his theoretical inventions and predilections on the world. Yet, Adorno's work in America shows that he is practical in a sense different both from empiricism and empiricist views of his work. In place of an isolated account of theory or a self-deceiving claim to pure, non-theoretical objectivity, Adorno argues that a critical engagement with culture entails an examination of the ontological, political, and social questions determinative of culture. This enterprise is distinct from armchair philosophizing, because it involves the intersection

74. Ibid., p. xii.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid.

of experiential study, historical analysis, and philosophical questioning. Contemporary empirical research has followed Lazarsfeld's model, to its great detriment and, frequently, to its great embarrassment, as we have seen in recent scandals in economics, psychology, and public opinion research.[77] Social scientists, in professionalizing their fields and adopting common methodologies and assumptions, with almost entirely quantitative approaches, have eliminated any systematic, critical questioning cognizant of the fundamental disciplinary challenges of the human sciences. The uncritical acceptance of positivistic models in sociology, economics, psychology, survey research, and other human sciences has left us with far too weak and dangerous a set of sciences to serve so prominently as guides to social policy. Adorno's work on *The Authoritarian Personality*, regardless of the success of this particular project, should serve as a model for social research, because it uncovers the problematic status of the human sciences. If inquiry in the human sciences is problematic, since the object is also a subject (as any Hegelian might argue), it is also problematic because the subject is governed in part by social and unconscious forces. The totality of these forces will never be open to our inquiry. Nevertheless, inquiry in the human sciences must direct itself critically to such forces if it is to

77. As Paul Krugman has argued, mainstream economists, steeped in their unquestioned assumptions that mathematical formulas, self-regulating markets, perfectly rational actors, and monetary policy would secure the financial and economic systems (the Washington consensus), failed to foresee the deep recession or the world financial system's near collapse in 2008, just as their models, enforced by economists at the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, have failed to achieve any measurable success in international development (China and India were *not* subjected to these models). In psychology, the intertwining of corporate and academic research programs (not to speak of its many other bad assumptions, its small, unrepresentative samples, or its uncritical citation methods), pioneered by Lazarsfeld's administrative research, has reached its logical conclusion: corporate profits determine the outcome of academic research. One hundred and twenty million prescriptions are written every year for costly and sometimes dangerous antidepressants that turn out to be no more effective than placebos, according to a review of clinical trials of SSRI's (Irving Kirsch, et al., "Initial Severity and Antidepressant Benefits: A Meta-Analysis of Data Submitted to the Food and Drug Administration," *PloS Medicine* [February 2008]). It is no coincidence that this study received no advance funding; yet even here the lead author (Kirsch) declared that he had been previously funded by pharmaceutical giants Squibb and Pfizer. In public opinion research, built on opposition to *Authoritarian Personality*-style case studies and critique, a series of political misses in recent years has highlighted its inability to deal with its own fundamental problems of question order effects, timing, forced choices, and the like. See David W. Moore, *The Opinion Makers: An Insider Exposes the Truth Behind The Polls* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008).

grapple with the problems inherent in its subject matter. It is convenient to treat statistics as a guarantee of truth in this area, but to do so is to obscure all of the relevant forces at work in the open, public sphere of the research object. Adorno's American work, at its best, insinuates this critical social task within the now hegemonic forms of the social sciences. His premature expulsion from the American social science scene was regrettable, because it allowed positivist research methodologies to drive out any legitimate, critical alternatives. Yet, the current crop of massive failures in contemporary American social sciences should remind us not merely that hegemonic discourses require critical alternatives for their correction and improvement, but that such discourses can lay claim to be scientific only in so far as they are themselves permeated by a radical, critical questioning. The claim here is Cartesian, but despite its oppositional framework, metaphysical terminology, and reductive subject-object distinctions, the underlying form of critique that I am championing is Adornian. If we address the relationship of Adorno and America in productive terms that transcend useless, misleading positive-negative, theoretical-speculative dichotomies, we may finally begin to integrate Adornian critique into contemporary American social sciences.

Adorno Unplugged: The Ambivalence of the Machine Age

David Jenemann

> There must be first days of prayer and "plugging." And often when success is at hand, the whole thing must be written off as a failure. Another song has been born to die a wailing death.
>
> *The New York Times*, January 5, 1936

> The cult of the machine . . . involves a self-renunciation that cannot but take root in the form of a fluctuating uneasiness somewhere in the personality of the obedient. For the machine is an end in itself only under given social conditions—where men are appendages of the machines on which they work.
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> Theodor W. Adorno, "On Popular Music"

These are heady times for Theodor W. Adorno, and perhaps the most exciting recent chance to revisit Adorno's often thorny, always trenchant responses to America has been Surhkamp's publication of *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory*, the fascinating and sprawling result of Adorno's early years in the United States and his collaboration with Paul Lazarsfeld and the Princeton Radio Research Project. The publication of this mammoth work on radio broadcasting—700 pages, the majority of which were written in English—reveals just how intimately familiar Adorno was with network broadcasting practices, advertising, technology, popular music, and—yes—even jazz and should finally lay to rest the reputation Adorno has as a European elitist with little but scorn for and no sensitivity to the aesthetic culture of the United States. Every page of *Current of Music* demonstrates that Adorno understood deeply the way things really were in America's burgeoning mass media in the late 1930s. In this work, there

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is no end of interconnected possibilities for future Adorno scholarship. In what follows, I hope to demonstrate how the ambivalence experienced by the "American Adorno" not only challenges the assumptions of certain postmodern critics but also yields a richer understanding of ambivalence itself as a productive category.

Current of Music introduces the concept of radio "physiognomics," the idea that radio, considered as a union between networks, producers, performers, technicians, advertisers, and—finally—the listener, constituted a rapidly mutating body that caught up all of its participants in an uneasy, fluctuating whole. This physiognomy gives radio its "face," and an understanding of how radio "embodies" all of its participants is the explicit aim of *Current of Music*:

> [W]hat does this face-like unity consist of? Whenever we switch on our radio the phenomena which are forthcoming bear a kind of expression. Radio "speaks to us" even when we are not listening to a speaker. It might grimace; it might shock us; it might even "raise its eyes" at the very moment we suddenly realize that the inarticulate sounds pouring from the loudspeaker are taking the shape of a piece of music which particularly touches us. To clarify the meaning of this type of phenomenon, and to show the fundamental structure within which every radio phenomenon is bound to take place is the purpose of our study.[1]

One of the more fascinating elements of Adorno's treatment of radio physiognomics is his analysis of radio "plugging," the saturation-marketing techniques that the radio networks and music publishers used to promote (and hopefully create) a hit song. The practice was so ubiquitous—and well codified—that between 1934 and 1938 (the year Adorno arrived in America), the U.S. government and the radio networks were in frequent negotiations as to whether to outlaw it, regulate it, or abandon it as yesterday's marketing technique. In 1936, it was such a well-known concept that it figures as part of a quasi-poetic "life and death of a song" marketing story in the *New York Times*.[2] For Adorno, writing around 1939, plugging was the important interface between the listener and the "body"

1. Theodor W. Adorno, *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory*, ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006), p. 77.

2. Lewis Nichols, "Tin Pan Alley is Stirred to Song: But While It Works on a Civic Melody It Is Troubled by Many Things, Notably the Radio," *New York Times*, January 5, 1936.

of radio and ultimately promoted the absorption of the listener into radio's physiognomy: "Plugging aims to break down the resistance to the musically ever-equal or identical by, as it were, closing the avenues of escape from the ever-equal. It leads the listener to become enraptured with the inescapable. . . . Listeners become so accustomed to the recurrence of the same things that they react automatically."[3]

In *Current of Music*, the critique of the culture industry is already tentatively articulated in English five years prior to the German version of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. But this radio text is more than just a rough draft, and his response to plugging is nuanced and full of possibilities that are missing in "The Culture Industry." For Adorno, plugging is not simply about this or that song or singer, but instead about the incorporation of the total radio body and its relation to the entire social field: "The plugging of songs is only a part of the mechanism and obtains its proper meaning within the system as a whole."[4] Critics of Adorno argue that the failure of a given song or singer refutes Adorno's claims to the monolithic power of the culture industry. Yet his analysis of plugging argues that such-and-such a song by this-or-that singer is far less consequential than the idea that what is being plugged is the entire social milieu and the listener's status within it as a consumer. Plugging plugs "styles and personalities . . . publishers, agencies, and name bands," even the idea of popular music as a value unto itself. In short, plugging plugs the idea of plugging: "Once a certain level of economic backing has been reached, the plugging process transcends its own cause and becomes an autonomous social force."[5] Hence, for Adorno, plugging is more than simply a marketing strategy or sales technique; it is a mechanism of power, and it operates on and through bodies, integrating the listener into the broader body of network broadcasting's "physiognomy." "Plugging has the function of reducing the distance and if possible also to overcome the resistance of the listener against commercialized music."[6] In the machine age, plugging is not merely a tool but the means whereby the union of humanity and machine "takes root."

From a contemporary vantage point, Adorno's treatment of radio as a physiognomy is potentially exciting, since it invites a consideration of

3. Adorno, *Current of Music*, p. 426

4. Ibid., p. 434.

5. Ibid., pp. 434–35.

6. Theodor W. Adorno, "Plugging, Like and Dislike in the field of Light Popular Music," n.d. [1939], Max Horkheimer-Archiv, box 13, file 18.

his theories of the culture industry in terms of recent debates regarding the "biopolitics" of postmodernity. This resonance is *potentially* exciting, because until now, one of the few groups of scholars who have yet to catch the recent Adorno wave are poststructuralists like Antonio Negri and Giorgio Agamben, who often explicitly reject Adorno, particularly his American writings, his critique of the culture industry, and his insistence on a response to historical realities mediated through the whole social field.

Farewell Adorno

In the recent essay "Art and Culture in the Age of Empire and the Time of the Multitudes," Antonio Negri seeks to describe the radical transformation from "the realism and repetitiveness of the modern critical model" to the "innovative chaos" that constitutes postmodernism. To understand this shift, Negri claims that we need to comprehend the new "figures of expression" unleashed by postmodernism. For Negri, these figures of expression, around, through, and in which "the chaotic ensemble of the multitude" negotiates the quicksilver flux of contemporary social formations, are "figures without measure, formal immeasurabilities—monsters. And the new forms of the monstrous consist precisely in the absence of measure."[7]

Negri's argument will be familiar to readers of his texts written with Michael Hardt (*Empire*, *Multitudes*), or of his Italian contemporaries Giorgio Agamben, Paolo Virno, and others. Indeed, Negri's essay gives a clear précis of the principles that energize much of what has come to be known as "post-workerist thought": the mélange of heterodox Marxism, reappraised Heideggerian ontology, and Foucault- and Deleuze-inspired poststructuralism. The resulting image of the world does away with those outmoded notions of subject and object, dialectical synthesis, and historical *Aufhebung*, central to theories of state-driven capitalist ideology, in favor of terms like the "becomings," "intensities," and "virtualities" of biopolitics. For Negri and his contemporaries, a post-workerist world consists of actors buffeted by contingencies and unmoored from traditional modes of subjectivation, liable to be radically reorganized, downsized, or renditioned (given the right geopolitical context), but also capable of forging new communities, alternate social and political forms, and different modes of defense against regimes of power than were envisioned

7. Antonio Negri, "Art and Culture in the Age of Empire and the Time of the Multitudes," trans. Max Henninger, *SubStance* 36, no. 1 (2007): 50.

within the modern state form. "This ambivalent but radical ontological condition," Negri says, by way of describing the flux of modern identity, "always implies the situation of those who are living through the passage from modernity to postmodernity."[8]

In order to stage this break from one mode of thought to the next, however, Negri makes the provocative claim that one must bid adieu to Adorno and Horkheimer's seminal critique of modernity and American culture in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In "Art and Culture," Negri gives Adorno[9] credit for revealing that the fronts of the war against fascism were not simply the battlegrounds of Europe but the sound booths of radio networks and the boardrooms of Hollywood studios. "The transformation of fascism into the commodification of culture was realized with unbroken continuity, spreading across the entire face of the planet as the systems of telecommunication became its main instrument of diffusion."[10] In making sense of the means whereby the agents of the mass media repackaged the goodies of the Enlightenment—freedom, poetry, and the romantic sensibility—and sold it back to us as a standardized sign of our ineluctable objecthood, Negri acknowledges that "Adorno's model of cultural criticism genuinely uncovered the ontology of the new world."[11]

Yet, Adorno—and his "modern" sensibility—is precisely what one must get past if one is to embrace the potentialities of the postmodern, where "there are neither syntheses nor *Aufhebungen*; there are only oppositions, varied expressions, multiplicities of linguistic tensions that escape in every direction . . . an immeasurability that marks the end of all criteria of measure proposed and imposed by modern rationalism." Adorno, defender of rationality and exemplar of a dialectical understanding of historical materialism, is clearly yesterday's news: "The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* has finally exhausted itself, extinguished in the capitalist production of repetitive images ('history is over') and replaced by the new production of desire."[12] The time of the culture-industry critique is past; the moment of Adorno's "ontology" is over. Thus, says Negri: "Farewell Adorno."[13]

8. Ibid., p. 52.

9. As so often happens, Horkheimer is unceremoniously dumped from the discussion.

10. Negri, "Art and Culture," p. 48.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., p. 50.

13. Ibid.

But I am not so ready to say goodbye to Adorno just yet. And it is not that I necessarily disagree with Negri's assessment of postmodernity or the idea that we have entered a "post-humanist" era. After all, one only has to consider the disruptions caused by the current economic crisis or simply to watch the relentless parade of indignities on display in so-called "reality" television (in which I include televised news as well as *American Idol*) to see that Negri and his peers have caught something vital about how we interface with the world—through the repetition of images divorced from meaning, the eruption of contingencies, and the reformulation of desire. But by dismissing Adorno and his critique of the culture industry, Negri, Agamben, Virno, et al., miss the radical ambivalence of the encounter between Adorno and America.

By this, I do not simply mean to describe Adorno's sometimes loving, sometimes antagonistic response to his adoptive exile home. Instead, and paradoxically, it is through the reaction that the culture industry provokes in its superannuated modes (the machine age, radio broadcasting, and the experience of standardization) that Adorno can mobilize a productive and even heroic ambivalence. Today, we see this most directly in Adorno's response to radio physiognomics and plugging, or in his analysis of Chaplin's machine-age ethics, which are uniquely "American" in their outlook and understanding of America at a transformational moment in the culture industry's emergence as the field in which ambivalence can be deployed. Thus, there is reason for biopower critics to embrace Adorno. In reassessing his response to Chaplin or considering his critique of plugging, we may find ample reason for contemporary theory to say hello—perhaps as though for the first time—to Adorno.

Chaplin's Skates

Allow me to describe a scene from the most "modern" of movies: Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*:

The Little Tramp is skating. On his first night on the job as a department store night watchman, the Tramp sneaks the Gamine into the empty department store, where the two live out the delirious fantasy of consumption offered by the multi-story shopping emporium. Strapping on skates, the Tramp dances elegant circles around the Gamine and skates smoothly away from her, backward, toward the balcony at the center of the store, unaware that workmen have removed any protective barrier between him and oblivion down below. With his back to the precipice, he boasts that he

can do his dance blindfolded and proceeds to cover his eyes. What follows is a glorious expression of movement, the world reduced to performer, skate, and floor, each rotation of the wheels a wonder but bringing the Tramp closer to death. The Gamine, until now preoccupied with her own skates, finally realizes with horror what the Tramp is doing and clumsily rushes to his aid. As he removes his blindfold and gets the full impact of his surroundings, his momentum carries him yet again to the brink, where he teeters and flails for one final, horrible moment…

Here, in miniature, we have the ambivalence of the machine age and the paradox of Chaplin's *Modern Tim*es. To be sure, mechanization has its dehumanizing and reifying vectors. We all know the famous image of the Little Tramp sent into the gears of the factory or assaulted by the feeding machine installed on the assembly line to promote efficiency and reduce waste. We remember how the factory president, spying on the men's room via a two-way television, catches the Tramp sneaking a cigarette and shouts him back to the line with a "Hey you! Get back to work!" Or perhaps we can't shake the way that the repetitive motions of tightening bolts colonize the Tramp's body and send him furiously into the street, turning the buttons on buxom women's coat fronts.

Yet we should also remember the flip-side of mechanization in *Modern Times*. It is only through the electronic mediations of the video screen and the phonograph that characters are given an intelligible voice, an admission that Chaplin himself seemed loath to make until the hapless barber's amplified speech shames the fascist forces in *The Great Dictator*. And if we insist on "the feeding machine" episode as evidence of Chaplin's criticism of the machine age, we must also be honest enough to acknowledge the mirroring scene later in the film, in which the Tramp himself becomes a feeding machine, shoving hardboiled eggs down his foreman's throat and funneling coffee into his mouth with a chicken carcass. In this role, he is every bit as hapless and inept as his automated counterpart. While mimicking the machine, he nevertheless pummels his boss with the same efficiency with which he has previously been pummeled.

No, the machine is not the problem. Instead, the issue here is the articulation of the individual with the machine, an ambiguous relationship that can gesture toward either the diminution or the potential elevation of the individual. The turn of the machine threatens, not the machine itself. Chaplin's Little Tramp therefore expresses the "fluctuating uneasiness" that Adorno sees in the cult of the machine, an uneasiness that lies somewhere in the personality of the subject, the resistant kernel that indicates

that the capitulation to the machine is never absolute. The source of the Little Tramp's power is Chaplin's capacity to transform that ambiguity from one vector into its opposite, and thereby to transform the external ambiguity of the machine age into productive individual ambivalence. Chaplin is the master of this turn, the pirouette, the revolution, the last second veering away from catastrophe into mastery. Hence the importance of the skates: In strapping them on and giving himself over, blindly, to their movement, the Tramp at once experiences the ecstasy of pure movement and the possibility of destruction. At the apex of his parabolic turn, he is closest to death and most full of life, pirouetting on the edge. The turn is crucial: the first thing we see in *Modern Times* is the clock's second hand revolving on its axis. And remember how many times the Tramp turns: in and out of his prison cell, high on "nose candy"; spinning away from his enraged co-workers as they chase him, pausing just long enough to point at the inexorable movement of the assembly line; gamely spiraling in and out of the crowded dance floor as he tries to deliver a meal in the final restaurant sequence. Even when the motions required by the conveyor belt take over his body, he is still turning imaginary bolts, noses, buttons. Like an animal, his life is reduced to the smallest possible space of existence, and his movements are determined by industrial capitalism and state juridical power. But even crammed into the machine gears or shoved into a prison cell, he spins on the last available point, and like an animal, he can always turn, scramble, escape.

Here, we see how *Modern Times* is not so much a critique of Fordist assembly-line practices, in which the synthesis of the human and machine bespeaks a teleological movement toward the production of commodities and the capitalization of labor, but an anticipation of the post-Fordist worker, characterized by ambivalence, opportunism, and a reaction to contingencies. In this, Chaplin's character fits precisely with Paolo Virno's analysis of the "virtuoso" labor of postmodernity, a labor no longer subsumed under the aegis of production but conditioned by opportunism and the imminent threat of change: "The 'truth' of opportunism," Virno writes, "what might be called its neutral kernel, resides in the fact that our relation with the world tends to articulate itself primarily through possibilities, opportunities, and chances, instead of according to linear and univocal directions."[14] To think that virtuosity through *Modern Times*, recall the

14. Paolo Virno, "The Ambivalence of Disenchantment," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota

sheer number of jobs that Chaplin has in the film and the various ways he finds to get into and out of prison. Remember, too, that we have no idea what Chaplin and his colleagues are assembling beyond the two bolts attached to a board, and once the Tramp is finally able to scramble back into the factory at the end of the film, his co-workers head out on strike.

Chaplin's Little Tramp is in many ways the embodiment of Virno's virtuosic production without product. None of his acts, whether as a waiter, a boxer, a night watchman, or a factory worker, produces anything that can be understood as a register of value in terms of industrial capitalism. As such, the Little Tramp's humanity is predicated on the fact that he stands outside of what makes "modern man" human. Thinking of *Modern Times* in this way helps illuminate Adorno's equivocal celebration of the Tramp on Chaplin's seventy-fifth birthday. The German intellectual, who knew Chaplin in California during his American exile, celebrates not Chaplin's humanity, his nobility, but instead his opportunistic ability to survive, to transform his surroundings in the face of catastrophe:

> His powerful, explosive and quick-witted agility recalls a predator ready to pounce. Only through this bestial quality would earliest childhood have brought itself safely into wide-awake life. There is something about the empirical Chaplin that suggests not that he is a victim but rather, menacingly, that he would seek victims, pounce on them, tear them apart. One can well imagine that Chaplin's cryptic dimension, or precisely that which makes this most perfect clown more than his genus, is connected with the fact that he as it were projects upon the environment his own violence and dominating instinct and through this projection of his own culpability produces that innocence which endows him with more power than all power possesses. A vegetarian Bengal tiger: comforting, because his goodness, which the children cheer, is itself in a compact with the very evil that in vain seeks to destroy him—in vain, for he had already destroyed that evil in his own image.[15]

What is striking about Adorno's account of the ethics of Chaplin's explosive, animalistic potential, is how it brings close Virno's "opportunism" and Giorgio Agamben's articulation of the ethics of the "singular whatever being" in *The Coming Community*: "Ethics has no room for repentance,"

Press, 1996), p. 21.

15. Theodor W. Adorno, "Chaplin Times Two," trans. John Mackay, *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 9, no. 1 (1996): 58–59.

Agamben claims, "this is why the only ethical experience is the experience of being (one's own) potentiality, of being (one's own) possibility—of exposing, that is, in every form and in every act one's own inactuality." To put it another way, for Agamben, ethics is *becoming*, to be not what one is, but what one is not yet. "Potentiality [is] the most proper mode of human existence."[16] Chaplin's ethic, therefore, is situated precisely in his capacity to skate, to pivot within the strictures of his given social milieu and turn power against itself.

But if the idea of the possibilities embodied in the little Tramp brings Adorno and Agamben into tantalizing proximity with one another, the potential for rapprochement between the two is frustratingly circumvented by Agamben's critique of the American Adorno in the essay "The Prince and the Frog," from *Infancy and History*. Here, Agamben analyzes an exchange of letters between Adorno and Walter Benjamin dating from Adorno's early exile in New York City. Agamben rejects Adorno's well-known complaint that Benjamin's dialectics—as displayed in his essay on Baudelaire—"lack mediation" through the entire social process.[17] In defense of Benjamin's "dialectic at a standstill," which collapses structure and superstructure into one another in an "immediate and immobile" relationship, Agamben criticizes Adorno's insistence on mediation as the too timid, and ultimately reactionary and pedantic, position of someone committed to outmoded notions of historical "progress." To make this claim, Agamben enlists Hegel's passage on mediation from *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, which famously begins with the statement "The true is the whole" and ends by claiming that "mediation is nothing beyond self-moving self-sameness, or is reflection into self, the moment of the 'I' which is for itself pure negativity or, when reduced to its pure abstraction, simple becoming."[18]

Not without reason does Agamben gloss this quotation, which he quotes in its entirety, as a manifesto of teleological historicism: "There is but a short step from this to declaring that every moment in history is merely a means to an end, and the progressive historicism which

16. Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press), p. 44.

17. Giorgio Agamben, "The Prince and the Frog: The Question of Method in Adorno and Benjamin," in *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1993), p. 116.

18. Quoted in ibid., p. 117.

dominates nineteenth century ideology does it in a leap."[19] Then, as though Adorno were directly and willfully channeling Hegel, Agamben follows this quotation by coyly asking, "Why, then, does Adorno—who is certainly not unaware of this critique—call upon mediation 'through the total social process' precisely to interpret the relationship between structure and superstructure…?"[20] Agamben may be disingenuous, because even a critic with a cursory knowledge of Adorno would know of his famous response to Hegel, in *Minima Moralia*, that "The whole is the untrue." Moreover, nearly every sentence of *Negative Dialectics* refutes Agamben's claim that Adorno's insistence on mediation smuggles "progressive historicism" in through the back door of Hegelian critique. "This negation," Adorno writes, "is not an affirmation itself, as it is to Hegel."[21] Indeed, negation is what ensures the gap between subject and object, structure and superstructure, that marks both the failure of mediation and its necessity. "Objectively, dialectics means to break the compulsion to achieve identity, and to break it by means of the energy stored up in that compulsion and congealed in its objectifications.…This is where the claim of their identity obtains that restlessness, that inward shudder, which Hegel calls Becoming."[22]

This inward shudder of becoming is what I see in the "fluctuating uneasiness" of the subject's response to the machine age and the virtuosic "turns" in Chaplin. For Adorno, this inward shudder/uneasiness is the heroic ambivalence of the modern subject bounded on all sides by the strictures of the social milieu and the demands of "identity." Thus, Agamben's critique of Adorno's insistence on mediation mistakenly dispenses with a natural ally to his formulation of "the singular whatever being" of *The Coming Community*. For Adorno, mediation is the index of the failure of identity and marks the gap between concept and particulars, a gap Agamben himself insists on repeatedly. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno insists on the utopian nature of non-identity by asserting that a thing identified in language "'A' is supposed to be what it is not yet." This sentiment resonates with Agamben's analysis of "the example" from *The Coming Community*:

19. Ibid., p. 118.
20. Ibid.
21. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), p. 158.
22. Ibid., p. 157.

> The antinomy of the individual and the universal has its origin in language. The word "tree" designates all trees indifferently, insofar as it posits the proper universal significance in place of singular ineffable trees. . . . In other words, it transmits singularities into members of a class, whose meaning is defined as by a common property. (The condition of belonging ∈) Linguistic being (being-called) is a set (the tree) that is at the same time a singularity (*the* tree, *a* tree, *this* tree); the mediation of meaning, expressed by the symbol ∈, cannot in any way fill the gap in which only the article succeeds in moving about freely.[23]

Here Agamben insists that "mediation of meaning" fails to fill the gap occupied by the non-identical, an argument that Adorno makes explicitly when he criticizes the "breaks in the form of predicative identity" that open up between the concept and particulars, absolutes and individuals, in *Negative Dialectics*.[24]

More noteworthy is that in order to activate this free movement of "the singularity," Agamben must introduce the experience of ambivalence—or, as he calls it, "omnivalence"—that "expropriates" belonging itself, and which expresses itself in "tricksters, fakes, 'toons, and the like" (i.e., opportunistic figures like Chaplin). That is to say, "omnivalence" obviates conceptual/taxonomical thinking by recognizing that singularities are not "tied by any common property, by any identity."[25] Or, as he elsewhere puts it, one must accord to human beings "the simple fact of one's existence as possibility or potentiality."[26] Agamben takes care to call this potentiality/possibility/becoming a "fact" rather than an essence or a material precondition (it is not "properly a thing"), because such essentialism would foreclose on the possibility inherent in each individual. Hence, "the impotent omnivalence of whatever being. It is neither apathy nor promiscuity nor resignation." Omnivalence is impotent because it does not align itself with forms of power, structures of identity, or conditions of certitude, but in that impotence lies the secret of its potentiality.

Plugging Ambivalence

This brings us back at last to Adorno's response to radio physiognomics and plugging and the importance of ambivalence to his understanding of the

23. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p. 9.
24. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 148.
25. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p. 11.
26. Ibid., p. 43.

culture industry. Adorno's vision of radio broadcasting's physiognomics "transmits singularities into members of a class, whose meaning is defined as by a common property." And just as "omnivalence" is the "impotent" turn within belonging for Agamben, so too is ambivalence the subject's response to the inescapable "whole field" of radio broadcasting and its plugging techniques. In 1939, while working for PRRP, Adorno prepared a memorandum on plugging for his colleagues. Much of this forty-page document is incorporated throughout *Current of Music*, but in the memorandum, Adorno makes it abundantly clear how important ambivalence is to the subject caught up in the perpetual ever-sameness of the radio. The listener may learn to love what it gives him and how it speaks for him, but that love is never unalloyed: "The unescapable is retained, incorporated and becomes a property, and as such is invested with libido."[27] But within the inescapable framework of radio physiognomics the subject still has the capacity to react, not with resistance, but with an intensification of ambivalence. Plugging, which on the one hand encourages consumer identification with sonic products, also engenders defiance: "The immediate repetition of the same piece of light popular music necessarily promotes counter-reactions that can be properly understood only within the general framework of 'ambivalence' toward the whole hit sphere."[28]

What is remarkable about Adorno's use of ambivalence in this context is not only how he valorizes it as a legitimate response of the subject caught up in the web of the culture industry, but also how his mobilization of ambivalence fits within the history of the concept. It may come as a surprise to some that the term "ambivalence" is a twentieth-century coinage. Although notions of "indifference," "ambiguity," and "being of two (or more) minds" have an extensive history, it is only within the context of the rise of modernity, and with it the development of consumer society, that one can be truly ambivalent. The word was coined by the Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler in 1910 in his "Vortrag über Ambivalenz"[29] and developed further that same year in "Zur Theorie des schizophrenen Negativismus."

Bleuler understood ambivalence as a symptom of schizophrenia (a term he also coined, along with "autism"—he was good at coining terms) and defined it as having three, somewhat nebulous variations.

27. Adorno "Plugging, Like and Dislike," p. 35.
28. Ibid., p. 27.
29. Eugen Bleuler, *Zentralblatt für Psychoanalyse* 1 (1911): 266–68.

> By ambivalence is to be understood the specific schizophrenic characteristic, to accompany identical ideas or concepts at the same time with positive as well as negative feelings (affective ambivalence), to will and not to will at the same time the identical actions (ambivalence of the will) and to think the same thoughts at once negatively and positively (intellectual ambivalence).

For Bleuler, ambivalence takes on the aspect of a deficient affective mode that engenders an ontological crisis, in part because the patient exhibiting ambivalent tendencies was often unable to distinguish between positive and negative emotions, thus resulting in a constitutive indecision: "The ultimate conclusions are not necessarily drawn by the split psyche of the schizophrenic." But somewhat comically, the very first example that Bleuler uses to describe the so-called aberrance of the ambivalent patient hints at the general applicability of the term in modernity, for even the recognizably mundane life of the average bourgeois couple is symptomatic of schizophrenia: "The mentally sick wife loves her husband on account of his good qualities and hates him at the same time on account of his bad ones, and her attitude towards each side is as though the other did not exist."[30]

Bleuler, as director of director of Zürich's Burghölzi Asylum, was at the time one of the handful of established psychiatrists to embrace psychoanalytic methods. And despite the break between the two men, which dated to 1911, Sigmund Freud quickly adopted the term "ambivalence" and used it to insult its inventor, claiming it was no surprise that Bleuler came up with the term because of his own alternating hostility and devotion toward psychoanalysis.[31] For Freud, ambivalence was a useful diagnostic tool, particularly when explaining the "trapped" sensation that patients reported in cases of obsessional neuroses and their oscillations between impulse ("I must") and prohibition ("I must not!"). Like many of the great innovators, Freud cannily asserted his priority over ambivalence by writing it—in a footnote—back into his analysis of "The Rat Man," which had first been published in 1909, the year before Bleuler's introduction of the term.

30. Eugen Bleuler, *The Theory of Schizophrenic Negativism*, trans. William A. White (New York: The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Company, 1912), pp. 31–32.

31. Robert K. Merton, *Sociological Ambivalence and Other Essays* (New York: The Free Press, 1976), p. 3.

More notably, however, in *Totem and Taboo*, Freud recognizes in ambivalence a general plight of humanity and one that transhistorically links the mental lives of totem-sacrificing "primitive" men to the unhappy consciousnesses of his Viennese contemporaries. Here, ambivalence becomes the central term to describe the twinned love and hate people feel toward authority and the means whereby those feelings are transferred to fetish objects:

> Psychoanalysis has revealed that the totem animal is in reality a substitute for the father; and this tallies with the contradictory fact that, though the killing of the animal is as a rule forbidden, yet its killing is a festive occasion. . . . The ambivalent emotional attitude . . . seems to extend to the totem animal in its capacity as substitute for the father.[32]

For Freud, despite its manifestation in severely neurotic patients, ambivalence at its most benign was a general state, applicable to most subjects struggling to deal with contemporary life and the vagaries of modern sexuality. "This form of the sexual organization," Freud writes, "maintains itself throughout life and draws to itself a large part of sexual activity."[33]

But ambivalence was not always deemed a deficient mode of existence, an obstacle, or a pathological state. In the wake of the horrors of World War I, ambivalence is notably understood as a legitimate, even noble response to a world gone mad. Famously, in "The Crack-Up," F. Scott Fitzgerald writes, "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless yet be determined to make them otherwise."

Despite its importance as a central—if often unnamed trope in world literature, the study of ambivalence has generally been confined to the social sciences. Most notably, sociologists such as Robert Merton, Zygmunt Bauman, and Neil Smelser have written influential works on a theory of sociological ambivalence. What links these three in particular is that they acknowledge ambivalence's fundamental relationship to Enlightenment rationality: you can't choose between alternatives without some sense of

32. Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo," in *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. A. A. Brill (New York: Modern Library, 1938), p. 915.

33. Sigmund Freud, "Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex," in *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. A. A. Brill (New York: Modern Library, 1938), p. 598.

a cogito and a ratio that can make sense of the phenomenological world. However, much like Freud and Bleuler, their sociological perspective deems the inability to decide as a failure of rationality, either because the ratio short-circuits in the face of its many choices, or, provocatively—and this is Baumann's innovation—rationality atomizes existence into so many discrete, incommensurable fields (what Baumann calls "self-multiplying, expertise-demanding problems") that one must either become an expert over an increasingly small piece of the rational world or give up knowledge altogether. What links these social science and psychological perspectives is the belief that ambivalence ultimately entails a deficient mode of interaction between the subject and the phenomenological world.

And what of philosophy? Contemporary philosophy, at least of a certain analytical strand, rejects utterly the idea that ambivalence and freedom coincide. One of the few contemporary American philosophers that would count as a household name, Harry Frankfurt, the philosopher of *On Bullshit* fame, famously champions the virtues of wholehearted identification with our object choices. And he goes so far as to claim that ambivalence is "a disease of the will." It is "a manifestation of the incoherence in which, precisely, the divided will of ambivalence consists. The desire for wholeheartedness is nothing other than a desire to be free of this crippling irrationality."[34]

Frankfurt's conclusions are drawn in a roundabout fashion from a reading of Kant's first *Critique* as a prescription for the rational determination of the will and hence a rejection of ambivalence. However, this is precisely the reading of Kant that Adorno refutes. In a pointed reference to his own American exile, Adorno in *Negative Dialectics* compares the post-Kantian subject with the experience of Western modernity and claims that for Kant, the individual who seeks his identity through reason is in a bind, since the concretion of practical reason in morality ultimately precludes the freedom that rationality is meant to entail. Hence, "a person cannot experience this utterly tightened freedom otherwise than as a restriction of its own impulses." Kant therefore leaves us "as ambivalent as the bourgeois spirit as a whole, which would like to guarantee 'the pursuit of happiness' to the individual and would forbid it through the work ethic."[35]

34. Harry Frankfurt, "Reply to J. David Velleman," in *Contours of Agency*, ed. Sarah Buss and Lee Overton (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), p. 127.

35. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 256–57.

In his lectures on the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Adorno amplifies this "peculiar ambivalence marking the concept of Enlightenment in Kant's thought." He quotes Kant's maxim in "What is Enlightenment?" that "For Enlightenment nothing is required but the freedom to make public use of one's reason in all matters, both as a writer and scholar, not however as a servant of the state, who as such may not reason." The paradox embedded in that use of public reason is that

> Here, then, you find the definition of enlightenment restricted in all innocence by that disastrous word "as" that plays such a dubious role in our age too. . . . This predicative use of "as" signals a restricting of reason in line with the division of labor in which human beings find themselves involved; the restriction imposed on enlightenment here is in fact a matter of the division of labor. . . . The purely theoretical human being is free to be enlightened in a radical sense. The moment he has a particular function, the post of civil servant, for example, all reasoning is at an end.[36]

To put it another way: the division of labor and the work ethic are at odds with the pursuit of happiness and the idea of freedom. As long as my identity is predicated on and circumscribed by an object or an objective condition, a concrete profession, the strictures of the workday world, etc., I can be nothing other than my identification with something outside of myself and thus subjectivity is bound. As Adorno elsewhere frames it: "Identity is the primal form of ideology."[37] To have an identity is to accept limitations. How then can one dissolve this antinomy between the pursuit of happiness and the work ethic, the division of labor and radical enlightenment? For Adorno, the answer lies in the autonomous work of art and in the subject's disenchantment with its socially determined, consumerist charms. It is apparent when surveying Adorno's work that a hard-won ambivalence is at the heart of both Adorno's aesthetic theory and his response to the culture industry of his adoptive home in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s. Hence the importance that the phrase "the pursuit of happiness" is written in English, in the original German edition of *Negative Dialectics*.

36. Theodor W. Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2001), p. 62.

37. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 148.

In perhaps the least dialectical and most assertive sentence of *Minima Moralia*, Adorno writes, "Freedom would be not to choose between black and white but to abjure such prescribed choices."[38] But how is this ambivalence translated into the arts? For Adorno, one of the century's foremost musicologists, one answer is dissonance, the sonic anomaly that is at once part of the score, the system of the composition, but which refuses to be subsumed by that system. As he writes in the *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, dissonance is "simultaneously autonomous and unfree."[39] In hearing the individual detail being dissolved into the totality of the work, and by understanding how the singular moves through and against the social whole, one could likewise "hear" and feel how human individuality itself faced its dissolution in society. For Adorno, in a typical dialectical move, it was in hearing this subjective demolition that the particular details—and by extension the listening individuals—were able to preserve some sense of identity, even if that identity was lost in the process. The collapse of particular into whole was never, Adorno claimed, absolute, just as the human was never fully machine. Thus, in 1965, Adorno presciently refutes Harry Frankfurt when he writes, in "Little Heresy," that "because the two do not merge fully into each other, the individual detail also acquires its own rights, which go beyond the whole."[40]

But in order to fully appreciate Adorno's productive post-exile use of ambivalence, we should return again to *Current of Music* and the memorandum on plugging. It is clear in these texts that Adorno is trying to work out what the subject's role is in the physiognomy of the radio while still preserving for the subject some measure of autonomy. Hence, in the "Plugging" memo, he claims that in response to plugging, "The consumer is aware of the alienation of the products he consumes and of their failure to respond to his individual structure."[41] The awareness of the subject is key here, because counter to the misperception held by many that Adorno's listener/spectator is merely a passive automaton at the whim of cultural industrial forces, the "Memorandum on Plugging" accords to subjects the knowledge that they are being duped. Hence the experience

38. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), p. 132.

39. Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1989), p. 221.

40. Theodor W. Adorno, "Little Heresy," in *Essays in Music*, trans. Susan Gillespie (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2002), p. 322.

41. Adorno, "Plugging, Like and Dislike," p. 5.

of ambivalence is the experience of subjective freedom within conditions that are objectively unfree. As such, ambivalence is aligned with individuality and stands steadfastly against identification. Once I make a definitive decision about a given object or situation, I have yoked my individuality to an identity outside of myself, i.e., other than I. Identification expects that the object or the situation will remain as it was when I identified myself with it. Change is tantamount to betrayal. Yet, my ambivalence—and everyone else's, for that matter—is absolutely my own. Ambivalence is not a deficient mode for the rational Enlightenment subject. It is perhaps the last vestige of freedom that was always the Enlightenment's dearest promise.

Thinking about ambivalence in this way helps make sense of Adorno's treatment of it in the plugging material and throughout his exile and post-exile career. First, ambivalence is a function of time. One of the questions Adorno often asks in *Current of Music* is why listeners so quickly think yesterday's popular song is today's trash. The answer is tied up in ambivalence, for ambivalence registers the subject's reaction to the perpetual ever-sameness of radio music as the experience of temporal change: Then I loved it, now I detest it, I will love it again. In the plugging memorandum, this capacity of ambivalence to register time forces Adorno to revise his thesis about the listener's helplessness in the face of the culture industry to something far more politically provocative. Initially, Adorno seems willing to concede to plugging the capacity to render subjects helpless, absolutely unable to escape: "Thesis: I am inclined to compare the general attitude of the listener masses [*sic*] toward light popular music to that sort of prisoner who finally loves the little green spot he can see through the barred window of his cell, or, if worst comes to worst, the cell itself. . . . It is possible that subjects, when asked about their preference, will answer that they like something particular simply because they 'cannot escape it.'"[42] In this thesis, Adorno describes the response to the culture industry merely as resignation and acceptance, and a cursory reading of Adorno's later work on the subject's response to the culture industry would assume that resignation was the only option available to subjects caught up in the various "physiognomies" of the mass media.

But then Adorno, as though revealing his own ambivalence, or perhaps merely registering that he had become as simplistic as many subsequent critics think he is, reworks that thesis to emphasize not so much radio's

42. Ibid., p. 26.

inescapability, but the resistance that very inescapability engenders in the form of ambivalence and its mode of expression: humor, laughter, and spite:

> Of course, this whole scheme is too rationalistic, and it is not to serve as more than an indicator of direction. . . . Superficially, our thesis about the acceptance of the unescapable [*sic*] seems to indicate nothing but a giving up of spontaneity; that the subjects are deprived of any spontaneous behavior and tend to produce mere passive reactions to what is given them. . . . Closer consideration leads me to qualify this thesis which I formerly was inclined to maintain too primitively. If the phenomenon of ambivalence actually plays the role which has been attributed to it in this Memorandum, it implies that the subjects cannot simply "react passively," accepting a material toward which they behave ambivalently. For enabling them to accept the unescapable, it does not suffice that they give up their resistance. They must invest positive psychological energies in order to overcome a resistance that does not simply disappear but in a way still survives at the very moment of acceptance. Here, the factor of spitefulness comes into play.[43]

This passage overturns much of the conventional wisdom about Adorno's pessimism and resignation in favor of something far more nuanced. The common take on Adorno, dating at least from his 1930s work on jazz and jitterbuggers, is that he simply believed (American) consumers of mass culture were reduced to mindless automata, bobbing their heads in slavish acquiescence. But in the "Plugging" memorandum, Adorno acknowledges a range of responses to mass culture that include detachment, cynicism, and satire. Indeed, from a contemporary perspective, one could say without too much hyperbole that Adorno's assessment of the resistance to radio engendered by ambivalence anticipates the postmodernist modes of pastiche, parody, and camp. At their most progressive, irony, ridicule, and play become coequals with non-identity. However, this spitefulness is not unproblematic, for throughout his career Adorno will assert that laughter and sadism are closely related, and he does so in the memo on plugging as well: "To express it most simply: if people like something only before they are forced to accept it, they will take their revenge in the moment the grip is eased and will compensate their bad conscience for having accepted trash by making fun of it."[44]

43. Ibid., p. 37.
44. Ibid., p. 31.

Nevertheless, it is with the transformation of ambivalence into ridicule and laughter that the ethic of Charlie Chaplin comes into sharp focus, and Negri's "figures without measure," Virno's "virtuosos," and Agamben's omnivalent "whatever beings" are sanctified. These are the patron saints of ambivalence, for what is ambivalence if not the ability to resist identification, to exist without measure, to produce without product, and in so doing turn that which is oppressive into objects of ridicule, to pivot on the point where our "own culpability" within the whole social field "produces that innocence which endows with more power than all power possesses"?[45] If this formulation sounds like Bakhtin's description of the carnivalesque, topsy-turvy world of Dostoevsky, it is because Bakhtin likewise saw ambivalence at the heart of misrule: "Ambivalence is characteristic for all of Dostoevsky's heroes. . . . Dostoevsky, as an artist, could not imagine human significance as a *single-toned* thing."[46]

Ambivalence is the turning in place within conditions of unfreedom. Here, Martin Heidegger's comments in "On the Essence of Truth" seem particularly appropriate. "[T]urning toward and away from is based on a turning to and fro proper to Dasein. Man's flight from the mystery toward what is readily available, onward from one current thing to the next, passing the mystery by—this is erring."[47] The to-and-fro-ing of ambivalence is not a loss of self in an either/or binary, but instead an intensification of the self in response to a world with which it is not identical. Spite, humor, parody, mimicry: these are the modes through which the subject survives the onslaught of modern life, be it in exile or simply when listening to the radio. Despite his horror at much of what he saw in America, Adorno still loved it and cherished the possibilities it continued to offer; he intuitively understood that his response to the physiognomics of radio was also his response to his exile home. He was swept up bodily into a whole field of social relations alien to him, and his response, as so many of the exile works attest, was imbued with an ambivalence to that milieu; but that ambivalence is not passive, and Adorno has the generosity and the foresight to accord to the "mass" the same experience he himself must have felt. Each subject was absorbed in the radio body, yet each had the

45. Adorno, "Chaplin Times Two," p. 60.

46. M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 150.

47. Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," trans. John Sallis, in *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), p. 150.

capacity to maintain its alterity—its whatever-ness, to give Agamben his due. To say, as so many have, that Adorno's response to America was ambivalent is not to dismiss Adorno in America. Instead, it is to proclaim that experience as one of profound freedom. It is not merely that his own response was ambivalent, but that he understood that ambivalence was the heart of America.

"The exile's intellectual mission": Adorno and Eisler's Composing for the Films

James Parsons

Coming to terms with Adorno and Eisler's *Composing for the Films* (*Komposition für den Film*) has never been easy. First-time readers in 1947 undoubtedly found the book puzzling, starting with its authorship. The art deco dust jacket transmits in chartreuse lettering against a dark grey background only five words: the title and the single name "Eisler." Yet Hanns Eisler is not the sole author, a revelation delayed until 1969 (though still questioned), when, seven years after Eisler's death, his collaborator, Theodor W. Adorno, issued a German-language version of the text.[1] The preface to the 1947 edition compounds the likelihood of misunderstanding when it declares that the purpose of "this small book" is to provide "an account of the theoretical and practical experiences with cinema music," a goal the authors—Adorno and Eisler—peg to the composer's Rockefeller

1. Here follows a summary of the book's publication history: English: Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (New York: Oxford UP, 1947). Eisler's name only. Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1951). Again, Eisler named alone. German: Eisler, *Komposition für den Film* (Berlin: Bruno Henschel und Sohn, 1949). Eisler alone credited. This version differs from the previous English editions as well as Adorno's 1969 German edition. Eisler removes the 1947 preface and replaces it with one "that spoke the language of the cold war," as Detlev Claussen puts it in *Theodor W. Adorno: One Last Genius*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2008), p. 151. Adorno and Eisler, *Komposition für den Film* (Munich: Verlag Rogner & Bernhard, 1969). Includes Adorno's "Zum Erstdruck des Originalfassung," pp. 213–15. Adorno and Eisler, *Komposition für den Film*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976), in Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 15. With some revisions, identical to the 1969 edition. Adorno and Eisler, *Komposition für den Film*, ed. Johannes C. Gall (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006). Includes DVD selections from Eisler's Rockefeller Film Music Project.

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Film Music Project.[2] The volume is diminutive solely in page count, and it takes on an increasingly strident tone (itself a source of further confusion) as the introduction makes clear in deeming motion pictures "inescapable" and "standardized" because they leave the "consumer" with "only apparent freedom of choice." Just as the automobile rolls off the assembly line, so too does the age's celluloid commodity: "production has been divided into administrative fields, and whatever passes through the machinery bears its mark, is predigested, neutralized, leveled down" (ix). This last statement mirrors the striking scene at the start of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), where, after a montage of pounding pistons and grinding gears, droves of workers descend into the earth to engage in dehumanizing toil. Lockstepping their way onto the elevator, the laborers display a "leveled-down" demeanor. (Charlie Chaplin's 1936 *Modern Times* makes good on the threat of leveling-down an individual when Chaplin himself gets caught up in a conveyor belt and passed through the cogs of a gigantic machine.) While the *Metropolis* sequence yields an arresting start for a film, its prose analogue hardly seems an auspicious way to launch a book. Easing the reader in may not have been a concern. User friendliness is not an overriding criterion for Adorno, nor is it necessarily a hallmark of Eisler's prose. Invited to the United States in 1935 to present a series of lectures in support of the World Committee for the Relief of the Victims of German Fascism, Eisler visited Hollywood for the first time. In an article later that year, he described the palpable frustration permeating the studio system. "For a film writer it is unbearable," he laments, "to live in a time of the most important events, full of blood and filth but also full of the heroic struggle of the working class, and, at the same time to work for a film company which demands that he continually produce the most piffling scripts, completely unrelated to reality, stupidly deceptive, and kitsch."[3]

I argue that many of the book's difficulties are deliberate, the outcome of the intellectual milieu that shaped Adorno and Eisler. Completed in California in 1944 (in German; the English translation appeared in 1947), the inquiry, like the state, traverses numerous fault lines that establish its

2. Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (New York: Oxford UP, 1947), p. v. Subsequent references will be included parenthetically in the text and will refer to this edition. Although the *New York Times of* February 23, 1940, reports the Rockefeller grant was $20,000, Sally Bick, in her meticulous "Eisler's Notes on Hollywood and the Film Music Project, 1935–42," *Current Musicology* 86 (2008): 14, gives the figure as $20,160.

3. Hanns Eisler, "Hollywood Seen from the Left," in *A Rebel in Music: Selected Writings*, ed. Manfred Grabs, trans. Marjorie Meyer (London: Kahn & Averill, 1999), p. 102.

terms. Foremost is Adorno's and Eisler's outsider-insider standing: on the one hand, European émigrés in a foreign land; on the other, intimate insiders with deep ties to and knowledge of the Hollywood movie scene, both professionally and socially. Given that *Composing for the Films* lacks terminal closure, exists in multiple versions in English and German, and was tacitly renounced for twenty-two years by Adorno, exile emerges as a useful tool for understanding the book. As Bertolt Brecht, Eisler's friend and frequent collaborator, wrote in 1940, "Refugees are the sharpest dialectic thinkers."[4] Building on Brecht's remark, together with those by other Los Angeles emigrants, a growing number of critics have found exile a useful means by which to grasp the phenomenon of Weimar on the Pacific.[5] According to the eloquent formulation of Edward Said, for "the exile" who "refuses to sit on the sidelines nursing a wound, there are things to be learned." For Said, Adorno is "perhaps the most rigorous example" of such an individual who rejects the prospect of secondary status while "ruthlessly" opposing "the 'administered' world." This larger process "is the exile's intellectual mission," one I posit as fundamental to a more inclusive appraisal of their joint study. As Said goes on to write, "Adorno's reflections are informed by the belief that the only home truly available now, though fragile and vulnerable, is in writing.... In short, Adorno says with grave irony, 'it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home.'" For Said, "to follow Adorno is to stand away from 'home' in order to look at it with the exile's detachment.... The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons.... Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience."[6]

In what follows I rely on a similar view of exile, one shunning the sanctuary of the familiar and refusing to fall back on victimhood. For many, the knotty pedigree of Adorno and Eisler's book has proven too vexing, the result being that some historians have throw up their hands in defeat. Playing the authorship card opens a Pandora's box that typically

4. Bertolt Brecht, *Werke: Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, ed. Jan Knopf et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), 18:264.

5. See most notably Ehrhard Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific: German Exile Culture in Los Angeles and the Crisis of Modernism* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2007); and David Jenemann, *Adorno in America* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2007).

6. Edward W. Said, "Reflections on Exile," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000), pp. 184–85.

obscures whatever historical-aesthetic resonance and ramification a text or work of art might otherwise possess. Mired in philological conundrums, some have found it easier to brand the book "infamous"—"so rooted in modernist elitism and Marxist pessimism that it really provides no practical methodological model for contemporary film musicology"[7]—than to plumb its potential. One can disown the book or accept its problems as inherent. Its ability to provoke discussion, however, remains undiminished. But in order to address the book adequately as a work of exile, it is necessary to engage with biographical concerns. For this reason, we must welcome the recent discovery of archival material at the New York branch of Oxford University Press, which provides a rich source for better understanding Adorno and Eisler's sole book-length contribution to music and film.

Once in the United States—Adorno in 1938, Eisler the same year yet beset by visa problems until 1941—the two immediately found themselves confronting what the first sentence of the introduction to *Composing for the Films* calls the "contemporary cultural industry."[8] For Adorno, this involved a half-time job as director of the Princeton Radio Research Project (1938–41) together with another arranged by Max Horkheimer at the Institute for Social Research in association with Columbia University. In Eisler's case, while he went to New York to teach at the New School for Social Research in 1940, it was only with the Rockefeller Film Music Project (1940–42) that he achieved a measure of economic security. For the task of writing a book on film composition, both men possessed impeccable musical backgrounds. Oddly for joint authors, however, their beliefs about music and its relationship to the world at large differed greatly, making it surprising that they could or would have joined forces to write this or any study. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer write, "Far more strongly than the theater of illusion, film denies its audience any dimension in which they might roam freely in imagination."[9] Despite his critics' frequent charges of negativity, Adorno finds a haven in the "advanced music" of Arnold Schoenberg's Second Viennese School. "Its truth appears guaranteed more by its denial of any meaning in organized

7. Robynn Stilwell, review of Jeff Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music*, *Notes* 57 (2000): 163.

8. For a fuller discussion of Adorno and Eisler's relationship, see Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno*, pp. 149–62.

9. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP 2002), pp. 99–100.

society, of which it will have no part—accomplished by its own organized vacuity—than by any capability of positive meaning within itself. Under the present circumstances it is restricted to definitive negation."[10] For Adorno, such "advanced music" is at its best because it does not resolve its constituent elements.

Like Adorno, Eisler ties the matter to "modern music," which in his estimation brought about a crisis," given the isolation of such music from social life.[11] However, the youthful Eisler claimed to reject all modern music, including his own and that of his teacher Schoenberg, who presided over not one but two musical revolutions, the first involving free atonality, the second the twelve-tone method. "I am bored by modern music, it is of no interest to me," Eisler wrote Schoenberg in 1926, "much of it I hate and despise. If possible I avoid [it]. . . . Alas, I must also include my own efforts of recent years with this."[12] In even starker contrast to Adorno, in the late 1920s he embarked on becoming, in the words of Dmitri Shostakovich, "the magnificent example" of the composer who leads "in the struggle for a new and just society and for a better future."[13] As he avers in a song for Brecht's 1930 *Die Maßnahme*, "Change the world, it needs it!" Five years later, he was even more emphatic: "the modern composer must change from a parasite into a fighter."[14] While in Adorno's view the purpose of art can be only negative, for Eisler it works for direct and positive societal changes.

In assessing these differences between Adorno and Eisler on whether music serves society and in deciding questions of authorship, the Oxford University Press production file, recently discovered by David Culbert,[15] is extremely useful. The cache of information dates from March 29, 1939, to June 4, 1947. In the spring of 1939, for two hundred and fifty dollars, the press contracted with Eisler for a book then titled *Why Modern Music is Hard to Understand*. In a December 6, 1939, memorandum, trade editor Philip Vaudrin specifies a 300-page publication in three parts:

10. Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster (New York: Continuum, 1994), p. 20.

11. Hanns Eisler, "Some Remarks on the Situation of the Modern Composer" (1935), in *A Rebel in Music*, p. 107.

12. Albrecht Betz, *Hanns Eisler: A Political Musician*, trans. Bill Hopkins (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982), p. 41.

13. Cited in Eisler, *A Rebel in Music*, p. 9.

14. Eisler, "Some Remarks," p. 112.

15. David Culbert, "How about Composing for the Films?" *Eisler-Mitteilungen* 45 (2008): 29. I sincerely thank Professor Culbert for sharing this file with me.

"1. music considered from the technical point of view, modern mechanical reproduction, etc.; 2. the sociology of modern music; 3. function and outlook." Optimistically, the press hopes to have the manuscript the following spring. The same entry highlights Eisler's Rockefeller Foundation funding, observing that the latter has the potential for a fourth report publishable later. Vaudrin concludes that "there seems to be no reason at all why we shouldn't take it on. Eisler is very able and apparently the Rockefeller Foundation thinks so too." But, Vaudrin presciently adds, "I am afraid . . . there is no way . . . we can force him to write it." By March 5, 1940, Vaudrin leaves open an option on the original book yet, based on Eisler's then successful Rockefeller backing, is willing to substitute that with one on film and music. On March 14, Eisler agrees, including the due date of April 1, 1941. Some items from the production file clearly are missing, as on January 8, 1942, Vaudrin reminds Eisler that the last time he heard from him was November 18, 1940 (the referenced letter is not in the file). In the 1942 letter, he hopes that the composer has not "forgotten that you are some time [*sic*] going to give us a manuscript on music and its relation to the film" and that "it is almost three years now since we entered into this agreement with you." Twelve days later, on January 20, Eisler answers: "I really feel guilty for not having written you before," promising the investigation "will be the result of two years of experimentation on my motion picture project" and that "those two years are ending now and the material for the book is all gathered." What remains is "putting this material in written form. Please be patient! I am doing my best in rushing and I assure you it will be a very good book," to which he adds, "I know you will understand and excuse me." Vaudrin responds the same day: "I don't like pestering you, but when, in these unpredictable times, do you think you are likely to finish the manuscript? In any event, I'm glad to know that you are making progress and haven't forgotten us." On July 14 Vaudrin repeats the ploy, suggesting an August lunch meeting to determine "how things are progressing." On July 20, 1942, from the Highland Hotel in Hollywood (he arrived in California in April), Eisler replies, admitting he is "unfortunately detained in Hollywood until October." Furthermore, he finds "it embarassing [*sic*]" to write "notes of excuse and delay all the time, but I am sure you realize what a difficult job I have."

Eisler's November 27, 1942, letter to Vaudrin, preserved in another collection, reveals he had found a way to ease some of the pressure then weighing on him. "Since many weeks I have been collaborating with Mr. Adorno," he explains. Those who have minimized Adorno's

participation would do well to remember the letter's penultimate sentence along with the rest of the production file.[16] "The status of Dr. Adornos [*sic*] coauthorship is not only a matter of honesty but also of expediency," he insists. "Without his intense collaboration the completion of the book may be considerably delayed or even endangered."[17]

Indispensable though the Oxford production file is, it does not answer all questions. Following Hatcher's December 1942 communication, there are no additional documents until Adorno's October 30, 1944, letter announcing "with pleasure . . . the finished German manuscript of our little book 'Composing for the Movies'." Having waited for an English text since spring 1941, the press had little use for a German manuscript. Alas, the dossier provides no insights into the German version. What it details in extraordinary fashion is Adorno's single-minded effort to secure an English translation, something the two translators learned at uncomfortably close range. UCLA musicologist George McManus, the first to make such an attempt, withdrew within a year, explaining on January 5, 1946, to Margaret Nicholson, Hatcher's successor, his voluntary departure given that "the manuscript is a very difficult one," a reality "intensified in part by the fact that the two authors write in entirely divergent styles." On January 14, 1946, Nicholson sent McManus a check for two hundred dollars for his "great labor," adding that the amount would have been more had the book's budget not gotten "entirely out of hand." Norbert Guterman, McManus's replacement, fared better, earning high praise from Adorno (January 16, 1946), who wrote that his work "makes for excellent reading, and Hanns Eisler is of the same opinion." All are working at top speed, for by January 21, Nicholson assures Guterman "the first chapter came back from Mr. Adorno this morning" together with the judgment that "some of the changes he made in the manuscript are really helpful; others you can disregard," a remark that seems to have forged a bond between Nicholson

16. Most vocally Günter Mayer, who, as editor of Eisler's *Musik und Politik: Schriften 1924–1948* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1973), writes that "Adorno's 1969 claim of coauthorship appears to be highly questionable" (p. 489).

17. Feuchtwanger Memorial Library, Hanns Eisler Collection, Correspondence A–Z, Special Collections, Univ. of Southern California, Los Angeles. I owe my knowledge of this letter to Bick, "Eisler's Notes," p. 35. Bick states "the evidence suggests" Eisler "might have initially asked . . . Brecht, who had arrived in Hollywood only six months before" to help with the study (p. 27). Eisler's 1942 letter predates by three years and four months a letter recently discovered by Jenemann at the Rockefeller Foundation Archives, which he believes "may perhaps settle the matter and bear out Adorno's claim" of collaboration. See Jenemann, *Adorno*, p. 110.

and Guterman. The latter well served the two when, following Adorno's February 19 letter to Nicholson, he announces that, "as was to be expected there are…a good many changes, particularly in the more theoretical passages." Assuring her he is confining "himself to the absolutely necessary," he raises the concern that "certain parts," although "very faithfully translated," are "somewhat 'cloudy'." While the production file does not record all that the translation required, one can assume that it was demanding. Writing to Nicholson on October 7, Guterman masks his frustration behind well-intentioned sarcasm: "Now Dr. Adorno will be satisfied; there will be no other insertion; the edited manuscript will receive the author's final OK, & will go to the printer! the book will be chosen by the Book of the Month Club, translated into 72 foreign languages (including Sanskrit) and will be happy forever after."[18]

In addition to the file's corroboration of Adorno's steadfast involvement in the translation, it also confirms the unswerving conviction of both men in *Composing for the Films*. In ways modest and major, the dossier is a mine of information. To take but one example, the date of the preface has been used to support the view of Günter Mayer[19] and others that Adorno's coauthorship is "highly questionable." Mayer's claim might have serenely slumbered had not James Buhler and David Neumeyer muddied the waters, in an otherwise important review article of two 1992 books on Hollywood film. They begin sensibly enough by pointing out that Mayer's evidence "is shaky at best." They should have stopped there. That precariousness, they assert, "consists of nothing more than an English version of the book's preface signed solely by Eisler and dated 1 September 1944." Thus, what is "highly questionable" is not Adorno's account but the date on Eisler's English preface. It is one thing if the English preface they mean originates with the 1944 German manuscript. If they are referring to the 1947 Oxford University Press publication, they are incorrect, for the date there reads "July 1947." The only preface containing the date "September 1944" is Adorno's 1969 edition (as well as those from 1976 and 2006[20]). It is regrettable that the production file took so long to surface. As it affirms, the preface does not date from after the time Adorno "had withdrawn his

18. Interestingly, Adorno's other major collaboration on music writing in the period, Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, *was* selected for the Book of the Month club and translated into many languages.

19. See note 16 above.

20. The preface to Eisler's 1949 German edition bears the date "Berlin, im Juli 1949." I thank Denis P. Gallo at the Library of Congress for this information.

name," as Buhler and Neumeyer assert, nor is 1944 wrong, at least in the sense they think it is.[21] As Adorno explains to Nicholson on October 28, 1946, "the date September 1, 1944 at the end of the Preface should be kept under all circumstances. . . . This is essential since otherwise our attack on [Sergei] Eisenstein . . . could be easily misinterpreted. It should also be kept in mind that there appeared an article in *Esquire* this year [1944] which partly coincides with our first chapter." The press failed to honor Adorno's request, for the date of the preface in the Oxford University Press edition is "July 1947." On the English translation, Adorno, in a postscript to his January 16, 1946 letter to Nicholson, is his own most eloquent spokesperson: "I have added, in my draft of the translation of chapters IV and V, certain sentences which do not exist in the German original. The reason for these additions," he writes, "was my wish to clarify some passages which might sound obscure if literally translated. I should therefore urgently advise not to eliminate sentences which Mr. Gutterman [*sic*] will easily recognise [*sic*; Adorno's emphasis]." The implication is plain: contrary to previous assessments, the English text is the equal of the German version but also a source possessing intrinsic worth, as Nicholson assured Adorno on October 8, 1946: "I hope you like the translation as it now reads. I think the manuscript is both interesting and very valuable, and as a result of the combined efforts of your first corrections and Mr. Guterman's revision, it is now stylistically in order."

The production file underscores a self-evident yet undeserved truth: the book experienced a literary exile even before its September 1947 publication. First, there are the events of Eisler's life that year, lifted from Greek tragedy—thanks to his two siblings. *The New York World-Telegram* set the stage the year before, on October 21, 1946, when it dubbed Eisler's brother, Gerhart, a "top Stalin Agent." The drama's driving force was Eisler's sister, Ruth Fischer (born Elfriede Eisler), a co-founder in 1918 of the Austrian Communist Party, expelled by the Party in 1926 when she opposed Stalin's domination.[22] (The success of her brothers, one enjoying a seemingly glamorous Hollywood life, the other a spy since the 1930s

21. James Buhler and David Neumeyer, review of Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music*, and Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film*, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 47, no. 2 (1994): 370, fn. 27.

22. For a biographical sketch of Fischer, see Harriet Pass Freidenreich, *Female, Jewish, and Educated: The Lives of Central European Women* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002), p. 158.

for the disbanded Comintern, seems to have engendered considerable jealously.[23]) First on May 12, in Los Angeles, and then for three days in September, in Washington, DC, when the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) interrogated Hanns (Gerhart was called another time), the forum must have struck her as heaven-sent. The hearings, according to Eisler "sinister and ridiculous," prompted a media feeding frenzy that ended with him leaving the United States on March 26, 1948.[24] The fallout enveloped Adorno as well, the result being his withdrawal from *Composing for the Films*. As Adorno explains in the postscript to the 1969 German edition, that decision stemmed from his desire to avoid "becoming a martyr to a cause that was not and is not mine."[25] Comparing Adorno's March 17, 1947, letter to Nicholson when he mentions "our book" (his and Eisler's) and Nicholson's June 4 communication to Adorno yields a demoralizing disparity. Responding to a lost intervening letter from Adorno, she assures him that the press grasps "the situation and in the circumstances this"—pulling out—"is probably the wisest thing to do. As we told Mr. Eisler, we are going ahead with our schedule on the book as well as we can." Having waited for the text so long, what Nicholson next offers is to her credit: "the advisability" that Vaudrin had discussed with Eisler "of postponing the book for three months or so, so that it will be brought out after what we hope is a momentary flurry." She concludes with the news that Eisler is "not at all sympathetic to this idea." As time would tell, the contretemps was not fleeting.

In employing exile to come to grips with Adorno and Eisler's book, it is important to ask what is gained if, attentive to Said's previous declaration, one retrieves the volume from the "sidelines"—not to conscript it for some preordained agenda but "to stand with it away from 'home' in order to look at it with the exile's detachment"? Part of that requires moving beyond authorship quibbles. Even though that has been one of my concerns, I have cited the production file to document *both* writers' participation. As the file bears out, the press consistently saw the book in that light. Writing to Vaudrin on June 13, 1946, Adorno, following the former's June 10 suggestion to strike the chapter on the Rockefeller Film Music Project (it "is really in the nature of an appendix and relates only very loosely to the text as a whole"), goes to some length to defer to Eisler.

23. This is the view of Betz, *Hanns Eisler*, p. 197.

24. Eisler, "Fantasia in G-men," in *A Rebel in Music*, p. 150.

25. Adorno and Eisler, *Komposition für den Film* (2006 Gall ed.), p. 136 (my translation).

(In the end, the chapter did become an appendix.) As Adorno acknowledges, "the whole book originated from Mr. Eisler's [Rockefeller] Project and his contract was based on the idea that he should give an account of the Project—something which, incidentally, is doubtless expected by a large number of experts, and people interested in Mr. Eisler's practical work in the movies, and as a composer in general." Ever concerned with persuasive writing, Nicholson offers a crash course in her previously cited October 8, 1946, letter when she advises Adorno on the use of the "we" to which he previously had expressed concern.[26] Her words bear out the book's collaborative makeup:[27] "I certainly agree with you that when there is only one author it is a stylistic mannerism to use 'we,' *but since there are two of you*, I think the practice is perfectly justified" (my emphasis).

If "the exile's detachment" does spark greater insight into *Composing for the Films*, it again is expedient to recall Said's model of the émigré who, while living up to its challenges, rejects second-class citizenship. Thus, the question becomes what emerges when one takes the book seriously and not as a hand-me-down or hot-house harangue. Philip Rosen, summarizing an important point from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, suggests a way forward in voicing a concern that integrally relates to exile: how to oppose "the subjection of human subjectivity to the irrational components of its own advance."[28] Horkheimer and Adorno find an answer in Odysseus, who, sacrificing himself "for the abolition of sacrifice," wrests power from the object or person of forfeit and retains it for himself.[29] While one might assume Eisler would have little interest in such rarefied matters of the mind, that supposition is erroneous. The son of a philosopher, Eisler maintained a life-long admiration of Hegel, a thinker he writes into the *Hollywooder Liederbuch*, a collection of forty-seven songs on which he was at work while writing *Composing for the Films*. With admirable brevity, Eisler, in a text he wrote himself (the only one in the collection), summarizes the Hegelian dialectic in six words: "considering the question from every angle." Eisler prominently positions that text at the epicenter of the twenty-sixth song, "Nightmare," a mordant send-up of twentieth-

26. The same Margaret Nicholson published *A Dictionary of American-English Usage Based on Fowler's Modern English Usage* (New York: Oxford UP, 1957).

27. I do not take seriously Adorno's June 13, 1947, claim that he "not only wrote but *conceived* 90%" of *Composing for the Films*" (Theodor W. Adorno, *Letters to his Parents*, trans. Wieland Hoban [Cambridge: Polity, 2006], p. 287).

28. Philip Rosen, "Adorno and Film Music: Theoretical Notes on Composing for the Films," *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980): 160.

29. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 40–41.

century inhumanity, when he enfolds his homage to Hegel within the imagery of "rat-men" who "accused me of not liking stench, of not liking garbage." Eisler's music for those outer sections, like those accusations, robotically pecks away at a restricted cluster of pitches, yielding to eleven measures of lyrical exuberance only at the words "considering the question from every angle." The juxtaposition, worthy of the resistance Adorno and Horkheimer ascribe to Odysseus, is as moving as it is unexpected. This Eisler achieves by the montage-like change of gears from the aggressively repetitive music that frames the song's central section and the elegiac contrast with which he counters the latter. In this regard, the song bears witness to Ernst Bloch's 1973 assessment of the composer: "I got to know him as a man who could formulate ideas with the greatest liveliness, wit and precision."[30] As Anthony Heilbut observed a decade later, given that Eisler "could be as suave a dialectician as Adorno and much more pithy, his writings offer something special, the inside view of a professional who is able to explore the social implications of phenomena that other refugee musicians were satisfied simply to behold."[31]

Following Eisler's HUAC imbroglio, Americans effectively consigned him to oblivion, a process that, until recently, not only effaced his music but also ensured he was unworthy of "legitimate . . . musicological research."[32] Already inclined to distrust a musician forced to leave the United States, the growing Cold War paranoia conditioned many to view the film book as the limit of polemic. The first two sentences of chapter 1 ("Prejudices and Bad Habits") establish an unambiguous tone: "The character of motion-picture music has been determined by everyday practice. It has been an adaptation in part to the immediate needs of the film industry, in part to whatever musical clichés and ideas about music happened to be current." Eisler and Adorno enumerate nine "intrinsic obstacles": the leitmotif, melody and euphony, unobtrusiveness, visual justification, illustration, geography and history, stock music, clichés, and standard interpretation. I restrict myself to the one offense as exuberantly healthy today as it was when Adorno and Eisler decried it more than sixty years ago, the leitmotif. Indeed, one might rightly wonder where the composer of *Jaws* (1975) and

30. Betz, *Hanns Eisler*, p. 261n55.

31. Anthony Heilbut, *Exiled in Paradise: German Refugee Artists and Intellectuals in America from the 1930s to the Present* (New York: Viking, 1983), p. 187.

32. Joy Calico, "'The Karl Marx of Music': Hanns Eisler Reception in the United States after 1947," in *Hanns Eisler: 's müßt dem Himmel Höllenangst werden*, ed. Maren Köster (Hofheim: Wolke, 1998), p. 132.

Star Wars (1977) might be were it not for this technique.[33] As the authors see it, the use of thematic "trademarks . . . by which persons, emotions, and symbols can instantly be identified" made sense in the nineteenth-century music dramas of Richard Wagner, where "salience and brevity" fit the art form's "gigantic dimensions." In contrast, film gobbles up the technique, given the "continual interruption of one element by another rather than continuity." In motion pictures, "the leitmotif has been reduced to the level of a musical lackey, who announces his master with an important air even though the eminent personage is clearly recognizable to everyone. The effective technique of the past thus becomes a mere duplication" (4–6). Film music subjects the leitmotif to the dictates of the film, destroying the possibility of any true dialectical inversion, as in the Hegelian master-slave relationship.

The emancipatory possibilities of exile thus remain submerged in film music and its dependent composers. Reading Schoenberg's assertion that California was a "paradise" into which he had been "driven," is one not troubled by the appearance of ingratitude?[34] Brecht was famous for similar proclamations, many of which entered Eisler's *Hollywooder Liederbuch*, particularly the *Fünf Elegien*. In the fourth, one learns that Hollywood forces the realization that "paradise and hell-fire are the same." Yet to take Brecht's and Schoenberg's assertions at face value denies the full range of their exile experience, one that Brecht articulated for different reasons in his *A Short Organum for the Theater* (conceived in Los Angeles), where he wrote of the "socially-conditioned phenomena" he wishes to save "from the stamp of familiarity." Whether a poem or play, it "regards nothing as existing except in so far as it changes, in other words is in disharmony with itself."[35] A comparable resistance informs *Composing for the Films*, just

33. I am aware that my view on the leitmotif is in the minority, as the many approving endorsements by film music scholars make clear. In addition to Eisler and Adorno's criticism, I direct the reader to Buhler and Neumeyer's 1994 review of Flinn and Kalinak, p. 377: "the leitmotif rebels against music. Acting against musical necessity, the leitmotif thrusts itself into consciousness; it calls attention to itself and demands to be heard; it refuses to fade into that continuous and largely 'unheard' tapestry of musical unfolding that is supposedly (or at least in classical film theory) the normal mode of being of film music."

34. The Schoenberg quotation is from Walter Frisch, ed., *Schoenberg and His World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999), pp. 297–98, which is itself from a speech he gave October 9, 1934, "Driven into Paradise."

35. Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre," in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. and ed. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964),

as it explains the outward thanklessness of others who found sanctuary in Hollywood. In short, I see a great deal in common between Rosen's "the subjection of human subjectivity to the irrational components of its own advance," Adorno and Eisler's "contemporary cultural industry" (ix), and the subjection of all culture to the same irrational identity in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In this last work, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that rather than producing "cultural chaos," industrial "culture today is infecting everything with sameness. . . . Automobiles, bombs, and films hold the totality together until their leveling element demonstrates its power against the very system of injustice it served. For the present, the technology of the culture industry confines itself to standardization and mass production and sacrifices what once distinguished the logic of the work from that of society."[36] Some will argue that Adorno's greatest contribution to the film study resides in pronouncements such as this. Still, to suggest *Composing for the Films* is a rehearsal of the later book written with Horkheimer devalues the effort that Adorno and Eisler expended on it and ignores Eisler's prior critical engagement with film music. Another essay, his "A Musical Journey through America," details a 1935 visit to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. While the "perfect organization" and the "technical equipment" provoked "astonishment," the pressure exerted on "music office workers" (a disparagement) struck Eisler as "hell" given that the composer who writes only one kind of music in assembly-line fashion becomes "hopelessly dim-witted." Under such circumstances the "standard of most" studio "films is abominably low, not only in subject matter, but also in music. Although films could be an excellent means of entertainment and education in modern society, in the hands of private industry they are solely for profit and a means of lulling the masses."[37]

There is nothing lulling about Eisler's dialectical music for *Hangmen Also Die!* (1943, Fritz Lang director), written between December 1942 and March 1943, while he and Adorno were working on *Composing for the Films*. As Ehrhard Bahr notes, the release by United Artists "boded well for a film that was motivated by the idea of avoiding the conventions of the Hollywood culture industry."[38] The same impetus spurred Eisler to put

pp. 192–93.

36. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 94-95.

37. Eisler, "A Musical Journey through America," in *A Rebel in Music*, pp. 90–91.

38. Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific*, p. 130. The writing team included John Wexley, Brecht, and Lang. As the project progressed, Brecht grew dissatisfied with what he viewed as Lang's profiteering pandering to Hollywood. See ibid., p. 146.

into practice many of the ideas then making their way into the film book. One is that music has the potential to bring about "dramatic distance from the scene" (25), a view that recalls Brecht's epic theater while highlighting a similar incentive: to renegotiate the social contract on behalf of art. The terms of that renegotiation had far-reaching implications, demanding not just new attitudes toward theater or music but a reconfigured pact with the audience. No longer, as Brecht had grumbled in 1935, would one "see entire rows of human beings…passive, self-absorbed, and, according to all appearances, doped."[39] Henceforth the arts would empower spectators with self-determination.

Montage plays a central role in Eisler's *Hangmen* music while at the same time permitting him to satisfy the concept of "dramatic distance." A key premise of *Composing for the Films* is that motion pictures work best when there is a "clash of heterogeneous…elements," an "antithetic relation" that dispels "the illusion of direct unity" (71). Adorno and Eisler do not posit this gratuitously. It is the means to save modernity—above all, "modern music"—from a shopworn Romanticism most apparent when film music uncritically clings to the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. This latter is problematic for two reasons. First, "[t]he sound picture without montage would amount to a 'selling out' of Richard Wagner's idea—and his work falls to pieces even in its original form" (73). Second, the continuing appeal of the "total artwork" within twentieth-century modernity is suspect, given that when music and film join forces, it invariably becomes the responsibility of music to conceal even larger fissures. "The alienation of the media from each other reflects a society alienated from itself," they write. "Therefore the aesthetic divergence of the media is potentially a legitimate means of expression, not merely a regrettable deficiency that has to be concealed" (74). Accordingly, "montage makes the best of the aesthetically accidental form of the sound picture by transforming an entirely extraneous relation into a virtual element of expression" (78). Eisler's music for the opening of *Hangmen* turns the "aesthetically accidental" into an advantage. It also provides an object lesson in how one can circumvent the "cardinal sin" he and Adorno save for the final sentence of *Composing for the Films*, the "tendency" of movie music "to vanish as soon as it appears," thereby renouncing "its claim that it is *there*" (133, original emphasis). For the first two minutes and twenty-five seconds,

39. Bertolt Brecht, "Über die Verwendung von Musik für ein episches Theater," in *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), 15:480.

Eisler plays on a business-as-usual approach that conditions the listener to expect uninterrupted music. The film's opening conveys a great deal of information: credits, Brechtian captions explaining the Nazi subjugation of the Czech people, three increasingly close-up shots of Prague's castle hill, culminating in an interior room laden with Nazi insignia. In most films, the music for the first of these would be at best innocuous, at worst, as Adorno and Eisler quip, the means of "ensnaring the customer" in a sonic-visual web of advertising (60–61).

Eisler's goal is different in *Hangmen*, a film that pits the courageous struggle of a united Czech people against Nazi oppression. Following the initially upbeat music, the mood turns serious as he subtly quotes the principal motif of his 1929 *Kominternlied*, memorably marked by an ascending tritone. Without relying on words—he refers to the song only instrumentally—he nonetheless prompts the listener to supply the song's text to "conquer the world." Likewise, Eisler proclaims his Marxist worldview while identifying with the Czech opposition forces and, in the process, disclosing one way in which music can critically engage with and oppose the "indifference" of "industrial rationalization" (61). Just as in a fugue Bach savors adding another musical line to an already thick contrapuntal texture, Eisler enjoys piling on multiple layers of meaning by availing himself of music's intertextual potential.

In *Hangmen*, once inside the castle the music stops as all await Reinhard Heydrich, the titular hangman. Eight minutes and seventeen seconds elapse before Eisler again calls on music, during which time the film introduces the resistance figures who rid Prague of the draconian Heydrich, this last an action not shown on screen but which sets in motion all that follows. Withholding music for so long accomplishes a number of things. It frames the Nazi's shooting with gravitas, just as it allows Eisler to invest music with even greater import, one enjoining the audience to speculate on when it will return and why. When it does, the composer again underscores sympathy for the people of Prague. Dr. Franticek Svoboda, who has just shot Heydrich, now seeks sanctuary in a movie theater. In a picture about appearances and false impressions, the ensuing film within a film *mise en abyme* affords a striking example of the "clash of heterogeneous elements." The entire scene takes its cue from Svoboda's request to the ticket seller: "one please." He enters the cinema a single individual yet leaves a member of a larger collective. The film, already in progress, features the second symphonic poem, *Vltava* (The Moldau), an orchestral depiction of the river flowing through Prague from Czech composer Bedřich Smetana's

Má vlast (My Fatherland). Against the rapid crosscut shots of Svoboda and the life-giving countryside surrounding the river—the visual accompaniment to Smetana's music—a medley of sounds including Smetana's music and the audience's increasingly animated whispers announce that Svoboda's actions have succeeded and Heydrich is dead. Applause joins the fray as the audience exits the theater in a near riotous state after a single Nazi, subsequently punched out, demands that the film stop. The film within a film does cease, and the cacophony of the projector as it halts closes the scene with a literal "clash of the heterogeneous," one unequivocally confirming that "montage makes the best of the aesthetically accidental," in this case the cohesion of the Czech people and Svoboda. With the greatest economy of means, the convergence of disparate elements establishes a great deal more, reanimating through image and sound, however fleetingly, the lost Czech "Fatherland" while making clear that Nazi control will be only temporary.

I reiterate the statement that launched this essay: reading Adorno and Eisler's *Composing for the Films* is not easy. Perhaps the best way to read the book is to retain its exile standing, a reality that forces those who take it up to follow both writers "away from 'home' in order to look at" it "with the exile's detachment." In the end, accomplishing this requires moving beyond authorship disputes to accept the book as it is. Such acceptance does not entail unthinking acquiescence. The authors disdain a great deal, but not because of "modernist elitism and Marxist pessimism." What they scorn is "a regression" from a modernity that, as it pertains to music and film, would turn back the clock to the nineteenth century, bringing with it a "pseudo-individualization achieved by industrial mass production." This result would be catastrophic, "a retrogression from the achievements of modern music," which "has freed itself…and is working with might and main at the dialectical task of becoming unromantic while preserving its character of music" (73). At the same time, Eisler and Adorno do not hold ever-encroaching technology "responsible for the barbarism of the cultural industry" (xi). What they seek, at least in movie music, is a formidable if not impossible reconciliation of opposites, one where "the relation between music and pictures is antithetic at the very moment when the deepest unity is achieved" (78). In this, they search for a home where neither they nor film music has often been.

Doctor Faustus's *Portrait of Theodor Adorno: Instrumentalized Aesthetics and Fascism*[*]

John Wells

> The closed artwork is bourgeois, the mechanical artwork belongs to fascism, the fragmentary artwork—in its complete negativity—intends utopia.
>
> Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*[1]

In "Toward a Portrait of Thomas Mann," Theodor Adorno suggests that Mann's narrative practice could be consistent with Adornian avant-garde art, because Mann's irony negates the very semblance upon which art relies: "there is no doubt that [Mann] disguised himself as a 'public figure,' that is, from his contemporaries, and this disguise itself needs to be understood. Not the least of the functions of Mann's irony, certainly, was to practice this disguise and at the same time negate it by confessing it in language."[2] By quoting passages from Adorno's musical aesthetics within what seems to be a straightforward parable about how modernist art proves consistent with the emergence of fascism in Germany, Mann's *Doctor Faustus* ironically presents Adorno, whom he met while in California during the Second World War, in a variety of disguises that imply both admiration for Adorno's intellect and suspicion of his favored artworks and theories.

* A National Endowment for the Humanities seminar that Russell Berman conducted in the summer of 2007 on the German Exile Community in California provided an invaluable opportunity for me to develop this examination of how Thomas Mann's novel presents Adorno's aesthetics.

1. Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. 183.

2. Theodor W. Adorno, "Toward a Portrait of Thomas Mann," in *Notes to Literature*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia UP, 1992), 2:13.

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The novel's aesthetic theories derive primarily from Adorno's essay on Schoenberg in *Philosophy of New Music*, which explains how Schoenberg's substitution of his inherited musical tradition with a new, highly regimented tonal system proves philosophically and musically progressive.[3] The protagonist of Mann's novel, Adrian Leverkühn, develops a Schoenbergian twelve-tone method for musical composition after signing what he understands to be a satanic covenant associated by Mann with Germany's descent into irrational barbarism under National Socialism. The novel's narrator, Serenus Zeitblom, struggles to incorporate both Leverkühn's avant-garde music and the disintegrating culture around him into his own Catholic humanism as he composes his friend's biography during the final years of World War II.

Mann's portrait of Adornian aesthetics links Adorno with the tradition of German inwardness, which Mann derides for fostering Germany's decline into a medieval and demonic condition in his 1945 essay "Germany and the Germans." This inwardness is partially consistent with Horkheimer and Adorno's account of German idealism in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. They argue that German idealism reinforces an instrumental form of cognition that enabled humankind to progress by mastering natural forces but produced an endless cycle of domination of nature and other humans; hence, human progress remains bound by nature's laws, rather than standing in autonomous opposition. Idealism's instrumental cognition alienates individuals from one another and the natural world as they try to impose their own designs onto nature and other individuals (or, as the National Socialists demonstrate, exterminate what does not fit their ideal). Mann explores idealism's perpetuation of dominance through the novel's representatives of German inwardness (Leverkühn) and Enlightenment humanism (Zeitblom). Mann performs that exploration, however, not by satisfying Adorno's reasons for valorizing modernist art, but by ironically instrumentalizing Adornian theory in a way consistent with his fascist antipode. Because Zeitblom, whose limitations Mann makes evident to the reader, is the "source" of this interpretation of Adorno, Mann's personal verdict on whether Adornian theory is consistent with fascism

3. Mann and Adorno's collaboration began in 1943, when Adorno both shared drafts of his work on Schoenberg and Berg and provided musical instructions for the eighth chapter on Kretzschmar's Beethoven lectures to Mann, who admitted that his own knowledge of music ended with the late Romantics. See Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005), p. 315.

remains unclear. Nevertheless, Mann thereby illustrates what he takes to be the possibility of a fascist appropriation of Adornian theory.

In the novel, a whole range of characters, from Leverkühn and Zeitblom to Johann Conrad Beissel, Wendell Kretzschmar, and the Devil, appropriates Adorno's theories, often taken verbatim from Adorno himself, for different purposes. Mann uses Kretzschmar's story of the theological figure Beissel, the American "Führer" in Pennsylvania who had fled Germany in pursuit of personal and theological freedom, to exhibit the possibility of the rise of American fascism and to argue that all forms of fascism incorporate a theological regress into a mythic absolute as they supposedly pursue millennial programs to liberate their people. But Zeitblom provides an alternate reading of Adornian theory in his humanist appropriation of Leverkühn's final twelve-tone composition, which demonstrates how humanism converts materials into an affirmative theology consistent with the instrumental processes that Adorno interrogates for failing to liberate humankind.

Mann's explanation of National Socialism's ascendancy in "Germany and the Germans," composed just after the first half of his Faustus novel and thus immediately after the chapter in which the Devil arrives to purchase Leverkühn's soul, elucidates the novel's obvious allegory.[4] Mann contends that Goethe's Faust, like Luther's Devil, exemplifies the "typical" Germanic willingness to abandon inwardness by trading eternal salvation for earthly power: "isn't this the right moment to see Germany in this picture, the moment in which Germany is literally being carried off by the Devil?"[5] This portrait of the isolated thinker driven by a quest for knowledge and power clearly suggests Leverkühn, whose musical talent is hardly demonic "in itself," though it drives him into retreat from civic life and can be abused to promote totalitarian systems. In his mythic explanation of Germany's descent into totalitarianism, Mann rejects all distinctions between a "good" German culture and its "bad" fallen form, and faults German Romanticism's valorization of the emotional rather than the rational, particularly its extremes of Dionysian intoxication, which he identifies with Nietzsche for praising sickness as a route toward knowledge.[6] Mann's use of Nietzsche's life as a model for Leverkühn's—particularly Nietzsche's

4. Thomas Mann, *Story of a Novel*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Knopf, 1961), p. 109.

5. Thomas Mann, "Germany and the Germans," *Yale Review* 35 (Winter 1946): 227.

6. Ibid., p. 239.

contraction of syphilis from a prostitute, his proposal to another by proxy, and his final decade of insanity—seems to confirm that his lecture provides the allegorical framework for his novel.[7] The National Socialist corruption of Nietzsche's ideas for antithetical purposes suggests why he provided an apt model for Leverkühn: Nietzsche's theories about the will to power and his critiques of egalitarianism seemed consistent with Hitler's millennial plans.

But if the novel links Nietzsche and Adorno with fascism, there is little or no basis for these links. The misreading of Nietzsche as Nazi, fabricated by his antisemitic sister Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche and rarely challenged prior to the 1950s, is no longer credible. At the same time, the novel's associations of fascism with inwardness and Schoenbergian music are difficult to justify. In *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses*, Adorno suggests that the attempt to derive fascism from inwardness, which Mann considers its enabling cultural disposition, is itself the fascist's false construction: "[Thomas] makes dictatorship an issue of inwardness rather than of politics and economy. It is, according to Thomas, due to a negative frame of mind, antagonistic to his type of religion."[8] In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer admittedly posit more of an anthropological than political or economic theory to identify the causes of fascist dictatorship, yet their anthropology incorporates economic and political concerns, and Adorno's empirical research on the political and economic appeal of fascism to Americans for *The Authoritarian Personality* and his analysis of Thomas's radio broadcasts illustrate his understanding of how specific social forces create environments ripe for fascism.

Similarly, Adorno rules out in advance the novel's fascist appropriation of his essay on Schoenberg in *Philosophy of New Music*. He aligns Schoenberg's music with the progress of human society, which develops by imposing order on nature (for music, on sound) but ultimately subordinates its members and regresses into the Darwinian struggle from which humankind emerged. Schoenberg's twelve-tone compositions initially

7. Even by 1954, however, in a letter to Adorno, Mann denounced such allegorical interpretation: "how obsolete, how overtaken, how refuted my 'Faustus' already looks today if one simply treats it as an allegory of 'Germany'." Theodor W. Adorno and Thomas Mann, *Correspondence: 1943–1955*, ed. Christoph Gödde and Thomas Sprecher, trans. Nicholas Walker (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006), pp. 107–8.

8. Theodor W. Adorno, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2000), p. 51.

seem reflective of totalitarian control, since they subordinate all notes to a rigid order. Yet Adorno contends that Schoenberg's break from traditional tonality (first in atonal compositions and then in twelve-tone ones) presented music's authentic response to the commodification of art and the mechanization of aesthetic production. As Adorno explains of radical music, for which atonality corresponded to painting's break from figurative representation, "[i]t was the antithesis to the spreading of the culture industry into its own domain. . . . Its aconceptual and nonrepresentational aspect, which has since Arthur Schopenhauer recommended it to irrationalistic philosophy, made it refractory to the *ratio* of salability. It was only in the era of the sound film, of radio and publicity set to music, that, precisely on account of its irrationality, it was entirely seized by society's commercial rationality."[9] Adorno contends that new music's determinate negation of musical tradition reveals how music, despite the appeal of its sensuous material to irrational philosophies and propaganda, can protest the inhumanity of the world that humankind has constructed. Music performs that protest by challenging conventions that reinforce illusions of social harmony and thus reflects society's failure to incorporate dissonant elements or its tendency toward a rigid imprisoning construction. The fascist mistake is to think that modernist art seeks to derive pleasure from presentations of suffering rather than to incorporate suffering as a means of revealing culture's failure to achieve true enlightenment. However, the marketplace's appropriation of modernist resistance converts it into a new conformism, as Adorno explains in one of the few passages in *Philosophy of New Music* that explicitly recognizes America, where many young musicians adopt the twelve-tone system as "a surrogate for tonality, as if freedom were aesthetically intolerable and needed to be furtively replaced by a new compliancy" (*P* 55). When rebellion is converted into fashion, the avant-garde can become a new convention eliminating the subject's agency. Hence, Adorno calls for a dialectic of the avant-garde, rather than a final form that will complete the avant-garde's project to deliver a new age, as new art continually revises inherited forms to resist a market eager to absorb it. Mann's novel illustrates that tendency to commodify culture and philosophy, not by providing a model of art that meets Adorno's criteria but by suggesting that instrumental drives can appropriate anti-instrumental artworks and aesthetic theories like Adorno's.

9. Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. 9. Further citations of this work will be documented parenthetically as *P*, followed by the page number.

German-American Fascism and Idealist Projection

In *Philosophy of New Music*, Adorno describes how music has exhibited reason's domination of nature by citing Luther's valorization of a rigid structuring of sound: "A system of the domination of nature in music results. It answers to a longing arising out of the primordial age of the bourgeoisie: to seize all that sounds in a regulatory grasp and dissolve the magic of music in human reason. Thus Martin Luther names Josquin des Prez, who died in 1521, 'the Master of Notes: They had to do as he wanted; the other masters had to want what the notes would do'" (*P* 52–53). Des Prez seems to be the model for Beissel, the "backwoods dictator" in *Doctor Faustus*,[10] who came to America to devote himself to his eccentric model of the divine in private, but found himself attracting disciples over whom he "ruled all the more absolutely since, to his knowledge, he had never sought out leadership, but had been called to it against his wishes and intentions" (*DF* 72). To expand his spiritual kingdom, Beissel establishes music as the most important component of the community's religious life and adopts a messianic agenda to purge that music of artificial European forms: "He wanted to begin anew, do things better, produce a kind of music more suited to the simplicity of their souls, music that would enable them when performing it to achieve their own, simple kind of perfection" (*DF* 73). Beissel's music perpetuates the domination that Adorno associates with des Prez by enslaving some notes to others: "He decreed that there should be 'masters' and 'servants' in every scale. Since he had decided to treat the triad as the melodic center of every given key, he called the notes that belonged to that chord 'masters' and all other notes on the scale 'servants'" (*DF* 73).

Leverkühn's semi-mocking respect for Beissel suggests an obvious correlation with Adorno's respect for Schoenberg, but Adorno consistently assimilates twelve-tone technique with idealism's drive toward absolute identity and thus with fascistic order. After reviewing how Oswald Spengler's philosophy of history presents control as the chief virtue of the bourgeois age, whether of democratic social life or musical compositions, Adorno contends that twelve-tone technique "is closer to that ideal than Spengler, or indeed Schoenberg, would have allowed himself to consider" (*P* 53). As it purifies music by imposing a rigid order that eliminates its

10. Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Vintage, 1999), p. 75. Further citations of this work will be documented parenthetically as *DF*, followed by the page number.

semblance of organic development, twelve-tone technique tends toward absolute identity, "the ideal of mastery as domination, whose boundlessness consists in the exclusion of whatever is heteronomous, of whatever is not integrated into the continuum of this technique. Boundlessness—infinity—is pure identity. . . . As a system closed in itself and at the same time self-opaque, twelve-tone rationality—in which the constellation of means is immediately hypostatized as goal and law—verges on superstition" (*P* 53). That superstitious appeal of twelve-tone composition implies both its attractiveness to irrationalist forces and the correlation between full-blown rationalism and theology that Adorno and Horkheimer explore in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where they demonstrate how enlightenment regresses into myth, which, like theology, classifies and explains phenomena so that humans can understand and control them. In *Philosophy of New Music*, Adorno clarifies how strict administration parallels absolutist theology: "Twelve-tone exactitude, which banishes all meaning as if it were an illusion claiming to exist in itself in the musical object, treats music according to the schema of fate. But the domination of nature and fate are inseparable. The concept of fate may itself be modeled on the experience of domination, arising from the superiority of nature over mankind" (*P* 54). Twelve-tone composition thus submits to nature through its very attempt to make nature adhere to rigid laws—in the terms of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, enlightenment regresses into myth. The rigid construction anticipates not a reconciled man and nature but the annihilation of human freedom, as the composer discovers himself bound by the very technique he developed to liberate himself from tradition. Nature's return to dominate humankind invokes a nearly pagan theological system in which humankind remains at the mercy of arbitrarily imposed rules that promote an order beyond human control and capable of absorbing whatever resists it.

The story about Beissel's "master" and "slave" notes is told by Wendell Kretzschmar, a fellow Pennsylvanian and yet another representative of Adorno in Mann's novel, at the end of a chapter in which Kretzschmar recites Adorno's explanation of why Beethoven did not write a third movement for his last piano sonata, Opus 111.[11] As Evelyn Cobley notes, the common ground between Wendell Kretzschmar and Hermann Kretzschmar

11. Mann appropriates these claims for Kretzschmar's lecture from Adorno's "Late Style in Beethoven," in Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2002), pp. 564–68.

(1848–1924), a composer and lecturer with a "völkisch" project to bring music to the people, seems to associate Adorno with National Socialism, since the historical Kretzschmar's project was easily adopted by the Nazis as an effort to unify musicology, education, and music practice within a single history of the *Volk* and race.[12] Kretzschmar's lecture on Beethoven's late works further links Adorno's aesthetics to Nazism by aligning late Beethoven with a subjectivist aesthetic in which the composer imposes his own designs on sound, a development in bourgeois culture that ultimately produces the avant-garde's repudiation of tradition and the imposition of subjective designs onto nature characteristic of runaway idealism. As Kretzschmar explains, "Beethoven's own artistry had outgrown itself, had left the snug regions of tradition, and, as humanity gazed on in horror, climbed to spheres of the totally personal, the exclusively personal—an ego painfully isolated in its own absoluteness" (*DF* 56–57). The "late subject" thus divorces itself from the social whole and composes music that expresses only the alienation of a subject withdrawn into absolute solipsism, the likely fulfillment of unfettered idealism. Like his model Adorno, though, Kretzschmar then maintains that the works in Beethoven's middle period were actually the most subjective, since they consisted of the manipulation of conventions to express a feigned reconciliation of the subject and object in an organic whole. The late works, by contrast, display a "quite different, much more forgiving and amenable relation to convention. Untouched, untransformed by the subjective, the conventional often emerged in the late works with a baldness—as if blown wide open, so to speak—with an ego-abandonment that, in turn, had an effect more terrifyingly majestic than any personal indiscretion" (*DF* 57).

Severing convention from the dictatorial subject suggests possibilities to liberate the composition (or notes within the composition) and the composer from a tradition that subordinates the individual. Kretzschmar, however, sets forth a fascistic model in which the combination of greatness

12. Evelyn Cobley, *Temptations of Faust: The Logic of Fascism and Postmodern Archaeologies of Modernity* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 90–91. Pamela Porter explains how Hermann Kretzschmar's "völkisch" project to bring music to the people became associated with National Socialism when Nazis claimed that their rule provided the best means to pursue his goals, and how Kretzschmar himself was associated with a pioneer in racial theory after the two of them attended the same conference on education. See Pamela Porter, *Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler's Reich* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1998), p. 50.

and death generates "a sovereign objectivity amenable to convention and leaving arrogant subjectivity behind, because in it the exclusively personal—which after all had been the surmounting of a tradition carried to its peak—once again outgrew itself by entering, grand and ghostlike, into the mythic and collective" (*DF* 57). The return to the mythic and collective implies the subject's veritable surrender of the benefits of enlightenment. In the break from tonality, Kretzschmar found not emancipation but an attempt to purge the culture of its inherited forms and impose a new structure on sound (nature) that can master it utterly, a move that collapses into a Dionysian frenzy that glorifies irrationalism. Just as the music that Beissel composed seemed totalitarian since it enslaved some notes to others and positioned the composer as a *Führer*, Beethoven's late work (in Kretzschmar's reading) seems ready for abuse by fascists intent on imposing their will on the world rather than abiding by social norms. Yet, Mann's appropriation of Adorno's ideas alters Adorno's account of late works, which address death only allegorically, since "Death is imposed only on created beings, not on works of art."[13] Adorno's attention to the relationship of the emancipated convention with myth contrasts with Mann's since Adorno does not suggest the subject's absorption by myth: "as splinters, fallen away and abandoned, [conventions] themselves finally revert to expression; no longer, at this point, an expression of the solitary I, but of the mythical nature of the created being and its fall, whose steps the late works strike symbolically as if in the momentary pauses of their descent."[14] In Adorno's reading, late works thus express a theological remembrance of human origins prior to man's alienation from nature but do not subordinate the individual when they liberate conventions from the composer's will so that they can express themselves.

Humanist Appropriations of Late Work: Totalitarianism or Reconciliation

When the Devil arrives to buy Leverkühn's soul in exchange for musical ability that will establish a new cultural epoch, Mann splits Adorno's representatives into two seemingly distinct parties. This division allegorically represents how Adorno's theory can be used or abused to represent either a messianic dream to establish a new epoch or a satanic corruption

13. Adorno, "Late Style in Beethoven," p. 566.
14. Ibid.

heralding a new epoch through a restored barbarism. After the Devil transforms into an "intellectualist, who writes of art, of music, for vulgar newspapers, a theorist and critic, who is himself a composer, in so far as thinking allows" (*DF* 253)—a figure traditionally assumed to be Adorno—he recites passages from *Philosophy of New Music* that illustrate Adorno's claims about how a serious composer must respond to the exhausted condition of traditional tonality: "What is false, what has become a vitiated cliché—the canon decides.…In every bar he dares conceive, the general technical state presents itself to him as the problem, demands of him at every moment that he do justice to it as a whole and to the single right answer it permits him at each moment. The result is that his compositions are nothing more than such answers, nothing more than the solution to technical puzzles" (*DF* 255; cf. *P* 33). Work that adheres to these technical rules necessarily proves canonical, at the cost of the creative geniuses who have formed its ranks, for the authentic composer will be subordinated by the tradition that compels his critique of it. Freedom seems impossible in such a world, where even aesthetic practice becomes mechanical production.

Equating Adorno with the Devil at this point suggests either Mann's suspicion of the critic who declares rules for artists that he cannot fulfill himself (even if Mann still appreciates the critic's work as he appropriates it within his own art) or Mann's indictment of Adornian aesthetics for abandoning art's mission to bring joy and solace to humankind. In *Philosophy of New Music*, however, Adorno is critical of the view, expressed by the Devil, that new music reflects modern society uncritically, contending that the authentic composer responds to history in ways that resist idealism (inwardness): "He loses that grand-scale freedom that idealist aesthetics habitually attributes to the artist. He is no creator. Society and the era in which he lives constrain him not externally but in the rigorous demand for correctness made on him by the composition" (*P* 33). This contention that music history constrains artistic practice is no capitulation to an administered society. Adorno identifies this capitulation with idealist aesthetics, in so far as it feigns a reconciliation between the will of the composer and the material that he masters by imposing his will on it (by adhering to historically established conventions that make his work comprehensible to an audience).

The authentic composer becomes no mere instrument of a vulgar materialist dialectic in transforming the power of expression from a romantic

model of the composer's personal experience to Adorno's materialist revision of Hegelian *Geist*. The music now exhibits the untruth of the culture that inflicted suffering on itself and nature: "The scars of this revolution in expression . . . are the disfiguring stains that have become as deeply fixed in the paintings as in the music—in opposition to the compositional will—as emissaries of the id, distressing the surface and as little to be wiped away by subsequent correction as are the traces of blood in [a] fairy tale. Real suffering has left them behind in the artwork as a sign that it no longer recognizes its autonomy" (*P* 35). An authentic composer thus becomes capable of preserving suffering that resists being subsumed by the musical whole or composer's will. His works remain fragmented rather than feign an autonomous unity, as the horrors of modern history implant themselves in the work and demand recognition. As James Schmidt points out, though, Adorno was always aware that art that lent a voice to human suffering could potentially convert that suffering into a triumphant song for those who suffered or who inflicted suffering.[15] As early as *Philosophy of New Music*, he recognized the risk of celebrating suffering, in conceding that atonal music could appeal to irrationalist philosophies.

Mann's Devil reveals the potential for the dictatorial composer to manipulate suffering within a beautiful artifact by following his explanation that suffering now demands to be heard in music with a disavowal of morality and praise of sickness: "Life is not squeamish, and cares not a fig for morality. It grasps the bold product of disease, devours, digests it, and no sooner takes it to itself than it is health" (*DF* 258). This indifference to morality and insistence that disease is a path toward genius suggests remnants of the Nietzsche novel based on the Faust myth that Mann had originally planned. The potential for Adorno's aesthetic theory, like Nietzsche's writings, to appeal to fascist agitators grows most evident when the Devil describes Leverkühn's future disciples: "You will lead, you will set the march for the future, lads will swear by your name, who thanks to your madness will no longer need to be mad. . . . It is not merely that you will break through the laming difficulties of the age—you will

15. James Schmidt, "Mephistopheles in Hollywood: Adorno, Mann, and Schoenberg," in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. Tom Huhn, (New York: Cambridge UP, 2004), p. 167. Schmidt notes that this problem remained intractable for Adorno even by his 1962 lecture "Engagement" (published as "Commitment," in *Notes to Literature*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen [New York: Columbia UP, 1991], 2:76–94).

break through the age itself, the cultural epoch, which is to say, the epoch of this culture and its cult, and dare a barbarism, a double barbarism, because it comes after humanitarianism" (*DF* 258–59). What the Devil here performs is what Adorno calls the "movement trick" in his study of Martin Luther Thomas's fascist techniques, i.e., "substituting the concept of the movement itself for the aim of the movement, an aim that is purposely left vague."[16] Thus, the Devil cites their common lament about contemporary culture without revealing any clear results (or costs) of the promised movement.

In contrast to the Devil's vague advocacy of social transcendence, Adorno remains dialectically precise in measuring both the progressive and the regressive results of new music throughout his examinations of it. Although the call to surpass humanitarianism suggests a correlation with Adorno's project, the image of lads swearing by his name and embracing barbarism violates Adorno's agenda to salvage enlightenment from its tendencies to relapse into myth. The Devil thus shows how Adorno's response to modernity might speak to the very right-wing ideologues whom Adorno had fled, for such zealots might find in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* not a program to salvage enlightenment but a totalitarian embrace of the nature that spawned humankind's merciless domination of it and ourselves. Leverkühn's followers in the Kridwiss Circle instantiate this fascist philosophy of beauty in brutality. At the end of the novel, Daniel Zur Höhe pronounces Leverkühn's speech about a pact with the Devil beautiful, thereby converting religion (or negated religion) into an aesthetic device and aestheticizing evil, just as Beissel incorporates domination into beautiful music (*DF* 522). For these individuals, "freedom was a self-contradictory notion," since its formulation required restraints on the freedom of its opponents, and after the French Revolution, "an age had dawned that . . . was moving toward despotic tyranny over atomized, disconnected masses leveled to a common denominator and as powerless as the individual" (*DF* 385). The circle's assessment of history's decline into barbarism implies obvious parallels with Horkheimer and Adorno's history of human development that renders Enlightenment reason consistent with a social Darwinian survival of the fittest, which one could celebrate as a primal truth about human existence rather than lament for the brutality it engenders.

16. Adorno, *The Psychological Technique*, p. 31.

Adorno's draft for Mann of Leverkühn's final work, *The Lamentation of Doctor Faustus*, imagines it as a late work by a gifted thinker degenerating into madness, akin to Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*.[17] This work, a symphonic cantata designed to "take back" Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, is a fully achieved work composed in the "strict style" with twelve syllables declared in its theme: "For I die as both a wicked and good Christian" (*DF* 511). Variations of this lamentation expand ever outward in a work that remains static precisely because it consists only of variations for its negation of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy"; such a strictly administered work seems to reject art's potential for worldly consolation. As Zeitblom explains, this work appears to express God's lament, "the Creator's sorrowful 'I did not will this.'…the uttermost accents of sorrow are achieved,…final despair is given expression, and—but I shall not say it, for it would mean a violation of the work's refusal to make any concessions, of its pain, which is beyond all remedy" (*DF* 515). On this point, Mann adheres to the plan that Adorno provided for him, but as James McFarland points out, Mann also revises Adorno's plan.[18] In place of Adorno's recommendation that the lament expand outward in rings throughout the composition, with only Faust as a solo voice, Mann eliminates the solo entirely and hears an echo that establishes a link between man and nature: "The echo, the sound of the human voice returned as a sound of nature, revealed as a sound of nature, is in essence a lament, nature's melancholy" (*DF* 510). What Zeitblom hears is thus nature's reply to the human lament, nature mimicking and thus reclaiming humankind, which he then converts into an affirmative theology to express hope for a reconciled world: "A work dealing with the Tempter, with apostasy, with damnation—how can it be anything but a religious work!" (*DF* 514). Although this Faust rejects "the idea of salvation as itself a temptation" in a world that clearly is not governed by a loving god (*DF* 514), Zeitblom closes by claiming that hope can develop in the face of the "irredeemable despair" of such a world: "This would be hope beyond hopelessness, the transcendence of despair—not its betrayal, but the miracle that goes beyond faith" (*DF* 515). In contrast to Adornian aesthetics's disallowance of all affirmation, Zeitblom appropriates the

17. Theodor W. Adorno, "Adorno's Sketch for Adrian Leverkühn's Cantata 'Doktor Fausti Weheklag'," in Adorno and Mann, *Correspondence*, p. 124.

18. James McFarland, "Der Fall *Faustus*: Continuity and Displacement in Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno and Thomas Mann's Californian Exile," *New German Critique* 100 (Winter 2007): 136.

work in an affirmative theology even as he concedes that it was not to allow any consolation or reconciliation.[19]

In *Philosophy of New Music*, Adorno argues that new music converges with knowledge by negating closed, traditional forms as it laments the antagonism between subject and object (humankind and nature). New music manifests its knowledge by exceeding its own borders rather than reinforcing the bourgeois illusion of social unity and stasis that closed artworks maintained by positing a spurious identity of subject and object: "The closed artwork was not an act of knowledge; rather, it made knowledge disappear into itself. It made itself an object of direct 'intuition' and enshrouded every fissure through which thinking could escape the immediate givenness of the aesthetic object" (*P* 96). Open and fragmentary artworks protest such dissimulation and thereby assault meaning: "music itself proves to be the opponent of the language of words in that it is able to speak meaninglessly, whereas all closed musical artworks stand together under the sign of pseudomorphosis, as the language of words. . . . The emancipation of music today is synonymous with its emancipation from the language of words, and this is the lightning that flashes up in the destruction of 'meaning,'" of the work severing its bond to the symbolic (*P* 98–99). An audience might interpret that renunciation of the symbolic as a celebration of irrationalism and regard new music's presentation of suffering as an affirmation of it, but the music that performs such a renunciation could also instantiate its opposite, a mode of cognition implicated by the suffering that enables it but which it is thereby committed to ending: "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. The sentimentality of inferior music caricatures what superior music is truly capable of shaping at the boundary of frenzy: reconciliation" (*P* 99). Adorno's attention to the human face, the most expressive part of the human form, emphasizes that such reconciliation is an embodied lament caused by the alienation between the subject and object. Such a lament enables the subject's return to that world, as "the earth reclaims Eurydice" (*P* 99). For the earth to reclaim Eurydice is for

19. Zeitblom's previous contention, during Leverkühn's studies of theology in Halle, that theological pursuits are inconsistent with humanism undermine Zeitblom's authority at this point in the novel and demonstrate that Zeitblom is hardly Mann's spokesman (*DF* 96).

Orpheus, the father of human music, to lose the battle against nature, to learn that humans are part of the natural world, not opposed to it.

While Adorno's description of the tears that new music brings forth was particularly influential on Horkheimer, the latter suspected that Adorno's attempt to overcome psychologism in art by delivering knowledge entirely to the object neglected how knowledge is mediated by the subject who encounters it. According to Horkheimer, that neglect of mediation leads Adorno to attribute a virtually theological value to the object and consequently lapse into the very philosophy of identity that they were trying to overcome.[20] Admittedly, Adorno concludes that art embodies an explicitly theological response to the meaninglessness of the modern world: "It has taken all the darkness and guilt of the world on itself. All its happiness is in the knowledge of unhappiness; all its beauty is in denial of the semblance of the beautiful. No one, neither individuals nor groups, wants to have anything to do with it. It dies away unheard, without an echo" (*P* 102). In music's sacrificial response to modern meaninglessness, Adorno is not insinuating a Christian resolution of suffering, for he never promises that faith in music will deliver salvation nor does he consider audience response. Although an audience that derives sadistic pleasure from presentations of suffering might enjoy such compositions, Adorno always makes clear his suspicion of such instrumental regard for art, for instance, as commodity fetishism in *Aesthetic Theory*.[21]

In the 1949 introduction to *Philosophy of New Music*, Adorno substitutes mimetic experience for this appropriative view of art. Instead of treating the individual artwork as an example of the theory, Adorno's dialectical method deals with it immanently by interrogating the adequacy of social categories for the art object: "it is necessary to transform the strength of the universal concept into the self-unfolding of the concrete object and to resolve the social puzzle of its image by the powers of its own individuation. In this, the aim is to provide not social justification but a theory of society by virtue of the explication of what is aesthetically right and wrong at the heart of the objects. The concept must immerse itself in the monad to the point that the social essence emerges of its own dynamic, not classify it as a special case of the macrocosm" (*P* 23). Even as this process

20. Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance*, trans. Michael Robertson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), pp. 308–9.

21. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 13.

for evaluating art aspires toward a social theory, it remains committed to judging the particular artwork as an autonomous work regulated by its own rules, which compel the critic to determine what they reveal about the society that produced the often antagonistic artwork. For the concept to enter the monad and achieve an understanding of its own social essence is for the concept to turn back upon itself and examine its own non-identity with the object. This inverts the traditional dialectic by placing the concept in the service of the object rather than subsuming the object within one's own conceptual repertoire. The experience of testing the adequacy of one's concepts, rather than subordinating the artwork under those concepts, instantiates a mimetic form of reason that had been eclipsed by the instrumental form that Adorno and Horkheimer rebuke for relapsing into myth. Adorno's attempt to mediate the concept through its recognition of its own social essence and its non-identity with the object suggests that his aesthetics might preserve the role for mediation that Horkheimer did not detect in the Schoenberg essay. The human subject's mimetic experiences with modernist artworks allow the artwork to articulate itself through the subject without enslaving that subject to the artwork; artwork's expression remains dependent on the audience's concepts even as those concepts prove non-identical with the artwork. Witnessing how the concepts refract off the particular reveals how concepts can be employed in a reflective rather than an idealist fashion and mobilizes conceptual understanding so that it will not ossify into a static form reflective of the administered society that Adorno feared.

No such revelation about a form of subjectivity that respects its non-identity with the object appears at the conclusion of *Doctor Faustus*, as the protagonist collapses into a decade of insanity before dying. Whether Zeitblom's narration succeeds in containing Leverkühn's story in a humanist worldview is arguable. But Mann illustrates how Adorno's theories about modern art can be instrumentalized to pursue totalitarian goals when those ideas are contextualized in an oeuvre other than Adorno's own. Adorno's call for a mimetic form of cognition instantiated by aesthetic experience seems undermined by a novel in which his own ideas have been revised and deployed to reflect the development of fascism in Germany, yet the distance between Adorno's ambitions for new music and Mann's appropriation of those ideas is surprisingly neglected in the two writers' recorded memoirs of their collaboration for the novel. In *The Story of the Novel*, Mann explains that Adorno's objections to the possibilities for redemption

that he had included were more influential on that chapter than any specific musical advice from Adorno, who "had no objections to make on musical matters, but took issue with the end, the last forty lines, in which, after all the darkness, a ray of hope, the possibility of grace, appears. Those lines did not then stand as they stand now; they had gone wrong. I had been too optimistic, too kindly, too pat, had kindled too much light, had been too lavish with the consolation. I had to grant that Adorno's criticisms were justified."[22] Adorno's account seems to correspond to Mann's, though Adorno voices some regret: "I found the heavily laden pages too positive, too unbrokenly theological in relation to the structure not only of the *Lamentation of Dr. Faustus* but of the novel as a whole. They seemed to lack what the crucial passage required, the power of determinate negation as the only permissible figure of the Other. Mann was not upset, but he was somewhat saddened, and I was remorseful."[23] Whether Mann accepted Adorno's advice or only pretended to do so while smuggling in his own allowance for grace has produced endless debate among Mann scholars, but such debates miss a key point that Adorno makes in his portrait of Mann: "I believe that the substance of a work of art begins precisely where the author's intention stops; the intention is extinguished in the substance."[24]

The "substance" of *Doctor Faustus*, according to Adorno's dialectical method, would concern neither Mann's nor Adorno's intentions but what the novel reveals about the conventions available for aesthetic expression and the adequacy of the audience's concepts for the novel. Mann's novel explores the fates of fascist politics, humanism, and Adorno's aesthetic theory, yet the novel's verdict on these ideas depends not on identifying a victor between the humanist Zeitblom and the avant-garde composer Leverkühn, but on reflecting upon the potential abuse of their philosophies by fascists, who often shared Adorno's anxieties about the world but sought to resolve those anxieties through the barbaric practices that drove Adorno and Mann into exile. By illustrating how avant-garde art and Adornian theory can be appropriated for ideologies that Adorno opposed, *Doctor Faustus* challenges Adorno's ambitions for art. Although the novel hardly seems to have promoted appropriations of art by fascists or the

22. Mann, *The Story of a Novel*, pp. 222–23.
23. Adorno, "Toward a Portrait of Thomas Mann," pp. 17–18.
24. Ibid., p. 13.

culture industry, it has consistently reinforced the very idealist practices that Adorno interrogated, as readers appropriate the novel as a hermeneutic object for their own subjective purposes. The voluminous criticism it has generated about whether it advocates or criticizes humanism and Adornian aesthetics has perpetuated Zeitblom's own appropriation of Leverkühn's work, yet the novel has hardly promoted fascist politics in the ways that Mann implies art that satisfies Adorno's criteria for modern art would. Critical appropriations of the novel as evidence for arguments may not often (or ever) instantiate the aesthetic experience that Adorno found when he listened to radical music, but by promoting a radical, historical-dialectical engagement with the text and its subject matter, they enact a measure of the Adornian project.

No Man's Lands: Refuse and Refuge in Adorno's American Experience

Matt Waggoner

In "Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America," Adorno likens his early trips from New York City to a previously abandoned New Jersey brewery, the site of the Princeton Radio Research Project, to Kafka's story about the "Great Natural Theater of Oklahama [*sic*]" at the end of the novel *Amerika* (German title: *Der Verschollene*). It is easy enough to account for this association. The natural theater story tells of Karl Rossmann's hire and transportation by train to a kind of circus in the American dustbowl. Rossmann is a European immigrant in search of refuge. It is, however, a highly ambiguous refuge. Readers are sometimes struck by parallels between Karl's deportation to a remote and uncertain place and the forced migrations of Jews by railway to the camps, or, for others, such as Adorno, exilic journeys to England and the United States.

I want to argue that Adorno's allusions to Karl Rossmann's journey contribute not only to our picture of Adorno's American experience (as one of the ways he narrated it) but also to a broader theme in Adorno's writing having to do with home, homelessness, and the problem of dwelling. A full examination of Adorno's critique of dwelling would at least encompass a comparison with Heidegger, an analysis of the figures of home and homelessness in his writings, a study of Adorno's treatments of architecture, cities, design and furnishings, and the concept of the interior. However, this project exceeds the scope of what can be accomplished here. I limit myself instead to some preliminary thinking about the fundamental framework of a problem of dwelling that is implicit throughout Adorno's work, but made explicit in places like the "reflections from damaged life" in *Minima Moralia*. Adorno posed the question of the fates of philosophy

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and experience after the chance to save it was missed. His fascination with the final scene of Kafka's novel stems, I think, from the way he viewed it as an allegory of the complexities and contradictions inherent in the question of living in damaged life. If the chance at salvation was missed and we now inhabit something like hell, what does it mean to live in hell? What is the status of redemption in a living hell? The intimacy in his writing between images of pessimism and those of the hope of deliverance (happiness, redemption, reconciliation, the state of freedom, etc.) constitutes the contested terrain of Adorno's thought, giving rise to discrepant interpretations. For some (e.g., Habermas and Wellmer) he was overcome with melancholia, resigning redemption to an otherworldly sphere. For others he was pessimistic, to be sure, but also a utopian, vigilant for glimpses of reconciled experience couched in the crevices of wrong life.

Adorno's reading of the natural theater fragment dramatizes the tension between these two readings, inscribing the utopian imagination within the limits of a barren landscape, where redemption and refuge are barely distinguishable, if at all, from death and desolation. I will not shy from recognizing a strain of anticipated salvation in Adorno, but I argue that he located, and limited, glimpses of salvation to the surfaces of what he described at times as no man's lands—e.g., abandoned breweries, the spot at the bottom of the stairs, or Oklahoma. The choice between a hopeful and a pessimistic Adorno has failed to capture as adequately as it should the promiscuity that characterized the relationship between those two attitudes in his thinking. By tracing the contours of the relationship between hell and hope, and between refuse and refuge, in Adorno's reading of the natural theater fragment, I want to show that the conundrum of dwelling in America figured in Adorno's memory as a paradigm for the conundrum of dwelling in damaged life, which, for him, was the only kind of dwelling with which relevant and responsible thought would concern itself.

I.

The predicament of modern dwelling, as Adorno understood it, could be summarized as horrifying. It is a zombie-like condition: the self has decayed into a half-dead, half-living thing, suffering the miserable fate of existing in a middle space where felt contact with things is no longer possible. The paradox of this condition for Adorno was that it gives rise to both misery and hope. To know that this is a living hell is to be appropriately pessimistic about the extent of the damage, but it is also to see things from an

imagined standpoint. There is irony in the effect that arises from naming these conditions "hell," as it already posits, implicitly, a less hellish point of reference. The only thing worse and more cynical than the claim that "this is hell" would be the claim that this place is just fine, that what we have is natural and without any alternative. If that were true, the redemptive ideal would be lost. This insight lies at the heart of Adorno's negative utopianism, and it is the key component of the relationship between *refuse* (*Abfall*, but Adorno also uses the terms *Abhub* and *Bodensatz*) and *refuge* or *shelter* (Adorno uses terms such as *Zuflucht*, *Asyl*, *Schutz*, and *Unterschlupf*). Simply put, what we encounter in Adorno is a kind of thought that combines a grim diagnosis of the preponderance of rationalization with a desire—for him it was philosophy's desire—to experience the nonidentical. While social structures prohibit the full experience of the object, Adorno occasionally and with hesitation acknowledged scenarios in which those encounters became possible, not immediately but as something like near misses. Following Kafka, Adorno attributed those instances to the spaces and occasions that comprise the dead forms of both society and subjective reason.

This is the kind of conjoined pessimism and desire that Adorno attached to his memories of living in America. In the foreword to the English translation of *Prisms*, Adorno wrote that he could "wish for nothing better than that the English version of *Prisms* might express something of the gratitude that he cherishes for England and for the United States—the countries that enabled him to survive the era of persecution and to which he has ever since felt himself deeply bound."[1] And yet on other occasions he reacted as European intellectuals often do upon arriving in America. He found it to be dizzying; he was turned off by Americans' disdain of finer things and by what was already at that time becoming the centrality of mass media to the American cultural experience. He argued that under the guise of pure enjoyment Americans willingly embraced the stock scenes and story lines of mass media in ways that unconsciously mimicked the function of media as propaganda in fascist Europe. He described the development of cities and travel routes as harsh and thoughtlessly imposed, in contrast to Europe's less conspicuous and more timeworn environments, which had developed over many centuries, retaining traces of the past and (he seems to say) a handcrafted quality:

1. Theodor W. Adorno, "Foreword to the English Edition," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967), p. 8.

> What is missing in the American landscape is not so much the absence of historical memories, as the romantic illusion has it, as the fact that no hand has left a trace in it. This relates not merely to the absence of farm-fields, the stubbly and often tiny scrub-like forests, but above all the streets. These are always immediately blasted out of the landscape, and the more successful their smoothness and breadth, the more relationless and violent their shimmering path stands in contrast to its all too wild, overgrown environs. They bear no imprint. . . . It is as if no-one had combed the landscape's hair.[2]

America's tract developments and broad highways lacked the imprint of subjectivity, giving the impression of a thoroughly planned and objectively determined society. While this may have been less true of *some* parts of the country (New England, for example), it does adequately portray 1940s and 1950s Los Angeles, where Adorno spent part of his time in America and where rapid settlement and urbanization of what is otherwise an immense desert, now a manufactured oasis, would have conjured such a reaction from visitors. This criticism of a lack of subjectivity proved to be a primary source of Adorno's critique of the empirically dominated intellectual climate in America as well.

Adorno's maintenance of complicated and contradictory feelings for America is more than autobiography. It exemplifies an aspect of his critique of modernism that, like Kafka's stories, sought salvation in the auto graveyards. Adorno celebrated Kafka's work as exemplary of his own negative utopianism. If Kafka's art devoted itself to the dregs of the world and constructed art "out of nothing but the refuse of reality,"[3] Adorno did not see this as what Benjamin called "left-wing melancholia"[4] because it contained a sideways glance at a better world: "[Kafka] does not directly outline the image of a society to come—for in his as in all great art, asceticism towards the future prevails—but rather depicts it as a montage of waste-products which the new order, in the process of forming itself, extracts from the perishing present."[5] In part, Adorno's affinities for Kafka can be accounted for in terms of his identification with the theme

2. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (New York: Verso, 1974), pp. 48–49.

3. Theodor W. Adorno, "Notes on Kafka," in *Prisms*, p. 251.

4. Walter Benjamin, "Left-Wing Melancholia," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. Michael Jennings et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005), 2:423–27.

5. Adorno, "Notes on Kafka," pp. 251–52.

of the *impossibility* of refuge. Kafka's stories narrate the eradication of the individual by the very processes that brought it into being, depicting the demise of a traditional criterion of individual experience.

Kafka's depiction of the destruction of interiority contrasts sharply with the role of interiority in someone like Kierkegaard. In his first book, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* (1933), Adorno argues that for Kierkegaard the interior was a place of respite from an overwhelming and intrusive outside world.[6] Like Benjamin, Adorno regarded Kierkegaardian interiority as a reflection of nineteenth-century bourgeois existence; nineteenth-century apartments were allegories of the kind of cloistered burrowing and internalized dream-life that befitted the class that sought to secure itself from outside realities and escape through speculation and fantasy.[7] Adorno's critique of interiority took aim at Kierkegaard and sided instead with Kafka. Kafka's mutilated subjects made a spectacle of failed conditions for the possibility of the individual. The individual became a falsified relic of bourgeois society that its own development demolished, and inwardness was rejected as a viable point of resistance to the intrusions of an outside world. Autonomy became impossible, and the individual was relegated to a perpetually catastrophic state.

It is worth noting that in shifting from Kierkegaard to Kafka, Adorno tended to externalize his metaphors from interiors to landscapes, as if to say that Kierkegaard theorized an inward refuge that was not possible after all, while Kafka theorized the subject's propulsion into the desolate exteriors and surfaces (no man's lands) of the landscape. On this view, Karl Rossmann's redemption in Oklahoma will turn out to have been allegorical of the kind of dwelling that does not take hold within the burrowed interiors of the bourgeois apartment, but rather within the fissures of the rugged landscape. There are other examples of Adorno's employment of the language of exteriority and mutilated landscapes precisely in those moments when he is evoking the other side of Kafka's pessimism toward refuge, i.e., that part of Kafka that occasionally granted the possibility of refuge, but only amidst the refuse. The language of mutilated surfaces so prevalent in the Kafka essay, for example, appeared elsewhere in the final aphorism of *Minima Moralia*, which combined images of exteriority

6. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1989).

7. See especially Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999), pp. 218–27.

("standpoints removed" and "perspectives from afar") with images of a distorted landscape that Adorno identified as the unlikely location for redemption.[8] Adorno also commented in "Notes on Kafka" that what for Kierkegaard was a moment of salvation was for Kafka a moment of failure: "history becomes Hell in Kafka because the chance which might have saved was missed."[9] This topos of missed salvation, along with the burden to focus on the predicament brought on by that failure, was revisited several years later in the famous opening lines of *Negative Dialectics*: "Philosophy, which once seemed outmoded, remains alive because the moment of its realization was missed."[10] In retrospect, Kafka's imprint upon Adorno's thinking took the form of an orientation *away* from an altogether otherworldly messianism and toward the distinctively this-worldly problem of a living hell, of living *in* hell, dwelling in the predicament, confronting and somehow salvaging a little dignity and goodness from the mess the world has made of us. Kafka was important in this respect, because he troubled himself to put flesh and bones on the underlying, unseen, disavowed hell of the present, giving it form and content.

In addition to "Scientific Experiences," Adorno refers to the Natural Theater fragment from Kafka's *Amerika* in *Minima Moralia* and twice in "Notes on Kafka."[11] In each case, these references highlight his willingness to follow Kafka beyond the dismal fate of interiority and damaged life (refuse) to an anticipated experience of redemption (refuge). The unlikely backdrop for this dialogue between Adorno and Kafka was the American West, but more specifically the no-place of a complex intercultural exchange: Adorno in America reading Kafka in Europe, who is writing about an America that he never visited. While it is easy to characterize Kafka's America as wishful thinking, what is more intriguing is the extent to which Adorno's America was no less mythic. This is not to say that Adorno was wrong about America (though at times he was) or that while in America he misperceived it. Nor is it to say that his America was

8. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 352.

9. Adorno, "Notes on Kafka," p. 259.

10. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1983), p. 3.

11. In his monograph on Gustav Mahler, in a different context that cannot be treated here, Adorno also refers to the natural theater of Oklahoma. Adorno writes about the composer: "His Utopia is worn out like the nature theater of Oklahoma" (Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, trans. Edmund Jephcott [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press], p. 150).

second-hand or superficial because he looked back to Europe, to Kafka, for metaphors to capture the kind of theatricality that he too associated with America. The point is rather that both Adorno and Kafka viewed America as a stage for congested and contrasting allegories of loss and hope, despair and redemption.

In the novel, the staging of such contrasts occurs with an almost happy ending for Karl Rossmann. Karl has stumbled upon an employment advertisement for the Great Natural Theater of Oklahama (*sic*) and has been lured by its announcement "All Welcome!"[12] Interviews take place at a horse-racing track that is already marked by the mystical and the theatrical. With actors dressed as angels and devils, set against a backdrop of musicians and empty stages, it is a haunting, carnivalesque atmosphere. After anxiously navigating his way around the obstacles presented by his ambiguous immigrant status, Karl is hired as a "technical worker" to his own astonishment and delight (having harbored dreams of becoming an engineer). In *Amerika*'s closing paragraphs, Karl and the other new hires (which include unemployed families with children and other immigrants) are hurried onto the train destined for Oklahoma. As a child's stroller is negotiated onto the train by a father and the transport leader, Karl wonders to himself, "What suspicious, unpropertied people had been assembled here, and had been so well received and looked after."[13] An entire car has been dedicated to the theater, and as people board, Karl overhears the hiring personnel say to the conductor, "They all belong to the Theater of Oklahama (*sic*)."[14] Belonging, sociability, and protection emerge in the most unlikely place; the nature theater not only stages obsolescence but houses and provides for those deemed useless, unwanted, and unincorporable, i.e., those who have already undergone a kind of social death. The theater is, in other words, emblematic of the kind of resurrection in the auto graveyards that Adorno detected elsewhere in Kafka's writings. Here, the graveyard is Oklahoma's dusty, desolate expanses, where the tension between proximity and distance that Adorno once described as insoluble moments of the "reconciled condition" is materialized: "The reconciled condition would not be the philosophical imperialism of annexing the alien. Instead, its happiness would lie in the fact that the alien, in the proximity

12. Franz Kafka, *Amerika: The Man Who Disappeared*, trans. Michael Hofmann (New York: New Directions, 2004), p. 202.

13. Ibid., p. 217.

14. Ibid.

it is granted, remains what is distant and different, beyond the heterogeneous and beyond that which is one's own."[15] In the natural theater, Kafka intimated an unordinary form of reconciliation, one that housed the alien and the discarded in a way that did not require any sort of liquidation of alterity, and within a setting that negotiated the imagery of expansiveness and distance with the proximities of warmth and solidarity.

From the standpoint of Kafka's oeuvre, this story is a little peculiar, since it is unlike him to conclude a work in such sentimental tones: "When the train began to move they put their hands out of the window to wave, at which the youths opposite dug each other in the ribs and found it stupid."[16] While many of Kafka's stories narrate the confrontation of an individual with anonymously oppressive and overwhelming mechanisms, this fragment revels in a different scenery and story line. The final passages of the novel have Karl and his companions traveling for two days by train across a landscape that impresses upon him the "size of America."[17] They observe mountains, valleys, and streams that, as they open the windows to put their heads out, were "so close that the chill breath of them made their faces shudder."[18] In these instances, Kafka comes close to fetishizing the grandeur and promise of the American West (in sharp spatial contrast with the settings of so many other stories he wrote, and with the cloistered nineteenth-century interiors described by Benjamin and Adorno), and his story's innocent subject, Karl, appears in the end to experience that landscape as strangely welcoming and redeeming.

One wonders to what extent Adorno's nostalgia for train travel served as a source of affection for this story. In *Minima Moralia* he recalled the "miracle" of "the express train that in three nights and two days hurtles across the continent," and remembered what made up the "voluptuousness" of that kind of travel: "the goodbye-waving through the open window, the solicitude of amiable accepters of tips, the constant feeling of receiving favors that take nothing from anyone else."[19] While this sort of conviviality of the experience of travel was passing due to its rapid industrialization and incorporation into the model of a service industry, as well as to "rampant technology" ("That the steps of railway carriages have to

15. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 191.
16. Kafka, *Amerika*, p. 217.
17. Ibid., p. 218.
18. Ibid.
19. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 119.

be retracted intimates to the passenger of even the most expensive express that he must obey the company's terse regulations like a prisoner"), one senses that Kafka's story of down-and-outs warmly received and tenderly cared for by the train's staff struck chords of a vanishing form of geniality. As if to rescue that lost form of experience, Kafka's "blue-black stone masses . . . summits, dark narrow valleys" contributed fitting imagery to the ending of a story about an unlikely sort of salvation encountered amidst the strange and shadowy world of the Natural Theater somewhere in the expanses of an otherwise bleak and barren Oklahoma. Kafka's *Amerika* documents a mythic and distorted geography, both natural and social, and then confounds every familiar reader's expectation by finding redemption on the distorted surfaces of a mutilated landscape.

Looking more closely at Adorno's references to this story, one could argue for the presence of two seemingly distinct claims. In *Minima Moralia* (the first reference), Adorno writes:

> If one wakes up in the middle of a dream, even the most troubling, one is disappointed and feels as if one had been cheated of what is best. Yet there are as few happy, fulfilled dreams as, in Schubert's words, happy music. Even the most beautiful ones retain the blemish of their difference from reality, the consciousness of the mere appearance [*Schein*] of what they grant. That is why even the most beautiful dreams are somehow damaged. This experience is unsurpassable in the description of the nature theater of Oklahoma in Kafka's America.[20]

Here, Adorno's reading of the Natural Theater fragment emphasizes the element of melancholia attached to the wish, one whose source is the discrepancy, never quite vanquished, between the dream's bliss and the reality that contrasts with it. The mistake, I think, would be to reduce this reading to the commonplace critique of wishful thinking as illusory, since fantasy is not merely ideological. Rather (as Marcuse also argued[21]), fantasy's function is critical when it is permitted to cast an incriminating light on reality, to reveal the deficiency in existence; from the place of its lack, reality gives rise to fantasy. To say "even the most beautiful dreams are somehow damaged" is not to say that dreams fail to satisfy because their status as dreams contains the mark of their unreality. It is instead to

20. Ibid., p. 111.

21. See Herbert Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), pp. 154–55.

say that the dream's empowerment, its redemptive quality, depends on the degree to which it is able to retain within it the trace of a loss. A dream is useless when it pretends to replace bad reality; when it preserves the consciousness of its distance from reality, it assumes the role of criticism. Distance is its critical leverage. In the same way, Kafka's unanticipated dreamscape in the conclusion of *Amerika* works only as long as it retains consciousness of a certain distance and shadowiness, the blue-black of the summits, the dark narrow valleys, the barren but mythically endowed vistas of Oklahoma, the cohabitation of angels and devils.

The context of Adorno's references to the Natural Theater in "Notes on Kafka" is his study of the "unsuccessful death" ubiquitous in Kafka's stories, i.e., that unique form of misery that is far worse than death insofar as one is all but dead but cannot die, like a living skeleton, like the "Muselmann" in the Nazi death camps. This, as well as Kafka's tendency to "reify the subject" by making persons into animals or pawns of an ominous mechanism, is "the other side of Kafka's story of the unsuccessful death," which Adorno described as a way of beating the world at its own game.[22] Kafka capitalized on an unintended and surreptitious consequence of the reifying effects of modernity. For Adorno, the "other side" of the image of the unsuccessful death consists in this: "the fact that mutilated creation cannot die any more is the sole promise of immortality."[23] The implication is that in the realm of the derelict there is something akin to partial disengagement from the instrumentalism that governs social being:

> It [the other side of the unsuccessful death] is tied to the salvation of things, of those that are no longer enmeshed in the network of guilt, those that are non-exchangeable, useless. This is what is meant in [Kafka's] work by the phenomenon of obsolescence, in its innermost layer of meaning. His world of ideas—as in the "Natural Theater of Oklahoma" [Adorno corrects Kafka's misspelling here]—resembles a world of stale goods [*Ladenhüter*]; no theologoumenon could describe it more accurately than the title of an American film comedy, *Shopworn Angel*. Whereas the interiors, where men live, are the homes of the catastrophe, the hideouts of childhood, forsaken spots like the bottom of the stairs, are places of hope. The resurrection of the dead would have to take place in the auto graveyards.[24]

22. Adorno, "Notes on Kafka," p. 238.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid. (translation modified).

Here, Adorno's reading of the Natural Theater is more explicitly linked to salvation-on-the-sly than it is in *Minima Moralia* (where it is possible, if ill-advised, to read his comments along the lines of the usual critique of ideology, i.e., a bad illusion). Oklahoma has now become a locale of despair and disrepair where the melancholia of uselessness, itself a form of unsuccessful death, gives way to its "other side," i.e., irrelevance to networks of productivity and instrumentality. There is immortality in this kind of death.

A number of transitions have occurred in the space between these two Natural Theater references: from an interpretation of the Natural Theater that results in a critique of fantasy (that is one way to read it) to an interpretation that points toward Benjaminian redemptive criticism; from the unsuccessful death that overwhelms and oppresses the individual to the unsuccessful death with a utopian loophole. There is also the transition from Adorno's study of Kafka's "other side" of unsuccessful death to his specification of the way that Kafka's mode of redemption tends to settle upon metaphors for the spaces and places in which we dwell, improbable "places of hope" like America, Oklahoma, the spot at the bottom of the stairs, the auto graveyards, spaces that emerge from within the destruction of subjectivity and offer curious forms of refuge. Kafka's metaphors designate something like obsolescence within the human geography of the modern. With Kafka, Adorno approaches these spaces as shadowy, near-mystical presentiments of redemption amidst refuse. Adorno's enthrallment with Kafka's America, saturated with the sorts of encounters between melancholia and redemption that can be found in the gothic South of a Flannery O'Connor, is a source of his philosophy of dwelling. In what follows I examine elements from *Negative Dialectics* that point toward the construction of such a philosophy.

II.

The Natural Theater fragment functions for Adorno as a compact allegory of the major themes of *Negative Dialectics*, and we can better understand Adorno's references to Kafka's story by reading them through the attempt to salvage experience, i.e., to recover that form of experience that contravenes the tendencies of reified social life by inclining toward the object. Consistent with the images of bleak expanses that link Adorno's and Kafka's depictions of refuge amidst refuse, *Negative Dialectics* names the location for the recovery of experience a "no-man's land."

In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno's critique of the philosophical tradition—primarily Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger—sets the recognition of this no man's land as the condition of an adequate subject-object dialectics. Adorno sees in Hegel an attempt to constitute the subject by way of objectivity, and thus to emphasize the constitutive role of the object in the subject's formation. However, Adorno criticizes the Hegelian primacy of the subject, because the result of Hegel's dialectic is that the object is shown to be subject, i.e., it is idealistically incorporated into the subject by way of the concept of Absolute Spirit.[25] In Heidegger, Adorno recognizes the semblance of his own critique of subjectivism (i.e., the philosophical "turn towards the object" occurs in Heidegger as well), as well as a desire to rescue concrete experience. Yet in a manner that remains controversial, Adorno detects in Heideggerian Being a return to pure origins and another kind of hypostatization of the subject. On the side of the object, Adorno criticizes positivism for its presumption of immediate access to things and its unwitting participation in the processes of reification through which rational thought subsumed objects in administered society.

Adorno's readings of the tradition dialectically seek out their inner contradictions and unintended truths. A common refrain is that while an author aims to demonstrate or prove one thing, against that author's own intentions an opposite truth emerges immanently within the argument. In each case, Adorno identifies a common pattern, which he accounts for historically: the primacy in modern philosophy and modern experience of a subjectivism that permits the subject neither to be itself nor to encounter the object.[26] The subject's repression of its dependence on the object inhibits an experience of itself as co-constituted in relation to things, propping up a falsely abstract and atomistic picture of self-existence. This false individualism inhibits the subject's capacity to experience the object except as a reflection of itself. The correction advocated by *Negative Dialectics* is the divestment of philosophy from subjectivism and, in its place, an axial turn toward the object.[27] It is an effort at re-describing mediation to mean that subject and object are neither separate nodes in a radical dyad nor single moments of a whole; they are instead subject to an ongoing dialectic, perpetually interdependent, except that the subject is more dependent

25. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 174–75; see p. 38.
26. Ibid., p. 171.
27. Ibid., p. xx.

on the object than the object is on the subject, since there can be an object without a subject, but every subject is also an object.[28]

Adorno describes the subject's uneven dependence upon the object as the "preponderance of the object." The preponderance or primacy of the object means two things in *Negative Dialectics*: the subject is more object than subject; and the subject by way of concepts cannot completely cover the object, i.e., there is a remainder. The subject's objectivity derives from consciousness's material grounding in its social formation. Adorno regards this view as implicit in Kant's philosophy and transcendental subjectivity. However, the objective constitution of the Kantian subject is a priori, whereas for Adorno it is historical. Yet, while Adorno advocates concentration on that which in the object exceeds the concept, the twist in his approach is his insistence that there is no path to the object except by way of the concept. The object still cannot be known immediately apart from concepts; what is required is what he calls a "self-critical turn" of the concept.[29] In place of irrationalism or positivism, on the one hand, and rationalism or idealism (that is, in place of full-blown immediacy or elimination of the object), on the other, negative dialectics aims to heighten that moment within the concept that exceeds the concept. Adorno calls this self-critical moment within the concept—an element immanent to the concept but also surpassing it as its addendum—a "no-man's land." It is the moment of the concept's material remainder; neither the object in itself nor merely the subject's own reflection, but the middle ground or split in which the concept's own immanent logic gives way to its undoing, to its other.[30]

Adorno does not suggest that the material remainder composing this no man's land could be accessed positively, but he offers two ways of approaching it. In the first place, Adorno borrows Benjamin's metaphor of constellations to describe how layers of concepts can congeal around a thing in order to illuminate it.[31] In the second place, and for my purposes

28. Ibid., see pp. 183–86. See also "On Subject and Object" in Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models*, trans. Henry Pickford (New York: Columbia UP, 1998), pp. 245–58.

29. "The self-critical turn of unitarian thinking depends on concepts" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 158).

30. Ibid., p. 228. Adorno describes it as "a flash of light between the poles of something long past, something grown all but unrecognizable, and that which some day might come to be" (ibid., p. 229).

31. Ibid., p. 162.

more relevant, his approach consists of encounters with the supra-rational element of reason, which he describes variously as an "impulse" and as a "somatic moment." Both terms enlist physical and material moments from experience that reification obscures but which can never be entirely extinguished from the realm of experience.[32] The handiest illustration of the somatic impulse that Adorno provides is a controversial one, that of the "moral impulse," which emerges in *Negative Dialectics* and in some of the published lectures through his account of Kant's philosophy, particularly the *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. These are also the occasions for Adorno's use of the descriptor "no-man's land." Adorno locates the moral impulse in the no man's land between rational subjectivity and the objectivities of both internal nature (a kind of quasi-biological reaction to what is bad) and the other's body (borrowing Brecht's phrase, Adorno refers to the "site of tormentable bodies"[33]). The moral-somatic impulse is not irrational, but neither is it entirely accounted for by reason; it is a "spontaneous" (another reference to Kant's language) reaction to suffering, which for Adorno is the quintessential moment of the material remainder and that to which philosophy ought to orient itself. In its experience of the moral-somatic impulse, the subject is inclined ("leans" or is "bent" toward) the other's objectivity, specifically that in the other/object that exceeds the subject's categories.[34]

An example of what this would mean is the way "human rights" were in the twentieth century susceptible to an inability to cover all instances of human suffering because of their conceptual dependence on the juridical framework of nation-state citizenship. The material remainder of human rights would consist of reactions to the suffering of both state-recognized and "excessive," stateless instances of humanity. In other words, consistent with Arendt and anticipating Agamben, Adorno argues that Western discourses of human rights recognize humanity in abstractly juridical rather than concretely somatic terms and for that reason fail to protect bare instances of injury. One of his examples is as equally compelling as that of the Holocaust: during the height of the European rhetoric of humaneness and civilization, Europe took barbaric measures against the peoples of Asia and Africa, a barbarism "repressed merely because, as ever, the

32. "The physical moment [of experience] tells our knowledge a suffering ought not to be, that things should be different" (ibid., p. 203).

33. Ibid., p. 286.

34. Ibid., pp. 228–29.

humanity of civilization is inhumane toward the people it shamelessly brands as uncivilized."[35] That is, reified categories of the human and the legal protections afforded it lead to blatant unevenness in the application of humaneness; what is missing is a capacity to respond to the human and to "the site of tormentable bodies" in a way that accounts for the bare instance of the possibility of somatic injury and not simply to abstract classifications of race or citizenship. Those bare instances of the possibility of injury correspond for Adorno to the material remainders of reason.

It is not insignificant that the logic of a no man's land in *Negative Dialectics* converges upon the figure of the camp. The moral impulse incites a spontaneous demand that there be no more torture and no more camps, beyond all frameworks for making that claim for those recognized as citizens of this or that state. The necessity of the moral impulse arises precisely because of the predominance of abstract conceptualizations of human rights that fail to respond directly to the material instance of human suffering. The obvious parallel to the conservative American defense of Guantánamo Bay and the use of torture techniques today would be that such a defense hinges upon the claim that *these* human beings, as associates of a non-state terrorist group, are not subject to the protections of the Geneva Conventions because those protections pertain only to states. Since the current framework of human rights discourse does not cover the bare material-physical instances of all cases of torture and detention, what is required is a moral injunction that says no more torture, no more camps, no matter to whom or when or why, because our spontaneous reaction to tormentable bodies prohibits it.

Adorno's revision of Kant's "moral given" into a materially grounded notion of the moral-somatic impulse succeeds in making Kant's model more determinate, but it still suffers from some of the same problems as Kant's, i.e., the suggestion that such an impulse is universally experienceable is beyond anything that can be made definitive and fails to account for cultural diversity in a way that would ring true for much contemporary ethical reflection. In any case, the somatic impulse is exemplary of something that Adorno sought to theorize, in what I think was an admittedly speculative tone, namely, a realm that was neither purely subjective nor objective. Such an impulse arises from within, but it also arises from an experience of the physical or extra-mental self. This is what he called the no man's land. It is again illustrative that Adorno used the figure of the

35. Ibid., p. 285.

camp, i.e., the location for the detention of the stateless, the unsheltered, the homeless, the legally and physically unprotected, as an icon for the moral remainder and an image of the moral force of the no man's land between pure subjectivity and naïve moral realism. Concretely, "homelessness" is a product of particular arrangements in particular states; conceptually, it is also a product of the concept of "home," i.e., homelessness depends conceptually on the notion of home, and in that way homelessness is a condition that gives voice to the material remainders of reason and reified legal selfhood. It is the uncovered moment of suffering that depends on the concept of home even as it subverts it. *Negative Dialectics* points to the material remainders uncovered by concepts, the objectivity left over after the subject abstracts it, but which can only be approached by way of the concept's self-critical turn, i.e., when the concept is forced to give way to that in it which exceeds it. In that moment, the subject is propelled into a no man's land between itself and the other, a propulsion that undoes the subject but, by bringing the object nearer to it, yields a new kind of experience of subjectivity, which is to say, yields *experience*. Finally, by theorizing that not being at home in one's home reorients the meaning of home in terms of a relation to otherness, *Negative Dialectics* describes the salvaging of experience in terms of a mode of dwelling. The rescue of experience that "for the time being" will not be complete but partial, because there is "no way out of entanglement," amounts to dwelling in the no man's land. "Dwelling," for Adorno (and in contrast to Heidegger), is an experience of homelessness that bends the subject in the direction of the material remainders in the object.

III.

An interpretation of *Negative Dialectics* that emphasizes the figure of the no man's land allows us to revisit the function of the figures of "Oklahoma" and "America" examined previously: America's hyper-reification represented to Adorno the logical consequence of the modern reign of the concept, a progression and a condition from which there is no disentanglement. Just as there is no way except through the concept, there is also no way except through the American instance that one can fully confront the paradoxes of modern experience, i.e., how the primacy of reason in reified society gives way to that in it which it cannot completely account for—no man's lands, remainders, refuse, that which is neglected, obsolete, discarded, unincorporable. Oklahoma is the name that Kafka gives to all

that, inhabiting it with subjects who suffer the same fate: freaks, misfits, immigrants, and the unemployed. And just as Kafka's story affords refuge to the refuse, so too does *Negative Dialectics* seek to establish the logic by which the uncovered, the unpossessable, the fragments that the concept gives way to but cannot contain, the inhabitants of the no man's land, are afforded a redemption of sorts.

I conclude by turning to Adorno's final reflections in his lectures on moral philosophy in 1963.[36] Adorno ends these remarkably candid discussions of Kantian morality, primarily, but also of ethical contemplation in his time, by acknowledging that his intellectual debt to Nietzsche is even greater than his debt to Hegel.[37] He recognizes the merits of Nietzsche's denunciation of bourgeois morality as cloaked violence, but argues that Nietzsche's approach to morality remained abstract and aloof, failing to understand, for example, that the slave morality of compassion that he railed against was imposed by the master class, that it was a product of what society had made of them and not simply the symptom of slave consciousness. It could be that Nietzsche's theory of slave morality accounts for this (since Nietzsche did, after all, argue that the condition of enslavement gave rise over time to the values of the slave). But Adorno concludes that what is missing in Nietzsche is an ability to formulate an ethical standpoint from within the condition of administered society, as opposed to one that claims to transcend it. Adorno reiterates his claim in *Minima Moralia* that there can be no right behavior in a wrong world, but maintains that ethics in a wrong world becomes the site for critique of that world. It may not be able to say positively what is right and wrong in an absolute sense, or even to say what is man or what is human, but it can know what is inhuman when it sees it, i.e., it can recognize and point to those instances of wrongness, suffering and torment, within society that belie its cloak of goodness.

In this distinction, we are able to better comprehend the difference that Adorno draws in *Minima Moralia* between Nietzsche's pride in not having been a homeowner and his own response that, short of transcending the conditions of administered life, the best position is that of not being at home in one's home, or inhabiting the no man's land. Nietzsche's critique of the ideology of home grasps its underlying violence, but opts instead for

36. Theodor W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2001).

37. Ibid., p. 172.

a form of escape that imagines it has the option of extricating itself from the conditions that give rise to it. This is the option that Adorno denies, and that denial is the starting point for his philosophy of dwelling. Dwelling is neither a return to home, nor an escape from an unproblematic concept of home; it is instead the occupation of a precarious middle ground between living in a very bad place and living in it differently, vigilant for the fissures that lie within it, which promise a glimpse of the right life. It is no surprise, then, that Adorno wrote and spoke favorably about his time in America, the place where reification prevailed but where he was afforded glimpses of welcome and sociability, and of a longing for closeness to the things he researched. And it is no surprise that he was drawn to Kafka's story of refuge in the arid landscape of one of the least desirable regions of the country, the place that Kafka paints as the combination of dark shadows, inhospitable angles, and the home of the homeless. His and Kafka's America exemplifies a theory of dwelling in which there is no Nietzschean escape from entanglement; dwelling has to take place in the midst of hell, yet perhaps with a glimpse of salvation. Adorno's response to Nietzsche is that one cannot simply transcend the society that makes one what one is; one can only attempt to live in damaged life in a way that employs awareness of what one has been made into by society as the record of society's wrongs. This kind of self-awareness and self-critique lies at the heart and should serve as the beginning point for the exploration of Adorno's philosophy of dwelling.

Minima Humana: Adorno, Exile, and the Dialectic

Antonio Y. Vázquez-Arroyo

> For the sake of the human, the inhumanity of art must overtop that of the world.
>
> Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*

In a letter from June 3, 1945, Adorno candidly relates to Thomas Mann his innermost feelings about meeting the novelist in the United States: "When I was able to meet you here in person, upon this remote western coast, I had the feeling that I was only now, for the first time, actually encountering that German tradition from which I have received everything—including the strength to resist the tradition."[1] At first glance, there is nothing too remarkable about this note from an admirer of one of the masters of European letters. Under closer scrutiny, however, this seemingly innocuous letter accentuates the centrality of Adorno's American exile for his recasting of the dialectical legacy, out of which emerges his "negative dialectics." Adorno's concept of tradition here is notable. He announces a dialectical sense of tradition whose critical power is not lessened by fidelity to it. Fidelity to tradition is hardly a ruse of the particular, for it mediates the dialectic of universal and particular. Adorno's German (and European) tradition holds the potential for a dialectical moment of transcendence through its immanent resistance. Only in the physical and existential elsewhere of the United States did Adorno apprehend this

1. Theodor W. Adorno and Thomas Mann, *Correspondence: 1943–1955*, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), p. 10.

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insight into his German-European tradition as allegorized in the figure of Mann.

Granted, nothing seems less controversial than asserting the centrality of exile in Adorno's thinking during his time in the United States, or suggesting that exile signifies a caesura in Adorno's life and thought that informs his subsequent reflections on the dialectic of identity and nonidentity. Less conventional, however, is the suggestion that Adorno's negative dialectic is an attempt to thematize in both its objective and subjective dimensions the condition of exile afflicting humanity in the age of catastrophes. This critical humanism or minima humana, based on Adorno's exile writings, attains its mature expression in his magnum opus, *Negative Dialectics*.[2] This essay thus explores the centrality of exile in Adorno's writings, especially as it figures in the works composed in the United States, and the imprint that this experience left in his plea for the critical humanism at the heart of his dialectical recasting of critical theory. I will address the centrality of the American interlude in Adorno's *oeuvre* and its ramifications on his post-exile thought. But rather than finding an American lineage in his philosophy, this essay ponders the centrality of exile and dislocation in Adorno's retrieval of the political-ethical import of a critical humanism that is part of his (negative) dialectical thinking. Before engaging with particular examples, I will situate Adorno's minima humana within a larger discourse on humanism.

Critical Humanism

Humanism has the dubious distinction of being a frequently vilified and yet poorly understood concept. It is often marshalled for theoretical and philosophical arguments about the legacy of European philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century. In the humanities, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Althusser, Foucault, and Derrida set the terms of most discussions of humanism, especially in North America and Europe. Like historicism, an equally equivocal concept with which it has been paired derogatorily, humanism at the end of the past century seemed bereft of any critical valence; indeed, it seemed to be attractive only to critical theory's antipodes. Yet, the straw-man version of humanism often found in these

2. Because Adorno is often prematurely labeled an anti-humanist *avant la lettre*, his critical humanism has received virtually no scholarly attention. An exception is Alfred Schmidt, "Adorno—ein Philosoph des realen Humanismus," in *Kritische Theorie, Humanismus, Aufklärung* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981), pp. 27–55.

discussions has little to do with the Renaissance humanism of Erasmus and Thomas More, or with subsequent theorizations, such as those found in Giambatista Vico's *New Science* or in the works of Feuerbach, the early Marx, and Gramsci, just to mention the most recognizable names.[3] Humanism's meanings across the European world, let alone outside of it, were often varied and far richer than its critics aver, ranging from early-modern humanism to twentieth-century variants: among the latter one can find the conservative, elitist (canonical) humanism of T. S. Eliot and Matthew Arnold, or that of Allan and Harold Bloom; the existentialist humanism of the early Sartre; the socialist humanism of E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams; the new humanism expressed in the restoration-liberalism of the so-called *anti-pensée 68* thinkers, such as Luc Ferry and Alain Renault; the secular humanism of the late Edward Said; and the "new humanism" most recently avowed by critical theorist Susan Buck-Morss.

Even so, with the exceptions of Said and, very recently, Buck-Morss, in the Anglo-American academic world humanism has been consistently disavowed in what has come to be known in the humanities, from the 1970s on, as "Theory." But what is the specific content of this vilified "ism"? Without attempting to be exhaustive, one can observe the semantic richness of humanism in its historical variation from an anthropocentrism based on human self-reliance, with an atheist humanism sometimes becoming its companion, to: the idea that history and social structures are human creations and thus amenable to modification; a movement denoting the intrinsic value of human beings, where humanity is an ethical end in itself; the belief in the perfectibility of humankind and the sovereignty of the individual; an ideology portending the ideal of autonomy and the coherence of individual subjects, especially in their inward experiences; a philosophy of authenticity; a category of historical periodization denoting a specific moment of time in a specific place; the belief in an ethically and politically relevant, universal human essence; or, as a corollary, the contemporary ethical code guiding humanitarianism as an ethical enterprise, above the fray of politics, a humanism that could be either secular or religious.

3. On early modern Italian humanism, see the still informative essay by Peter Herde, "Humanism in Italy," in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. Philip P. Wiener (New York: Scribner, 1973), 2:515–24, and the special issue of the journal *Annali d'Italianistica* 26 (2008), titled "Humanism, Posthumanisms, and Neohumanisms." I am grateful to Cesare Casarino for bringing this special issue to my attention.

Two of these variegated and sometimes even contradictory formulations are directly relevant to Adorno's critical humanism: the secular humanism of Said and the universalist humanism of Buck-Morss. The latter is situated within the tradition of critical theory and takes its primary cue from Benjamin's reflections on allegories and ruins, even if it is irreducible to it. In Buck-Morss's recent reflections, a "new humanism" involves a commitment to the emancipatory idea of a non-teleological, undisciplined universal history of freedom. It is a humanism that uncompromisingly decries inhumanity in all its guises.[4] For Buck-Morss, humanism proclaims a commitment to humanity at large and refuses to hypostatize an identity between humanity and any credo or doctrine bearing its name or seeking to house it. Significantly, Buck-Morss regards a truly universal history as a fragmented project that refuses to be disciplined or synchronized. In this historical narrative, humanity is a subject composed of ruins and allegories: a critical narrative of the travails of humanity entails "a double liberation, of historical phenomena and of our imagination" in which "universal humanity is visible at the edges."[5] Built into this formulation is a critique of humanism as humanitarianism and the civilizational conceits often found in liberal ideologies of human rights. Equally present, however, is a rejection of a nominalism that portends alternative modernities, or what has amounted to a leftist cop-out, culturalism. Here humanism presupposes the idea of humanity as an agent of history, even if it could not fully master its predicaments of power.

Buck-Morss's humanism shares with Said's "secular humanism" a critical stance not only toward the present, but also toward its other, more conservative formulations and the view of history as human-made. In Said's apposite formulation, "[Humanism's] purpose is to make things more available to critical scrutiny as the product of human labor, human energies for emancipation and enlightenment, and, just as importantly, human misreadings and misinterpretations of the collective past and present."[6] Said emphasizes the secular aspect of humanism and the possibility of knowing the historical unfolding of a collective history.

4. See Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh, PA: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

5. Ibid., pp. 149 and 151.

6. Edward W. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia UP, 2004), p. 22. Earlier, Said defines humanism more precisely as "the secular notion that the historical world is made by men and women, and not by God, and that it can be understood

Said's humanism, like Adorno's, is intimately related to the idea of exile. Adorno's critical humanism shares with Buck-Morss and Said the emphasis on humanity, the centrality of learning and cognitive experience in creating a critical sensibility with a strong ethical and political import, and the avowal of universal history. But unlike theirs, his is defined by an emphasis on dialectical mediation and a materialism akin to mapping and critically challenging the superfluous forms of suffering created by capitalism and other manifestations of instrumental reason. Unlike ideologies of authenticity, which he found in Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, Adorno's minima humana refuses to hypostatize an authentic human interiority or substratum.[7] Rather, his critical humanism avows emancipated subjectivity, which for Adorno can be found only if one dispenses with illusions of authenticity and instead focuses on the variability of human subjectivity; the achievement of autonomous subjectivity entails the dialectical apprehension of the forms of suffering and domination that hinder it, as well as the unity of the continuities and discontinuities mediating its unfolding. Adorno's critical humanism refers to the wound of exile, both in the subjective experience of loss and despair and in the objective agonies of reason and culture in the modern world. The experience of exile allows Adorno to sharpen his insights into what was valuable in his European *Bildung*, such as "new music." In a retrospective aperçu of his years of exile, Adorno sees the texts that were to compose *Current of Music* as the core of his *Philosophy of New Music*, both works of exile.[8]

rationally according to the principle formulated by Vico in *New Science*, that we can really know what we make, or to put it differently, we can know things according to the way they were made" (11). Two contrasting approaches to Saidian humanism are found in Timothy Brennan, *Wars of Position: The Cultural Politics of Left and Right* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006), pp. 93–125 and in R. Radhakrishnan, *History, the Human, and the World Between* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2008), pp. 115–81. Brennan corrects the widespread interpretative assumption informing Radhakrishnan that downplays how humanism, rather than being an awkward *turn* after *Orientalism*, always informed Said's original form of literary criticism and his engagement with Foucault and other doyens of Theory.

7. On Adorno's critique of Jaspers and his own "metaphysics of the human," see Chris Thornhill, "Karl Jaspers and Theodor W. Adorno: The Metaphysics of the Human," *History of European Ideas* 31 (2005): 61–84.

8. See Adorno, "Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry Pickford (New York: Columbia UP, 1998), p. 228. In two other essays written in America, Adorno identifies in music the repository of a true humanism; see *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 20:413–40.

Reason in Exile

Dialectic of Enlightenment, *Minima Moralia*, and *Philosophy of New Music* constitute a triptych of Adorno's formulation of the dialectic of enlightenment and his account of minima humana during his exile: *Dialectic of Enlightenment* seeks to map out the general, universal trend; *Minima Moralia* reflects subjectively from the perspective of mediated immediacy about the caesura of exile in the twentieth century; and *Philosophy of New Music* is an extended "excursus" whose thematics belong to the argument presented in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a counterpoint to the excursus on the culture industry (Adorno's unfinished work *Current of Music* forms the prolegomena to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*).[9] Indeed, the critique of the culture industry found in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is more fittingly read in relation to *Philosophy of New Music* and *Current of Music*: the former presents a dialectical aesthetic that could be interpreted as cultivating the kind of subject that can resist the standardization diagnosed in the "Culture Industry," a retrieval of a different humanism on the basis of the development of a different form of cognition for which right listening is a paradigm; *Current of Music* probes deeper into the physiognomic of radio transmission in the culture industry through Adorno's empirical mapping of the industry.[10]

As with Adorno's work in general, the political and theoretical significance of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* arguably finds dialectical expression in its form and structure. For Adorno, the form in which a critique is presented or articulated is dialectically intrinsic to the critique itself. And this principle is at work in the quintessential exile text, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.[11] In it, as in *Minima Moralia*, the dislocations of exile find expression as part of the form of the content of that experience, thus

9. See Adorno, *Current of Music*, ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009). For a different view, see Sheldon S. Wolin, "Reason in Exile: Critical Theory and Technological Society," in *Technology in the Western Political Tradition*, ed. Arthur M. Melzer et al. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1993), pp. 162–89.

10. For a discussion of the centrality of "listening," see Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Things Beyond Resemblance: Collected Essays on Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006), pp. 193–209.

11. This echoes the authors' experience in the Anglophone philosophical world, which enforced a mode of expression alien to their intellectual milieu. See Martin Jay, "Adorno in America," in *Permanent Exiles: Essays in the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986). Adorno's complex reckoning with American culture and his critical appropriation of American social sciences are well documented in Thomas Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota

enacting a dialectic reversal that vindicates the content of this fragmentary, disintegrated form. The main objects of these philosophical fragments are "to gain greater understanding of the intertwinement of rationality and social reality, as well as the intertwinement, inseparable from the former, of nature and the mastery of nature." It is an essay meant to pave the way for "a positive concept of enlightenment which liberates it from its entanglement in blind domination."[12]

It is in this vein that the different excursuses staged the proposition that the first essay sets forth, "Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology": in the excursus on the *Odyssey,* the dialectic of myth and enlightenment is traced while developing a theory of sacrifice and renunciation from the perspective of ego-formation; the second excursus, which takes Kant, Sade, and Nietzsche as its central objects of reflection, ponders the emergence of the sovereign rational subject at its center, especially in relation to enlightened-abstract moral and rational formalism. The essay on the culture industry then follows these two initial excursuses. Here Horkheimer and Adorno delineate the contours of the dialectic of enlightenment in liberal capitalist society. This discussion of the culture industry illustrates some aspects of the domination of nature that emerged from the Enlightenment's abstract emancipation: humanity repressed its own nature, which later came back to haunt humanity with the advent of fascism. For the authors this process also finds expression in the bogus diversity of the otherwise unitary world of artificial sensuality and false happiness that liberal-capitalist society often embodies. "The regression of enlightenment to ideology" is discussed by referring to the examples of radio and film. The subsequent "Theses on Anti-Semitism," which deal with "the reversion of enlightened civilization to barbarism," are in essay form. The text ends with a set of aphorisms that illustrate some of the themes explored and open up topics for future reflection. In its form, there is something akin to what Adorno subsequently formulated in *Negative Dialectics* as the "logic of disintegration."[13] Rather than proceeding systematically or deductively, the text breaks off without offering a final

Press, 2009), and David Jenemann, *Adorno in America* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2007).

12. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2002), p. xviii.

13. See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), pp. 144–46. In a note omitted from the English translation, Adorno claimed that the idea of a "logic of disintegration" is his oldest philosophical idea, going all the way

statement of its main thesis or an explicit formulation of the "positive" concept of enlightenment. The fragmentary text thus remains open, and the conception of reason and enlightenment that informs it can only be discerned by reading and rereading the text itself, thus critically apprehending the "movement" of thought.[14]

Dialectic of Enlightenment aims at an immanent subversion of the received conceptual tradition. Rather than abandoning the categories of thinking inherited from the dominant tradition, Adorno and Horkheimer ask the reader to break the established patterns of these concepts from within, without abolishing them, but by giving these a different configuration from reified concepts, thus critically engaging the status quo in its conceptual representations and concrete reality. This movement of critique is allegorized in Adorno's depiction of Mann in his letter cited initially: Mann embodied a tradition that critical self-reflection needed to transcend its limitations immanently. Thus, immanent criticism yields new insights, and even new formulations of old concepts that can add a different meaning to the concepts under scrutiny without erasing their historical nature.[15] Adorno and Horkheimer write:

> the very concept of [enlightenment] thinking, no less than the concrete historical forms, the institutions of society with which it is intertwined, already contains the germ of the regression which is taking place everywhere today. If enlightenment does not assimilate reflection on this regressive moment, it seals its own fate. By leaving consideration of the destructive side of progress to its enemies, thought in its headlong rush into pragmatism forfeits its *sublating* [*aufhebenden*] character, and therefore its relation to truth.[16]

By calling attention to this regressive moment in its concrete historical manifestations, Horkheimer and Adorno seek to write a "primal history of subjectivity" (*Urgeschichte der Subjektivität*). This historicization of reason speculatively comprehends the coexistence of myth and enlighten-

back to his student years. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), p. 409.

14. See Lydia Goehr, *Elective Affinities: Musical Essays in the History of Aesthetic Theory* (New York: Columbia UP, 2008), pp. 1–44.

15. Adorno most clearly formulates the dialectic of immanence and transcendence in "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), pp. 17–34.

16. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. xvi.

ment, and shows how enlightenment has reverted to mythology and how reason itself has entered the predicament of exile in the age of catastrophes. Adorno and Horkheimer's historicizing movement renders enlightenment self-reflective about its own relation to myth and tradition, and brings to bear the enlightening elements that the non-dialectical binary of enlightenment and myth neglects. Odysseus is thus called bourgeois; and enlightenment, the self-image of its proponents notwithstanding, partakes in the old practice of sacrifice. The regression to mythology and barbarism is accordingly not external to the enlightenment as a historical process, or cast as a mere remnant of a primitive past; rather, these are already contained within the historical and concrete manifestations of enlightenment itself. In these iterations of the dialectic of civilization and barbarism, the modern and the archaic, Adorno enacts the principle that he sees in the German tradition allegorized in the figure of Mann: if there is a German theme, it is precisely this dialectic; and if there is a literary and philosophical culture for which myth as enlightenment figures prominently, it is evident in German letters, from Goethe's *Faust* to Mann's *Doctor Faustus*.[17] Adorno is able to draw from this tradition while dialectically transforming it, tracing the regressive elements while mining both the progressive and the regressive elements sedimented in the historical travails of these concepts.

Thus, the regressive element in the concept of enlightenment hardly exhausts the concept. On the contrary, its complicity with historical forms of domination and unfreedom calls for a critical genealogy of its formulations in their institutional and political complicity. It is the destructive aspect of enlightenment's faith in progress that needs to be pondered critically. In doing so, the authors delineate the task of critical theory: for critical theory to be *critical* and to avoid forfeiting its critical and emancipatory promise, it has to inquire epistemologically into both the conceptual and the concrete historical formulations of the enlightenment and its betrayal of the promise of emancipation emerging from it. Accordingly, "What is at issue . . . is not culture as a value . . . but the necessity for enlightenment to reflect on itself if humanity is not to be totally betrayed."[18] Herein one finds a crucial tenet of Adorno's critical humanism: to avoid betraying humanity, a form of critical self-reflection is paramount, for which the memory of suffering provides the guise for theorizing critically in ways

17. On Mann, see Fredric Jameson, *The Modernist Papers* (New York: Verso 2007), pp. 113–33.

18. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. xvii.

similar to what in *Minima Moralia* Adorno referred to as the standpoint of redemption.

Not Being at Home

Conceived largely as an attempt to present "aspects" of Adorno's joint theoretical endeavors with Max Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* from "the standpoint of subjective experience," Adorno's *Minima Moralia* presents reflections that offer possibilities for responsible critical thinking and acting in order to redress the perpetuation of superfluous suffering.[19] Adorno presents the subjective experience of critical theory from the perspective of his concern with "damaged life." Consistent with his avowal of subjective experience, Adorno thus insists that his personal experience of exile is indispensable for critical reflection, even if it needs to be dialectically rendered as mediated by the universal process that led to his expulsion from his home country.[20] Adorno explicitly relates the subjective reflections offered in *Minima Moralia* to his joint authorship with Horkheimer in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "The specific approach of *Minima Moralia*, the attempt to present aspects of our shared philosophy from the standpoint of subjective experience, necessitates that the parts do not altogether satisfy the demands of the philosophy of which they are nevertheless a part. The disconnected and non-binding character of the form, the renunciation of explicit theoretical cohesion, is meant as one expression of this."[21] Adorno thus presents the relation between the content of the philosophy he expounds and the form in which he does it: a way of thinking that later on would take pride of place in his anti-systematic and fragmentary content, one dialectically embedded in its exposition.[22]

At the outset of *Minima Moralia*, Adorno indicates that his reflections spring from a "melancholy science," a statement that, as many interpreters have rightly suggested, stands in contrast to Nietzsche's *Joyful Science*, even if *Minima Moralia* is stylistically Adorno's most Nietzschean text.

19. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Verso, 1990), p. 18.

20. See Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), pp. 20ff. For a discussion see Antonio Y. Vázquez-Arroyo, "Universal History Disavowed: On Critical Theory and Postcolonialism," *Postcolonial Studies* 11 (2008): 455–65.

21. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 18. See Adorno's "The Essay as Form" in *Notes to Literature*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia UP, 1991–92), 1:3–23.

22. See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 18–22, 52–53, 162–64.

But here the aphoristic form—or perhaps more accurately, the short essays conjuring up "thought-images"—is not found alongside Nietzsche's affirmation of life *tout court*, let alone his aristocratic ethos of the playfully dangerous "perhaps." Rather, the content of this form lends further expression to the suffering of a "damaged life" in the age of catastrophe. It presents a stark contrast with some of the basic tenets of Nietzsche's philosophy: rather than a vitalism that calls for a bold new philosophy of a "dangerous perhaps"[23] (even if one that is surely infused by a strong sense of responsibility after the death of god), Adorno posits the need for thought to be responsible, not from the perspective of a new philosophy, or a philosophy of the future, but from the ancient idea of "teaching the good life." But his call for the idea of the good life is made from the perspective of damaged life, the only perspective that seems possible in the immediate aftermath of Auschwitz. After the caesura of Auschwitz, in *Minima Moralia*'s lapidary formulation, "the whole is the false."[24]

These *subjective* reflections and *Dialectic of Enlightenment* are both concerned with the fate of individual experience in the age of total power and the administered society. While the depiction of reason's exile in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* maps the universal trend, the reflections found in *Minima Moralia* constitute the other pole of Adorno's dialectic of the universal and particular. But this concern hardly leads Adorno to posit individual experience as immediate or to hypostatize it as an ahistorical substratum of authenticity, as previous critics of Hegel, such as Kierkegaard, have done: individual experience is mediated by the *objective* dynamics of contemporary society, by the total social process of which both capitalism and fascism are a part. Thus, to apprehend the individual, the standpoint of the totality cannot be rejected entirely, and the individual cannot be posited in abstraction from this: "He who wishes to know the truth about life in its immediacy must scrutinize its estranged form, the objective powers that determine the individual even in its most hidden recesses."[25] Rather than positing either the individual or the totality as a vantage point for thinking difference, Adorno seeks to apprehend both in their mutual mediation, as both constitute, albeit not equally, individual and collective experiences. But Adorno's insistence on subjective experience does not proceed to take

23. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Rolf-Peter Horstmann (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), p. 6.

24. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 50.

25. Ibid., p. 15. See also Adorno, *History and Freedom*.

the subject, as given in the philosophical tradition, as the point of departure for his inquiry. Historical conditions do not allow thought to do so: "For since the overwhelming objectivity of the historical movement in its present phase consists so far only in the dissolution of the subject, without yet giving rise to a new one, individual experience necessarily bases itself on the old subject, now historically condemned, which is for-itself, but no longer in-itself."[26] Two central moments of Adorno's critical thinking about the condition of exile are found in this passage: Adorno affirms the centrality of dialectically expounding the historical movement that has dissolved subjectivity; and his suggestion that even though subjective experience tends to be annihilated in the present, what actually takes place theoretically is not its erasure, but a dislocation. Adorno's minimal humanism cannot not theorize these two aspects as the movement of negative dialectical thinking. The double negation in this characterization of Adorno's humanism is intentional, for it captures what is particular about his vindication of this concept: critical humanism thematizes humanity as dislocated. However, its dislocation is not a priori hypostatized but historically framed in a universal history defined by catastrophe and domination of inner and outer nature under the aegis of instrumental reason and positivist notions of progress. Adorno's minima humana is a critical theory that seeks to redeem the idea of an emancipated humanity.

Adorno thus relates the possibility of subjective experience to a situation of despair, the *lament* that has taken over subjective reflection needs to be resisted and redirected: "Subjective reflection, even if critically alerted to itself, has something sentimental and anachronistic about it: something of a lament over the course of the world, a lament to be rejected not for its good faith, but because the lamenting subject threatens to become arrested in its condition and so to fulfill in its turn the law of the world's course."[27] These formulations more than echo the dialectic of natural history, which Adorno was already articulating as early as 1932, a dialectic that remained at the core of his negative dialectic until the very end; namely, how "the law of the world's course" threatens to become sedimented as a teleology turning a historically arrested subject into a particularity of an unnatural teleology, thus hypostatizing it into a subject of defeat.[28] Even so, the seed for critical thinking resides in individual experience.[29] The critical

26. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, pp. 15–16.
27. Ibid., p. 16.
28. For more on this, see Vázquez-Arroyo, "Universal History Disavowed," pp. 451–73.
29. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 18.

significance of Adorno's negative dialectic, qua critical theory, is the ability to avoid arresting the movement of thought in its power to render, without mending, these moments in which individual experience is mediated by the universal tendency of the times.

In *Minima Moralia* Adorno formulates a "morality of thinking" strongly infused with dialectical and political concerns in which catastrophe and exile figure prominently: "Dwelling, in the proper sense, is now impossible."[30] Accordingly, not to be at home "in one's home" is constitutive of morality in the age of catastrophe. The critical valence of exile is thus avowed in this minimal humanism. As part of this morality of thinking, he presents a reworked understanding of subjectivity, a question he grapples with until his late essay "On Subject and Object."[31] Adorno reads Hegel's account of the subject-object relation immanently and reformulates it from the perspective of the problem of immediacy and mediation. Like Hegel, Adorno posits the centrality of mediation, but unlike Hegel he does not see the subject-object relationship as leading to a higher unity. Still, Adorno's contrasting formulation comprehensively renders the relationship between oppositions, positing the universal against the particular or the individual against society. Informed by these motifs, Adorno introduces his conception of dialectical thinking as bearing the weight of responsible thinking:

> It is just this passing-on and being unable to linger, this tacit assent to the primacy of the general over the particular, which constitutes not only the deception of idealism in hypostasizing concepts but also its inhumanity, that has no sooner grasped the particular than it reduces it to a through-station, and finally comes all too quick to terms with suffering and death for the sake of a reconciliation occurring merely in reflection—in the last analysis, the bourgeois coldness that is only too willing to underwrite the inevitable. Knowledge can only widen horizons by abiding so insistently with the particular that its isolation is dispelled. This admittedly presupposes a relation to the general, though not one of subsumption but rather almost the reverse. Dialectical mediation is not a recourse to the more abstract, but a process of resolution of the concrete in itself.[32]

30. Ibid., p. 38.

31. See Adorno, "On Subject and Object," in *Critical Models*. See also Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, pp. 73–75.

32. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 74. In *Negative Dialectics* Adorno writes: "We are not to philosophize about concrete things; we are to philosophize, rather, out of these things" (33).

By taking the concrete as his point of departure, Adorno reverses the Hegelian formulation and seeks to render the intersection between the universal and the particular from the perspective of the concrete, thus anticipating his later argument on behalf of the primacy of the object.[33] And in this instance, the object is exile, the exiled subject as an object of the general historical trend, which reduces humanity to its minimal existence, a reduction pasteurized by a bogus liberal humanism. If there is a trope that is central to Adorno's minimal humanism, it is exile: the exile of reason in the world of instrumental reason; the exile of not being at home in the world of capitalism; the exilic condition of *Kultur* in the culture industry; the exile of the new music in the world of popular music. Fidelity to humanity thus demands infidelity to current representations of the human. That is why for Adorno the inhumanity of new music is only such from the perspective of damaged humanity and it bears the message of a truly emancipated humanity. Dissonance against the forced traditionalism of the culture industry redeems a dislocated humanity.

In a similar spirit, Adorno approvingly quotes a passage from Nietzsche's *Gay Science* that critiques the way identitarian thinking obliterates the uniqueness of the particular:[34] "He who seeks to mediate between two bold thinkers stamps himself as mediocre: he has not the eyes to see uniqueness: to perceive resemblances everywhere, making everything alike, is a sign of weak eyesight."[35] In Nietzsche's awareness of this tendency of thought to identity, Adorno sees a crucial element for the ethical sensibility in his conception of dialectical thinking. The passage merits lengthy quotation:

> The morality of thought lies in a procedure that is neither entrenched nor detached, neither blind nor empty, neither atomistic nor consequential. The double-edged method that has earned Hegel's *Phenomenology* the reputation among reasonable people of unfathomable difficulty, that is, its simultaneous demands that phenomena be allowed to speak as such—in a "pure looking-on"—and yet that their relation to consciousness as the subject, reflection, be at every moment maintained, expresses this morality most directly in all its depth of contradiction. But how much

33. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 183–86.

34. In Nietzsche, Adorno most values his critiques of identitarianism and the philosophy of origins. On the latter's relationship to Adorno and post-structuralism, see Peter Dews, *The Limits of Disenchantment* (New York: Verso, 1995), pp. 79–89.

35. Nietzsche as quoted in Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 74.

> more difficult has it become to conform to such morality now that it is no longer possible to convince oneself of the identity of subject and object, the ultimate assumption of which still enabled Hegel to conceal the antagonistic demands of observation and interpretation. Nothing less is asked of the thinker today than that he should be at every moment both within things and outside them.[36]

The "distanced nearness" of reason in exile is not only the defining moment of the dialectic of enlightenment as Horkheimer and Adorno conjured it from exile, but also what defined Adorno's reflections within Europe's philosophical and aesthetic traditions. In these formulations one finds an initial iteration of what later on Adorno presented as the importance of both immanence and transcendence for critical thinking. Furthermore, the assertion that to "be at every moment within things and outside of them" captures the relevance of speculative thinking for Adorno's critical theory. And in this assertion one can fully discern the stakes of Adorno's reworked understanding of the intersection between subject and object—a relationship that needs to be rethought in light of the primacy of the object yet without erasing subjectivity. In a later essay titled "Notes on Philosophical Thinking," Adorno writes that "truth is a constantly evolving constellation" that requires the subject to apprehend its different configurations. But subjective experience takes the object as its point of reflection, even if such a primacy is fragile; thus in its mutual mediation with an object, the thinking subject must "snuggle up" with it.[37]

Humanity and New Music

In the 1948 preface to *Philosophy of New Music*—a book that alongside the "Essay as Form" is one of the most poignant testaments to Adorno's negative dialectic at work—Adorno suggests the centrality of this text to the joint project launched with *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "This book should be understood as a detailed excursus to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*."[38] The signature of the critical elucidation of "new music" is the centrality of "determinate negation," a category that, alongside "mediation," became one of two central movements in Adorno's negative dialectic. If

36. Ibid.

37. See Theodor W. Adorno, "Notes on Philosophical Thinking," in *Critical Models*, pp. 131 and 129.

38. Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. 5.

the excursus on the culture industry provided a much-contested account of the massification by means of standardization of culture in the Hollywood of the 1940s, and its role in the advent of the administered world of instrumental rationality in the capitalist world, *Philosophy of New Music* presents an account of the dialectic of enlightenment in the world of "classical music." Of course, the latter in its popularized version had also contributed to the process of regression that for Adorno found concrete expression in the decaying of listening. In a way, the studies constituting the book *Current of Music* bridge the insights on the culture industry in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* with the philosophical elucidations on Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky in *Philosophy of New Music*.

Listening plays a crucial role in Adorno's critique of the culture industry. And music was always a crucial paradigm for the aesthetic in his writings. It is the province of the non-conceptual, and Adorno's exile in the United States led him to a critical physiognomy of listening and musical experience. He sought to pursue this critical physiognomy empirically in his *Current of Music* and also formulate it theoretically in the excursus on the culture industry. Understood in this way, Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music* could be read as a counterpoint to the critique of the culture industry as laid out in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, as well as a plea on behalf of truly emancipated, human listening. Not only music in Hollywood but also "classical" variants like NBC's "Music Appreciation Hour" were complicit in the decay of music appreciation and experience.[39] Herein the two poles animating Adorno's different reflections on the concept of culture can be dialectically rendered without any attempt to fuse them into a higher unity: culture understood as the trashiness of commercial culture; culture as a utopia of reconciliation. When coupled with "industry," culture, in the former sense, is thought about in order to map out its standardization, which correlates to the standardization of self-preservation expounded in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Both industry and culture are constitutive of the increasingly pervasive logic of instrumental rationality. Of course, like culture, industry carries a determinate negation in Adorno's philosophy: it is by means of industry that the possibility to obliterate superfluous suffering becomes a potentiality. As Robert Hullot-Kentor's writes: "…if *culture*, when it is culture, is what potentially goes beyond self-preservation; and if *industry*, meaning considerably more than a device of manufacture, is what reduces this potential to the task

39. See Adorno, *Current of Music*.

of survival, then the *culture* industry—as the production of culture by industry—is the reduction of all that does and could go beyond self-preservation to nothing more than life lived in the violent struggle for survival. *The manufacture of culture as the production of barbarism is the culture industry*."[40] Adorno christened this process "barbarization." Its dialectical opposite, the possibility for true autonomy, resides in the new music that is dialectically dissected in Adorno's "detailed excursus." The non-identical conceptual depth found in the modernism of Beckett and Schoenberg performs the movement of this autonomy: art that follows its own logic, the primacy of the object, without effacing the subject.

The chiasmus of enlightenment and myth is given yet another dialectical turn in *Philosophy of New Music*: "The falsification of myth bears witness to an elective affinity with genuine myth. Perhaps that art alone would be authentic that would be liberated from the idea of authenticity itself, of being thus and not otherwise."[41] Authenticity, thus understood, can break the spell of what is, of an inhuman humanity to which Adorno's minimal humanism offers its determinate negation. Unlike the idea of humanism found in existentialist versions, say, in Jaspers or Sartre, the idea of "the authentic" that informs Adorno's notion of true humanity dispenses with the ahistorical conceit of authenticity. Critical humanism tries to pry open the dialectic of domination at the heart of the present. In Adorno's sober if stark formulation, "What is, is stronger. In coming to grief on this, men have themselves learned to be stronger and to dominate nature, and in precisely this process fate has reproduced itself." Both the culture industry and the restorative attempts of Stravinsky not only are part of this fated process but also impair one's ability to arrest it, to bring it to a halt. Instead, the dialectics is one of domination in which "the measure of destruction equals the degree of domination."[42] Echoing revolutionary nomenclature, Adorno provocatively calls Schoenberg the archetype of progress and Stravinsky that of restoration. The former refuses the reconciliation of the universal and the particular, while the latter evokes archaic ideas of sacrifice and tonality that for Adorno are complicit with the barbarization underway in the culture industry. Of course, this stark characterization hardly precludes a more dialectically differentiated account

40. Hullot-Kentor, "The Exact Sense in Which the Culture Industry No Longer Exists," *Cultural Critique* 70 (Fall 2008): 144–45.

41. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p. 158.

42. Ibid., p. 54.

of both movements: as the philosophical reflections found in *Philosophy of New Music* unfold, it becomes evident that Schoenberg's music is not devoid of its own antinomies and not everything is regressive in Stravinsky.[43] Even so, the general tenor of the discussions takes its primary cue from the insights of a dialectic of revolution and restoration in the aesthetic realm that is homologous to the dialectic of progress and regression traced in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

How can this calamitous dialectic of enlightenment be brought to a halt? For Adorno, just as figurative painting was a defense of aesthetic autonomy in the face of mechanical reproduction, atonal music is a "breach" in music to defend it from its mechanical standardization in the culture industry.[44] Atonal music represents the autonomous becoming of art. For in contrast to the tonal system—which, according to Adorno, "owes its dignity to the closed and exclusive system of a society that is based on exchange, whose own dynamic tends toward tonality, and with whose fungibility all tonal elements stand in profound agreement"—atonal music breaks free from the dialectic of destruction that is exalted by the culture industry and the restorative attempts to create harmony.[45] Yet atonality is not devoid of mediation. As such, its antinomies threaten to arrest its free movement. Atonal music is autonomous in its abandonment of the deceptive harmony of domination. Dialectical autonomy is thus a central theme in Adorno's critical theory. The dialectic "is necessary to transform the strength of the universal concept into the self-unfolding of the concrete object and to resolve the social puzzle of its image by the power of its own individuation." By means of this autonomous dialectic, Adorno recasts the mediation of the universal and the particular without positing the dominance of the former over the latter. "In this the aim is to provide not social justification but a theory of society by virtue of the explication of what is aesthetically right and wrong at the heart of the objects."[46] Reflection on the aesthetic realm allows Adorno to thematize the functions of domination, autonomy, and freedom in society. An adequate account of

43. It is thus a misreading to see Adorno's essay on the aging of new music as betraying his *Philosophy of New Music*. See Adorno, "The Aging of the New Music," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2002), pp. 181–202.

44. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p. 9.

45. Ibid., p. 13.

46. Ibid., p. 23.

these functions is crucial to Adorno's critical humanism if it is to avoid the ahistorical pitfalls of his antipodes.

The aesthetic provides the locus for concretizing the autonomy of the object, which is the promise of the redemption of humanity in the age of catastrophes. Adorno hardly minces words or hesitates to use theological tropes in articulating the role of humanism and art. He rightly understands how complete bare life is animalistic; a humanity bereft of culture is not humanity, nor is a humanity bereft of the materialism that is part of the aesthetic. In an oracular formulation, Adorno presents these intersections:

> The more the all-powerful culture industry seizes for its own purposes the principle of illumination and corrupts it in the treatment of men for the benefit of a perduring darkness, all the more so does art rise against this false luminosity; it opposes configurations of that repressed darkness to the omnipotent neon-light style and helps illuminate only by convicting the brightness of the world of its own darkness. Only for a pacified humanity would art come to an end: Its death, which now threatens, would be exclusively the triumph of bare existence over the consciousness that has the audacity to resist it. . . .
>
> Yet this menace weighs on the few intransigent works of art that are still actually produced. By realizing total enlightenment in themselves, regardless of the cunning naïveté of the culture industry, these works not only become offensive for the sake of their truth, as antitheses to the total control aimed at by the industry, but they also simultaneously make themselves like the internal structure of what they oppose and enter into opposition with their own intentions.[47]

Ultimately, the authentic artwork is a socially necessary illusion. Just as in *Negative Dialectics* Adorno dialectically reformulates Kraus's aphorism "origin is the goal," he recasts the idea of aesthetic authenticity: "everything depends on whether the music adopts an attitude that claims authenticity as already won or whether the music, with eyes closed, as it were, relinquishes itself to the demands of the matter in order to achieve it in the first place."[48] Authentic art is thus inauthentic. By subjectively following the autonomous movement of the object, which is ultimately its true authenticity, a new beginning could unfold. Built into Adorno's claim

47. Ibid., p. 16.
48. Ibid., p. 155. See also ibid., p. 156.

for autonomy, which is art's true moment of authenticity, is a more general argument about recasting autonomy dialectically. In this recasting, the idea of emancipation becomes a dialectical homology for different mediated fields of human action, the aesthetic, especially music in its non-conceptuality, being Adorno's preferred subject of reflection. But this logic of (negative) dialectical autonomy, with its emphasis on mediation and determinate negation, provides an opening to think about questions of political form from the perspective of the critical humanism that it foreshadows, thus expanding Adorno's critical theory into a terrain he never visited.

Adorno, the Wound?

Adorno's avowal of a critical humanism never amounted to a sustained reflection on the political, let alone on political form. Nor did it fully make explicit the centrality of mortality, the materialism of the frailty of the human body, as part of the idea of humanity. Even so, it makes clear the one-sidedness of the presentation of Adorno as a thinker who offers "Beckett and Schoenberg as the solution to world starvation and threatened nuclear destruction."[49] Instead, for Adorno the aesthetic provided a realm where the somatic aspect of re-cognizing suffering could be apprehended.[50] The core of this insight was formulated in the triptych that forms his exile writings: the philosophy of non-identity exhibits the caesura of exile and his exile works elucidate how reason became exiled in the modern world, what its objective dimension is (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*); what constitutes its subjective dimension, the damaged life (*Minima Moralia*); and how modernism sets forth possibilities of the aesthetic to salvage humanity in inhuman times (*Philosophy of New Music*).

The challenge Adorno's critical theory bequeaths is to formulate a politics of critical humanism outside of the aesthetic realm that is true to the logic of the political field. One way to articulate the role of exile in Adorno's dialectic, its minima humana, and their centrality for a critical theorization of political autonomy and political form—both neglected themes in his writings and real limitations for any critical humanism to

49. Terry Eagleton criticizes this view, while noting that some passages in Adorno's oeuvre, read literally—a misguided hermeneutic strategy for reading this accomplished stylist—support this interpretation. For Eagleton there are at least "two Adornos," one conforming to the stereotype and a second one, "a theorist for whom the aesthetic offers a paradigm rather than a displacement of emancipatory political thought." See Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (London: Blackwell, 1990), p. 360.

50. Adorno, "Critique," in *Critical Models*, pp. 341–48.

have political import—is to borrow his moving characterization of Heinrich Heine, an exile, and refer to him as "Adorno, the wound." It is the wound of exile, not just personal exile, but the exile of reason, of the aesthetic, from a world that in its dialectical regression has sought to obliterate critical reason and autonomous art, the world in which the good life can no longer be lived. That is the wound that Heine bequeathed to Adorno and that Adorno's work bequeaths to us. Political forms that would allow for a truly emancipated (and reconciled) humanity and arrest the logic of total power require a sense of critical fidelity that shatters the grip on the subject that total power seeks to hold. Like Heine's "undiluted concept of enlightenment,"[51] Adorno's concept claims to make good on the promise of an emancipated concept of enlightenment that is arguably at the core of every sentence he ever wrote. The concluding passages of his essay on Heine show his fidelity to the idea of humanity:

> Heine's stereotypical theme, unrequited love, is an image for homelessness, and the poetry devoted to it is a unique attempt to draw estrangement itself into the sphere of intimate experience. Now that the destiny which Heine sensed has been fulfilled literally, however, the homelessness has also become everyone's homelessness; all human beings have been as badly injured in their beings and their language as Heine the outcast was. His words stand for their words: there is no longer any homeland other than a world in which no one can be cast out any more, the world of a genuinely emancipated humanity. That wound that is Heine will heal only in a society that has achieved reconciliation.[52]

It remains unknown what political forms in their autonomous logic, which can be realized only subjectively, will house an emancipated humanity with a sense of political responsibility based on the experience of homelessness, its distanced nearness, and its mediated immediacy. Yet in this inquiry we must recall the wound that is Adorno's negative dialectic, one that remains unhealed in the false dwellings of our post-historical, liberal-capitalist predicaments of power.

51. Theodor W. Adorno, "Heine, the Wound," in *Notes to Literature*, 1:81.

52. Ibid., 1:85. In a 1949 lecture at UCLA, Adorno paid similar homage to Heine: "What survives in Heine seems to be an inherent appeal to continue to fight for the vanquished and to resist the merciless judgment of history" ("Toward a Reappraisal of Heine," in Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 20:452).

Dialectic of Regression: Theodor W. Adorno and Fritz Lang[*]

Ulrich Plass

Perhaps the gist of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's grand theory of modernity, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), can be summed up as follows: there is no progress without regression. The chapter most forcefully informed by their experiences in Southern California is called "The Culture Industry," and it "shows the regression of enlightenment to ideology which is graphically expressed in film and radio."[1] This article seeks to contribute a fuller understanding of the term "regression" by placing it in the biographical context of Adorno's friendship with film director and fellow Los Angelino, Fritz Lang. I will discuss three interrelated aspects: "regression" is a crucial lesson learned in Adorno's American investigations of the culture industry, but it continues to inform his thought for the rest of his life; Lang's last films have regressive qualities that shed a different light on Adorno's critique of regression and enter into an aesthetic discourse around notions of subjectivity and authorship, allegory, and "late style"; finally, Adorno and Lang's friendship, which began in America and continued until Adorno's death, reflectively enacts different forms of "strategic regression."

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1. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2002), p. xviii.

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More broadly, my article suggests that "regression" is not merely the determinate negation of "progress" but, rather, can itself be re-read and "transvaluated" dialectically. Regression, then, can *both* signify a debilitating relapse *and* a reflective reappropriation of "regressive" modes of knowledge and conduct. Therefore, instead of discussing regression as it appears in most writings of the Frankfurt School, as an exclusively negative or derogatory term linked primarily with America and the culture industry (especially film and music), I will read it against the grain and treat it as signifying a mode of experience that undercuts the narrow definitional range of the concept. This mode of experience is associated primarily with qualities pertaining to childhood: naïveté, silliness, playfulness, and an uninhibited capacity for wonder.

That these and similar qualities have an important function in different places in Adorno's thought has been documented widely.[2] Childhood provides a reservoir of mimetic experience that prefigures the more sophisticated forms of aesthetic experience in Adorno's musical writings, his *Aesthetic Theory*, and his *Notes to Literature*; and, importantly, it also enables access to forms of knowledge that are closed off to adults. For example, children are said to be endowed with a capacity for preconceptual knowledge of "the somatic," the "unmeaningful stratum of life,"[3] which is inherently absent in later, mature conceptual knowledge. Thus, all thought remains indebted to childhood, and if philosophy wants to retain a sense of the "life of the concepts," as Adorno says in allusion to Hegel,[4] it must retain an openness to the uncertainty of experience possible only in childhood. To be sure, there is much that can be said against Adorno's bourgeois idealization of childhood, but the aim of this article is not to offer an exhaustive critical account of this issue. Rather, it will be

2. For example, Theodor W. Adorno, *Kindheit in Amorbach*, ed. Reinhard Pabst (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 2003); Petra Schünemann, "Paideia: Kindheitszeichen bei Adorno," *Frankfurter Adorno Blätter* 2 (1993): 129–45. See also Adorno's 1933 adaptation of motifs from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and other children's stories: *Der Schatz des Indianer-Joe: Singspiel nach Mark Twain*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979).

3. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1983), p. 365. In the book, childhood serves as a figure for both the capacity for "metaphysical experience" (crystallized in the experiential pair of "happiness and idle waiting") and the unconscious knowledge of what civilization represses: the deadly violence done to humans and animals. See ibid., pp. 365–67 and 373–75.

4. Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), 1:17.

sufficient to point out that an account of Adorno's critique of regression in the culture industry ought to be seen within the context of his insistence on the philosophical relevance of experiences pertaining to childhood.

Adorno's "American Friend"

Detlev Claussen has described Fritz Lang as Adorno's "American friend." Claussen's formulation is not meant as a reference to Wim Wender's adaptation of the novel *Ripley's Game*, nor is he implying that Adorno had no other American friends. Rather, Claussen proposes that through his friendship with the successful Hollywood director, Adorno gained valuable insights into the film industry, which informed his scathing portrayal of commercial films as principal manifestations of the culture industry.[5] This enabled a significant shift from Adorno's hitherto almost exclusive critical focus on music and radio. With his move from New York to Los Angeles in 1941, Adorno began paying attention to film, too.

Adorno spent almost a decade in California. When he embarked on his long return trip to Frankfurt am Main, he was sent off by his wife Gretel, Max Horkheimer, Fritz Lang and the latter's long-time partner, Lily Latté. This was hardly accidental: during their shared time in Los Angeles, the two couples had socialized regularly, including on holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas. After first Theodor and then Gretel Adorno left the United States, they stayed in touch with Lang and Latté. The correspondence between the two couples shows a degree of warmth and intimacy that is surpassed only by Adorno's letters to his parents.[6] Even years after his return to Germany, Adorno would still seek to employ Lang and Latté as his preferred Hollywood insiders. For instance, when the German politician Carlo Schmid, of whom Adorno thought highly, was about to travel to California, Adorno was eager to have him meet

5. Detlev Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno: One Last Genius*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2008), p. 163.

6. For useful discussions of the friendship and the correspondence, see Claussen's chapter "Fritz Lang, the American Friend" in his biography *Theodor W. Adorno*, pp. 162–75, and Rolf Aurich's "Fritz Lang and the Philosopher," in *Fritz Lang: Leben und Werk/His Life and Work/Sa vie et son oeuvre*, ed. Rolf Aurich et al. (Berlin: Jovis, 2001). Also relevant is Thomas Elsaesser, "Fritz Lang und Lily Latté: Die Geschichte zweier Umwege," *Filmblatt* 6, no. 15 (2001): 40–53. For further documentary accounts, see *Adorno: Eine Bildmonographie*, ed. Theodor W. Adorno Archiv (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), pp. 191–95, and *Adorno in Frankfurt*, ed. Wolfram Schütte (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), pp. 286–87.

his friends. Adorno told Latté, "[i]t would be good if you could tell him something about the workers' movement within the film industry; he is very much interested in it."[7]

Insight into the friendship between the Adornos and Lang and Latté can be gained from thirty-six letters at the Adorno archive, dating from the 1950s and 1960s (the collection of the correspondence between Lang and Latté and the Adornos is not complete), and from Adorno's recently published *Letters to his Parents.* While both women played a crucial role in initiating and maintaining the friendship (they had attended the same middle school in Berlin and had harbored crushes on the same teacher), I will discuss only the friendship between the two men. Before I can evaluate the significance of their friendship in relation to their respective careers, it is important to point out briefly a few relevant aspects of Lang's fate in Hollywood and beyond.

The director's anything-but-smooth American career came to a close with the film *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* in 1956. While Adorno's return to Germany was, in most respects, an unqualified success, there was no German revival of Lang's Weimar-era fame. In France, however, the *Nouvelle Vague* celebrated Lang as a true auteur. For many years, the most imaginative criticism of Lang's oeuvre took place on the pages of *Cahiers du cinéma*. There, Lang found critical redemption from his demoralizing demotion to directing B-movies with weak scripts. For example, in 1954 François Truffaut penned an adoring review of Lang's 1953 film *The Big Heat* in *Cahiers du cinéma.* He depicts Lang as an author of one grand recurring theme: "man fighting alone in a half-hostile, half-indifferent universe."[8] By claiming that all of Lang's works adhere to a consistent artistic and moral vision, Truffaut not only observed a continuity between his German and American films, but also suggested that Lang always found ways to redeem even the most formulaic and perfunctory genre films: "Fritz Lang is truly the *auteur* of his films."[9] Truffaut's review fits into a topos that Lang himself cherished: the misunderstood director is the shrewd

7. Letter to Lily Latté dated September 24, 1953, Adorno Archiv, Br 866/5. At the time, Schmid was vice-president of the German Federal Diet [*Bundestag*]. Adorno also appreciated Schmid's translation of Valéry's *Pieces on Art*, published by Suhrkamp in 1959. See Adorno's essay "Valéry's Deviations," in *Notes to Literature*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), 1:137.

8. François Truffaut, "Loving Fritz Lang," in *Great Film Directors: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Leo Braudy and Morris Dickstein (New York: Oxford UP, 1978), p. 607.

9. Ibid., p. 609.

auteur who outfoxes script writers and studio bosses, a theme echoed in Godard's *Contempt* (*Le mépris*), in which Lang plays himself as an aging director, donning his characteristic monocle. One sequence in Godard's film depicts a run-in with the producer Jeremy Prokosh (played by Jack Palance) who accuses Lang of having inserted into the film a scene that was not originally in the script. It turns out that the scene is in the script after all, but Lang's direction has unrecognizably transformed the written text into an aesthetically autonomous series of images. As Lang's character explains in the film: "[I]n the script it is written and on the screen it's pictures. Motion-picture it's called."[10] The point of the scene is twofold. It reinforces the idea of Lang as an auteur slyly resisting his producers, and it demonstrates another recurrent theme of his critical reception: Lang's authorship is not only a matter of his struggle against the studio system, but also, more subtly, "his attempt to control in detail the image as it appears on the screen. . . . [His] control over mise-en-scène did not simply add something to the words, but transformed them. Lang's contribution is alchemical, a chain reaction of reinterpretation and visualization, opening up the film (and the viewer) to non-verbal meanings."[11]

In 1957, Lang accepted an offer from producer Artur Brauner (himself a returned Jewish émigré) to come back to Berlin and realize an old project that, in Lang's own words, director and producer Joe May had "stolen" from him in 1920. It was a double feature based on Thea von Harbou's novel *The Indian Tomb*. Von Harbou's novel pitches the wholesome German family against the violence and treachery of the oriental other, and May's film, just like its successor, a wildly popular 1938 remake by Richard Eichberg, fit smoothly into the orientalist mould. Lang's own remakes, filmed on location in 1958 under the titles *The Tiger of Eschnapur* (*Der Tiger von Eschnapur*) and *The Indian Tomb* (*Das indische Grabmal*), do nothing to correct the stereotyping orientalism of its two predecessors.[12] Only his last film, *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* (*Die tausend Augen des Dr. Mabuse* [1960]), a critique of surveillance and the society of the

10. Cited in Tom Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), p. 6.

11. Ibid.

12. For a critique directed in particular against the reception history of formalist readings of Lang's double feature, see Barbara Mennel, "Returning Home: The Orientalist Spectacle of Fritz Lang's *Der Tiger von Eschnapur* and *Das indische Grabmal*," in *Take Two: Fifties Cinema in Divided Germany*, ed. John Davidson and Sabine Hake (New York: Berghahn, 2007), pp. 28–43.

spectacle, offers a political perspective that suggests a degree of redemption from the reactionary politics of the Indian double feature. Yet Lang's last film, his third dealing with the master criminal, did not provide the director a respite from mostly dismissive reviews by the German critics. Where Lang's French critics took a comprehensive view of the auteur's oeuvre, the German critics saw the late films as artistic failures, especially when compared to the director's masterpieces from the Weimar era. In Germany, Lang was seen as a legend, someone belonging exclusively to a past golden age of the cinema whose present work was reduced to futile attempts to revive his former glory. However, I would argue that it is precisely the regressive quality of Lang's last films that links his work to Adorno's.

A Critical Theory of Regression

Adorno's use of the term *regression* is undoubtedly influenced by the important role it plays in Freudian psychoanalysis. According to Freud's early topographical model of the psychic apparatus, the term signifies the regression that takes place in dreams (i.e., a backward movement from the motor to the perception system) or, according to Freud's later theory of the drives, the regression of libidinal tendencies, a de-sublimation or re-somatization with potentially dangerous consequences. Merging Freudian psychoanalysis with his own philosophy of history, Adorno (with his co-author Horkheimer) states: "The curse of irresistible progress is irresistible regression."[13] In the twentieth century, progress has increasingly become defined in such narrowly rationalistic and technological terms that, from the apocalyptic point of view of the Frankfurt School in exile, progress and regression have been rendered virtually indistinguishable, as if the dialectic of the two had imploded. Adorno diagnoses this phenomenon particularly in the realm of culture. In addition to a critique of the industrial mechanisms of production and distribution, he also offers a devastating account of regressive forms of cultural reception. At certain points of his critique, however, dialectics unwittingly becomes the victim.

In 1963, Adorno delivered a radio lecture entitled "Culture Industry Reconsidered," in which he captures the problem of "regressive effects of particular products of the culture industry" in a statement that does not quite amount to an anecdote: "It is no coincidence that cynical American

13. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 28.

film producers are heard to say that their pictures must take into consideration the level of eleven-year-olds. In doing so they would very much like to make adults into eleven-year-olds."[14] Adorno's indignant accusation shows a seamless continuity with his earlier theoretical works made in the United States, such as his first American essay, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" (1938). In it, Adorno puts forth a powerful yet non-dialectical view of regression, claiming that the contemporary mode of listening to music (not only to popular but also to classical music) no longer fulfills traditional aesthetic demands to follow and "understand" attentively the temporal totality of a composition. Instead, "contemporary listening . . . has regressed, arrested at the infantile stage." "Regressive listening" is atomistic and dissociative, and regressive listeners are "childish; their primitivism is not that of the undeveloped, but that of the forcibly retarded." Regression is not merely a form of denying oneself the capacity to listen to increasingly minimalist yet complex new music (the latter being the self-reflective modernist response to reductive, repetitive, and standardized popular music), but it is also a form of denying the possibility of all "different and oppositional music."[15]

In denying the possibility of difference, regression fulfills a negative double function. On the one hand, it arrests the consumer in an "infantile milieu" of film, music, sports, and similar sorts of entertainment, a milieu ruled by the perverted aesthetic logic of an identity between culture and advertising. On the other hand, regression denigrates the longing for childhood as a (imaginary) state of happiness and fulfillment. This second aspect is crucial: regression means both arrest in infantilism and a violent, self-destructive mockery of the possibility of childhood as a *promise of happiness* (the latter will become an indispensable concept in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*). "Regressive listeners behave like children. Again and again and with stubborn malice, they demand the one dish they have once been served."[16] Within the system of the culture industry, there is no escape from being imprisoned by regression in the blind immanence of a childish demand for a repetition of the same song or story. Escape from repetitive sameness is sought only in the false novelty of, for instance, a new

14. Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, ed. Jay Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 105.

15. Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan Gillespie (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2002), p. 303.

16. Ibid., p. 307.

rhythmic technique or a different arrangement, and the longing for escape manifests as rage against that which yesterday was still up-to-date but today seems hopelessly outdated: "Regressive listening is always ready to degenerate into rage. If one knows that he is basically marking time, the rage is directed primarily against everything which would disavow the modernity of being with-it and up-to-date [English in the original] and reveal how little in fact has changed." Regressive listeners, Adorno concludes, "would like to ridicule and destroy what yesterday they were intoxicated with, as if in retrospect to revenge themselves for the fact that the ecstasy was not actually such."[17]

Adorno uses the notion of regression in tandem with related terms such as "reification" or "standardization." As David Jenemann argues, Adorno's critique does not issue from European cultural arrogance, but rather grows out of the actual research he undertook in the United States.[18] Adorno's friendship with Lang provides more evidence that Adorno's alleged biases ought to be viewed in a more nuanced fashion. In letters to his mother, Adorno mentions visiting Lang with Gretel on the set of his films *Secret Beyond the Door* (1948) and *House by the River* (1950). Commenting on the music composed for the latter film, he wrote to his mother: "I spent all day yesterday at the Republic Studios for the recording of the music to Lang's new film. . . . The technology is so perfect that as soon as a piece of music is recorded it can immediately be synchronized with the film and the dialogue, which means that one can directly check whether the recording was successful. If only the indescribably advanced technology were matched by the quality of that which it serves."[19] Adorno's sentiment is not surprising: the culture industry is progressive only in purely technological terms of production and distribution, while reception, form, and content are regressive. However, when focusing exclusively on the criticism voiced in this letter and in Adorno's theoretical writings, one can easily miss a different aspect pertinent to the problem of regression, one encapsulated in the idea of childhood as a figure of possibility for a different life, the promise of a corrective to the hopeless reality of "damaged life."

17. Ibid., p. 311.

18. See David Jenemann, *Adorno in America* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2007) as well as his article in this issue of *Telos.*

19. Theodor W. Adorno, *Letters to his Parents*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), p. 373.

A different perspective on regression is provided in section 128 of *Minima Moralia*, titled "Regressions." In three separate but related reflections, Adorno cites songs intimately familiar to him from early childhood. The first two are lullabies: Brahm's famous "Good evening, good night" and Taubert's cradle song beginning with the line "Sleep in gentle ease." Brahm's lullaby proposes the idea of absolute regression as the necessary correlate to possible happiness: "Nothing, for us, can fill the place of undiminished brightness except the unconscious dark, nothing that of what once we might have been, except the dream that we had never been born."[20] Adorno alludes to two seemingly mutually exclusive absolutes: happiness (i.e., a state of being) and death (i.e., not-being). Childhood, Adorno implies, is the developmental state of consciousness in which, prior to conceptual knowledge, a dream-like experience (recall that Freud first coins the term "regression" in his theory of dreams) of an unexpected dialectical relationship between these two seemingly mutually exclusive absolutes can take place. The dream of having never been born does not signify death but the possibility of experiencing life "undiminished." Then, after citing the first strophe of Taubert's lullaby, Adorno formulates a series of (rhetorical) questions, in which he asks whether the child's falling asleep can be read as a healing forgetting of the injustice that (in the song's lyrics) is done to the alien, the poor beggar who is driven away from the doorstep. Unabashedly, Adorno puts forth a utopian fantasy of regression as a complete cancellation of the world *as it is*, a world that, belying its pretenses to humanity, has relapsed into a state of unenlightened nature: "Is there not concealed in all persecution of human beings, who, with the little dog, set the whole of nature on the weak [*die ganze Natur aufs Schwächere hetzen*], the hope to see erased the last trace of persecution, which is itself a part of nature? Would not the beggar who was driven out of the gate of civilization be secure in his homeland [*Heimat*], which has been freed from the ban of the earth [*Bann der Erde*]?"[21]

Most eloquently, Adorno's almost cheerful appraisal of regression is presented in conjunction with the children's song of the two rabbits that are shot down by the hunter but quickly regain their senses and realize that, after all, they are still alive and run off. Only as an adult, Adorno

20. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), p. 199.

21. Ibid., p. 200.

confesses, has he been able to draw the lesson from this song: "Reason can only endure in despair and extremity [*Überschwang*]*;* it needs absurdity, in order not to fall victim to objective madness." If reason needs despair and excess in order to sustain itself, and if the absurd is needed in order to resist the madness of the world, then the most extravagant form of regression, the embrace of naïve, stupid childhood modes of experience, is precisely what is most needed. Thus, Adorno counsels, "one ought to follow the example of the two rabbits; when the shot falls, collapse crazily as if one were dead, collect one's wits and then, if one still has breath, show a clean pair of heels." Resistance to objective madness is possible only by surrendering to a child-like openness, bordering on self-surrender, to experience both fear and happiness: "The capacity for fear and for happiness are the same, the unrestricted openness to experience amounting to self-abandonment in which the vanquished rediscovers himself."[22] Within the strident critique of the culture industry and the condemnation of regressive listening, there is still a place for suggesting, at least in the minor literary form of aphoristic speculation, the possibility of a *different* form of regression, one that issues from an infantile capacity to find oneself by abandonment to precisely the sort of experience that a rationalistic, "adult" response would deem foolish. For Adorno, this is decidedly different from the retardation suffered by the regression of listening, which fosters a spiteful attitude against what one once was or might have been as a child. Adorno's philosophical longing for *another* possibility of regression, depicted in *Minima Moralia*, must be borne in mind when one encounters his frequent attacks on the culture industry as producing a mode of regressive reception.

Regression and Late Style

The correspondence between Lang and Adorno contains few references to intellectual matters, but it is clear that they had an active interest in each other's work. Lang's library contained many of Adorno's books, and he mentioned, for example, that he appreciated Adorno's phrase "the administered world"[23] and was reading his volume *Eingriffe* (*Interventions*) with great pleasure.[24] After 1956, when Fritz Lang started traveling to Germany more frequently, the two met on numerous occasions, sometimes for official events, such as the International Film Week in Mannheim in 1964.

22. Ibid.
23. See Lang's letter dated April 15, 1958, Adorno Archiv Br 861/19.
24. See Lang's letter dated August 13, 1964, Adorno Archiv Br 861/22.

Notably, they also recorded a radio discussion on "The Situation of Film" for the Hessischer Rundfunk in 1958. A record of the broadcast does not exist, but a typescript with Adorno's questions has survived. Adorno wonders, for example, what the most substantial differences between American and European cinema are in terms of mass culture. The question was probably intended to prod Lang to reflect on his own experiences directing in Germany and America, and to do so bearing in mind different mechanisms of viewer identification. In brackets, Adorno noted: "everyday person and exceptional person." This parenthetical note could refer to the shift in Lang's oeuvre away from his German movies featuring heroes often described by Lang himself as "supermen" (such as the "super-criminal" Dr. Mabuse or the "super-spy" Haghi in *Spies*) to his American movies featuring regular Joes (such as the peanut-eating Joe Wilson in *Fury*) and aiming at more psychological plausibility and narrative coherence.

Adorno's questions stress the historical and social context of film: "Film is not something isolated, but it reflects in its own development much that is universal. How do you see this relationship?" We do not know how Lang responded, but what Adorno had in mind was a historical dialectic of progress and loss. He notes: "It seems to me, as a layman . . . as if, owing to the ideal of naturalness, film today is tamer than it used to be, as if it had lost certain possibilities of the extreme that it possessed during its pioneering era."[25] Tellingly, the two films on which Lang was beginning to embark just then, *The Tiger of Eschnapur* and *The Indian Tomb*, were derided for their lack of naturalness and plausibility. In France, however, precisely the lack of verisimilitude, the ostentatious artificiality of the sets, the conventionality of the plot, and even the mechanical woodenness of the actors found a positive reception. The critic Philippe Demonsablon observed admiringly that Lang "is not interested in the real,"[26] i.e., he does not care about the real India, but seeks to reconstruct an orientalist fairy-tale idea of India, a complete artifice. Even scenes shot on location look as if they were filmed in the studio. The story itself, as Fereydoun Hoveyda proposed in his review, follows the outdated serial form of silent movies like Joe May's first *Indian Tomb* films or Lang's own early films *The Spiders*, *Die Nibelungen*, and *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler*, and thereby gestures back at the childhood of the film medium. Given the predictable narrative

25. Adorno Archiv Ge 101/1

26. Philippe Demonsablon, "Le Tigre d'Argol," *Cahiers du cinéma* 98 (August 1959): 59.

and the clichéd plot and characters, the achievement of the two-part film lies not "in its subject matter, but above all in its mise-en-scène and in its concern with stylization."[27]

The style of the films can be described as a merging of the grandiose and the simple: Hoveyda speaks of a "grand simplicity,"[28] and he points out that the most elevated is presented in the form of the simple or profane—a kind of inverted campiness: Lang "transforms the Maharajah into an operetta prince," and Hoveyda praises the genius of Lang's idea to make Debra Paget (the American star of the two films, lured to Germany with a salary much higher than Lang's) look like a dancer in the *Folies Bergeres*.[29] For the French critic, Lang's two Indian films are not minor works; on the contrary, they offer a "chain of fantastic adventures" that "awaken in me many inclinations of the child that I was."[30] The films' aesthetic accomplishments, Lang's enthusiastic critics imply, derive from their power to transport the viewer back to the unbridled sense of wonder that only a child spectator possesses. Lang's late work underscores cinema's force to enchant and induce a sense of marvel, but with a self-conscious twist: the cinema is experienced not as high art but as a product of the world of the cabaret and the circus, providing "purely physical pleasure."[31] (Incidentally, a significant amount of the films' comparatively large budget was spent on renting circus animals: elephants, tigers, and camels.)

In his autobiographical book *Moving Places*, the American film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum points out that the regressive qualities of Lang's two penultimate movies are not oppressive but liberating, reconfirming what one had already intimated, primarily with one's body, as a child: "For me the breaking of religious taboos and the presence of Debra Paget offered a carnal image that was rekindled recently on a return trip to London, when I saw subtitled prints of Fritz Lang's glorious *The Tiger Of Eschnapur* and *The Indian Tomb*. . . . For all of us, it was like a first kiss of pantheism, a blueprint that creeks, lakes, waterfalls, streams, oceans, fields, and stars had already suggested, but one that only a movie could prove, by ordering

27. Fereydoun Hoveyda, "Les Indes fabulées," *Cahiers du cinéma* 99 (September 1959): 57.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., p. 56.

31. Martin Scorsese, "Learning from Lang," in *Fritz Lang 2000*, ed. Robert Haller (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 2000), p. 31.

and illustrating a world for all to see."[32] Rosenbaum's formulation suggests that in the case of Lang's two "glorious" films, the moving image is at once proof and blueprint of the visible world. The accomplishment of Lang's films, then, cannot be found in narrative sophistication (which they lack) but, rather, in a primitive yet clarifying abbreviation of the world to what can be seen: they capture the very idea of cinema as pure vision and thus reassert Lang's authorship as a creator of unalloyed images.

Later in the book, Rosenbaum reiterates his praise of the two films, articulating it in terms of what he describes as a relationship between disintegration and clarity: the more a director's command over his work disintegrates, the more clarity is won, the more pure vision triumphs. Here, visual authorship, one could say, arises paradoxically out of the disintegration of directorial control. Among the "signs of disintegration" are: "(1) A conscious naïveté that is sought and achieved, aimed at a child's sensibility, and easily read as camp. (2) A naked artifice of props, actor-props, color schemes and schematic plots laid bare, so that even the wires holding up the fake snake in Debra Paget's religious dance inside a cave temple are visible."[33] The signs of disintegration are, at the same time, signs of clarity: the naïveté of a "child's sensibility" amounts to more than mere camp; the laying bare of cinematic artifice offers a clarity not only of what is seen on the screen, but also of the entire apparatus of technology and narrative convention that makes cinematic vision possible in the first place. In reading the films as allegories of the cinema, Rosenbaum follows a well-established critical tradition that has pitched Lang as a filmmaker whose "mise-en-scène is so often vision itself" and whose last three films are "theoretical in extreme" since they are musings on "the cinema as it might be"[34]—they are made, as it were, for a possible cinema, not an actual one. According to such an allegorical reading, then, Lang's last films signal not only regression backward, but also a breakthrough to a "regressive" modernist cinema quite different from, for example, the films of the French New Wave. Yet Rosenbaum even carries his praise to the point where Lang's double feature gives us a cinema that is no longer quite of the cinema: "Critics hung up on 'craft' and intentionality will probably

32. Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Moving Places: A Life at the Movies* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1995), p. 20.

33. Ibid., pp. 185–86.

34. Raymond Bellour, "On Fritz Lang," in *Fritz Lang: The Image and the Look*, ed. Stephen Jenkins (London: British Film Institute, 1981), pp. 28–29.

never be able to see it as a dazzling achievement . . . but there is nothing in cinema like it. I'll go even further: it has the only cave in movies that's worthy of Plato's."[35]

In underscoring the diminished role of authorial subjectivity in Lang's Indian films, Rosenbaum's observations resonate with Adorno's thoughts on *late style*—even though Adorno formulated them in relation to composers like Schoenberg, Mahler, and, above all, Beethoven. Lang's last films defy understanding if one desires to view them as culmination of his mastery; instead, they testify to an undoing of subjective control and authority and an increasing reliance on conventions. Viewed in terms of authorship as the seal of originality, they signify nothing but regression—and Rosenbaum puts his finger on this much more persuasively than most of the French auteurist critics who seek to redeem Lang as the wily master who remains firmly in control. If one wants to subsume Lang's last German films under the rubric of authorship, one must unmoor the term from the notion of subjective control. Whereas, according to Adorno, all "subjectivistic" artistic modes of procedure (*Verfahrungsweise*) aim at eliminating conventions by putting a premium on the force of "expression," late-style artworks no longer conceal but disclose what is devoid of originality and subjectivity: "convention appears in a form that is bald, undisguised, untransformed."[36] The disintegration mentioned by Rosenbaum is, in Adorno's terms, the waning of subjectivity; and the clarity mentioned by Rosenbaum is the appearance of naked conventionality, described as a radical externalization. The late work has a tendency to become all surface; it no longer hides its mechanism. The awkwardness of Lang's last films is, on the one hand, due to the mediocre production staff and actors with whom the director had to work; on the other hand, precisely the awkwardness, the perfunctoriness, and the silliness of these films are integral to a late-style aesthetic strategy of undisguised self-repetition and recycling: the self and his creations have entered cinema's storehouse of conventions and can be cited at will.

In duplicating his earlier work, in rewriting it, Lang's last films make visible a world in which everything has been ossified into clichés, and they thus suggest that Lang directs as if from beyond the grave: as if the auteur Lang were writing himself out of his last films. In discussing the director's late work, the metaphor of "writing" is not a malapropism. In a curious

35. Rosenbaum, *Moving Places*, p. 186.
36. Adorno, "Late Style in Beethoven," in *Essays on Music*, p. 565.

inversion of Walter Benjamin's observation about the Baroque mourning play, in which "the written word tends toward the visual," Lang's late style calls for an approach that treats his visual vocabulary as if it were encoded in "the form of allegorical script."[37] By pointing toward the death of the author and the death of "classical" cinema, and by pointing at their own imperfect and "ruined" state, his films attain an allegorical dimension, which requires one to "read" rather than just "watch" them. Considering Benjamin's description of "allegory as a form of writing,"[38] one can observe, somewhat counterintuitively, that Lang's directing in his Indian films has renounced all production of visual effects. Instead of images, Lang's direction stages "*concepts* of images," and instead of *realizing* the script, his direction merely *reads* it.[39] In Lang's late films, allegory[40] is the seal of late style, the death of an art form as we knew it and the coming into being of something that cannot be seen but only read—a fragment or a ruin that can be completed only with the "inner eyes" of the beholder. Paradoxically, then, Lang's last films are both regressive spectacles in which everything is sheer surface *and* allegorical ruins that need to be deciphered and thus point to a different form of cinema, one much more in tune with Adorno's idea that film may recreate the experience of reading discontinuous images. In his 1966 essay "Transparencies on Film," he writes: "It is in the discontinuity of . . . movement that images . . . resemble the phenomenon of writing: the latter similarly moving before our eyes while fixed in its discrete signs."[41]

The Blind Director and the Philosopher Who Closes his Eyes in the Cinema

In linking Lang's last films to Adorno's aesthetic notion of late style, one can better appreciate the disappointment with which the films were received in Germany. Lang had been the foremost auteur of Weimar cinema, and his postwar return to Germany had seemed to promise a return to past glory. Lang himself indulged this illusion: his contract with producer

37. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (New York: Verso, 1998), p. 176.

38. Ibid., p. 184.

39. See Frieda Grafe et al., *Fritz Lang* (Munich: Hanser, 1976), p. 140.

40. On allegory in Lang's *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse*, see Joe McElhaney, *The Death of Classical Cinema: Hitchcock, Lang, Minnelli* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), pp. 41–42.

41. Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, p. 180.

Artur Brauner stipulated that the first image on the screen would read "Ein Fritz Lang Film," that his name would appear once again at the end of the opening credits, and that in all promotional material his name was to be printed in the largest font. Yet Lang did not have the degree of creative control suggested by the proud brand name "Ein Fritz Lang Film." Brauner and his executive producer were above all concerned with staying within their budget, they accused Lang of wasting time and film material, and the relationship between producer and director quickly deteriorated. No wonder, then, that Lang signed one of his letters to Adorno with "your unhappy Tiger of Eschnapur."[42]

One of Lang's interns during the filming of *The Tiger of Eschnapur* was the young Alexander Kluge, of whom Adorno thought very highly and whom he had recommended to Lang with the words: "he is a *Wunderkind* [prodigy] who has passed all of his exams with extraordinary brilliance.... He is the most gifted of Germany's young generation."[43] Kluge's opinion of what he saw at the set became public in 1966, when the well-known film critic Uwe Nettelbeck published a review of Kluge's first feature-length film, *Yesterday Girl* (*Abschied von Gestern*). He wrote: "On the third day, Kluge says, Fritz Lang ceased to direct and resigned himself to sitting around and keeping an eye on the filming, because, according to Lang, Artur Brauner turned against him, took sides with the lower staff and the architect, and failed to recognize Lang's abilities."[44] These statements suggest that Kluge had merely been wasting his time trying to learn from a once great director who had resigned himself to letting others be in charge. However, Kluge later published a text in which he gives his short-lived internship during the filming of *The Tiger of Eschnapur* considerable credit for having initiated his own career as a director. Explaining that Lang's work encountered obstacles everywhere, Kluge writes in retrospect: "Every second of Lang's ideas was undermined as being too expensive, too abstruse.... This was the destruction of a filmic concept, and it is to the merit of Lang's mastery that, after all, a film of quality was produced."[45]

For Kluge, the film's qualities are mere remnants of Lang's former mastery; he reads the film exclusively in terms of artistic authorship, not

42. Letter dated April 15, 1958, Adorno Archiv Br 861/19.

43. Adorno Archiv Br 861/21.

44. *Die Zeit*, September 2, 1966, no. 36.

45. Alexander Kluge, *Ulmer Dramaturgien: Reibungsverluste* (Munich: Hanser, 1980), p. 103.

in conjunction with the dynamic of late style. His focus on authorial control allows Kluge to deduce from the disheartening experience at the set a politically charged, oppositional notion of *Autorenfilm* (author's film): "But this is not the film that Lang wanted to make—a compromise was forged from the producer's superior power and the persistent resistance of a director who repeatedly wanted to resign. I have been able to observe this, and out of this I developed the concept of the author's film."[46] In contrast to the appreciative reviews of the film in the *Cahiers du cinéma* and their emphasis on mise-en-scène, Kluge appreciates the movie solely as a warning example of what cinema should not be—and only in that respect does the experience on the set provide an important catalyst for Kluge's strategic concept of a new "author's film" (which was intended to add a distinctly legal and economic dimension to the aesthetic notion of auteurism) and his role in helping shape an institutional framework for the Young German Film. In 1962, Kluge was one of the signatories of the *Oberhausen Manifesto*, in which he and his fellow filmmakers demanded freedom from the dictates of the commercial film industry and declared: "The old film is dead. We believe in the new one."[47]

The old cinema against which Kluge and his Oberhausen peers rebelled was, as Adorno phrases it in allusion to their manifesto, "repulsive" because of "its infantile character, regression manufactured on an industrial scale."[48] Fritz Lang, however, did not fit into the binary opposition of "Daddy's Cinema" and "Young Film," and Kluge treated the veteran director with ambivalence. On the one hand, he made Lang look resigned and out of touch in his interview with Nettelbeck; on the other hand, he sought to have him hired as the chair of the first German film department, housed at the Hochschule für Gestaltung (College of Design) in Ulm, and he asked Adorno to publish an article that would improve Lang's reputation with Germany's young generation.[49] When it came to the philosopher's

46. Ibid.

47. Eric Rentschler, ed., *West German Filmmakers on Film: Visions and Voices* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988), p. 2.

48. Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, p. 178.

49. Kluge wrote to Adorno: "What hurts Mr. Lang especially with the younger generation is the book by Kracauer [*From Caligari to Hitler*].…Lang is thereby labeled as an old master, someone whose strength lies in the virtuoso mastery of outdated artistic techniques. You know as much as I do that that is not the case. Perhaps you could, when you get a chance, write a little essay about Mr. Lang in which you present him as a progressive man?" (Adorno Archiv Br 766/3). Neither Adorno's essay nor Lang's professorship

relation to the cinema, Kluge's ambivalence toward Lang was extended to Adorno as well. Kluge's statements about the subject tend to underscore Adorno's iconoclasm, his suspicion of graven images. For instance, Kluge liked to cite the following apocryphal statement by Adorno: "I love to go to the movies; the only thing that bothers me is the image on the screen."[50] More recently, Kluge still claimed that "Adorno did not appreciate film much. . . . In the cinema he liked to close his eyes and trust the sound."[51]

However, the flippancy of Kluge's remark conceals both the extent to which Adorno benefitted from Kluge's cinematic work and the precise degree to which the latter was informed by Adorno's aesthetics. Put succinctly, both Kluge's and Adorno's film aesthetics converge in the conviction that a non-regressive cinema would be one in which the ideal spectator would, like a child not yet jaded by the mechanisms of commercial cinema, see not so much the images on the screen but rather fill in with his or her imagination the gaps between the images. Kluge's concept of film is significantly influenced by the following tenets of Adorno's aesthetics:[52] (1) the idea of aesthetic experience as realizing the claim of non-identity, i.e., a relaxation of the grip exerted by the subject on its own fixed identity; (2) an idealization of the child spectator as the one capable of "understanding" the neglected refuse of society; (3) a notion of active reception that requires the viewer's "productive fantasy";[53] and (4) a significant theoretical investment in the modernist technique of montage. The latter aspect constitutes a direct link to the film aesthetics propagated in Adorno and Eisler's *Composing for the Films*. For the book's re-publication in 1969,

came to pass. For Kluge's own account of his plans to bring Lang to Ulm, see Kluge, *Ulmer Dramaturgien*, p. 31.

50. Kluge, *Ulmer Dramaturgien*, p. 48. Kluge first used a similar formulation in 1966. See Enno Patalas and Frieda Grafe, "Tribüne des Jungen Deutschen Films II: Alexander Kluge," *Filmkritik* 9 (1966): 490.

51. Alexander Kluge, *Neonröhren des Himmels: Filmalbum* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 2007), pp. 107–8.

52. For a comprehensive presentation of Kluge's aesthetics with occasional references to Adorno, see Peter Lutze, *Alexander Kluge: The Last Modernist* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 1998).

53. The phrase is from Adorno's "Skoteinos, or How to Read Hegel." There are striking parallels between how Adorno prescribes how to read Hegel and how to view films: both require a "relaxation of consciousness" that makes it possible to read "only associatively" (Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993], pp. 141–42).

Adorno tried, fittingly but in vain, to have Kluge contribute an additional chapter on the Young German Film. The confrontation with Kluge's work thus reaffirms for Adorno (and, presumably, for Lang as well) the relevance of filmic modernism, and, as Miriam Hansen has argued, "[t]he dynamics of influence between Adorno and Kluge" cannot be integrated into an easy temporal logic of "early and late," America in the 1940s and Germany in the 1960s.[54] The confrontation with Kluge's budding modernist film career symbolizes, for Adorno and Lang, both a break with and a continuation of their legacies.

Kluge's bon mot about Adorno's closed eyes in the cinema also conjures up the figure of Fritz Lang, whom Kluge depicts as "The Blind Director": "He sees every scene with his 'inner eye' and only has to put it into words for the actors, the cameramen, the lightning technicians, and the soundmen. . . . He has to describe what he sees with his inner eye with as much color and precise detail as possible."[55] In retrospect (his brief text on Lang was published in 2007), Kluge depicts both Adorno and Lang as blind when it comes to the cinema, as seers whose visions unfold in front of their inner eyes only. This is both a reaffirmation of Kluge's own aesthetics of the cinematic "gap" and an elegant put-down of the Weimar generation that returned to Germany only after many years in America. In a 1986/1987 interview with the journal *October*, Kluge dismisses Adorno's statements on film: "Adorno . . . had no knowledge of the production sphere. He did not deal with it. . . . He never really saw a factory, and that is why he sees society as a factory. That is why I never believed Adorno's theories of film. He only knew Hollywood films. He went with Fritz Lang, Brecht, and Eisler together as friends to Hollywood."[56]

The glaring factual inaccuracies of Kluge's statement aside, his claims are reminders that both Lang and Adorno failed to achieve what they were striving for in postwar Germany: to create a sense of continuity with Kluge's generation. Lang did not find the acknowledgment he was hoping for, and little stings such as Kluge's remarks, reported by Nettelbeck in

54. Miriam B. Hansen, "Introduction to Adorno, 'Transparencies on Film' (1966)," *New German Critique* 24/25 (1981/1982): 197.

55. Alexander Kluge, *Cinema Stories*, trans. Martin Brady and Helen Hughes (New York: New Directions, 2007), p. 29.

56. Stuart Liebman, "On New German Cinema, Art, Enlightenment, and the Public Sphere: An Interview with Alexander Kluge," *October* 46 (1988): 42. Kluge says much the same in *Ulmer Dramaturgien*, p. 47.

Die Zeit, hurt him deeply. In response to a letter by Lang to Gretel, Adorno sought to reassure his friend: "Not only is Nettelbeck's account . . . evidently not correct, but there is something humanly impossible in the whole matter. It is plausible that young people are ambivalent toward us older ones, especially when there is something they can learn from us while, at the same time, they seek to assert themselves; we cannot blame them for it. I observe this very often in my own students. However, it is, in contradistinction to the spreading [social] coldness, a question of tact, of education, and simply of humanity, a question of whether they primitively make us the recipients of this ambivalence, possibly putting it into the service of advertising, or whether they are capable of dealing with this ambivalence in their own selves, and that means primarily: in the productivity of their work."[57]

Adorno's eloquence on this matter suggests that he, too, suffered from this ambivalence. After Adorno's death in 1969, Lang wrote to his friend Eleanor Rosé: "He died of a heart attack. Probably brought on because his students did exactly what he had taught them over these last twenty years, namely to rebel. He never understood that they could also do that against him, much like he, the way I see it, never understood today's young people."[58] This often-repeated and highly dubious interpretation of Adorno's heart attack must be seen in light of Lang's own desire to understand and be understood by the younger generation. In interviews after the end of his active career, he mentioned that what concerned him most was the situation of young people. His last film project was meant to deal comprehensively with the problems facing the youth of his time. Lotte Eisner describes it as "a story about contemporary youth, their conflict and desires, their striving to free themselves from the traditions of the establishment, and their use of drugs."[59] Lang's unrealized film idea reflects an important theme that, over the course of his friendship with Adorno, grows more pressing: how to relate productively to a younger generation that does not share the experience of exile and therefore lacks a crucial historical perspective. How does one teach them the sobering lessons learned as an American émigré without precluding the chance to foster a sense of responsible continuity and commonality?

57. Adorno Archiv Br 861/28.

58. Aurich et al., *Fritz Lang*, p. 450.

59. Lotte Eisner, *Fritz Lang*, trans. Gertrud Mander (New York: Oxford UP, 1977), p. 416.

Becoming Animal, Becoming Child

Lang and Adorno discussed the problems that characterized the young German postwar generation during their 1958 radio interview, for which Adorno had prepared the following questions: "In what do you see the decisive changes in the young people's consciousness (wish for security, dying off of fantasy)?" And: "Repeatedly, I have had the opportunity, especially with young people, to observe a kind of resistance against expression, against every emotion intensified to an extreme.…How would you think about this question?"[60] It seems that these two questions or claims are connected. Adorno diagnoses in the younger generation a wilting of imaginative powers, and this goes hand in hand with a stifling sobriety that rejects all extreme expressions of feeling. As if to counter that kind of sobriety or even coldness, Adorno and Lang's letters are not only full of emotional intimacy, but they also put into play a deliberately regressive, childlike silliness, starting with the animal nicknames with which they address each other. In the correspondence, Gretel Adorno is the "Giraffe," Lang the "Badger," and Adorno the "Hippopotamus." These forms of address are signs of intimacy *and* a reflection of the role that the culture industry played in their lives: Lily Latté is sometimes referred to as "Maus" or "Micky" (*sic*), after the Disney character. The conscious embrace of childhood provides a dialectical counterpoint to the dangers of regression that Adorno detects in the unreflective consumption of products manufactured by the culture industry. It makes a difference whether one regresses unconsciously and involuntarily or whether one reflectively cultivates regression as a means to reclaim a prior self in all its intellectual shortcomings. Reflective regression has an anamnestic function, cultivating what has been irretrievably lost—no doubt, one might call this strategy "Romantic."

The strategic regression enacted in the correspondence was articulated primarily as an affinity with animals, a playful anthropomorphism that Teddie and Gretel cultivated in how they treated, for example, their dog Ali Baba, to whom Adorno would sing the same lullaby by Johannes Brahms to which he himself listened as a child, as he describes in the essay "Regressions" cited above. Further evidence of the importance of animal pets in the friendship is a photograph showing Lily Latté holding a black cat, Adorno stroking one of Lang and Latté's white terriers, and

60. Adorno Archiv Ge 101/2.

Lang handling a young opossum.[61] When Lang addressed both Adornos, he referred to them simply as "dear animals." An important friendship ritual was the exchange of small gifts: the little animal figures that adorned Adorno's desk were often gifts from Lang and Latté. Adorno acknowledged the receipt of one such gift (presumably a toy hippopotamus) by giving his name as "Archibald Stumpfnase Kant von Bauchschleifer Nilpferdkönig" ("Archibald Stubnose Kant von Belly-Dragger Hippopotamus King") and writing: "I feel that it [the hippopotamus] is the most perfect copy of my hidden inner self, or a copy of what Kant, whose name I also bear, calls my intelligible character. Or my Platonic idea."[62] Adorno's thank-you letter is addressed to "Maudax G.m.b.H."— "Mau-" refers to "Maus," "-dax" to the German word for badger, "Dachs," and the business acronym stands for "company with limited liability."

That the identification with animals is a regression that seeks to dialectically redeem what progress has eliminated—i.e., the similarity between humans and animals—is underscored by a document titled *The Dogs' Declaration of Independence*, which is supposedly penned by Horkheimer but, as it says, "drafted in consultation with the creator of panhumanism, Archibald the Hippopotamus-King."[63] *The Dogs' Declaration of Independence* was a gift for Fritz Lang's fifty-sixth birthday on December 5, 1946, and the recipient is described in it as "one whose agreement [*Einverständnis*] with all suffering creatures is as unquestionable as his profound and empathic knowledge of the human nature of Dogs."[64] The declaration claims that "all creatures are created equal," that "all animals are human beings," that, accordingly, "dogs too can claim human rights," and "among the human rights of dogs [are], besides drinking and sleeping: snooping, walking astray, barking, biting, lifting one's legs, foolish play, and a sensible degree of general destruction."[65]

61. See *Adorno: Eine Bildmonographie*, p. 193.

62. Letter dated March 4, 1951, Adorno Archiv Br 861/6. In his letter to Latté about Carlo Schmid, cited above, Adorno adds the politician to his small community of animal-like humans: Schmid "literally looks like a hippopotamus touched by the spirit, and how can I assert myself against such drastic competition; after all, I am only the idea of a hippopotamus" (letter dated September 24, 1953, Adorno Archiv Br 866/5).

63. Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1985), 12: 345.

64. Ibid., p. 344.

65. Ibid., p. 343.

In addition to this canine claim to humanity, the stuffed toy monkey Peter (presumably a reference to Kafka's educated monkey "Rotpeter") played a large role in Lang's life and correspondence. The director would frequently discuss him in his letters, he would fix him his famous double martinis, and, at the end, Peter the Monkey was buried with him. So it is no exaggeration to say that both Adorno and Lang unabashedly shared in the pleasures of regression, in the pleasures of treating animals, animate or inanimate, as humans, and thus preserving some of childhood's enchantment in a disenchanted world. The twofold purpose of this strategic regression was, I believe, (1) to provide a private antidote to the culture industry's destruction of genuinely spontaneous and unrestricted experience, and (2) to hold on to an almost utopian image of an undamaged life that is promised only by the memory of a child-like capacity to embrace the wondrous world of anthropomorphic animals. In referring to themselves and their partners as animals, Adorno and Lang not only elevated animals to the status of humans, they also made themselves smaller, less important, less serious. This was a crucial difference between their cultivation of animal anthropomorphism and the fantasies of anthropomorphic animals fabricated in the Disney studios.

Moreover, one can read the friends' deliberate comedic rituals of becoming a child, becoming an animal, as antidotes against their fear of being limited to the status of exile, of never fully arriving at a place they could call home. Perhaps the embrace of childhood and the identification with mute and helpless animals served to counter their fear of being rendered replaceable, dispensable. However, there are limits to the effectiveness of this strategic regression: the fear of entirely negative regression, of violence, never subsides. Two dreams recorded by Adorno express this succinctly: On March 14, 1948, after a night of too much drinking, he had the following dream: "I recollected a film script that I wanted to give to Fritz Lang (with whom we lunched today). It was to be called: 'The Forgotten Princess.' It concerned a princess who had no function in the modern world and is therefore forgotten. She turns to the hotel industry, experiences all sorts of conflicts and ends up marrying a head waiter."[66] This is a funny dream precisely because the imaginary film script depicts the failure of fantasy to summon a different world: not only

66. Theodor W. Adorno, *Dream Notes*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), pp. 46–47.

has the princess "no function in the modern world," but she also suffers the indignity of ending up married to a "head waiter" rather than a fairy-tale prince. There is no escape from the disenchanted world, and this is the truth that Adorno's "realistic" Hollywood film scenario reveals.[67]

Adorno's comical spoof of a fairy-tale is accompanied by another "much more disturbing" dream. According to Adorno's dream protocol, he "had been given a child to torture, a delightful, twelve-year old boy. He had been spread out on a little apparatus that was positioned at an angle so that his delicate body was everywhere exposed." In his dream, Adorno proceeds to box and kiss the boy, then he "hit him on his buttocks until they went quite red." Finally, he "hit him hard in the testicles. At that he finally stretched his arm out to pick something up. It was a monocle that he inserted into one eye without making a sound."[68] The sexually abused child in the dream represents, of course, the monocle-wearing Fritz Lang. To Adorno's sanguine dialectic of regression, his American dream seems to offer a melancholy correction: the nightmare of regression—the repressed underside of progress, enlightenment, and reason—will always return, no matter how much Adorno and Lang seek to "reappropriate" regression as a reflective practice. Nonetheless, the image of a naked twelve-year old Fritz Lang tortured by a sexually aroused Adorno proves that in the context of the friendship between the director and the philosopher, even the most sobering lessons appear in the guise of comic relief.

67. Somewhat implausibly, Kluge reports that Adorno had indeed hopes of becoming a Hollywood screenwriter. See Kluge, *Ulmer Dramaturgien*, p. 48.

68. Adorno, *Dream Notes*, p. 47.

Devices of Shock: Adorno's Aesthetics of Film and Fritz Lang's Fury

Ryan Drake

> Los Angeles, end of May 1942:
> I dreamt I was to be crucified. The crucifixion was to take place at the Bockenheimer Warte, just by the university. I felt no fear throughout the entire process. Bockenheim resembled a village on Sunday, deathly quiet, as if under glass. I observed it closely on my way to the place of execution. I imagined that the appearance of things on this my last day would enable me to glean some definite knowledge of the next world. At the same time, however, I declared that one should not let oneself be seduced into ascribing objective truth to the religion practiced there simply because Bockenheim was still at the stage of simple commodity production. That aside, I was worried about whether I would obtain leave from the crucifixion to attend a large, extremely elegant dinner to which I had been invited, though I was confidently looking forward to it.
>
> Theodor W. Adorno, *Dream Notes*

Two critical yet comic elements, beyond the more obvious narrative of persecution, reveal themselves in Adorno's recorded nightmare. The first is comic because it so aptly displays his relentless critical impulse despite himself, the way in which theory invades the private sphere of his dreams: even in sleep, Adorno finds himself at once reading phenomena and on guard against a false transcendence from which they could, in the last instance, be deciphered.[1] The second is more patently absurd, yet perhaps

1. We should note that this is by no means the only overtly theoretical appearance within his dreams. Elsewhere, Adorno recalls from a dream the organization of a

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more difficult to assess: that he should gain permission to interrupt an unspeakably cruel and final punishment, an essentially hopeless enterprise, in order to enjoy an opulent feast. This moment of release, with its added hope of sensuous gratification, appears discordant with the severe tone of Adorno's writings on late capitalism, its generalized culture of resignation to what its inhabitants are "presently being fed."[2] The nightmare of crucifixion here is not, I suggest, emblematic of social privation and neglect, as one might expect under the historical circumstances of a German-Jewish refugee in the process of "adjustment" to American life during the war, but of endless cultural consumption in the mode of paralysis: "barbarism has now reached a point, the possibility of escape to a dinner being cut off, where it cannot stuff itself full enough of culture. Every program must be sat through to the end, every best-seller read, every film seen in its first flush in the top Odeon."[3] Indeed, Adorno could not have asked for a better vantage point from which to analyze this cultural dynamic than during his extended stay in the United States, where he was frequently counted among the guests at celebrity dinner parties.

If Peter Hohendahl is correct in characterizing the émigré's period of social adjustment as a "traumatic experience,"[4] not merely with regard to new customs and a new language but also to the intensification of resources for collective social control already familiar to him from Hitler's rise to power, it is nonetheless the case that more than a morbid curiosity or a dutiful scientific resolve drew Adorno close to the center of the culture industry in Los Angeles, an industry that he described as so administratively all-encompassing, particularly in its manifestation through movies,

constellation of stars in terms strikingly similar to the way in which he describes the logic of his written work. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Dream Notes*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 35.

2. Theodor W. Adorno, "Transparencies on Film," trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *New German Critique* 24/25 (1981–82): 204.

3. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), pp. 118–19.

4. Peter Hohendahl, "The Displaced Intellectual? Adorno's American Years Revisited," *New German Critique* 56 (1992): 85. In support of Hohendahl's claim, a letter to Walter Benjamin, written just prior to his departure from London in 1937, reflects Adorno's ambivalence about the prospect of fleeing to "an America where the waves of crisis are obviously gathering pace in a most disturbing manner too." Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence, 1928–1940*, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999), p. 229.

that it scarcely permits dreams at all.[5] His intimate friendship with Fritz Lang, who had left Germany upon being asked by Joseph Goebbels to direct the German Film Institute in 1933[6] and who had met with relative success as a director in Hollywood, appears to constitute something of a reprieve from the scathing critiques of film as an aesthetic medium that he published along with Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Drawing from the latter, commentators have tended to attribute to Adorno a wholesale rejection of film as little more than a vehicle of naked bourgeois ideology, in contrast to Walter Benjamin's more optimistic—albeit qualified—approach to cinema's emancipatory potential. Indeed, Adorno's numerous assertions to the effect that the sound film contributes to the "stunting of the mass-media consumer's powers of imagination and spontaneity"[7] appear only to further the long-standing picture of the zealous critic carefully guarding himself against this most dangerous and American of infections. Yet in Detlev Claussen's recent biographical study, a section of which is devoted specifically to the unlikely friendship with Lang, Adorno is described as a "passionate moviegoer" from a young age whose ostensible "contempt for the film as an art form is contradicted . . . by the esteem in which he held Lang."[8] In addition, attempts to explain what appears to be a softened stance on cinema during the time of his German repatriation, in such works as "How to Look at Television" (1954) and "Transparencies on Film" (1967), typically overlook the more complicated perspective visible elsewhere, for example, in Adorno's favorable profile of Charlie Chaplin as early as 1930.[9]

Straightforward solutions to this perceived discord between personal complicity in and theoretical condemnation of the motion picture industry have an equally sedative effect: either Adorno's formidable critique of film as belonging to a larger "medium of undreamed of psychological

5. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum Books, 1972), p. 125: "Art for the masses has destroyed the dream but still conforms to the tenets of that dreaming idealism which critical idealism balked at."

6. Peter Bogdanovich, *Fritz Lang in America*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group), p. 15.

7. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 126.

8. Detlev Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno: One Last Genius*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008), pp. 164, 172.

9. Published originally in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, May 22, 1930.

control"[10] is overstated, and cultural conditions are not nearly as dire as he would have us believe (hence there really is no nightmare, so why not indulge?), or he internalized the transparent nature of the industry's deception to the same degree in which he depicted it (since the crucifixion will take place regardless, why not look forward to the dinner party in the midst of it?). In this leveling effect, cultural affirmation—not incidentally, the most damaging aspect of film for Adorno—plays itself out all over again. This essay seeks to bypass the familiar narratives of consistent hypocrisy and an eventually exhausted theoretical hysteria in order to hold in view the question of film's status as an art form, and to do so with Adorno's connection to Lang in mind. To this end, I will take up a particular work by Lang, namely, *Fury*, his first U.S. film and what has been called a "fully dialectical fable on the nature of American populism,"[11] as a prism through which we might catch sight of the paradoxical notion, in Adorno's thinking, of a film of resistance.

Resistance and autonomy are intertwined, if not synonymous, terms in Adorno's work, applied as frequently to objects of art as to human subjects. For it is precisely through the former, as Benjamin observed,[12] in its eventual extrication from unquestioned use value in its "ritual function," that the latter actually might be guided toward that self-directedness that is categorically assigned yet practically denied to humans at the level of the base as well as that of the superstructure. At the risk of oversimplifying one of the dimensions of Adorno's theory of art for our present purposes, I shall characterize this aesthetic denial as accomplished by a system of artistic products primarily in their complicity with the logic of commodity fetishism, wherein the illusion of singular, irreplaceable objective existents is projected through the countervailing abstraction of ubiquitous, calculable exchange value. The illusion of qualitatively new forms of experience, embodied in the principle of the shock effect or the spectacle, which "captures" the consciousness of its audience, is the primary means whereby manufactured art products socialize the modern subject in the mode of the consumer. Thus, as a parallel to the advance of technology

10. Theodor W. Adorno, "How to Look at Television," *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television* 8, no. 3 (1954): 216.

11. Tom Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity* (London: British Film Institute Press, 2000), p. 227.

12. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), pp. 223–24.

propelled by the dynamics of a competitive market, the ever-renewed task of the culture industry is to reproduce the very values and norms through which a consuming public is maintained while at the same time meeting the ever-mounting demand for novel aesthetic provocation.[13] For Adorno, this "longing for the new"[14] characteristic of the modern age is really only the desire for what is packaged as new but which popular tastes have been trained to expect. Such ideological sleight-of-hand is accomplished through an increase in a pleasurable intensity of effects that is at once sensuously overwhelming and conceptually impoverished. Mass culture lends itself to a calculus of alternately inducing stimulus and tranquilization as forms of collective inclusion (pop culture as a means of "connecting" with the world and others) whose general pattern accords less with the nefarious aims of the individual entrepreneur than with the impersonal imperatives of what Horkheimer referred to as "the formalization of reason."[15]

Works that ascend, on the other hand, to the level of autonomy for Adorno are marked not only by their ability to create, in each particular case, specific rules of form suited to their aesthetic content,[16] but as well by an acknowledgment of their own essential semblance character, their status as mimetic objects mediated in their construction by human subjectivity. Such works therefore seek by means of technique to distance themselves from their subject matter at the same time that they provide access to it. Consistent with Clement Greenberg's narrative of modernity,[17]

13. The modern principle of the shock effect has its roots in the work of Baudelaire, in particular his essay on the illustrator Constantin Guys entitled "The Painter of Modern Life." For a more thorough account of this phenomenon in its historical context, see Susan Buck-Morss's extraordinary study "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered," *October* 62 (1992): 3–41.

14. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 32.

15. Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Continuum, 1974), pp. 36f.

16. Cf. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 228. Regarding the order of its construction in this sense, "every authentic artwork is internally revolutionary."

17. I have in mind here particularly Greenberg's famous essay "Modernist Painting," where he notes: "Having been denied by the Enlightenment all tasks they could take seriously, [the fine arts] looked as though they were going to be assimilated to entertainment pure and simple, and entertainment itself looked as though it were going to be assimilated, like religion, to therapy. The arts could save themselves from this leveling down only by demonstrating that the kind of experience they provided was valuable in its own right and not to be obtained from any other activity." Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), 4:86.

this acknowledgment in the medium of easel painting, for example, was manifest in the nineteenth century in an increased focus upon the material elements essential to its form, wherein the flatness of the canvas and the sensuous nature of the paint itself began to overtake the representational figures formerly evident through these elements. The abstraction from recognizable relations between objects or objects themselves, as well as the corresponding presentation of the "matter" of painting in avant-garde works of visual art, held a twofold advantage for undercutting the place reserved for them within bourgeois culture. Works could thus avoid the problem of affirmation that for Adorno necessarily attends figurative representation.[18] The aesthetic depiction of objective phenomenal content, no matter the producer's intent, retains an irreducible force of legitimation of the social conditions to which such content refers. At the same time, such works could actively interrupt the illusion of immediacy through which conventional forms of mimesis create a naively "realistic"—hence, affirmative—appearance of the world by accentuating their own elements of mediation. Such "serious" art objects—only ever autonomous in a qualified sense, given that they cannot be wholly removed from the social order against which they operate—invite opportunities for immanent critique of that order.

Film, the works of which are neither generated under the exclusive control of a single, independent artist nor able to escape from the figurative-representational nature proper to their form, therefore appears at first glance, from an Adornian position, ill-suited for the task of ultimately undermining the scheme of production upon which it rests. In fact, Adorno expressly indicates that the "photographic process of film . . . [which] places a higher intrinsic significance on the object, as foreign to subjectivity, than aesthetically autonomous, techniques . . . is the retarding aspect of film in the historical process of art."[19] Accordingly, one of the burdens of the motion picture, in its attempt to achieve a measure of aesthetic autonomy,

18. This tendency on the part of artworks as such, and not simply representational ones, to sanction the current form of the subject's lifeworld is never fully neutralized, since even the negating power of revolutionary art invokes its correlate. Adorno enunciates this qualification at the start of *Aesthetic Theory*: "Artworks detach themselves from the empirical world and bring forth another world, one opposed to the empirical world as if this other world too were an autonomous entity. Thus, however tragic they appear, artworks tend a priori toward affirmation" (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 1).

19. Adorno, "Transparencies on Film," p. 202.

would entail drawing the audience's consciousness toward those aspects of its formal composition that are typically united in increasingly seamless—and hence, implicit from the perspective of the viewer—fashion in its more commercial forms, namely, the projected interplay of "word, image, and music."[20] However, insofar as the various techniques unique to film (e.g., montage, superimposition, tracking) operate by way of the shock effect, these must be employed against themselves, as it were, in concert with applicable techniques borrowed from photography, music, and literature in order to solicit the audience's powers of attentive sensation without sacrificing meaningful content. The notion that film would be little more than "dependent art" was unlikely at best in the Hollywood of the 1930s, given the studio system's elaborate division of manual and intellectual (broadly construed) labor and the Great Depression's highlighting of the profit motive as the cinema's *raison d'être*. Yet, as Claussen relates a personal conversation between the two friends, it was Adorno who reportedly defended Lang's films *as* instances of autonomous art.[21] In the case of *Fury*, this characterization holds not simply because it meets the formal challenges of its medium, as I demonstrate below, but also because under Lang's direction, his film evinces an awareness (which Adorno mentions in the context of a critique of television, but which applies equally to movies) that "the social effect depends [not merely upon] its technical structure . . . [but also] upon the explicit and implicit messages"[22] that these works convey to their audience. This is not to assign to artistic production a technique of calculated moral responses; rather, it is to maintain in its objective content a self-conscious connection with the justice (or lack thereof) of the social whole from which it issues. For Lang, films could not simply present themselves as enchanting illusions, striking in their resemblance to actual social conditions; there had to be a tacit acknowledgment that, especially in America, they were complicit in the service of what Adorno called the "dreamless dream," namely "repossessing the entire sensible world once again in a copy satisfying every sensory organ."[23]

Fury achieves exceptional status in this sense to the extent that it takes as its subject matter an extreme case of the very condition of moral

20. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 124.

21. Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno*, p. 172.

22. Theodor W. Adorno, "Prologue to Television," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia UP, 1998), p. 49.

23. Ibid. On this point, cf. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 202.

and intellectual oblivion that cinematic effects had begun to exploit as a matter of course on the part of its audience. Given that films "incite the viewers and listeners to fall into step as if in a parade," as Adorno writes, "[i]t would not be incorrect to describe the constitutive subject of film as a 'we' in which the aesthetic and sociological aspects of the medium converge."[24] While Joe Wilson (Spencer Tracy) and his ostensible fiancée Katherine (Sylvia Sidney) figure as the protagonists of the movie, its principal character is a frenzied mob of outraged small-town residents seeking vengeance for a local girl who was kidnapped and, as is subtly suggested, sexually molested. Joe, who fits the broad profile of one of the criminals in question and who is held as a suspect in the town jail until he can be questioned by the district attorney, finds himself the target of a public lynching when the swarming townsfolk, unable ultimately to reach him in his cell, set fire to and eventually bomb the building before the National Guard can arrive. Presumed dead by all—including the audience—a disillusioned, half-burned Joe reappears on his brothers' doorstep to enlist their aid in bringing twenty-two members of the mob to trial for murder, secretly directing their collective fates from a remove mediated primarily through radio broadcasts, which at the time were a technological novelty. The center of *Fury*'s action, therefore, is a thoughtless aggression in infectious, collective form: in Adorno's words, "mimetic impulses"[25] seeking satisfaction in a spectacle of violence under the pretense of justice.

Originally titled *Mob Rule*, Norman Krasna's story seems in retrospect designed to conjure up associations with the treatment of Jews under National Socialism in Germany at the time of its theatrical release. Its more immediate inspiration, however, was drawn not from abroad but from an event three years prior in San Jose, California, in which a horde of approximately ten thousand local citizens stormed the courthouse and dragged two men being held for the kidnapping and killing of Brooke Hart into the town square, where they were hanged—the first mass-advertised lynching in U.S. history. The following day, along with several reports detailing the event, the *San Francisco Chronicle* printed a photograph of the crowd (men and women, dressed in clothes ranging from casual to more formal attire) forcing its way through the courthouse doors, a caption just above the image reading "Fury would not down."[26] *Fury* thus does not

24. Adorno, "Transparencies on Film," p. 203.

25. Ibid.

26. *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 27, 1933. Whether the official title of the film was drawn from this caption is unconfirmed.

merely transpose the threat of an easily manipulated and desperate public fallen prey to agitators or fascist dictators foreign to American soil,[27] but instead serves as a reflection of a tendency already at work at home—a tendency that the big business of harmless amusement would sooner have its customers forget. *Fury* is, in its cultural assignment, a vestige of memory, a reminder of the potential sudden shift from an orderly, if repressed, state of society into barbaric oblivion, oppositional psychic forces juxtaposed in Joe's endearing habit of confusing the terms "memento" and "momentum" (an intellectual failing that establishes not only his inclusion among the ranks of the average, working-class man, but ultimately interferes with his intentions of remaining anonymous while manipulating the proceedings of the trial against his aggressors).[28] Indeed, the image early in the film of a steam engine screaming along its tracks, breaking up the audience's view of a passionate kiss between Joe and Katherine, calls attention to the awesome propulsive force of collective human striving and in turn foreshadows the latter's menacing socio-historical character when it is unleashed without the guide of conscience.

As Adorno states, however, a viable aesthetics of film "focuses on the movement of objects,"[29] and in Lang's picture the title character shows its movement to be dialectical. The fury unleashed upon Joe transforms him as a moral agent. When he reappears after the media had pronounced him dead, he reveals that his outrage has been adequately stoked in the darkness

27. Photographs of the hanged men were used by Hitler's regime as propaganda against the United States ten years after the crime occurred, alleging that since Hart was Jewish, the lynching of his suspected murderers was evidence of America's general support for the Jewish people. Cf. Harry Farrell, *Swift Justice: Murder and Vengeance in a California Town* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992), pp. 301–2.

28. Anton Kaes notes the dual sense of "memento" as "both a reminder and a warning" and sees *Fury* itself in its political double-meaning, to which Lang and Adorno, as foreigners in the process of cultural adjustment, would have certainly been especially sensitive. Kaes, "A Stranger in the House: Fritz Lang's 'Fury' and the Cinema of Exile," *New German Critique* 89 (2003): 50.

29. Adorno, "Transparencies on Film," p. 200. Adorno credits this notion to the theoretical work of his former mentor, Siegfried Kracauer, about whom he had written a retrospective piece two years prior, "The Curious Realist: On Siegfried Kracauer," trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, *New German Critique* 54 (Autumn, 1991): 159–77. Although ambivalent in his critique, Adorno does commend Kracauer on his techniques of reception analysis, which serves to maintain the link between accountability for the state of culture and participation in it, a "moment of legitimacy [namely] outrage at the fact that countless human beings who ought to know better and at bottom do know better nevertheless abandoned themselves passionately to false consciousness" (p. 170).

of the movie theater, where newsreels re-broadcast, in an incessant loop, images of his horrific fate. His indignation is not limited to his specific group of offenders; it extends to audiences everywhere in the country, to the "average Joe" who responds to his lynching as if it were simply another instance of standardized amusement. Barking out orders between clenched teeth in the fashion of an impetuous director, he tells his brothers, who look at him as if he were a ghost, that he has spent the day "in a movie . . . watching a newsreel of myself gettin' burned alive . . . over and over again . . . the place was packed. They like it, they get a big kick out of seeing a man burned to death, a big kick!" In the cinema's own brand of realism, there seems no longer to be any meaningful distinction between the unfolding of real events and the composition of simulated ones; through the appearance of immediacy within their products, dream factories prove themselves adept at manufacturing community by accommodating nightmares as well.[30] "Concepts like sadism and masochism," Adorno writes, "no longer suffice. In the mass society of technical dissemination they are mediated by sensationalism, by comet-like, remote, ultimate newness. It overwhelms a public writhing under shock and oblivious of who has suffered the outrage, itself or others. Compared to its stimulus value, the content of the shock becomes really irrelevant. . . . Sensation has submerged, together with differentiation between qualities, all judgement."[31] The "we" that the motion picture cultivates and sustains is generated in a collective gasp robbed of cathartic power.[32]

If Spencer Tracy's Joe Wilson is an effective generic individual persona, the generic small town of Strand in which he is scapegoated has a special resonance with the role of film in American consciousness. As

30. Cf. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 206: "Immediacy, the popular community concocted by films, amounts to mediation without residue, reducing men and everything human so perfectly to things, that their contrast to things, indeed the spell of reification itself, becomes imperceptible."

31. Ibid., pp. 237–38.

32. Adorno explicitly contrasts the catharsis of ancient Greek tragedy, which retains elements of understanding in its effect of wonder, with the empty forms of anticipation or even amazement relating to the modern viewer who is accustomed to Hollywood realism: "It seems pretty certain that those who saw the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus or Sophocles' *Oedipus* were not likely to translate these tragedies (the subject matter of which was known to everyone, and the interest in which was centered in artistic treatment) directly into everyday terms. This audience did not expect that on the next corner of Athens similar things would go on" (Adorno, "How to Look at Television," pp. 228–29).

Tom Gunning points out, this resonance would have been apparent for "audiences in the 30s . . . [given that] the Strand Theatre in New York City had been the first great picture palace in the United States, the standard against which all other theatres were judged, and dozens of theatres around the country were named after it."[33] Indeed, given the dearth of scenes in *Fury* of people at work, the impression Lang creates of this small town is that it is held together more through its leisure activities than through the organized labor that assigns each individual her place. Feeling more in harmony with one another by watching the same movie silently in the dark than through meaningful intercourse in the light of day, Lang's audiences were to be made aware of the mediating and superficially cohesive powers of film that stand in for the otherwise impoverished state of political discourse in the United States.[34] Under the assumption that, since seeing a given film is a matter of personal choice, one's engagement in the entertainments of culture is a reflection of individual freedom, the larger ideological community active through films and, *a fortiori*, the culture industry is not taken seriously in its function. Much like the lynching itself, film attendance proceeds in the spirit of "Let's have some fun!"

Joe's own naïve ideology, his original belief in the social contract—the ostensibly just trade-off between sublimated individual impulse (hard work and patience) and socioeconomic reward (affluence and community approval)[35]—is now transformed into the pre-historic law, in his own words, "that says if you kill somebody you gotta get killed yourself," namely, simple, old-fashioned vengeance. While unable to free himself from a logic of equivalence (an eye for an eye), he plots to use the law, which he had formerly held in reverence, as a mere pretense to carry out his own form of satisfaction. Now driven by this concentrated impulse, the legally deceased Joe reverts to the brute vestiges of nature within himself:

33. Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang*, p. 226.

34. Of meaningful conversation in America, Adorno observes that people's "capacity for speaking to each other is stifled. It presupposes experience worth communicating, freedom of expression, and at once independence and relatedness . . . [they] have taken recourse to elaborate games and other leisure-time activities intended to dispense them from the burden of conscience-ridden language. . . . Spontaneity and objectivity in discussing matters are disappearing even in the most intimate circle, just as in politics debate has long been supplanted by the assertion of power" (Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 137).

35. Theodore Rippey provides a compelling account of *Fury* along the lines of this—more recognizably Freudian—trade-off in "By a Thread: Civilization in Fritz Lang's *Fury*," *Journal of Film and Video* 60 (2008): 72–89.

animal instincts desirous of blood. In this sense, Lang's superimposition of chickens and other fowl together in a coop upon the montage of townsfolk engaging in apparently harmless gossip about Wilson on the lead-up to the horrific event applies not merely to the residents of Strand, but to Joe himself. In overcrowded conditions, such as those of agricultural mass production, chickens are known to collectively turn on and peck to death one of their own at the first sign of blood. This association comes to light more clearly in the tense scene out in front of the jail where the sheriff attempts to face the agitated crowd and assert the authority of his office: once the simulation of blood appears on the sheriff's face thanks to a hurled tomato, the massive gathering thereupon descends into a flurry of mindless violence. In working from this same desublimated destructive instinct, Joe unwittingly betrays that he is not immune from the very tendency that he so badly wishes to punish.

These startling scenes of seemingly "unhinged" psychic forces are not presented as contrary to modern administrated conditions of social life but rather as aspects proper to it. In Katherine's own mental breakdown at the spectacle of her lover disappearing behind flames and a barrage of stones from the onlookers, she too—if more overtly—joins the ranks of a larger audience that has been shocked into paralysis. The repetitive projection of this violence in the movie theater has its counterpart in Katherine's consciousness: she is left literally incapacitated, stuck in the moment of her trauma. Only the strike of a match, lit by Joe's brother Charlie—who himself needs the calming effect of his cigarette addiction in order, as he says, to "think"—shocks her back into a state of affairs that she can only then begin to process.[36] That a habit tied to compulsive consumption, the lighting of a match (the appearance of precarious control over a naked force of nature), rekindles Katherine's consciousness is a display of the resuscitative powers of industry in relation to the condition of nature within humans. Leisure time filled with amusements is precisely the "remedy" it prescribes for the individual who, in her perceptive organism, feels herself "burned out." Her exhausting experience, distilled into these moments of helplessness, corresponds to the vacuous subjectivity of the assembled masses, of which Benjamin wrote, in the same year that *Fury* played in theaters across the United States, that "its self-alienation has

36. Adorno notes the "compulsive" nature of the modern consumer in "Prologue to Television," p. 53.

reached such a degree that it is capable of experiencing its own destruction as an aesthetic enjoyment of the highest order."[37]

Against such self-alienation, to which audiences are gradually rendered unable to pose any productive alternative, Adorno locates the task, proper to film in its technical aspect, of "wrest[ing] its a priori collectivity from the mechanisms of unconscious and irrational influence [in order to] enlist this collectivity in the service of emancipatory intentions."[38] Film must present itself to its viewers from a cautious distance, overtly gesturing to its constructed dimension. In relieving itself of the attempt to approximate the autonomy of other, pre-photographic art, film finds its unlikely opportunity to achieve a measure of autonomy. In particular, its own integration of music and moving images as guides to proper response are to be set into question. As *Fury* transforms into a courtroom drama in its second half, the presence of professional media influences moves more explicitly into the frame. Yet the movie itself begins behind glass, in a *mise en scène* of shop-window advertisements for bedroom furnishings of newly-married couples, and through this glass Joe and Katherine dream together of the paired slots reserved for them in respectable society once they can earn their way in. We return to this advertisement late in the film, which has been relocated from Chicago to Strand—a frozen, portable snapshot into which desires are projected. Composition of space is reduplicated on-screen as a failed pretense to intimacy, highlighting the falsity of the impression that the middle class is held together not merely by money and privilege but by the wisdom of discriminating tastes.

The obvious "composition" of particular objects in *Fury* is complemented by Lang's attention to the typical functions of music in films, in particular its supplementary role in smoothing over transitions between

37. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 242. Adorno takes up a similar position specifically in relation to the effects of popular film, stating that it "has succeeded in transforming subjects so indistinguishably into social functions, that those wholly encompassed, no longer aware of any conflict, enjoy their own dehumanization as something human, as the joy of warmth" (Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 206).

38. Adorno, "Transparencies on Film," pp. 203–4. This notion anticipates Adorno's articulation in *Aesthetic Theory*: "The object of bourgeois art is the relation of itself as artifact to empirical society.…Art, however, is social not only because of its mode of production, in which the dialectic of the forces and relations of production is concentrated, nor simply because of the social derivation of its thematic material. Much more importantly, art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art" (p. 225).

one shot and the next. If, as noted above, the object *in motion* is at issue in film, the temporal dimension of a movie's narrative is as critical to its status as the spatial. Once Katherine departs for a job in another city, the passage of time—from October to the following May—that they must spend apart is first traced by the movement of Joe's thumb along the miniature columns of the calendar in his pocketbook, at which point the camera fades in to a tired Katherine grading examinations. The weight, as well as the hollow uniformity of the intervening duration, is figured in the stack of identical booklets at her elbow. Yet the melancholy music playing in the background as this visual transition occurs (beginning with Joe's counting of the months to come) comes to an abrupt halt when Katherine finishes the last exam and crosses her bedroom to turn her radio off. What the viewer is customarily led to assume is a cinematic convention—the presence of music to which she, but not the fictional characters on-screen, is privy—is undercut by the fiction itself; the music draws the viewer along with the semblance, only to be withdrawn from within that semblance itself. As it turns out, what the radio broadcast, aligned with the position of film, had been drowning out is the singing of an African-American woman as she hangs laundry in the yard down below Katherine's window, as her husband and son, we infer, enjoy the serenade nearby. Broadcasting does not simply project but, already concealing an ideology within itself, covers over the embodied voices through which both suffering and hope for an otherworldly transcendence (as the woman's folk song reflects[39]) are expressed. Thus, the presence of music is not shorn from the play of image but instead displayed, as it were, in its immediate and mediating positions vis-à-vis the viewing public.

This aesthetic transparency has its formal counterpart in Joe's later lonely wanderings about Strand, where the weight of his own impulse for vengeance begins to affect his own powers of sensation. Thinking that

39. Significantly, the song in question, "Oh, Boys, Carry Me 'Long," written by Stephen C. Foster in 1851, is a folk song with which much of the older audience would have been familiar as part of popular culture in incipient form. Though Barbara Mennel, in her study "White Law and the Missing Black Body in Fritz Lang's *Fury*" (*The Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 20 [2003]: 203–23), is correct in her observation that the singing woman is "coding her desire as a collective desire for freedom" (p. 217), she passes over a fact that might complicate her somewhat neat division between racial coding in music, namely, that the song is not a spiritual but a minstrel song. Here the musical and lyrical code is originally a projection of imagined suffering from a position of racial power onto the racially oppressed.

the celebratory band music emanating from a nearby bar (not incidentally named "The Business Men's Club") is live music, he enters in the hope of finding the immediate social contact that he suddenly craves. Present instead are tables and stacked chairs, an empty establishment, save the black bartender, his ear so close to a radio emitting jazz as to evoke discomfort. Such music, seemingly deployed from nowhere and broadcast everywhere, is all the more striking as a cue for human impulses at the point in which a pronounced snap of the dial plunges the scene into silence. Joe is startled; he'd expected general mirth, as the music had seemed to advertise. Seeing that the aural "performance" is a façade, he settles instead for the woodenness of a mere business transaction, its own awkward nature underscored by the feigned smile on the bartender's face as he serves Joe a highball. Even for the disillusioned hero of the film, spontaneous and simulated performances have begun to blur; their distinction for the new Joe, however, seems only to be that between outright aggression, on the one hand, and a lack of solace, on the other.

The ubiquity of broadcasts, and hence staged numbers, matches the ubiquity of products in the theater and in the shop window. Tucked between these moments in which music is exposed as cinematic ruse, we bear witness to a scene in which Joe, disturbed by the developments of the legal trial he had designed from afar, angrily snaps the sound off of his radio and hurls it to the floor. Of course, a smashed radio changes nothing in the course of events; Joe's pathetic surrender to errant impulses is an expression of the tightening of cultural forces around him rather than a respite from them. As his actions spell out, the splintering in question is psychological. Indeed, we learn in the barbershop conversation that proves the catalyst for building the momentum of gossip that there is a common-sense distinction to be made between oneself and one's "funny" impulses: "If you resist 'em, you're sane. If you don't, you're on your way to the nuthouse or the pen." Hector, the resident barber, confesses to his patron that over the past twenty years he has had numerous impulses to cut the throat of the person he was shaving. His selfhood, as Adorno would agree, seems at least in part defined and sustained by his ability to resist these urges, about which he remarks to his increasingly nervous cohorts, "It's like an itch—you gotta scratch it." As the film progresses, neither he nor Joe, nor the crowd of offenders who had joined the mob in Strand, seems ultimately to have any power of internal integrity against the resilience of programming.

In fact, the fate of personal and social life as bound up with mass-reproduced images and sounds is set into question as well through the relation between *Fury*'s internal narrative timing and its historical timing as a work. We discover, again in Joe's pocket calendar, that the story takes place in the present: his arrival in Strand to reunite with Katherine takes place the very month and year that the film is released in the United States, May 1936. For its original viewing audience, mob violence is framed in correspondence with the social conditions of the historical moment. The audience would have been aware that as the film transitions into a court-room drama in which particular individuals are called to account for that violence, the story moves into a future that was bearing down upon them. Not simply legal but moral action would be called for on their part, a task at which other nations were failing and from which there would be no "delivery" via optimism in technological advances. The radio microphone, as Lang's close-up shot reveals, is present in the courtroom as well.

Accordingly, film, in its subversive potential, as Adorno writes, "is faced with the dilemma of finding a procedure which neither lapses into arts-and-crafts nor slips into a mere documentary mode."[40] In its claim to be art, film cannot renounce its status as an object of popular culture whose technically choreographed world-unto-itself quality makes it inoffensive enough for mass consumption, nor can it abandon itself to its inherent fetish of the up-to-date report whose semblance of objectivity aligns it all the more with propaganda. Though Lang confessed a preference for documentary-style shots in *Fury*, even the documentary character of images within the courtroom narrative preserves a separation between strict realism and the dreamlike quality emblematic of the Hollywood film. The heart of Joe's plan of revenge upon his attackers through legal means is contained in his specific sensitivity to the presence of the media, won precisely through the repetitive interaction between various audiences and the same newsreels reporting his lynching. The sense of moral satisfaction to which *Fury*'s viewers are privy—and to which Joe is not—lies in seeing the confrontation between individual agitators and their reproduced images in court. The new technology showcased in these court scenes is film's "stop action" freeze frame, taking film apart by halting its motion, reverting it back to photography in order to examine it *as* a document. *Fury*'s audience is not treated to a repetition of the same footage, but rather is given new material that confirms the action that the audience has already seen. But

40. Adorno, "Transparencies on Film," p. 203.

included in this material is, as Rippey observes, what is also evident to the audience, "close-up and low-angle footage that the newsreel crew could not possibly have shot."[41] Despite having already made eyewitnesses of his movie-house viewers, Lang nonetheless contrives evidence for a case about which they are already certain, and so portrays film's documentary aspect in tandem with the dreamlike narrative discontinuities through which sensational effects are customarily produced.

In this photographic element of film within the film, detached from its function of depicting objects in motion, the manufacture of shock itself becomes an object. Each member of the mob, having reclaimed his or her respective epistemological and moral position of individual subject, is forced to re-live the socially repressed events from this position, and is thus shocked at having to claim, before the country at the other end of the broadcast, the impulses to which his or her identity is attached. The self, whose command of past events, of taking in experience as such, becomes all the more enfeebled with each added level of shock, has no defense against these images of uncontrolled nature manifest from within. These defendants are caught within the vicious cycle that drives them between the extremes of narcosis and panic, yet which from either side weakens the capacity for critique and, hence, cultural rehabilitation. As the movie makes clear, their punishment, like the destruction of Joe's radio, changes nothing in the larger institutional dynamic.

That Adorno prescribes for film a subjective realism congruous with its dreamlike quality—that is, in fidelity to the individual's projection of unintended, discontinuous images of nature "consolingly coming over him or her in dreams or daydreams . . . set off against each other in the course of their appearance"[42]—is evidence that, despite its failings and its administrated character, film harbors within its medium opportunities for human spontaneity to prove itself in the service of invigorating its sensory life rather than damaging it. To attend to subjective experience of this kind, in which impulse and imagination disrupt affirmative representations of the world, it is necessary, as with *Fury*, to sever the elements of cinematic representation from one another in concert with the severance of psychological forces of which subjectivity is composed. In Lang's portrait of modern anxiety, the aspiration is not so much to recreate moving objects in a dreamworld, nor is it merely to offer up within America a sobering mirror

41. Rippey, "By a Thread," p. 72.
42. Adorno, "Transparencies on Film," p. 201.

for recent historical events. Instead, it is to linger in the negative, aligning itself with the picture that Adorno offers of the suffering consciousness of time endured in the darkness by the insomniac whose inability adequately to process lived experience keeps his thoughts from settling: "The hours that are past as seconds before the inner sense has registered them, and sweep it away in their cataract, proclaim that like all memory our inner experience is doomed to oblivion in the cosmic night."[43]

43. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 165.

Damaged Life as Exuberant Vitality in America: Adorno, Alienation, and the Psychic Economy

Shannon Mariotti

In the aphorism "The Health Unto Death," in *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, Adorno issues a provocation and a challenge: "If such a thing as a psycho-analysis of today's prototypical culture were possible," it would need to "show the sickness proper to the time to consist precisely in normality."[1] Investigating this unique form of illness would require questioning the traditional markers of health: "unruffled calm," an "unhampered capacity for happiness," "exuberant vitality," and even the "champagne jollity" of "the regular guy" and the "popular girl" (*MM* 58, 63). Hence, Adorno identifies a need to explore "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" (*MM* 59).

But psychoanalysis itself is no longer fit for the task of exploring this "sickness of the healthy." Like other members of the Frankfurt School, Adorno was deeply influenced by psychoanalysis:[2] critical theory sought to apply Freud's analysis of subjective psychology to a Marxian social critique of the repressive and dominating features of modern civilization.

1. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), p. 58. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *MM*.

2. Max Horkheimer declared "we are really deeply indebted to Freud and his first collaborators. His thought is one of the *Bildungsmächte* [foundation-stones] without which our philosophy would not be what it is." Joel Whitebook, "Fantasy and Critique: Some Thoughts on Freud and the Frankfurt School," in *The Handbook of Critical Theory*, ed. David Rasmussen (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996), p. 287. See also Joel Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia: Studies in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

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But from Adorno's perspective, psychoanalysis failed to fulfill its promise. Once imagined as a tool for analyzing the social roots of "bourgeois self-alienation," it came to be infected by the problem it sought to cure: psychoanalysis, and psychology in general, became part of a new regime of modern domination characterized by "a lavish display of light, air, and hygiene," "ready-made Enlightenment," and the "conventionalization of psychological illnesses" (*MM* 58, 65). Mainstream psychoanalysis had lost Freud's critical edge, and it problematically ignored Marx. Adorno's proposed analysis of "today's prototypical culture" would interrogate the "absolute pre-dominance of the economy." But this is something that psychoanalysts no longer question: as Adorno writes, they have "sworn allegiance" to the conditions of modern capitalism, with its attendant application of the logic of commodity exchange and the division of labor to all aspects of life (*MM* 68).

In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno takes up the critical work that psychoanalysis can no longer perform. He explores the "inferno" where individuals overcome their illnesses and neuroses to cheerfully adapt, to be sociable, practical, so they can get on with the job at hand. This inferno is very much that of 1940s[3] Los Angeles, where the work was written. The text's deep temporal and spatial situatedness illustrate the constitutive character of America's influence on Adorno's thought. Adorno articulates a uniquely modern, American experience of alienation in which damaged life masquerades as exuberant health. As his biographer Stefan Müller-Doohm notes, Adorno chose well in selecting the motto for part one of *Minima Moralia*, choosing "a sentence from the novel *Der Amerika-Müde* (*Tired of America*) by the Austrian writer Ferdinand Kürnberger: 'Life does not live.'"[4]

Adorno's theory (and practice) of negative dialectics places value on the "nonidentical," the rupturing, dissonant, critically valuable qualities of experience that resist the modern tendency toward "identity-thinking" that subsumes, homogenizes, and categorizes all that is other, different, or unique. For Adorno, "life" is associated with the unsettling experience of the nonidentical, while death and "not living" are linked with systematizing logics and identity-thinking. Adorno does not articulate an image of utopia or a vision of the ideal human subject. However, the value he places

3. Indeed, part 1 is dated 1944, part 2 is 1945, and part 3 is 1946–47.

4. Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005), p. 305.

on the nonidentical and the threat modern capitalist society poses to this vital aspect of life allow him to chart a damaging loss and outline a theory of modern alienation. But Adorno's description of alienation in *Minima Moralia* takes on a uniquely American form: the experience of damaged life, where the self is drained of nonidentical qualities, is captured in the "compulsive extravagance" and "champagne jollity" of the regular guy and the popular girl of postwar America. Adorno perceived the American urge to be happy, to be normal, to be popular, to live life to the fullest, as endless and ultimately self-cancelling. In a perverse illumination of "wrong life" that shows things are not as they should be, Adorno associates the show of ecstatic exuberance with death and excrement: "The very people who burst with proofs of vitality could easily be taken for prepared corpses" (*MM* 59). On closer inspection, "the brightest rooms are the secret domain of faeces" (*MM* 59).

A major theme of *Minima Moralia* is the relationship between psychiatry and this unique form of alienation in America. Adorno is directly critical of the medicalization, conventionalization, normalization, standardization, and popularization of psychoanalysis that followed the postwar therapeutic revolution. But he also sees psychoanalysis as contributing to the problem of alienation that it once sought to counteract: for Adorno, postwar transformations in the mental health professions helped put the face of exuberant vitality on damaged life. In consequence, a nascent form of negative dialectics began to replace psychoanalysis as Adorno's critical tool, as his own actions symbolize. In 1953, he was offered a position as director of research at the Hacker Psychiatry Foundation in Beverly Hills. William F. Hacker was a psychoanalyst who wanted to "transform his psychiatric clinic into an institute for training and research."[5] Adorno spent months contemplating the offer before deciding against deeper immersion in psychoanalytic research in the United States, choosing instead to return to Germany. *Minima Moralia*, published in 1951, helps explain his motivations: here, employing the practice that he would later term negative dialectics, Adorno works against the problem of damaged life that was, in his view, now only exacerbated by postwar psychiatry.

To trace the roots of Adorno's thoughts on the uniquely American sickness of health and normality, I provide a brief history of psychology in America in the post–World War II era. Turning next to *Minima Moralia*, I explore Adorno's critique of psychoanalysis. Finally, I highlight how the

5. Ibid., p. 337.

dominant postwar tendencies criticized by Adorno persist: his critique of psychiatry in America in the 1940s and 1950s is especially relevant today given the increased possibilities for "cosmetic psychopharmacology" and biomedical enhancements that allow us to become "better than well," to borrow Peter Kramer's well-known phrase.[6] The quest for normality—but also for something more, for enhancement, exuberance, extension, expansion, and all things better, longer, faster—that Adorno captures as the uniquely American experience of alienation is still fed by contemporary psychiatry and, especially, the pharmaceutical companies. Whereas psychoanalysis defined psychology during Adorno's time in the United States, today we live in the so-called "age of the brain." But despite significant differences between these two eras, there are underlying continuities. The roots of the contemporary era were sown during the therapeutic revolution of the 1940s and 1950s, and the tendencies that Adorno criticized have only intensified. In light of this, I conclude by exploring the political consequences of what Adorno calls "prescribed happiness" and consider the lessons that his warnings might hold for contemporary democracy in America.

The Roots of Adorno's Critique: Developing a Therapeutic Culture in Postwar America

Revolutionary changes in American psychiatry occurred immediately following World War II, which was a catalyst for large-scale transformations in the way the discipline was organized and perceived. The mental health professions gained unprecedented recognition due to the rise in individuals suffering trauma from the war, as well as the large number of people deemed unfit for service because of psychiatric problems.[7] Funding medical research, which now included psychiatric research, was a major priority in the years following World War II: hospitals and research centers were created, the medical workforce grew, and medical care became one of the largest industries in the United States.[8] In 1946, the National Mental

6. Peter Kramer, *Listening to Prozac: The Landmark Book About Antidepressants and the Remaking of the Self*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 1997).

7. Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), p. 344.

8. As Starr notes, "Between 1950 and 1970, the medical work force increased from 1.2 to 3.9 million people. National health care expenditures grew from $12.7 billion to $71.6 billion (up from 4.5 to 7.3 percent of the GNP), and medical care became one of the nation's largest industries." Starr, *The Social Transformation*, p. 225.

Health Act was passed, which dramatically increased funding for training and research.[9] Three years later, in 1949, the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) was created and quickly became the fastest growing division of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). There was a profound and novel perception that psychiatry was socially valuable and worthy of public recognition. As Paul Starr notes, "In 1948 William Menninger [chief army officer in charge of psychiatry] could write, without undue exaggeration, that psychiatry 'probably enjoys a wider popular interest at the present time than does any other field of medicine.'"[10]

In the postwar era, psychiatry meant psychoanalysis or what was also called dynamic psychiatry. Psychoanalysts had "captured the intellectual leadership of the psychiatric profession."[11] One factor in this new dominance of psychoanalysis was the Nazi takeover of Germany and the consequent immigration of many Jewish psychoanalysts to America. The demand for analysis rose at the same time that the supply of dynamic psychiatrists in America increased: Freud's European followers suddenly found themselves practicing psychoanalysis in places like Topeka, Kansas.[12] In part because of the influx of these Europeans, a Swiss psychiatrist named Henri Ellenberger could write, in 1955, that out of "all the countries in the world," "America is the first to have adopted dynamic psychiatry as its leading psychiatric trend."[13]

Psychoanalysis dominated the professional field of psychiatry, but it was also popularized in the general culture of the postwar era. Psychoanalysis became a cultural phenomenon, as references to neuroses and complexes popped up in magazines and newspapers, on the radio, and in the movies. In 1947, an article in *Life* magazine noted that a "boom has overtaken the once obscure and much maligned profession of psychoanalysis," rooting this trend in "the increase in popular knowledge and acceptance of psychiatry, and especially psychoanalysis, as a cure."[14] In

9. T. M. Luhrmann, *Of Two Minds: An Anthropologist Looks at American Psychiatry* (New York: Vintage 2000), p. 213.

10. Starr, *The Social Transformation*, p. 345.

11. Allan V. Horwitz, *Creating Mental Illness* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 51.

12. Edward Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac* (New York: Wiley, 1997), p. 168.

13. Ibid., p. 172.

14. Charles Barber, *Comfortably Numb: How Psychiatry Is Medicating a Nation* (New York: Pantheon, 2008), p. 74.

the postwar era, for the first time, "the image of the mysterious but all-knowing analyst became the stock-in-trade of cartoonists."[15] The type of psychoanalysis that was popularized, however, was uniquely reflective of the American optimism of the 1950s. The literature on the subject highlights, again and again, how distinct American psychoanalysis was from its European counterpart. As T. M. Luhrmann puts it: "This was not the psychoanalysis of devastated Europe but a bright, shiny, intellectual appliance, an automated floor buffer for messy psyches."[16] She continues:

> By the early sixties, the American public had adopted psychoanalysis with gushing enthusiasm. Looking back on that era from the distance of four decades, psychoanalysis seems so alien, so peculiarly European against the postwar cheeriness of Tupperware suburbia that one concludes that the American public can have adopted it so eagerly only by not quite understanding Freud's essential pessimism. Some scholars link the popular eagerness to a peculiarly American and deeply un-Freudian optimism about the perfectability of the self.[17]

In entering the conventional mainstream culture of the 1950s, psychoanalysis was also watered down. Key elements of Freud's theory were weeded out, such as his idea of the essential unsociability of human nature, the inevitability of conflict between self and society, his emphasis on sexual instincts, and the kind of social critique of illness that we see in *Civilization and Its Discontents*.[18] Psychoanalysis now emphasized adaptation instead of conflict and was concerned with helping individuals fit into society and respond to social demands.[19] In the United States, psychoanalysis became a "doctrine that suited the American analysts as progressive in spirit and practical in the prospect of improving patients' lives, as opposed to Freud's own pessimistic views about the inevitability of repression in civilized life."[20] During this period, psychotherapy transitioned "from an exotic procedure performed by neurologists to a virtual national pastime."[21]

15. Ibid., p. 73.
16. Luhrmann, *Of Two Minds*, p. 214.
17. Ibid.
18. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), ed. James Strachey, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (New York: Norton, 1961).
19. Horwitz, *Creating Mental Illness*, p. 52.
20. Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry*, p. 169.
21. Ibid., p. 289.

Increasingly desiring to model itself on the medical profession, and also under pressure from insurance companies, consumers, and (as time went on) the newly created pharmaceutical companies, psychiatry transformed itself. Once a discipline concerned with insanity at the margins of society, psychiatry moved out of the asylum and began to cater to "normal" people in mainstream society as a therapeutic culture developed. David Horwitz notes that postwar dynamic psychiatry "created a language" for the interpretation and relief of new kinds of problems, extending from neuroses to "more generalized maladaptive patterns of behavior and character and the even more nebulous and far broader realm of personal problems."[22] The new "clients" of dynamic psychiatry were "people who were dissatisfied with themselves, their relationships, their careers and their lives in general."[23] As psychoanalysis was commodified, the product being sold to average Americans was also regularized. Martin Grotjahn, a Berlin psychiatrist and analyst who emigrated to the United States, noted that "instead of 'the relaxed and free debating atmosphere of the psychoanalytic coffeehouses in Berlin," one found a "frighteningly standardized American product."[24] Not surprisingly, the emblem of this urge came out in 1952, when the first volume of what is now popularly known as the *DSM*, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, was published. It reflected the dominance of psychoanalysis and the taxonomy of disorders developed during World War II. It contained sixty-two different diagnoses, described in the dynamic language of psychoanalysis: anxiety reaction, depressive reaction, obsessive-compulsive reaction.[25] As we will see, the monolithic urge toward abstraction, homogenization, and standardization characterized by the *DSM* is sharply at odds with the fragmented, particularized, aphoristic nature of the exploration of psychic uneasiness in *Minima Moralia*. Indeed, Adorno's practice of negative dialectics works to unsettle and disrupt the kind of thinking most starkly represented in the *DSM*.

Damaged Life, Psychoanalysis, and the Mask of Exuberant Vitality

For Adorno, the medicalization, popularization, and standardization taking place within the mental health professions during the post–World War II era

22. Horwitz, *Creating Mental Illness*, p. 51.
23. Ibid.
24. Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry*, p. 170.
25. Luhrmann, *Of Two Minds*, p. 227.

captured a larger tendency of modern society: late modernity was increasingly characterized by the homogenizing, categorizing imperatives of a "systematized society." At the level of everyday life, the abstracting logic of identity (reflecting the abstract logic of capitalist commodity exchange) pushes humans into conformity with conventions and fits both thought and action into established social norms and categories in ways that leave no room for the impulsive, the extraneous. Life is dominated by the logic of identity and the idealist dialectic that serves conservative interests of power, reconciling contradictions and abstracting from particular differences to maintain the illusory appearance of equilibrium and harmony. Raging against all that is different, other, irreconcilable, and particular, the logic of identity eviscerates the "qualitative variety of experience" and imposes an "abstract monotony" on the "administered world."[26] Such a life can barely be called living.[27] For Adorno, it is a dull, lifeless, formulaic, alienated mode of experience: "our perspective of life has passed into an ideology which conceals the fact that there is life no longer" (*MM* 15). Adorno consistently uses expressions such as "not living" and "death" to describe the personal, psychological, and social effects of modernity characterized by the urge to identify, classify, and categorize that which is other, particular, unique, different. In contrast, "life" is represented by the qualities that resist the logic of identity and refuse to be folded into the system. This is the nonidentical, the element of objective reality that defies being subsumed into categories or synthesized. By paying attention to the disruptive qualities of particular things, letting the object "speak," and granting "preponderance to the object," the practice of negative dialectics works to break apart the false harmonies built up by the logic of identity and the idealist dialectic.[28] Given the dominance of the systematizing logic

26. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), p. 6.

27. This is one key difference between Adorno and Foucault, though they share an interest in psychology and illness and have similar critiques of social normalization: the sense of loss and lament and the attempts at a recovery and recuperation that pervade Adorno's work are foreign to Foucault's understanding of subjectivity as always already being produced.

28. Here Adorno echoes Marx's attempt, in the first chapter on *Capital*, to let the commodity "speak" and tell a different story than the conventional wisdom of political economy. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, *A Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Penguin, 1992).

of late modernity, negative dialectics becomes a politically valuable practice of working against power and unsettling the status quo.[29]

In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno's writing style is part and parcel of this project, itself an enactment of negative dialectics. Given that I am interweaving Adorno's aphorisms with some straightforward histories and analyses of contemporary psychiatry, it is important to note that—despite similar themes—I do not equate *Minima Moralia* with these other studies. I engage histories of psychiatry during the 1940s and 1950s to outline the roots of Adorno's critique and to highlight the conditions to which his aphorisms respond. But in contrast to these studies, Adorno's aphorisms do not try to describe, represent, or give a historically accurate picture of postwar psychiatry that has a one-to-one correspondence with sociopolitical reality. The fragmented passages in *Minima Moralia* themselves enact and perform a critique of the problem of the "sickness of health."

Toward this end, Adorno employs several specific stylistic devices. He uses chiastic sentence structures to make paradoxical inversions (for example, "wrong life cannot be lived rightly"). Chiasmi are used to convey the conditions of damaged life without reifying them.[30] Consider the paradoxical, inverted epigraph to *Minima Moralia*: "Life does not live." In these four simple words Adorno conveys a dissonant, rupturing, inharmonious critique of conventional modes of living, but also implies that life and living do have richer possibilities: even within this negative statement, he evokes a hope that life, differently organized, might in fact more truly live. For Adorno, we see things best—avoiding an objectifying, instrumental analysis—if we do not look directly at them, but instead look above, beyond, and next to them, all the while changing observation points ourselves. Thus he critiques psychoanalysis by constructing an experimental constellation made up of many disparate and particular snapshots, parallaxes, taken from different vantage points: to explore psychoanalysis, he looks at notions of health, happiness, vitality, images of enlightenment, how the self is imagined, as well as medical categories of illness. Adorno

29. My book *Thoreau's Democratic Withdrawal: Alienation, Participation, and Modernity* (Madison: UP of Wisconsin, 2009) reads Thoreau through the theoretical lens of Adorno. Here, I give a much deeper analysis of the value of negative dialectics as an enactment of democratic politics.

30. Gillian Rose notes Adorno's frequent use of the chiasmus, "to avoid turning processes into entities." Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia UP, 1978), p. 13.

also employs exaggeration to cast the particular tendencies he observed in the world around him into greater relief and illuminate a kind of truth that the mere recitation of facts, figures, and statistics will not yield. In a fragment from a longer aphorism, Adorno notes: "In psycho-analysis nothing is true except the exaggerations" (*MM* 49). This is, in part, due to the domesticating and dulling effect that stems from psychoanalysis becoming conventionalized and exchanged in the marketplace. As Adorno once said in an address, "I have exaggerated the somber side, following the maxim that only exaggeration per se today can be the medium of truth. . . . My intention was to delineate a tendency concealed behind the smooth façade of everyday life."[31] Hyperbole, like paradox and the parallax view, work to disrupt our tendency to think in terms of commonly accepted systems, categories, and the "ordinary use of concepts."[32]

Using these techniques, Adorno dislodges psychoanalysis's unquestioned conventional associations with therapy, health, medicine, and progress. He argues that illnesses and "psychic wounds" hold critical potential as moments of nonidentity that depart from the mechanized normality of mainstream conventions and illuminate the "wrong life" that cannot be "lived rightly." But the idea that Freudian analysis could lend itself to social criticism became increasingly alien in the postwar era, especially in America. From Adorno's perspective, postwar psychoanalysis tamed the critical power of psychic wounds in several ways: by abstracting particular experiences into universalizable general phenomena, by conventionalizing illnesses into predetermined categories, lifting the burden of critical thought from the individual, and by redirecting the cause of the problem away from society and toward a politically innocuous mechanism or complex. Illnesses were domesticated, rendered harmless; their critical and political potential was erased and they were seen as commonplace, even normal, not a cause for concern or worry.

Adorno criticized how this process of standardization separated the individual from his or her complexes and disorders, which were objectified into things, unrelated to the sufferer's life experiences. Anxiety, for example, was seen as a symptom that could be defined in general and

31. Theodor W. Adorno, "The Meaning of Working through the Past," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia UP, 1998), p. 99.

32. Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, p. 11.

abstract terms, manifesting itself in the same ways, regardless of personal or social context:

> Terror before the abyss of the self is removed by the consciousness of being concerned with nothing so very different from arthritis or sinus trouble. They are accepted but by no means cured, being merely fitted as an unavoidable component into the surface of standardized life. (*MM* 65)

The organization of psychoanalysis redirects people's energies toward figuring out which complex they have: "initiates must become adept at subsuming all instinctual conflicts under such concepts as inferiority complex, mother-fixation, extroversion and introversion" (*MM* 65). This process of naming, categorizing, and diagnosing has the effect of making the individual's intensely singular experience just another iteration of a generalized phenomenon:

> Ready-made enlightenment turns not only spontaneous reflection but also analytical insights—whose power equals the energy and suffering that it cost to gain them—into mass-produced articles, and the painful secrets of the individual history, which the orthodox method is already inclined to reduce to formulae, into commonplace conventions. (*MM* 65)

Hard-won critical insights into one's condition vanish under the imprimatur of socially authorized categories. In being officially recognized, individuals find comfort, even pleasure, in being like everyone else, a specimen of the majority, even in their weakness, even in their defects.

> Catharsis, unsure of success in any case, is supplanted by pleasure at being, in one's own weakness, a specimen of the majority. . . . One proves by the strength of one's defects that one belongs, thereby transferring to oneself the power and vastness of the collective. . . . The individual is now scarcely capable of any impulse that he could not classify as an example of this or that publicly recognized constellation. (*MM* 65)

As part of this standardization, conventionalization, and rationalization, a kind of quasi-Hobbesian subject is (re)created, a mechanistic assemblage of moving parts. The individual is imagined as an apparatus composed of objectified instincts, psychological mechanisms, biological impulses, and inherited traits and characteristics. A division of labor is projected onto

the organization of the psyche, the self, the individual as a whole. Each component of the self has a category for its appropriate use and, when the machine works properly, is activated for that use only in the proper context. As Adorno puts it, "psychology repeats in the case of properties what was done to property":

> The principle of human domination, in becoming absolute, has turned its point against man as the absolute object, and psychology has collaborated in sharpening that point.…The dissection of man into his faculties is a projection of the division of labor onto its pretended subjects, inseparable from the interest in deploying them and manipulating them to greater advantage.…Alienating him from himself, denouncing his autonomy with his unity, psycho-analysis subjugates him totally to the mechanism of rationalization, of adaptation. (*MM* 63–64)

The ego takes on the role of "business manager," charged with deploying certain traits and characteristics at will to fit different social situations (*MM* 230). Is the context a funeral? Then sadness is called for. A popular movie that everyone likes? Cue the laughter and enthusiasm. A fancy meal at an expensive restaurant? Bring on the feelings of satisfaction and enjoyment. Thus the individual's traits, characteristics, mechanisms, and instincts come to be imagined as malleable external objects: "Character traits, from genuine kindness to the hysterical fits of rage, become capable of manipulation, until they coincide exactly with the demands of a given situation.…They are no longer the subject; rather, the subject responds to them as to his internal object" (*MM* 230). As Adorno says, "subjectivity itself, knowledge, temperament, and powers of expression" are "reduced to an abstract mechanism, functioning autonomously and divorced both from the personality of their 'owner' and from the material and concrete nature of the subject-matter at hand" (*MM* 230). Through the process of categorizing mechanisms, the self confronts itself as a conglomeration of objectified parts.

The management of these parts is left up not to the individual but to the collective authority of society. This is the danger that Adorno associates with psychoanalysis becoming professionalized and organized like a business with "clients." Psychoanalysis, now infiltrated by the authority of mainstream society, became a power working to "calibrate" individuals to work in conventional ways, shaping the appropriate deployment of traits, mechanisms, and impulses (*MM* 231). For Adorno, psychoanalysis

instilled in people an "empty, mechanized quality," a "pattern of reflex-dominated, follow-my-leader behavior" that is "to be entered to the account not only of their illness but also of their cure" (*MM* 61). Yet, the psychoanalytic "cure" is necessarily violent: "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, of internalized castration" (*MM* 58). For Freud, castration anxiety is connected with the fear of a loss of power, while psychoanalysis plays the role of helping us recognize and cope with this anxiety. But for Adorno, in another provocative inversion, psychoanalysis itself becomes responsible for the mutilation that deforms and dominates in the name of health.

Adorno saw this programming of the self as a loss, but also noted that we cannot know what an unmutilated, whole, or complete subject would even look like, since our very understanding of subjectivity as well as the biological and psychological make-up of the subject reflects the dominant mode of production in society. For Adorno, "there is no substratum beneath such 'deformations,' no ontic interior on which social mechanisms merely act externally: the deformation is not a sickness in men but in the society which begets its children with the 'hereditary taint' that biologism projects onto nature" (*MM* 229).

This "dissection of man into his faculties" and the categorization of mechanisms and complexes that characterized postwar psychoanalysis was, for Adorno, ultimately a tool for control. In a striking hyperbole, he compares psychoanalysis with fascism, saying that the "psychoanalysis wisdom" became a "technique" and a "racket" that bound "suffering and helpless people to itself, in order to command and exploit them" (*MM* 64). But psychoanalysis is a form of domination that operates in subtle and seductive ways: "It is part of the mechanism of domination to forbid recognition of the suffering it produces" (*MM* 63). The silencing effect of psychoanalysis works in two ways. First, to criticize it is to open oneself to charges of illness, to show oneself to be in need of treatment: "He who calls it by its name will be told gloatingly by psycho-analysts that it is just his Oedipus complex" (*MM* 63). But, second, even more insidiously, to criticize it, to refuse it, is to insanely seem to cling to pain and unhappiness, since psychoanalysis is supposed to be for our own health and enlightenment, to help us enjoy life more. Why would we criticize something that is for our own good? Something that promises to make us good, better, and even best?

Adorno was especially sensitive to how American psychoanalysis aimed to make the individual not just "normal" but better than normal: it prescribed exuberant happiness itself, restoring a capacity to take pleasure in mainstream life that was thought to be "impaired by neurotic illness" (*MM* 62). As he notes, thinking about the problem in these terms is itself problematic; we are conceived as though we have a part whose function is to experience pleasure, but this mechanism can break down and sometimes needs repair. However, to be "fixed," to be happy, the neurotic must compulsively take pleasure in the offerings of mainstream culture:

> Prescribed happiness looks exactly what it is; to have a part in it, the neurotic thus made happy must forfeit the last vestige of reason left to him by repression and regression, and to oblige the analyst, display indiscriminate enthusiasm for the trashy film, the expensive but bad meal in the French restaurant, the serious drink and the love-making taken like medicine as 'sex'. . . . The admonitions to be happy, voiced in concert by the scientifically epicurean sanatorium-director and the highly-strung propaganda chiefs of the entertainment industry, have about them the fury of the father berating his children for not rushing joyously downstairs when he comes home irritable from his office. (*MM* 62)

The demand that we be happy, the diagnosis that there must be something wrong with those who cannot take pleasure in conventional modes of living, is itself a form of domination. This demand for conformity with a diseased society effaces the underlying social causes of unhappiness. Yet the "gospel of happiness" masks itself as a concern for psychological health, as a guide for how one should live life properly: "What a state the dominant consciousness must have reached, when the resolute proclamation of compulsive extravagance and champagne jollity, formerly reserved for attachés in Hungarian operas, is elevated in deadly earnest to a maxim of right living" (*MM* 62). The injunction to be happy must be pressed on us with increasing fervor and desperation. The more problematic the social reality, the more society generally and psychology in particular admonish us to be happy and think we must be in need of treatment if we are not. Instead of fulfilling its early critical promise, psychoanalysis became guilty of promoting a "health unto death," all the while seeming to improve life, normalize it, enhance it, promising enlightenment. Instead of being marked by suffering, those who are most alienated seem determinedly, resolutely, happy and healthy. Adorno gives us evocative images of the

"sickness of the healthy," saying the traces of their unique illness cover their skin "like a rash printed in regular patterns" (*MM* 59). For Adorno, the following verses capture the "psychic economy" of postwar America: "Wretchedness remains. When all is said, / It cannot be uprooted, live or dead. / So it is made invisible instead" (*MM* 59).

The Prescience of Adorno's Critique: Becoming Better than Well in the Age of the Brain

Perhaps it is not surprising that the pursuit of happiness seems to be a uniquely American anxiety, given that it is one of the unalienable rights listed in the Declaration of Independence (though Jefferson likely understood happiness to mean the pursuit of one's own interests generally). While Freud defined health as the capacity to love and work despite your discontents, today we are prescribed a level of happiness that borders on "champagne jollity," without regard to the condition of our lives. We are given images of a person with generalized anxiety disorder who, after treatment, not only leaves his house to socialize but is now the life of the party! Medications promise to restore our capacity to enjoy life, but the context of that life is not part of the discussion. Consider the marketing slogans for some of the popular drugs aimed toward the "normal" individual (the target audience for psychoanalysis in an earlier era) who experiences the milder forms of anxiety and depression: "Welcome Back" (Prozac); "Your Life is Waiting" (Paxil); "I'm Ready to Experience Life" (Wellbutrin). But what kind of a life? Welcome back to what? These slogans suggest that the depressed or anxious self is alienated from the true self, while the happy self is identical with his or her essence. Maybe the conventional mode of life to which we are supposed to be returning, to live with exuberant vitality, is what sent us to the doctor in the first place. But the social roots of illness are strikingly left out of the contemporary discourse.

But how can Adorno's postwar writings still speak to us today, given the fact that psychoanalysis no longer dominates psychology? We are told that a revolution has happened: psychoanalysis is dead and has been replaced by neuroscience. We are not in the era of Freud and neuroses, but now live in "the age of the brain" and Prozac. Pharmaceuticals have replaced psychoanalysis and people talk about chemical imbalances instead of complexes. Contemporary psychiatry is dominated by a new paradigm, variously called "biological materialism," "scientific materialism," the "medical model," or "diagnostic psychiatry." Despite these

changes, however, there are also undisputable continuities between psychoanalysis and biological materialism. The roots of the current era can be traced back to the psychoanalytic revolution that was the target of Adorno's analysis in the 1940s.[33]

In the past decade, there has been a steady increase in literature exploring what Adorno called "exuberant vitality" and what are today called "enhancement technologies" or "cosmetic psychopharmacology." Peter Kramer's 1996 book *Listening to Prozac*, which critically analyzed Prozac's tendency to make people feel "better than well," has come to represent an inaugural point for these debates. Since then, critics from various disciplines have expressed similar concerns over how new technological possibilities are transforming our expectations for psychiatry, changing our attitudes toward psychic unease, and reshaping our notions of the self.[34] Like Adorno, these critics tend to focus on how psychiatry is becoming conventionalized within everyday American life. We also hear strong echoes of Adorno's concerns regarding the "gospel of happiness" and the tendency to abstract illness from social conditions, to pathologize human difference, and to quest after exuberant vitality (today, through mood elevators, "lifestyle drugs," and more and more medications for "everyday" worries and anxieties). By hyperbolically characterizing the extremes of his own era, Adorno captures trends that have now become commonplace.

Today, the happiness imperative and an increasingly uncritical attitude toward illness are further reinforced by the current paradigm of biological

33. The roots of diagnostic/medical psychiatry can be found in postwar psychoanalysis/dynamic psychiatry: the "diagnostic counter-revolution in psychiatry displaced most of the dynamic legacy," but "it never abandoned the vast expansion of conditions encompassed within dynamic psychiatry—the broad range of phenomena it now treats—is a direct legacy from its now thoroughly repudiated predecessor (Horwitz, *Creating Mental Illness*, p. 52). Jonathan Michel Metzl, *Prozac on the Couch: Prescribing Gender in the Era of Wonder Drugs* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003), tells how "pills replaced the couch" and "neuroscience took the place of talk therapy," supplanting the 1950s American faith in psychoanalysis with faith in the "biological revolution."

34. See also David Healy, *The Antidepressant Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997); Carl Elliott, ed., *Prozac as a Way of Life* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2004); Carl Elliott, *Better Than Well: American Medicine Meets the American Dream* (New York: Norton, 2003); Peter Conrad, *The Medicalization of Society: On the Transformation of Human Conditions into Treatable Disorders* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2007); Allan V. Horwitz and Jerome C. Wakefield, *The Loss of Sadness: How Psychiatry Transformed Normal Sadness into Depressive Disorder* (New York: Oxford UP, 2007).

materialism. The materialistic, mechanistic view of humans as an assemblage of parts, the division of the self into faculties—two tendencies that Adorno criticized in the 1940s—have become the foundation for the study of mental illness. Allan V. Horwitz argues that

> psychiatric researchers and clinicians, as well as much of the public, now view mental illnesses as biomedical diseases of the brain that are comparable to other physical illnesses. Because the brain is viewed as part of the physical world it is seen as subject to laws of cause and effect rather than to cultural frameworks of motives, actions, meanings, and responsibilities that are applied to social objects. The symptoms of brain-based diseases can be abstracted from their individual and social contexts and studied as things that have distinct causes, courses, and responses.[35]

But as Adorno recognized over fifty years ago, imagining mental illness in this way, analogizing it to physical illnesses of the body, problematically redirects our attention away from critical analysis of the context of the individual toward treating the "broken part." Advertisements instruct people to ask their doctor about whether their sense of unease could be due to "seasonal affective disorder" (S.A.D.) or "generalized anxiety disorder" (G.A.D.), as if there were no social causes of mental illness.

A second defining feature of contemporary psychiatry is the dramatic expansion of "treatable disorders" eligible for diagnosis and medical intervention. At present, as Horwitz notes, the "hundreds of diagnostic categories of the *DSM* are a heterogeneous collection that include, among many other things, people who hallucinate, become distressed after the failure of a romantic relationship, drink too much, eat too little, or behave badly in classrooms."[36] Peter Conrad sees medical norms as a "cultural form of social control, in that [they] create[d] new expectations for bodies, behavior, and health."[37] The diagnostic expansion that Adorno criticized in the 1940s and 1950s has also continued to pursue the elusive American ideal of "exuberant vitality." Biomedical technology offers more and more possibilities today that feed America's long-standing fascination with improvement and enhancement. Peter Conrad characterizes the ever-growing number of treatable conditions as generally tending toward the "enhancement, extension, and expansion" of human capabilities; the

35. Horwitz, *Creating Mental Illness*, p. 5.
36. Ibid., p. 2.
37. Conrad, *The Medicalization of Society*, p. 151.

contemporary tendency is to define more and more conditions as "life limiting," decreasing tolerance of mild symptoms and medicalizing "underperformance," creating new norms of what it means to "really" live life.[38] Conrad explores androgenetic alopecia (male pattern baldness), erectile dysfunction, attention-deficit disorder, idiopathic short stature, as well as the medicalization of states of worry and sadness. As Conrad notes, "The quest for a more voluptuous body, the fascination with eternal youth, and the pursuit of athletic victory are long-held and deeply engrained social and individual goals in American culture. Such goals are not unusual in a culture that values bigger, faster, and more."[39] Now there are more and more ways that technology and medicine combine to enhance, extend, and expand the range of human capabilities in the name of health and vitality.

These drugs also find their largest market in the United States: Americans are far and away the largest consumers of prescription drugs of all varieties.[40] The pharmaceutical industry is the most profitable industry in America, and antidepressants are its most profitable class of drug—which means that "antidepressants have been the most profitable product in the most profitable industry in the most profitable country in the world."[41] But the most popular pharmaceuticals offer something that is elusively "more," an enhanced state that is increasingly defined as "really living." Barber notes how Prozac and subsequent antidepressants promise not just to alleviate symptoms of illness but to do something far more decisive and fundamental: to restore people to their true selves and allow them to return to the kind of vital, achieving life that it is presumed we all want.[42] David Healy argues that well before Prozac, before there were even specific medicines to treat depression, Americans were uniquely concerned with the depressive illnesses. In contrast to other countries where the depression diagnoses came later and far more infrequently, "the United States had given birth in the 1870s and 1880s to the concept of neurasthenia, the prototype of what was later to become the depressive neurosis, one of the striking features of which was the frequency with which it came to

38. Ibid., p. 6.

39. Ibid., p. 89.

40. Barber notes that "all this drug taking is a profoundly, even outrageously, American phenomenon," as "Americans are responsible for almost half the world's prescription drug sales." Barber, *Comfortably Numb*, p. 20.

41. Ibid., p. 24.

42. Ibid., p. 50.

be diagnosed."[43] What was thought to be a very rare condition was, in the United States, frequently diagnosed, and "the concept of a depressive neurosis found favor in American psychiatry."[44] The antidepressant era began in earnest in the United States in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when the first arsenal of pharmaceutical "magic bullets" (as they were called) was invented.[45] Antidepressants were developed in the United States and have also found their greatest market here.

Perhaps in part because happiness is seen as an entitlement and a right, Americans, more than people in any other country, see themselves as suffering from disorders that are in need of treatment and seek that treatment through psychiatric medications.[46] For Carl Elliot, Americans are motivated to "pursue fulfillment through enhancement technologies not in order to get ahead of others, but to make sure we have lived our lives to the fullest."[47] Elliot describes this pursuit of happiness and self-fulfillment as a duty, an obligation, even an anxiety: Americans constantly worry over whether they are as happy as they should be, as they could be. Charles Barber agrees that happiness is "something that Americans feel terribly compelled to pursue," as evidenced by the money we spend on things that promise to make us happier, as well as more "whimsical" features of American culture ("that uniquely American icon, the smiley face"), emoticons, and websites that allow users to constantly register and update their mood.[48] These desires seem innocuous: after all, who doesn't want to be happy? What could be wrong with the desire for happiness? Despite the dour visage we may normally associate with this resident of the metaphorical "Grand Hotel Abyss," Adorno does not just want to rain on our parade, nor does he find suffering or unhappiness valuable for its own sake.[49] But he does identify dire ethical and political dangers in

43. Healy, *The Antidepressant Era*, p. 38.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., p. 1.

46. Based on a World Health Organization survey in 2004, "an extraordinary *26 percent* of Americans reported that they suffered from any type of psychiatric disorder in the prior year—far exceeding the rates of all of the other fifteen countries" in the study. Barber, *Comfortably Numb*, p. 19.

47. Elliot, *Better than Well*, p. 303.

48. Barber, *Comfortably Numb*, p. 132.

49. As Georg Lukács says, "A considerable part of the leading German intelligentsia, including Adorno, have taken up residence in the 'Grand Hotel Abyss'… 'a beautiful hotel, equipped with every comfort, on the edge of an abyss, of nothingness, of absurdity. And the daily contemplation of the abyss between excellent meals or artistic entertainments, can

rushing past pain and unease toward comfort and stability, in turning a deaf ear to the dissonant call of the nonidentical and instead heeding the happiness imperative.

Alienation, America, and Democracy

For Adorno, sensations of loss, pain, and suffering can allow us to confront the nonidentical, stimulating our critical capacities in politically valuable ways. As he writes:

> The smallest trace of senseless suffering in the empirical world belies all identitarian philosophy that would talk us out of that suffering. . . . The physical moment tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different. "Woe speaks: 'Go'."[50]

But, as Adorno finds in postwar America, the sense of suffering, pain, and woe is what we immediately try to skip past on the road to happiness. Taken together, the paradigm of biological materialism and the medical model, the conventionalization of psychological illnesses—as well as the American enthusiasm for all things "more," better, longer, and faster—work to drown out the discordant call of the nonidentical qualities of psychic disease. For Adorno, psychoanalysis also alienates us from the praxis of thinking,[51] from a potential shared collective endeavor that is a central feature of a life that truly lives. Adorno thinks that we possess a "genuinely critical need" to resist "what is"—thinking itself is "a revolt against being importuned to bow to every immediate thing."[52] Since the nonidentical qualities that can stimulate critique are contained within the antagonistic features of objects, thinking exists at least as a universal *possibility* for those who can learn to see, listen to, and engage particularity.[53] Critical thinking is a praxis for Adorno: as he says, "Open thinking points

only heighten the enjoyment of the subtle comforts offered.'" Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), p. 22.

50. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 203.

51. On praxis as thinking, see "Critique," in Adorno, *Critical Models*; and "Resignation," in Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

52. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 19.

53. As Susan Buck-Morss writes, "The transitoriness of particulars was the promise of a different future, while their small size, their elusiveness to categorization implied a defiance of the very social structure they expressed." Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* (New York: Free Press, 1977), p. 76.

beyond itself" and "takes a position as a figuration of praxis which is more closely related to a praxis truly involved in change than in a position of mere obedience for the sake of praxis." There is a "utopian impulse in thinking."[54] Given what is being sacrificed, Adorno describes the achievements that psychoanalysis associates with health and happiness as "the profoundest mutilation," as "internalized castration," as testament to the magnitude of the loss.

In addition, the democratic value that Adorno places on our capacity for critique further highlights the political dangers of the happiness imperative. For Adorno, "Critique is essential to all democracy. Not only does democracy require the freedom to criticize and need critical impulses. Democracy is nothing less than defined by critique."[55] The second "prerequisite of democracy" is "political maturity," which is "demonstrated in the power to resist established opinions and, one and the same, also to resist existing institutions, to resist everything that is merely posited, that justifies itself with its existence."[56] Thus the experience of alienation, of damaged life, that has been explored in this essay is a major problem for democracy: "Using the language of philosophy, one could indeed say that the people's alienation from democracy reflects the self-alienation of society."[57] Adorno is concerned with the willingness to follow the lead of others, to conform to conventional opinion, to bend to the will of seemingly immutable historical forces. These are the markers of the alienation that negative dialectics tries to work against, making Adorno's method of critique democratically valuable. Through his aphorisms, Adorno models the kind of disruptive, rupturing, and inharmonious way of thinking that teaches us to think for ourselves, that makes self-government possible in the truest sense of the words.

In these ways, Adorno reminds us of what is lost if we listen only to the contemporary imperatives to be happy. The conventionalization of psychological illness and the promotion of exuberant vitality lift the burden of critical self-reflection from the individual, shift the focus away from the nonidentical qualities of disease, and redirect energy away from an exploration of the conditions of our personal and social lives.

54. Adorno, "Resignation," p. 202.

55. Adorno, "Critique," p. 281.

56. Ibid.

57. Theodor W. Adorno, "The Meaning of Working Through the Past," in *Critical Models*, p. 93.

Paradoxically, in the pursuit of happiness, we may participate in a less visible regime of domination. Because of the different ways both eviscerate life and self, Adorno draws unsettling parallels between something as seemingly innocuous as psychoanalysis and something as abhorrent as fascism. Here, too, we see the specter of the happiness imperative: "there is a straight line of development between the gospel of happiness and the construction of camps of extermination so far off in Poland that each of our own countrymen can convince himself that he cannot hear the screams of pain. That is the model of an unhampered capacity for happiness" (*MM* 63). Adorno did not think he had completely left fascism behind him when he emigrated to the United States. In America, he detected strong traces of suppression and domination in a seemingly unlikely place, in the psychoanalytic discourses of health and happiness. Here, instead of enlightening critical self-reflection, was a subtle form of violence, repression, and control. Here, alienation took on a new face, but represented damaged life all the same. *Minima Moralia* bears the strong imprint of postwar American culture. Reading it today, however, Adorno's aphorisms still capture some key contemporary tendencies with a prescience that both surprises and alarms.