

# Introduction

ANDERS BARTONEK & SVEN-OLOV WALLENSTEIN

From its inception in the 1920s, Critical Theory as it developed under the auspices of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* in Frankfurt, was a project that by drawing on a series of disciplines and traditions not only intended to study modern bourgeois society as a factual reality, but also, in line with Marx's eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach, sought to transform it. Today, almost a century after the founding of the Institute, more than three generations of theorists have reworked the initial critical program in different ways. Whether, though, this development can be unified into one single trajectory is doubtful. Beginning with the forced relocation of the Institute to US in the 1930s, its influence spread to the Anglophone world; various responses have developed, and what from the outset appeared like a substantially German debate today extends across the world, absorbing influences from many other intellectual traditions. Today, the existence of something like the "Frankfurt School" is tenuous, and even more so, the existence of a "Critical Theory" that could be circumscribed by a set of problems or methods; the term has acquired a life of its own and is used across the intellectual field, institutionally as well geographically. If, then, there is unity, it is one cribbed together through a set of family resemblances rather than augmented through conceptual coherence.

Thus, to ask about the past, present, and future of Critical Theory does not imply that an answer is forthcoming that would demarcate an inside from an outside, or determine what the legitimate descendants of the initial program would be. Rather, it opens up towards many new influences. This malleability is in fact a direct consequence of the claim that theory is not outside history, but must always respond to a changing present, which in turn requires that the perspective from which the past is apprehended and assessed cannot be fixed. Similarly, the idea of critique implies that the point of departure must be the present instead of some fixed eternal standard, that is, a present grasped in its contradictions and opened up to other possibilities. To inquire into the past, present, and future of critical theory is thus not to ask three separate questions, but rather involves a process of constant reappraisal.

## Marx and Freud, system and subject

If one were to delineate the development of Critical Theory by trusting the reference to stages, generational shifts, and proper names, the most important

figures of the first generation would be Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Walter Benjamin; in the second Jürgen Habermas, Alfred Schmidt and Albrecht Wellmer; and in the third, Axel Honneth, Rahel Jaeggi, Christoph Menke, and Martin Saar, to name but a few. While obviously simplified, and also more debatable as we approach the present—as well as downplaying the fact that the past is always open to revision on the basis of current concerns—this chronology nonetheless still retains pedagogical merit; it allows us to understand this development as a series of problems, imposed both from within and without.

In fact, the very distinction between internal theoretical problems and external pressures emanating from society is precisely what is rejected from the outset. This comes across in the program proposed by Max Horkheimer in his “Traditional and Critical Theory” (1937), a key idea of which is that society must be understood as a totality constituted by contradictions that need to be theorised at the systemic level as well as mapped onto individual configurations that cannot be simply reduced to passive reflections. In bridging the gap between totality and subjectivity in terms of a dialectical whole, Critical Theory obviously followed Hegel, on the one hand, but on the other, in stressing contradictions as necessarily unresolved, it also drew on Freud and Marx, and engaged in turning each into a mutual support for the other. The question of how political economy and the economy of the drives intersect in the formation of the subject—how its preferences, fantasies, and desires, ranging from everyday life to the spheres of politics and aesthetics—thus resonates through the first phase of the Frankfurt School.

The emphasis on subjectivity and experience also implied that economic factors always had to be understood in their implications for consciousness, the latter of which gained a new quasi-autonomy. If Marx in *The German Ideology* once could claim that historical materialism dispelled the vacuous idealist “phrases” about consciousness, since the latter is finally never anything other than “conscious being” (*Das Bewusstsein kann nie etwas Andres sein als das bewusste Sein*), i.e. a reflection that arises directly out of the actual life process according to the model of the camera obscura, to the effect that forms of ideology will lose all semblance of autonomy and no longer have a history and development of their own—then Critical Theory, notwithstanding its many reverent references to Marx and to the theory of ideology, stakes out a different route. Determinism is no longer the key problem, but rather how the base is taken up—to be sure in ways that are distorted and reflected. Here, Critical Theory draws upon themes in Hegel, which Marx, in his eagerness to reject idealism, at least in this context, appears to have repressed. If consciousness is

nothing but conscious being, Hegel might have retorted how being amounts to very little but *being having become conscious*, in a process of mediation for which the mechanical model of the camera obscura is wholly inadequate, and any theory that wants to account for the correlation of system and subject simply by explaining away the latter will be just as inadequate.

The term “Western Marxism” probably locates these discussions in a far too unequivocal geographical scheme that only later would congeal into the East-West divide, and we should rather see the conflicts over base and superstructure, determination “in the last instance”, consciousness, ideology etc., as a series of shifting positions responding to both internal theoretical factors and external socio-political events. A central question that obviously determined most discussions of the implications of this divide was why the promised socialist revolution never happened—or, when it did take place in Russia, soon failed to make good on its promises—and whether this needed to be accounted for precisely in terms of consciousness, and how seemingly mere superstructural phenomena could take the lead over the basic contradictions of capital. This first question then came to resonate with a second one, which soon became even more urgent: how to explain the rise of National Socialism. In the analysis proposed by Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, this violent irruption of brutality cannot be accounted for only in terms of the pathologies of capitalism—although it is obviously that too—but must be located as the catastrophic end point of a historical dialectic that emerges already in the archaic phase of history. Thus, for Adorno and Horkheimer, “Enlightenment” does not refer to a particular historical period, but spans the whole of history, from the first step out of myth to modern scientific rationality. Enlightenment reason, they propose, is always double-edged: as instrumental rationality it seizes control over both outer and inner nature, and rationality is gradually severed from all substantial aims until it becomes its own myth and relapses into irrationality. National Socialism cannot then be understood as merely an aberration from the progressive trajectory of reason, but is deeply rooted in the ambivalences of the Enlightenment itself; it is a catastrophe of reason that is prefigured in its own trajectory, and thus calls for a critique of reason that must draw on the legacies of “critique” from Kant and Hegel to Marx and Freud, while also remaining attentive to the blind spots of its predecessors.

## Nature and art

Crucial here is the transformation of nature, and in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Horkheimer and Adorno propose Odysseus as an exemplary case where the first fateful implications already can be discerned. Faced with the alluring song of the sirens, Odysseus keeps the distance required for attaining subjectivity by fettering himself to the mast while propping the oarsmen's ears with wax; he is able to enjoy the sirens without being led into their trap, just as the oarsmen can go performing their task, although cut off from enjoying the song. In this he installs a complex figure of domination, based in a division of intellectual and manual labour, which also allows for aesthetic pleasure to emerge as memory of nature and myth; the deadly song is henceforth heard as music, which will always retain a trace of a first nature now lost. As the process of Enlightenment unfolds, this mastering of inner as well as outer nature becomes a defining feature of Western philosophy and science (the extent to which it also applies to other cultures is never addressed), and a certain theory of the subject fuses with the socio-historical development, so that a critique of social domination must always involve a critique of epistemology and subjectivity.

While many of the sombre and pessimistic features of this analysis can undoubtedly be accounted for by the immediate context of writing during the war, they also point to one of its main dilemmas, later addressed by the second generation of Critical Theory, notably Habermas, and then echoed by many others: how can the inherited tools of rationality be turned against themselves without simply engaging in a form of self-destruction? If instrumental rationality and identity thinking are the ineluctable result of a tradition whose emergence even antedates the first philosophers, in what way could a different rationality at all begin to articulate itself? In short: even if a wholesale rejection of Enlightenment reason is by no means what the analysis proposes, is it not yet an outcome that is difficult to avoid?

Hinted at in the interpretation of Odysseus in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and increasingly present in Adorno's subsequent writings, there is an appeal to art and aesthetic experience as an antidote to instrumental rationality and the domination of nature. In the excursus on the sirens we find the paradigm for art as a particular way of approaching nature and the world of non-human life (features of which are discussed by Camilla Flodin and Rolf Wiggershaus below)—art as a stylised song of what is lost, which is either exiled in aesthetic autonomy of the concert hall, severed from physical response and action, or allows for a remembrance of nature that holds regression at bay. Art, in Adorno's case specifically music, to which he devoted a long series of analy-

ses that both make vast philosophical claims and immerse themselves in minute details (the latter aspect is treated by Anne Boissière below), thus holds out a promise of happiness necessarily broken because of art's position in a broken world. Art cannot deliver what it promises, not least since it just as much as everything else partakes in reification (a theme dealt with in different ways in Gérard Raulet's and Josefine Wikström's respective contributions), and yet, in its very manner of delivering the promise, in its refusal, simply by being art, to accept the given state of things, it opens a different perspective of what an object—and consequently a subject—could be outside of conceptual subsumption. The culture industry, the discussion of which forms a kind of counterpoint to the analysis of the siren song, instead affirms commodification, standardisation, and reification, and it solidifies both object and subject by appealing to a regressive promise of immediate identification and pleasure. While the analysis of the culture industry has been challenged on many points, notably in a long tradition of “cultural studies”, which stresses that reception always implies transformation and cannot be reduced to passive consumption, it retains a relevance, specifically in relation to the spectacularisation of politics (discussed in Douglas Kellner's contribution).

### Theory and praxis

The claim that there must exist a unity of theory and praxis has been interpreted differently in the Marxist tradition, from the stress on authoritarian party leadership as the only means for radical change, to a distrust in top-down organisation and the belief that the revolution can only come from the spontaneous actions of the masses. But while a stress on the autonomy of theory and the emphasis on subjective mediation, which we find in Critical Theory does not as such entail any break with practice, the rejection of Soviet-style Marxism as a viable option, together with the far-reaching claims that National Socialism were rooted in the history of philosophy, nevertheless resulted in a distancing from political practice that was chastised by opponents such as Bertolt Brecht, György Lukács, and many others who cannot be unequivocally aligned with Soviet Marxism. That, in the face of the imminent disasters of world history, the Frankfurt School would have comfortably checked in at the “Grand Hotel Abgrund” and lamented the spectacle of destruction from the ivory tower of philosophy and aesthetics, as was later claimed by Lukács, is as such an unjust allegation; and yet the problem remains: what, if any, political practice is consonant with the dark picture painted by the dialectic of enlightenment?

The first generation never wholly abandoned the idea of a revolutionary transformation, but in the post-war political landscape their paths would diverge. Whereas Marcuse in his American exile became a prominent figure in the student movement, and his project for concrete and radical philosophy advocated direct revolutionary transformation, Adorno, after returning to Germany, was far more cautious. He suspected that what the student revolts in Germany would accomplish was only a “pseudo-praxis”, compensating for the fact that current society made any genuine action impossible (a theme discussed in various ways by both Sven Anders Johansson and Anders Bartonek). This caused severe conflicts between the Frankfurt school and the student movement; even though to a large extent they shared the same goals, their respective ways to get there were significantly different (see here Stefan Müller-Doohm’s contribution). In Adorno’s own writings from the period, the claim recurs constantly that theory cannot forever remain external to praxis if it is not to dwindle, at the same time as their fusion at present must be postponed: from the initial paradox in *Negative Dialectics* onwards, namely that philosophy lives on because the moment where it could have been realised was missed, the link between interpretation and transformation proposed in the last of Marx’s theses on Feuerbach become increasingly tenuous, or itself increasingly a matter of interpretation rather than action.

### Communicative action, intersubjectivity, the good life

If the first generation never wholly abandoned the prospect of a revolutionary transformation of society, then the second and third, for whom the reconstruction and re-founding of the post-war state and civil society was the central task, gradually shifted the terrain to a reformist politics. The task was no longer to formulate an idea of utopia, no matter how hesitant and aporetic, in which communal life, philosophy, and art would be radically different, but rather to pose the question of the foundations for rational discourse and a rational society in a way that does not require a radical break with the present, but sets itself goals reachable through gradual improvements (see Andreas-Arpad Sölter’s contribution). This was largely the achievement of Jürgen Habermas, and already in his first major work, on the transformations of the public sphere (*Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, 1962) while the structural matrix of cultural decline was still operative, the stress on the enlightenment, and particularly Kant, as a project that has remained unfulfilled, pointed beyond the darker aspects of the dialectic of enlightenment. This stress on the public nature of reason (aspects of which are discussed by Cecilia Sjöholm by way of Hannah

Arendt) was later developed into a grand theory of communicative action and intersubjective reason, in which rational dialogue and deliberative democracy was to counterbalance the harmful effects of the supremacy of market economy and the way in which technology tends to colonise the life-world. If there is a promise of utopia in the second generation of Critical Theory, it is not one that aspires to go beyond bourgeois society, but to achieve a better balance between different forms of rationality inside society as it exists.

For this project, the earlier critique of reason now appeared as too encompassing in its rejection of all the normative standards and rational procedures that modern societies have developed, and in subsuming rationality under “instrumental rationality” it sometimes became indistinguishable from the irrationality it wanted to denounce. This went hand in hand with a more specific claim that the first generation of Critical Theory, and specifically Adorno, would have remained oblivious to the turn from a philosophy of consciousness to a philosophy of language, and thus caught up in “metaphysical thinking” and in a series of unresolvable paradoxes that arise from taking the subject-object relation as the ground of reason, whereas a shift to language and intersubjectivity simply would take us into a “postmetaphysical thought” that exorcises the spectre of foundationalism.

Another aspect of this is the rejection of the idea of mimesis, a relation to things that precedes conceptual subsumption and survives inside it, and which is crucial for both Adorno’s epistemology and his aesthetics. In Habermas’ reading mimesis is proposed as an alternative to discursive rationality, although without being able to supply any normative criteria for its application. In aesthetics, which was largely pushed to the side in this type of theory, there was a similar shift to what Albrecht Wellmer termed a “post-metaphysical aesthetics of modernity” that emphasises the communicative role of art, and suggests that Adorno, precisely because of his dependence on the subject-object paradigm, remained entrenched in late modern strategies of refusal and negation (different aspects of which are treated in Lydia Goehr’s and Sven-Olov Wallenstein’s texts below).

This internal polemic and self-criticism was also fuelled by another debate, the quarrel over modernism and postmodernism in the mid-1980s, which created new links as well as divisions between German and French philosophy. In his lectures at the Collège de France, which became the basis for *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* (1985), Habermas aligned earlier Critical Theory not only with what he saw as an irrationalist tendency in French thought, but also with Heidegger, and inserted his own defence of the Enlightenment in a vast historical panorama from Hegel onwards. The tenor

of these lectures had the effect of making philosophical dialogue across the Rhine more difficult, but also made the question whether there was any real continuity in the tradition of Critical Theory more acute, as well as, perhaps unwittingly, opening up a new avenue for Adorno in France (the historical irony here being that if Adorno's lectures at the Collège de France some twenty years earlier, in which he outlined *Negative Dialectics*, dismayed some of his listeners because of his treatment of Heidegger, then Habermas, in chastising French philosophers for their dependence on Nietzsche and Heidegger, pushed Adorno into their camp). Internal to Critical Theory however, the question had to be raised whether the rejection of the earlier program in favour of communicative rationality was a logical progression that provided the critique of current society with a more sound foundation, or whether something essential had been lost, i.e. the very sense of the "critical". If contemporary political institutions are integral moments in the logic of global capitalism (which now seemed to take on the role earlier ascribed by Adorno to the "administered world"), to what extent is an appeal to these very institutions not simply acquiescent to society as it is?

In the wake of these debates, we find the work of Axel Honneth, who grappled with the work of both the first and second generations, but in the end sides with Habermas' constructive approach. Original however is Honneth's affirmative retrieval of Hegel, specifically the *Philosophy of Right*, which is taken to demonstrate the need for public recognition between members of a democratic society. Taking issue with the earlier interpretation we find in Adorno that mostly gives a picture of Hegel as the philosopher of the closed system (even though Adorno's reading is in fact far from univocal), Honneth wants to resuscitate the idea of an "ethical order (*Sittlichkeit*) as the element of intersubjectivity that gives orientation to the lives of individuals. This also includes a new take on the socialist tradition, although now without reference to Marx, which seems to effectively exclude the dimension of antagonism and conflict and is now replaced by the idea of the individual as "suffering from indeterminacy". Freedom, Honneth argues, can only be achieved to the extent that the individual becomes a recognised part of an ethically normative society.

If the ethical order derived from Hegel is supposed to give direction to individuality, what remains of individual experience precisely as individual? If normative ethical orders provide the bedrock for freedom, does this not once more imply that the "system" (to be sure in a more benevolent and supple version based on "recognition") swallows the subject, installing something like a "malignant normality" (Shierry Weber Nicholsen) that evacuates the possibility of resistance and critical intellectual work? On the other hand, one



might argue that the attempt to develop a moral reflection in a work like Adorno's *Minima Moralia* is caught up in a romantic idea (Anke Thyen), and that the claim to have access to true, authentic individuality, even if expressed obliquely and aporetically, as in Adorno's writings, is just as repressive and presupposes insights without normative guidelines. Or, might it not be the case that the insistence on the singular and opaque, that which is irreducible to universal standards, itself already contains an ethical intuition that releases the present from its false immediacy, and that necessitates a philosophy expressing itself in a particular form of writing (Helena Grass)?

In this sense, what we take to be the present—and even more so the future—of Critical Theory depends to a large extent on how we assess its past, i.e. which of the earlier ideas are adjudged to be pertinent and which need to be discarded. Should it avoid the stance of radical theory and engage in constructive contributions to feasible and already existing programs of liberal democracy, or should it rather insist on incommensurable experiences and residues that rational communication must overlook? The claim that Critical Theory requires a set of normative commitments can be understood in different ways, for instance in the form of a “procedural rationality” that safeguards minimal basic rules for rational debate, or more substantially, as a set of philosophical commitments that themselves must always remain open to debate, and cannot be decided by any reference to pre-existing rules. If at present no solution to this problem seems available, this is perhaps not so much a weakness as a strength, and it is what makes Critical Theory open to a not yet determined future.

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In his “Thinking against and through the Protest Movement: Adorno, Habermas, and the New Left”, Stefan Müller-Doohm offers a historical scrutiny of Adorno's and Habermas's respective skirmishes with the student protest movements in Germany in the 1960s. Re-opening the historical archives, Müller-Doohm sheds light on important aspects of the history of Critical Theory and its connections to the political praxis of the students, providing us with a more nuanced version than the simplified accounts often given. While both Adorno and Habermas were sympathetic to some of the claims of the protest movement, neither of them saw themselves as active parts, and they reacted against what they perceived as a threatening irrationality and a cult of immediate action. Their arguments, however, were in fact very different: whereas Adorno assumed the role of a “general intel-

lectual” and criticised the student movement for undermining academic freedom, the autonomy of theory, and the independence of the subject, Habermas assumed the role of a “specific intellectual”, and his objections were motivated by an idea of radical reform-driven politics. In the end, Müller-Doohm suggests that the dynamics of these debates were one of escalating incomprehension, and no constructive dialogue between the representatives of Critical Theory and the new left took place.

In his contribution, “The Lava of Thought: The Future of Critical Theory beyond Cultural Criticism”, Arpad-Andreas Sölter examines the potential of Critical Theory and its methods to produce cultural criticism and radical social questioning. The main issue is whether the intimate connection to a particular German tradition of cultural criticism in fact is an obstacle to fulfilling this task. The text deals mainly with Adorno’s and Habermas’ respective conceptions: while they share the critique against conservative bourgeois cultural criticism, and hold on to the unfulfilled ideals of enlightenment, which they perceive as having become perverted, the outcome of their respective analyses are quite different. According to Sölter, what is needed in order for Critical Theory to make a difference is the development of a normative theory of rationality that, to some extent following the claims of Habermas, incorporates a democratic fallibilism, and that by proceeding step by step aims to initiate gradual improvements. Only by prioritising feasibility over wishful thinking, as well as advocating an ethics of responsibility that incorporates the self-reflexivity of Enlightenment, will Critical Theory be relevant to the future tasks of social philosophy.

Douglas Kellner’s “Donald Trump, the Culture Industry, and Authoritarian Populism” also addresses the theme of cultural criticism, and attempts to explain the Trump phenomenon by drawing specifically on some of the key concepts derived from the encounter between first generation Critical Theory and American mass culture. Kellner discusses two main issues: on the one hand, how the concept of the cultural industry, which we find in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, might be useful in accounting for the rise of the “master of media spectacle”, and on the other hand, how the concept of the authoritarian personality, which plays a decisive role in the theories of several scholars tied to the Frankfurt school—here particularly Erich Fromm—can provide an understanding for the specific “mind-set” that makes authoritarian populist politics attractive. While there are parallels to other political leaders (notably Mussolini, Kellner suggests), historically as well as in the present, Trump is also rooted in a long history of American populism and its anti-establishment sentiments.

Rolf Wiggershaus' "Elements of a Critical Environmental Philosophy" connects political issues to the analysis of the domination over nature, a key element in Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis of the enlightenment. What is at stake, he suggests, is a "remembrance of nature" in the subject; not distance and autonomy, but rather the acknowledgement that we are inevitably part of a natural order while still avoiding a regression to myth. Drawing on examples from recently discovered biotopes with extreme life conditions, and citing controversies over whether such environments should be protected as common heritages of humanity and be studied scientifically, instead of being exploited as objects of deep sea mining, Wiggershaus widens the perspective and questions the implications of the very idea of a seamless monitoring of nature and its connection to social monitoring. From quantified self-practices, smart devices in homes and cars, to mass surveillance of urban space, "smart cities" or "honest cities", where norms are upheld through constant monitoring on an individual level, he identifies a process in which humans have become increasingly estranged from one another and from themselves, precisely through the demand for security and protection. A critical analysis of this, Wiggershaus proposes, must treat the alternative between conquering and saving as merely a starting point for a thinking of "remembrance" as sketched in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and of the possibility of "freedom in the midst of the natural", as Adorno writes in a later discussion of Kant in *Negative Dialectics*.

Camilla Flodin too, in her "Adorno's Utopian Animals", pursues the question of nature in Adorno's writings, although with a particular focus on the place of the animal, which until recently has been largely neglected. In the face of an exorbitant loss of species, Flodin argues that a renewed interpretation of Adorno's ideas on natural history and human domination over nature, especially as they emerge in his writings on art and aesthetics, can open a different avenue for thought. Here a way out of the dialectic of enlightenment is sketched, which gives a voice to subjugated nature, particularly in the form of natural beauty. This concept was suppressed in the tradition from Hegel onwards, but was still present as a trace in the Kantian analysis of the sublime, even though it was obscured by being tied to the human being's moral superiority precisely as separated from nature. Transposed to art, however, the sublime can bear witness to the subjugation of nature and reveal human beings as natural. Citing Adorno's interpretation of Mahler's Third Symphony, Flodin suggests that the idea of a "likeness to animals" (*Tierähnlichkeit*) has a critical and utopian potential, in showing us both difference and affinity, which is a

source of joy as well as an imperative: to try to be “a good animal”, as Adorno writes in *Negative Dialectics*.

In his “On Reification: Some Thoughts on Adorno, Benjamin and Honneth”, Gérard Raulet first establishes a link between Adorno’s early work on phenomenology and the later reflections of reification and the primacy of the object. This primacy is, on the one hand, a consequence of reification, and, on the other hand, a possibility of overcoming it through a “second reflection” that shows how the non-constitutive role of the subject can lead to a fuller experience of the subject. These ideas, Raulet suggests, which we find fully worked out in Adorno’s two final works, *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*, draw substantially on Walter Benjamin, and the idea of a divine language beyond subject and object—that is, a memory of the “name” that gestures towards nominalism and yet remains different from it. Art is one way of giving voice to this “unreconciled reconciliation” or “transcendental affinity”, and Benjamin and Adorno provide two different answers to the question of what this means: while Benjamin tends towards the psychophysical order of the body, for Adorno, affinity must be approached through history. Contemporary representatives of Critical theory have however taken a different path; such is the case with Axel Honneth, who, in his influential theory of recognition, evacuates mimesis as well as giving an impoverished version of reification, all of which, Raulet argues, has considerable consequences for our relation to nature as well as social theory.

Josefine Wikström also brings up a problem connected to reification and the body, in her “Interest in the Body’: Art, Autonomy, and Natural Beauty in Adorno”. Starting out from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where Adorno and Horkheimer, on the one hand, trace a repression of the body and its passions throughout the tradition, and, on the other, the desire for the pure and perfect body in Fascism, she proposes a reading of our contemporary focus on the body, both in various forms of philosophical materialisms and in performance and dance. While Adorno’s ideas on performance are largely contained in his writings on musical reproduction, an alternative point of access can be found in his theory of natural beauty. The dialectical relationship between art and natural beauty in Adorno first hinges, Wikström argues, on separation and abstraction understood as a social form: art’s autonomy is a social fact conditioned by the production and circulation of other commodities. In natural beauty, a separation from nature takes place, which then, as the residue of non-identity in things, returns as both a promise and a threat. Art, Wikström argues, imitates not nature, but the act of separation, intensifying it, first in the ambiguous form of the commodity, and then as a historical construction. In con-

temporary dance and performance Wikström then discerns both a tendency towards extreme control and a trust in the body as somehow real and true, and a locus of inner feelings, none of which succeed in showing the contradictory aspect of natural beauty crucial for Adorno's critique of human domination over nature.

Lydia Goehr's contribution, "Painting in Waiting: Prelude to a Critical Philosophy of History and Art", explores the dimensions of waiting: temporal suspension, hesitation, anticipation, but above all artworks that are imageless, unwritten pages, blanks, and silences. Drawing on a wide variety of examples from literature, visual art, music, and philosophy, she traces the multiple connotations of the figure of the blank, from the claim to artistic freedom, to a politics of the not-yet that oscillates between prophesy and the demand that the future must be left open. The underlying question is whether the structure of "waiting for" always implies an object, or if we can think of it in an intentionless fashion, as an existential mood. In Adorno she finds an imageless waiting that refuses the mimetic verisimilitude to *what is*, thereby retaining an utopian, even messianic mode, mimesis in waiting for *what of the not yet*. Citing a passage from Habermas, Goehr places Adorno's idea alongside the claim that we must find the ground for communicative action among subjects, which, Habermas suggests, must not be pictured as the totality of a reconciled form of life and cast into the future as utopia: what is at stake are necessary, not sufficient conditions, so that the situation is never fully determined, and philosophy, as a particular form of waiting, can remain critical.

Sven-Olov Wallenstein, in his "Adorno's Aesthetics Today", discusses the present relevance of Adorno's aesthetics in light of changes that have become greatly intensified since the 1960s: the nominalism of the arts; the fusion of high and low, and Adorno's own distance from those emerging forms of artistic practice in his own time that were to become decisive for later developments. But if we follow Adorno's own claim that theory needs to be written from the vantage point of the present, then, being faithful to him must mean that we answer his questions anew, instead of repeating answers given more than half a century ago. Wallenstein particularly stresses four points in which a rethinking might be needed (a process that, to be sure, is already underway in Adorno's own texts). *Interpretation*, first, should be seen as a second work, an invention of a particular kind, rather than something merely grafted onto the first object, so that they cease to appear as a subjective power exerted on a passive object. Second, the concept of *autonomy* must be articulated differently than the one available to Adorno, since the idea of a substantial closure that guided him now appears as a framing condition that

the works themselves assume as a problem. Third, *contradiction* must be rendered more fluid so as to incorporate a more expansive sense of difference. Fourth and finally, the *utopian* dimension of the work must be pluralised, which does not mean to simply abandon the idea of reconciliation, but to think it as necessarily multiple.

Anne Boissière's "Orientation towards the Concrete" focuses on Adorno's writings on music, and the kind of philosophical gesture they contain. In opposition to a prevailing tendency to theorise art in general, Adorno's reflections on music bear on the concrete, in which the presence of the non-identical in details is at stake. This also implies a different manner of philosophising. This immersion in details, she argues, requires a form of passivity or relaxation, an abandonment of oneself to the experience of the object rather than an attempt at dominating it through concepts. In the radio talk "Beautiful Passages", built on citations and fragments of music, as well as in the unfinished magnum opus on Beethoven, Adorno connects this to his own childhood and memories outside of the socio-historical sphere: these are glimpses of a metaphysical experience, Boissière proposes, which require an "exact imagination" to break up the movement of dialectics. Similarly, in the monographs on Mahler and Berg, we encounter a different take on subjectivity: the element of lingering in Mahler, technically expressed in the "extensive type" that breaks with quantitative and measured time, in Berg, a subjectivity that is transformed into a mortal disappearance. Reading Adorno against the grain (just as he himself wanted to do with Hegel), means focusing on these singular moments; it is to think in "models" instead of falling back into the trap of a general theory.

Cecilia Sjöholm, in her "Arendt on Aesthetic and Political Judgement: Thought as the Pre-Political", addresses the legacy of Critical Theory through the work of Hannah Arendt and the idea of the public sphere. From Kant to Habermas the public sphere has served as an element of rationality, which today finds itself challenged in many respects. The question, then, is whether Arendt's idea of an "inner voice" might allow us to approach this idea differently. If the thinking individual in dialogue with itself—which Arendt develops in her reading of Shakespeare—is in fact already marked by a constitutive plurality that replaces the transcendental subject as the agent of experience, this might provide a new model for critical thought at a time when the idealised notion of a public sphere seems problematic. For Arendt, in always implying a plurality that also goes beyond the collective, the inner voice presents this plurality already in thought itself, and in this way it orients us towards a horizon that supports a common grasp of the world. To Arendt,

then, we can only really think when others are encroaching upon us; only in a world of plurality can we truly reflect on our actions and ourselves.

In his contribution “The Future of Saying No: The Non-Identity and Incompatibility of (Critical) Theory”, Anders Bartonek examines the relation of theory to praxis in the thought of Adorno, with a focus on the tension that the question of the non-identical entails with respect to society as it is. On the one hand, it is necessary for theory to preserve a moment of the non-identical, in order to remain critical and to hold on to a minimal utopian hope; on the other hand, since the path to a genuinely liberating praxis in Adorno’s view is blocked, the alternative option for critical theory seems to be to make itself incompatible with social praxis, cutting off the possibility of having an impact as well as protecting itself from being swallowed up by the cunning of society. This might leave no other perspective for Critical Theory than a future of saying No; the question that remains is whether there is a way around this steadfast negative approach, since every “constructive” attempt must overcome this, otherwise it risks remaining an unsuccessful endeavour.

Sven Anders Johansson too, in his “What is a Revolutionary Subject? Activism, Theory, and Adorno’s Conception of the Subject”, addresses the issue of the possibilities of resistance and revolutionary praxis, but sees the question of the subject of activism as the crucial hinge on which the future of Critical Theory hangs. Discussing Adorno’s critique of the student movement in Germany in the late 1960s, as well as addressing a contemporary event of activist subjectivity, Johansson highlights the crucial role that historical context plays in deciding which political possibilities are available at any given moment. Johansson furthermore stresses the importance of passivity, corporeality, and frailty for a fruitful understanding of the critical and theoretical subject as a point of departure for a revolutionary praxis. The question is: how to establish a critical subject—one which no longer remains within the confines of the personal established by liberal and capitalist logics, but rather gestures towards the pre- or non-personal. Adorno’s stress on thinking as a connection to the “happiness of humanity” points to another sense of the subject, Johansson proposes, a subject that necessarily implies a somatic dimension and an openness to its surroundings, without the desire for control; it is one that acknowledges the relative powerlessness of the individual and the illusory quality of its freedom and self-determination.

In “Adorno’s *Minima Moralia*: Malignant Normality and the Dilemmas of Resistance”, Shierry Weber Nichol森 discusses Adorno’s claims about the “workings of malignant normality”, both in the context of its origin in the immediate aftermath of the second world war, as well as its further develop-

ment in the larger trajectory of advanced capitalism. NicholSEN sees Adorno's *Minima Moralia* as a reflection on the "slight possibilities of resistance" that could be developed within this totalising form of negative normality or normalized suffering. She thus situates her own contribution within the twilight of negativity and resistance. In order to locate the possibility of resistance in such a situation of seemingly normal inhumanity, the critical intellectual, NicholSEN suggests, faces a difficult dilemma since any use of normalised language risks maintaining precisely such a semblance of normality. But in this situation, it seems just as essential to resist the image of an absolute negative totality; only then can resistance retain a minimal hope. For Adorno, the individual plays a significant role in carrying out such an engagement, and NicholSEN argues that individual experience must be the starting point in a situation of overwhelming malignancy.

Anke Thyen's "In many people it is already an impertinence to say I: Some critical observations" undertakes a critical examination of Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, questioning its moral merits due to what she perceives as an aggressive and mocking tone in relation to the oppressed individuals that Adorno claims to defend. Thyen sees in Adorno's thinking a vagueness concerning the qualities of individuals, and whether they are at all able to transcend false consciousness and develop a critical perspective on society. Who can have this ability and why, and how did Adorno reach this level of reflection and insight? Is it legitimate for him to take this position of representing individuals that have lost their genuine individuality? Thyen addresses a series of problems concerning individuality and the idea of the "I" from various conceptual perspectives, and in the end questions the status of Adorno's moral philosophy and its ability to offer a description of normative foundations in society. Therefore, she concludes, it is questionable whether it is more than just a romantic idea—an idea that also robs the individuals of their capacity for reasoning and for genuine moral judgement.

Helena Grass' "Critical Theory and the Good Life: Do All Good Things Go Together?" poses a similar question as Thyen: can Critical Theory point towards what a good life would be in contemporary society? First, she suggests that there today exists no such thing as a single, uniform Critical Theory, and furthermore that such a corpus in fact never existed; simply, there are only multiple forms of critical theorising. Unlike Thyen, however, Grass proposes that the writings of Adorno, and particularly his *Minima Moralia*, are able to bring together critique and ethics. Instead of reducing the question of the good life to a matter of personal opinion or taste, while without appealing to a universal standard, Adorno's focus on the singular, the "tiny pieces of morality",



cuts across these distinctions. The good life can only be lived in a good society, which is only realised in the particular; at present, damaged life can only find expression in damaged forms, in the fragmented reflections of a text that yet gestures towards a horizon of an as yet non-existing common, be it in the form of “Rien faire comme une bête”. However, for Grass, Adorno’s own insistence on negativity, which seems to block all positive precepts, does not do him justice; so for instance, the idea of negative dialectics must always be guided by an idea of what lies beyond identity thinking—utopia, as it sometimes appears in Adorno’s writings—if it is not to relapse into sheer nothingness. We must ask, Grass suggests, what kind of possibilities and potentialities are hidden in the here and now? She proposes that subjectivity would then be recognised as something singular, unrepeatable, as having dignity, just as objects would too be respected as unique and valuable entities, and tenderness would be a guiding category for social life.

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