



THEODOR ADORNO

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Driving Impulses

In order to fully grasp the driving impulses and key ideas that underpin the work of Theodor Adorno, we need to understand the sociocultural and historical backdrop to his work. This backdrop includes the creative forces of modernity; the gathering forces of anti-Semitism, Nazism and the Holocaust; and the development of the counterculture movement and postmodernism, or the 'hyper-modern' as Adorno defines it in *Aesthetic Theory* (1997).

Adorno was a sociologist, philosopher and musicologist. He was born an only child in Frankfurt to a Jewish father (a wine merchant) and Catholic mother (an accomplished musician). His work is constituted by the interrelation of aesthetics, phenomenology, western Marxism and musicology. He is described by Martin Jay¹ as 'precocious, musically and intellectually'. He was introduced at the age of fifteen to German classical philosophy by Siegfried Kracauer (a friend of the family). They began by reading Kant's *First Critique* and he learned 'to decode philosophical texts as documents of historical and social truth.'²

After graduating from the University of Frankfurt with a doctorate in philosophy at the age of 21, influenced by Marxism, psychoanalysis, Kant, Hegel's dialectics, the phenomenology of Husserl and musicology (all crucial to the development of his thinking), and where he met his friend and collaborator Horkheimer, Adorno was accepted by Alban Berg as a music student in Vienna. Here he met composers such as Schoenberg whose atonal twelve-tone scale was to be immensely important to him. Adorno praised Schoenberg

for negating the bourgeois principle of tonality and exposing its claims to naturalness in the same way that dialectical thought undermined the pseudo naturalism of bourgeois economics.³

On his return to Frankfurt from Vienna in 1927, he was connected through his intellectual and personal friendships with Horkheimer, Lowenthal and Kracauer to the Institute for Social Research, where he became professor of sociology until his forced migration in 1934. Here he also met the western Marxists Bloch, Brecht, Weill, Lukács and, most importantly, Walter Benjamin. Adorno's work is influenced by and inextricably connected to that of his friend Benjamin.⁴ However, Adorno's Hegelian reading of

Marx differed from the latter group, in that his focus upon developing dialectical critique did *not* accept that committed or political art (such as Brecht's *Mother Courage*) could counter the barbaric forces of capitalism and anti-Semitism. 'When genocide becomes part of the cultural heritage in the themes of committed literature, it becomes easier to continue to play along with the culture that gave birth to murder.'⁵ For Brecht and Benjamin, committed art could make a difference. In contrast, Adorno argued that works that were autonomous, that emerged from the sedimented stuff of society (not explicitly politically directed or posited by the artist or author) such as Kafka, Beckett and Schoenberg (so more abstract work) 'could compel the change of attitude which committed works merely demand'.⁶

Adorno's forced migration was spent first of all at Merton College, Oxford (three and a half years) followed by positions at the Institute for Social Research in New York and then at Berkeley in California. After the war, Adorno returned with his colleagues Horkheimer and Pollack to rebuild and reopen the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. The Institute was officially opened in 1951 and in 1953 Adorno became the director.

It was during his exile in North America that Adorno wrote some of his most powerful and popular texts: *The Authoritarian Personality*, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*. Shierry Nicholsen writes about the importance of *Minima Moralia*, written during and in the aftermath of the Second World War, because in it Adorno explores 'the thinking individual's struggle to retain the capacity to think and experience in the midst of a constellation of power, individual and society that reduces the very idea of the good life to a mere glimmer'.⁷ Anyone who has witnessed the pile of shoes and boots in the Holocaust exhibition at the Imperial War Museum, London, or indeed has visited Dachau or Auschwitz will understand what Adorno means here. Moreover, Adorno also said 'I have no wish to soften the saying that to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric'.⁸

It was in North America that Adorno applied **Freud's** work to his analysis of the Holocaust, which in turn led to his involvement in *The Authoritarian Personality*,⁹ one of a multivolume series of studies in prejudice. In this influential text, Adorno et al. draw links between anti-Semitism and totalitarian thinking, arguing for an analysis that looks for explanations at the level of the psyche as well as the social sphere.

Dialectics and dialectical thinking are very important to Adorno's critical analysis of the social world. Adorno took dialectics beyond Marx and Hegel, arguing that there was no identity between subject and object, no teleological thinking (remember Marx felt that the proletariat were the subject/object of history and would lead a revolution to squash capitalism and usher in socialism). Indeed, critical theory should not be subject to political goals, nor could history be synonymous with progress as emphasized by Enlightenment thinkers. Instead, Adorno focuses upon the relationship between subjectivity and the social world (influenced by Freud); the growing commodification of culture; the loss of hope in history as progress; and the transformative potential of art – defined as the last vestige of 'truth' in a world overtaken by the forces of capitalism, commodification and reification (influenced by Lukács) as instrumental reason.

The common themes and key ideas that form the core around which Adorno's critical analysis unfolds include three interrelated concepts that I will explain more fully in

the next section. The first of these is negative dialectics or **non-identity thinking**, which serves to understand and counter the impact of the increasing commodification of social life. The second is *Kulturkritik* that served to analyse the impact of the culture industry (identified by Adorno as mass deception) involving the analysis of **identity thinking** and instrumental reason. Finally, there is the transformative role of art and critical thought. The task of artist and critical theorist is to reveal the unintentional truths of the social world and preserve independent thinking. Thus, autonomous (not committed) art and critical analysis could be held up like a mirror to society, thus potentially serving a liberating, transformative function.

IDENTITY AND NON-IDENTITY THINKING

For Adorno, a real *object* in the world (anything from capitalism as a whole, through an outbreak of ethnic violence to a TV advertisement) can always outstrip the concepts by means of which a *subject*, a person, perceives that object. That is, any attempt to fully capture the complexity of a real object in a concept is doomed to failure. It needs to be understood that any object could be approached as if through a prism, through a constellation of different perspectives, and that even then there would always be more. Something about the object would always escape the constellation of concepts designed to capture it. A subject can thus never fully capture the object, there can never be an identity between the subject's concepts and the objects out there. 'Identity thinking' is misleading as it mistakenly assumes away the gap between subjective concepts and their objects. On the other hand, *non-identity thinking* can be a valuable critical tool. Non-identity thinking, or what Adorno sometimes calls *the immanent method*, examines inconsistencies, or 'lack of fit', between the concept of an object and its actual existence. This lack of fit is particularly marked in, for example, racist and sexist stereotypes. Stereotypes of women, for example, tend not only to be obtuse as to the distance between their concept of women and the actual reality of particular women, but they also treat all women as *equivalent*, ignoring any differences between them. While particularly marked in the case of stereotypes, identity thinking inevitably creeps into conceptions of all other social objects. Non-identity thinking provokes the interrogation of all such easy assumptions of identity and equivalence.

Through a focused determination to unmask 'lack of fit', non-identity thinking can shed new light on the object itself. It can reveal glimpses of the object that have not previously been seen or acknowledged, even if sometimes it can only do this fleetingly. The method can be used to subvert lazy or expedient ways of thinking encouraged by the mass media, from the language used in news bulletins to the messages of commercial advertisements, phenomena discussed later in the chapter. David Held gives an example from political discourse, showing how non-identity thinking can work to question conventional notions of freedom: 'In the so-called free society in which we live the inequality of social power ensures that the claimed identity between concept (freedom) and object (the present state of affairs) is false. The negation of the concept of freedom in practice points to aspects of society which aid, restrict and restrain freedom's actualization'.¹⁰ That is, the dominant concept of freedom in liberal democratic societies, with all its political and ideological persuasiveness, does not fit with the complex reality of power inequalities and their differential impact on people's actual freedom. Non-identity thinking homes in on this and exposes it.

Key Issues

Instrumental Reason and Identity Thinking

I began writing this chapter in New York at a workshop on Humiliation and Human Dignity where, in discussions about the quality of life, conflict and peace, it was argued that there is a need for the kind of growth that can foster social communities and relationships, that this is needed to interrupt pathways of violence in order to build egalitarianism¹¹ and human dignity and to counter negative social forces such as the impact of humiliation, **instrumental reason** (see glossary box, p. 219 of the 3rd edition), racism, sexism and identity thinking. In reflecting upon this chapter and the workshop, my thoughts turned to ways in which Adorno's work was dedicated to unmasking the false, seeking the truth in life's fictions and working against the forces of totalitarianism that include prejudice, racism and 'othering'.

The quality of life and the impact of destructive forces are expressed for Adorno through the society of domination – an administered society marked by instrumental reason and identity thinking. As NicholSEN states, for Adorno:

the structure of contemporary society is one of domination, and ... domination has reached into the very fabric of daily life. Even the smallest pleasures of life serve to legitimize a society based on domination and thus to legitimize the suffering beneath the surface ... The individual must be constantly vigilant, and yet is unable to avoid complicity with this pervasive structure of domination. Complicity seems to follow from participation of any kind. Conversation itself, the medium of social life, entangles one in complicity.¹²

As an example, NicholSEN draws upon an excerpt from *Minima Moralia*, 'How nice of you doctor.'¹³ Here Adorno describes how through a chance conversation on a train, we might consent to statements that ultimately are abhorrent to us and 'that one knows ultimately to implicate murder.'¹⁴ As NicholSEN states, the 'false appearance of agreement is enough to undermine truth.'¹⁵ Adorno elucidates:

Sociability itself connives at injustice by pretending in this chill world we can still talk to each other, and the casual amiable remark contributes to perpetuating silence, in that the concessions made to the interlocutor debase him.¹⁶

To take this further, sociability as affability is described by Adorno as having a screening (denial) effect on class and relationships, allowing both to 'triumph more implacably'.¹⁷ In NicholSEN's reading, affability is malignant, in the sense of being destructive of respect for human beings; thus, we can argue, leading to humiliation (our own and the 'other's'), isolation and loss of human dignity, particularly if we go along with a judgemental statement that runs totally counter to our own values, such as sexist or racist comments.

NicholSEN describes her reaction to the articles in *Minima Moralia* as on the one hand resonating with them, for they seem true and it is a relief to hear someone say them so directly; but, on the other hand, they are so pessimistic that they are literally unbearable for they leave no way out. Quoting Adorno, she says:

As Adorno describes it, the untruth of ordinary life is so pervasive, and complicity with domination so unavoidable, that we are condemned to solitary suffering. All we can do is hold fast to an awareness of pain, and try to remember that something better might have been, might conceivably still be, possible.¹⁸

Thus, dominant ideology, instrumental reason and identity thinking increasingly shape both the individual psyche and social structures/processes. The drive for equivalence rooted in the exchange principle reduces the world and subjects to thing-like equivalences. This constitutes *identity thinking*. The non-identical becomes 'commensurable and identical'.¹⁹ In American society (where Adorno was writing), affability and phoniness can easily mask or screen the forces of Fascism. Thus, in Nicholsons's reading, it becomes possible that 'Affability as a mask of tolerance and egalitarianism ... hides impersonal social violence.'²⁰

By way of an example, in my college accommodation, I was (being only an occasional TV viewer) surprised by the quantity of commercial breaks in TV programmes and what can only be described as the onslaught of advertising and consumer products that promise to make my life better; products such as: a 'urine guard' that will protect my floors and carpets from cat urine – for only a few dollars; to being offered the possibility of changing my world by 'thinking in line with the word of God' and 'Dr Dollar' by donating every month to 'Change 2006'. All I have to do is set up my account and they do the rest and 'God's kingdom will benefit'. Or, for a monthly fee, I can have clean air in my home and avoid the long-term effects of pollution with a unit that changes the air in my bedroom/house every ten minutes, thus protecting me from dust mites, pollen and viruses.

These examples of product advertising are good examples of identity thinking in operation – seeing/feeling equivalence between my access to clean air and accepting the need to pay for it as the exchange of equivalents. *Instrumental reason* is defined by Adorno as *technological reason* that dominates nature, and *social reason* that leads to the domination of human beings. And the drive for equivalence (money for clean air; money for access to the kingdom of God) rooted in the exchange principle reduces the world (objects) and subjects to thing-like equivalences. The non-identical becomes 'commensurable and identical'.

It is but a short step from the manipulation of needs described above to seeing the equivalence between asylum seekers and 'social junk' as 'swamping' our cities and towns. Newspaper headlines reinforce the equivalence in the public imagination of the scapegoating and 'othering' of people seeking refuge from totalitarian regimes, dire poverty and certain death, as scroungers, tricksters and undeserving. In *What's the Story? Results from Research into Media Coverage of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK*, written by Sarah Buchanan et al., and based on the Article 19 research project conducted by the Cardiff School of Journalism, it was found that:

Media reporting of the asylum issue is characterised by the inaccurate and provocative use of language to describe those entering the country to seek asylum. 51 different labels were identified as making reference to individuals seeking refuge in Britain and included meaningless and derogatory terms such as 'illegal refugee' and 'asylum cheat'.²¹

For Adorno, the very fabric of social life is constituted by domination, instrumental reason and identity thinking and his critical analysis of society looked to negative dialectics, *Kulturkritik* and the role of art as unintentional truth in offering some semblance of hope in a damaged world.

Negative Dialectics

In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno argued against the drive for equivalence we see identified above, and for the non-identity between subject and object. Influenced by Nietzsche and Lukács, he argued that concepts as ordinarily used mask the truth – they have become lies. *Negative Dialectics* looked to Marxism as method and dialectical thinking as the core of that method. And it was up to the subject (us) through negative dialectics to access the ‘truth’ that was largely hidden by the operation of identity thinking, instrumental reason and reification (a version of ideology). Reification – the treatment of people as things, fixed and without critical capacities – is rooted in society *not* the individual psyche and change can only be brought about socially by changing society. However, as we have seen, reification is an outcome of identity thinking at the level of the psyche, and is a fact of consciousness as well as a social category. Gillian Rose interprets identity thinking as the way unlike things appear as like, and she believes that it is this mode of thinking – that considers them as equal – which constitutes reification as both a social phenomenon and as a process of thinking.²² Our very subjectivity is being ‘liquidated’ by the power of reification and identity thinking.

In response, non-identity thinking confronts the partial truth of an object with the potential truth and advances the interests of the truth by identifying the false using the form of the constellation. The critical theorist seeks to assemble a response/argument through what Adorno calls ‘constellational thought’, and in so doing holds up a mirror to society. If we agree with Adorno that domination has reached into the very fabric of social life, into language and subjectivity, then tools for the critical analysis of society must proceed dialectically by identifying the true in the false – in constellational not linear form.

The example in the previous section from *Minima Moralia* is a useful example of non-identity thinking. Affability in the face of statements that we know to ‘uphold murder’ (that is, dehumanizing, sexist, prejudicial/racist remarks) serves to uphold false conditions and reinforce identity thinking, and ultimately does violence not only to the speaker but to ourselves. For Adorno, any thinking that is determined by a desire to control the world cannot qualify for the status of ‘truth’. What constitutes truth is that which hides behind appearance, and unmasking can only come about by changing society, although it is art as well as critical theory that can provide the change-causing gesture;²³ and, as identified above, *not* in the form of committed art but through unintentional/autonomous art such as that of Becket, Schoenberg, Picasso and Kafka.

Nowhere in Kafka does there glimmer the aura of the infinite idea; nowhere does the horizon open. Each sentence is literal and each signifies. The two moments are not merged as the symbol would have it, but yawn apart and out of the abyss between them blinds the glaring ray of fascination.

Here too, in its striving not for symbol but for allegory, Kafka's prose sides with the outcasts. Each sentence says 'interpret me' and none will permit it ... For more than most writers, it must be said of Kafka that not *verum* but *falsim* is *index sui* [not the truth but the opposite is the truth].²⁴

Kafka's fragmentary style²⁵ denies closed systems and truth can be found in the gaps and contradictions in the text: 'What is enclosed in Kafka's glass ball is even more monotonous, more coherent and hence more horrible than the systems outside.'²⁶

Kulturkritik

The development of the administered society, identity thinking and the growth of 'mass culture' were for Adorno synonymous: 'The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises.'²⁷ The culture industry is described as the entertainment business: it helps to maintain the hold of reification. No effort is required of us as consumers, our reactions are prescribed (if I have cats, I need a urine guard; I might want to feel I have a stake in the kingdom of heaven but in my chaotic and busy life paying for it may be a step towards living it; clean air is important in the context of risk society and what a relief I have the opportunity to pay for it), capitalism is sustained and instrumental reason is strengthened. In *Adorno: the Stars Down to Earth*, Stephen Crook states that Adorno raises unsettling questions about contemporary culture, and he asks

how far dependency has become the typical condition of the 'self' in advanced societies, how deeply authoritarian currents run through our superficially pluralistic cultures, and how free our beliefs and opinions are from the pervasive undercurrent of irrationalism?²⁸

Adorno and Horkheimer describe the culture industry as 'mass deception' and non-identity thinking or negative dialectics through *Kulturkritik* performs the much-needed task of revealing the truth, uncovering the meaning of objects and preserving independent thinking. Nichol森 believes that Adorno offers a 'non-discursive rationality' as an alternative to 'a dominating systematizing rationality that is the counterpart of an administered world'.²⁹ This non-discursive rationality is best described through the concept of autonomous art, and its role in uncovering unintentional truth.

The Transformative Role of Art: Art as Unintentional Truth

Adorno describes works of art as rebuses or picture puzzles and shows us that what is contained in them is the sedimented stuff of society. Picasso's *Guernica* is an example he uses in *Aesthetic Theory*:

by means of inhumane construction, [*Guernica*] achieves a level of expression that sharpens it to social protest beyond all contemplative misunderstanding. The socially critical zones of artworks are those where it hurts; where in their expression, historically determined, the untruth of the social situation comes to light. It is actually against this that the rage of art reacts.³⁰

Art as a social product is a cipher of the social; it is formed through the objective demands of the material, the historically given techniques and means of production, the subjective experiences and playfulness of the artist; and at the same time is an independent force in society. Works of art are constitutive – they bring something new into society as well as reflecting what is already there.³¹ ‘The new’ is a blind spot (reminiscent of Benjamin’s dialectical images in *Trauerspiel*) on the side of a positive mimesis³² in tension with the increasingly instrumental and constructive character of reified society.³³

However, the crisis of modernism, the growing forces of totalitarianism, an increasingly administered society and ideology as reification are represented in the increasingly affirmative nature of art – described by Adorno as *Entkunstung* (desubstantialization). This brings with it the loss of art’s capacity to act as a medium of the truth. The related crisis in art includes the commodification of art (the integration of art into life or art viewed as a thing among things), or art viewed as a vehicle for the psychology of the producer or the viewer). The central concept of dissonance of art turns into its opposite as affirmation and commodification.

On the other hand, ‘auratic art’, art that resists accommodation, remains the last vestige of hope in a damaged world. Auratic art invokes ‘frisson’, ‘shudder’, and, in the realm of unfreedom, freedom can only find its representation fleetingly, unintentionally, as ‘coming and going’ in the unresolved tensions between *mimesis* (sensuousness, spirit, playfulness that animates art works) and the *constructive rationality* (means and social forces, demands of the material and artistic sphere) of production. The socially critical dimensions of auratic art are those that hurt ‘where in their expression, historically determined, the untruth of the social situation comes to light’.³⁴

The problem is that art’s opposition is minimal within the increasing reification and desubstantialization of art. The truth content of art is explained via the dialectic of art – mimesis versus constructive rationality. ‘It is through the dialectical combination of mimesis and rationality that art is produced.’³⁵ Given the growth of identity thinking and instrumental reason and the takeover by the constructive/rational pole of the dialectic, mimesis retreats into abstraction in an attempt to avoid affirmation. Art survives as cultural heritage or affirmative pleasure, as business for profit. Culture as redemption becomes culture as manipulation, save for the few autonomous works where the sedimented aspects of the social, the subjective/collective are contained, and, in the tension between mimesis and constructive rationality, truth unfolds from within the work, rather than being posited intentionally by the artist.

For Adorno, the mystery of art is its demystifying power. And it calls for a twofold reflection ‘on the being of itself of art, and its ties with society’.³⁶ Art ‘as a refuge for mimetic behaviour ... represents truth in the twofold sense of preserving the image of an end smothered completely by rationality and of exposing the irrationality and absurdity of the status quo’.³⁷ The task of the philosopher and critical theorist is to interpret the social world through critical theory; not as ‘legislators’ degraded to ‘propagandists or censors ... for they help to weave the veil’³⁸ but as interpreters.³⁹

Seeing Things Differently

Adorno's work provides both inspiration and a driving force for my own work as a feminist scholar, particularly in relation to the themes of: non-identity thinking; interpretive sociology/ethnography (micrology); and the role of mimesis – again, to be interpreted as sensuous awareness – in producing knowledge that is potentially transformative. I describe this as critical theory in praxis. Indeed, Adorno's writing on the dialectic of art as being formed in the tension between mimesis and constructive rationality has led me to develop a methodology I call *ethno-mimesis*, a renewed methodology influenced by Adorno's account of the dialectic of art, and indeed Adorno's articulation of coming to know the work of art.⁴⁰

A 'force field'⁴¹ (Jay, 1993) develops around theory, experience and praxis (as knowledge for) in the process of my immersion in the lives of sex workers, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. The research process involves a theory of feeling/involvement/sensuousness in critical tension to reason, rationality, objectification and the triangulation of data. This methodology incorporates ethnography (micrology) and mimesis (as sensuous knowledge) and involves creative methods such as the production of art works by research participants as visual/poetic data to be interpreted alongside more orthodox data such as interviews, surveys and observation.

'The splinter in your eye is the best magnifying glass.'⁴² This quotation describes how I feel about this process. The statement encourages us to focus upon what is ordinarily overlooked, the small scale, the minutiae of lived experience. In focusing upon pain and the unsayable – the gap between the appearance and the reality – that can be found within the small scale, we can often reach a better understanding of the broader social picture. Drawing upon Adorno, it is only by trying to say the 'unsayable', the 'outside of language', 'the mimetic' the sensual, the non-conceptual, that we can we approach a 'politics' that undercuts identity thinking, refuses to engage in identity thinking – but rather criss-crosses binary thinking and remains unappropriated. Works of art, as ciphers of the social world, help us to access the sedimented stuff of society, what may be unsayable, and help to reveal the unintentional truths of society.

This kind of politics and praxis strikes resonances with some contemporary feminist theorists,⁴³ especially when we loosen up the knowledge/ideology axis contained in Adorno's works, for Adorno argued himself into a one-way street, in that only autonomous art could mirror social conditions. If we acknowledge that we do have the resources to look behind appearances and engage critically with our world, society, politics and culture, and that constructive rationality and reification are not quite so embedded as Adorno argued, then we can explore the transformative potential of critical theory, critical praxis. For some people, critical analysis of their society involves being placed outside 'citizenship' and brings the risk of death – as in the case of Nelson Mandela and those asylum seekers who have stood up against totalitarian regimes, have refused to be bystanders or 'affable' amidst the horror of the real.

In my work, I argue that through art works, performing arts, live arts, painting, poetry, literature, photography and architecture, we are able to get in touch with our 'realities',

our social worlds and the lived experiences of others, in ways which demand critical reflection. For NicholSEN, the critical potential of art is that it can ‘pierce us’ and ‘help us to grasp reality in its otherness within the context of the image society that attempts to tame and inhibit critical reflection.’⁴⁴ NicholSEN looks to photography to help us develop a broader, more compassionate and accurate consciousness.

As an example, see the piece below created by a Bosnian refugee as part of an Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB), funded project on ‘Global Refugees: Exile, Displacement and Belonging’ (a colour version of this picture can be seen at www.palgravehighered.com/stones).⁴⁵

In the Global Refugees project, representing lived experience in artistic form could be potentially regressive, in that (remembering Adorno’s comments on the desubstantialization of art) it may facilitate the transformation of pain into enjoyment, where suffering can simply be consumed or enjoyed and something of its horror is removed. However, our research does not simply memorialize the testimonies of the participants, but through retelling, rewriting, reconstructing and reimagining the loss, displacement and exile faced by the people involved, and in representing their stories or testimonies through art forms to as wide an audience as possible (in community centres as well as galleries), the processes of regeneration and reconstruction emerged and acted as a spur to the processes of community development. Challenging and resisting dominant images and stereotypes of ‘refugees’ and ‘asylum seekers’ can also serve to raise awareness, educate and empower individuals and groups.

Through art forms such as Figure 1, ethnographic research and artistic representation can inform each other, developing greater knowledge and understanding through the production of texts as ‘feeling forms’, for they contain ‘truths’ about the social world. The image represents the artist’s feelings towards her Serbian neighbour who saved her life. This work does not support the regressive moment in art – the transformation of pain into joy, but rather serves to increase awareness of emotional pain and acts as a counter to postemotionalism. Moreover, we can acquire a more complex understanding of our similarities and differences through such intertextual feeling forms – in them we glimpse the sedimented stuff of society and, in the process, if we engage, we can be informed, empowered and challenged.

For NicholSEN, the very conjunction of non-discursive rationality and the aesthetic dimension are the key to Adorno’s potential usefulness to us as a counter to ‘a dominating systematizing rationality that is the counterpart of an administered world’.⁴⁶

Legacies and Unfinished Business

Adorno’s central dialectic of mimesis and constructive rationality provides an example of the importance of understanding the critical tension between emotion, feeling, spirit, subjectivity and our ‘out there’ sense of being in the world – institutions, organizations, bureaucracy and objectification. Given the relationship he outlines between culture, the culture industry and reification, the need is for immanent, dialectical criticism – in order

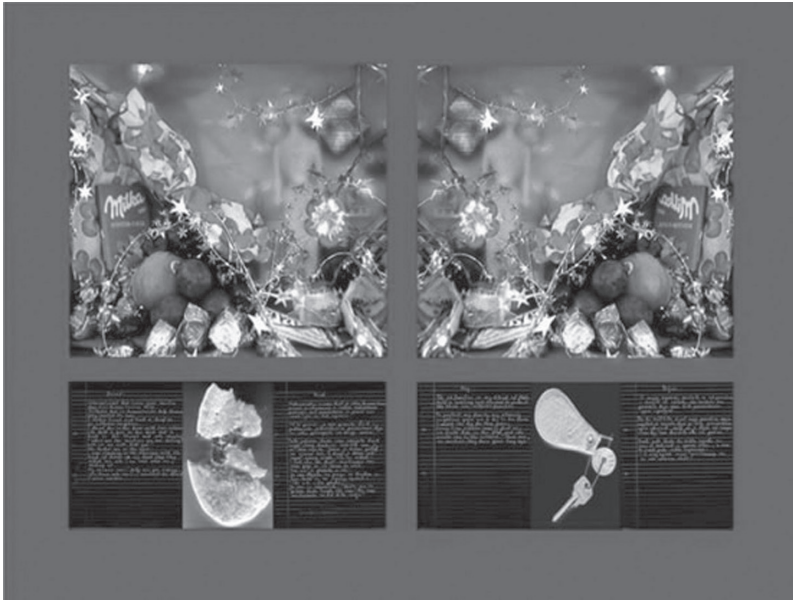


Figure 1 Good neighbour

to say the unsayable – the ‘unutterable’ – to undercut cultural criticism (he defines this as legitimating the status quo) with dialectical criticism.

The major intellectual legacies of Adorno’s work on art, society and culture include his work on:

1. Deconstructing identity thinking – the false identity between subject and object marked by instrumental reason – Keith Tester’s⁴⁷ examination of the ‘dialectic of reification’ uses Adorno to develop his analysis of the inhuman condition, the fabrication and reification of our social worlds.
2. Understanding the interrelationship between psychic, social and cultural processes and practices. NicholSEN picks this up in her work on aura and subjectivity⁴⁸ and utilizes Adorno and Benjamin to push forward both the understanding and practice of environmental consciousness and psychoanalytic psychotherapy.⁴⁹
3. Working at the intersections of philosophy, politics and aesthetics in order to illuminate the contradictory nature of social and sexual oppression. Not by way of an answer or solution to the problems of the modern age, marked by increasing consumption, capitalism and reification of all aspects of life, but rather as tools for the critical analysis of society.

A number of feminists have creatively taken up these themes in their reworking or use of Adorno and I will focus upon some of these in what follows, drawing out just some of the many fruitful avenues of critical thought that Adorno’s work continues to inspire.

In his writings Adorno develops a relentless attack upon essentializing the feminine, at the same time as proclaiming the utter loss of hope in the Enlightenment as progress. Becker-Schmidt⁵⁰ informs us that in German sociology, Adorno's attempts to 'relate societal transformations to restructurings of psychical energies on a collective scale' have not been continued; and that it is feminists who have productively analysed Adorno. However, for Becker-Schmidt, because Adorno's image of femininity is conformist rather than progressive, his ideas must first be transformed into a feminist perspective. She does this by focusing upon theories of equality and difference in gender relations and also by asking in what way differences in the power relations between men and women support social domination above and beyond gender relations. Difference, identitarian logic and the correspondence between gender hierarchies and societal hegemonies are key themes in her work and have far-reaching impacts for feminisms. For example, Becker-Schmidt identifies that, in the women's movement, sociological positions have emerged that emphasize 'the difference between gender groups in order to grant the social group "woman" a voice for asserting her own interests'. On the other hand, 'we come across concepts in the social sciences which postulate "equality" as an absolute demand as well.'⁵¹ Becker-Schmidt goes on to explore why these approaches conceptualize equality and difference as opposites rather than as mediated positions and what effect this has on the formulation of women's policies. The important message here, for me, is that drawing upon Adorno's critique of identitarian logic, we can disrupt binary thinking and explore and analyse the mediations between opposite stances to develop more complex sociological thinking. A good example is the current feminist discourse on prostitution, with one group arguing for sex as work and the other arguing for sex as violence and abuse.

Juliet Flower Macannel produces a brilliant psychoanalytic analysis of Adorno and women, describing herself as ambivalent and resistant to his work. She tells us that in her reading of Adorno, there is little fault to find in his theoretical works as far as women are concerned, 'his aphorisms about women are almost always proto-feminist. Long before the women's movement he assailed women's abuse, archaic as well as contemporary.'⁵² Adorno, she says, is clear that 'The feminine character, and the ideal of femininity on which it is modelled, are products of masculine society.'⁵³ Flower Macannel writes that 'Adorno contrasted the bad equality of today and its demand to eradicate differences, with a potentially "better state" in which people could be different without fear.'⁵⁴ In relation to the liberation of woman, he tells us that 'Women's new emancipation has only a mere "appearance" of life.'⁵⁵ Identifying that there can be no emancipation for women without that of society, Adorno identifies the battle of the sexes 'in the way a housewife holds her husband's coat for him'. In 'the incongruity between his authoritarian pretensions and his helplessness', his wife helps him on with his coat. 'In demystifying the husband, whose power rests on his money, earning trumped up as human worth, the wife too expresses the falsehood of marriage, in which she seeks her whole worth. No emancipation without that of society.'⁵⁶ However, for Flower Macannel, Adorno's concept of 'woman' is limited to a bourgeois definition/ understanding: 'If we want to imagine or dream ourselves beyond both the family and capitalist society as women we do not get much help from him.'⁵⁷ For Flower Macannel, Adorno's theoretical works take analysis

of the woman question only so far, yet we are made aware also of the complexity of the 'woman question' and its relation to sexual and social structures and forces.

Nicholsen's work in the field of psychoanalytic psychotherapy and environmental consciousness is also greatly influenced by Adorno. In a recent paper,⁵⁸ she explores passion, psychoanalysis and the postemotional dilemma in order to show the usefulness of Adorno to us in understanding the present. She describes how the concept of 'postemotionalism', coined by Stjepan Meštrovic in 1990s North America, was explained 'brilliantly' by Adorno in the 1940s. 'Postemotionalism' is a state of being where 'synthetic, quasi-emotions become the basis for the widespread manipulation of self and others, and the culture industry as a whole'. In postemotional society, 'a new hybrid of intellectualized, mechanical, mass-produced emotions have appeared on the world scene'.⁵⁹ Drawing upon *Minima Moralia*, Nicholsen draws parallels with Adorno and refers to a section called 'Invitation to the dance'. Here Adorno tells us that part of the mechanism of domination is to 'forbid recognition of the suffering it produces'. Nicholsen draws links to postemotionalism and 'normotic illness', coined by Bollas to describe clients who experience themselves as commodity objects, marked also by mental flatness and lack of human relationships. Nicholsen argues that psychoanalysis could help to increase awareness of emotional pain and decrease the experience of postemotionalism.

Further Reading

The following texts will help the reader to take further the themes of this chapter.

Adorno, T.W. (1980 [1977]) 'Commitment', in *Aesthetics and Politics*, translation editor R. Taylor, London: Verso; see also the Afterword by F. Jameson.

Adorno, T.W. (1996) *Minima Moralia*, translated by E.F.N. Jephcott, London: Verso.

Adorno, T.W. (1997) *Aesthetic Theory*, translated by R. Hullot-Kentor, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Benjamin, A. (1989) *The Problem of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin*, London: Verso. A collection of chapters by philosophers; see especially J. Hodge, 'Feminism and postmodernism'.

Buck-Morss, S. (1977) *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, Brighton: Harvester Press.

Crooks, S. (1994) *Adorno: the Stars down to Earth*, London: Routledge. Read the 'Introduction: Adorno and authoritarian irrationalism'.

Jay, M. (1984) *Adorno*, London: Fontana. A great introduction from the Fontana Modern Masters series.

Nicholsen, S. (1997) *Exact Imagination Late Work: On Adorno's Aesthetics*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. A wonderful collection of articles on Adorno's aesthetics by one of Adorno's translators.

O'Neill, M. (ed.) (1999) *Adorno Culture and Feminism*, London: Sage. A collection of chapters by an international group of feminist scholars working with Adorno's theories, including the cited chapters by Becker-Schmidt and Flower Macannel.

O'Neill, M. in association with Giddens, S. Breatnach, P. Bagley, C. Bourne, D. and Judge, T. (2002) 'Renewed methodologies for social research: ethno-mimesis as performative praxis', *Sociological Review*, 50(1).

O'Neill, M. (2004) 'Global refugees, (human) rights, citizenship and the law', in Cheng, S. (ed.) *Law, Justice and Power*, California: Stanford University Press.

Rose, G. (1978) *The Melancholy Science: an Introduction to the Thoughts of T.W. Adorno*, London: Routledge.

Witkin, R. (1998) *Adorno on Music*, London: Routledge. A detailed account of Adorno's work on music from a sociological perspective.

Notes

1. Martin Jay describes five points of light and energy that form the force field of Adorno's intellectual career: western Marxism, aesthetic modernism, Mandarin cultural conservatism, Jewish identification, and deconstructionism – see chapter 1 in Martin Jay's *Adorno* (1984) London: Fontana.
2. Ibid. p. 25.
3. Ibid. p. 27.
4. See *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin 1910–1940* (1994) G. Scholem and T. Adorno (eds) Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
5. Adorno, T.W. 'Commitment' in *Aesthetics and Politics*, translation editor R. Taylor, London: Verso, 1997, p. 189; see also the Afterword by F. Jameson.
6. Ibid. Adorno, 1997, p. 191.
7. S. Nichol森, 'Adorno's *Minima Moralia*: On passion, psychoanalysis and the postemotional dilemma', from personal communication with the author; presented in shorter form in 'Psychoanalysis, passion and performance', in *The Alliance Forum on Passion*, Seattle: Washington, 2002b.
8. Op. cit. Adorno, 1997, p. 188.
9. T. Adorno, Frankel-Brunswick, E., Levinson, D. and Sanford, R. *The Authoritarian Personality*, New York: Harper, 1950.
10. D. Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, pp. 216–7.
11. A term coined by E. Lindner to mean equal dignity for all, see 'Humiliation in a globalizing world: does humiliation become the most disruptive force?' 2004 (<http://www.humiliation-studies.org/documents/LindnerHumiliationFearGlobalizingWorld.pdf>).
12. Op. cit. Nichol森, 2002b, p. 3.
13. Op. cit. Nichol森, 2002b, pp. 25–6.
14. T.W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott, London: Verso, 1996.
15. Op. cit. Nichol森, 2002b, p. 3.
16. Op. cit. Adorno, 1996, pp. 25–6.
17. Op. cit. Adorno, 1996, p. 26.
18. Op. cit. Nichol森, 2002b, p. 4.
19. Adorno, T.W. (1973) *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. K. Tarnowski and F. Will, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
20. Op. cit. Nichol森, 2002b, p. 6.

21. S. Buchanan, Grillo, B. and Threadgold, T. *What's the Story? Results from Research into Media Coverage of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK*, London: Article 19, 2002, p. 5.
22. G. Rose, (1978) *The Melancholy Science: an Introduction to the Thoughts of T.W. Adorno*, London: Routledge, Ch. 3.
23. S. Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, Brighton: Harvester Press, 1977, pp. 36–7.
24. T.W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. S. Weber and S. Weber, California, MA: MIT Press, 1995, pp. 246–7.
25. To better understand this point, read Kafka's short story 'Metamorphosis'.
26. Op. cit. Adorno, 1995, p. 261.
27. Adorno, T.W. and Horkheimer, M. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. J. Cumming, New York: Continuum and London: Verso, 1995, p. 139.
28. S. Crook, (1994) *Adorno: the Stars Down to Earth*, London: Routledge. Read the 'Introduction: Adorno and authoritarian irrationalism'.
29. S. NicholSEN, *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno's Aesthetics*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1997, p. 3.
30. Op. cit. Adorno, 1997, p. 237.
31. See J. Hillis-Millar (1992) *Illustration*, London: Reaktion Books. Here Hillis-Millar draws upon Walter Benjamin's work to illustrate the way works of art make culture.
32. Adorno's use of mimesis is influenced greatly by Walter Benjamin and is not to be interpreted as imitation or mimicry but rather as sensuous knowledge.
33. See J. Roberts (1982) *Walter Benjamin: Theoretical Traditions in Social Sciences*, London: Macmillan – now Palgrave Macmillan.
34. Op. cit. Adorno, 1997, p. 237.
35. Osborne, P. (1989) 'Adorno and the metaphysics of modernism: the problem of a postmodern art' in A. Benjamin (ed.) *The Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin*, London: Routledge.
36. Adorno, T.W. (1984) *Aesthetic Theory*, eds G. Adorno and R. Tiedmann, trans. C. Lendhart, London: Routledge.
37. Ibid. p. 79.
38. Op. cit. Adorno, 1995, p. 20.
39. See also Z. Bauman, (1988) 'Is there a postmodern sociology?', in *Theory, Culture and Society*, 5: 217–37.
40. O'Neill, M. in association with Giddens, S., Breatnach, P., Bagley, C., Bourne, D. and Judge, T. (2002) 'Renewed methodologies for social research: ethno-mimesis as performative praxis', *Sociological Review*, 50(1). In coming to know the work of art, Adorno reflects upon the process of interpretation, commentary, criticism via immersion, followed by objectification and dissociation – through micrology and *Verstehen*. This describes for me the research process of immersion and connection at one and the same time as maintaining a critical distance through a process of objectification to provide as close as possible an account and interpretation of an issue.
41. Jay, M. (1993) *Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique*, New York: Routledge.
42. Adorno, T.W. (1978) *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott, London and New York: Verso.
43. See O'Neill, M. (ed.) *Adorno, Culture and Feminism*, London: Sage, 1999. For example, contemporary feminist thought evolved out of critiques of the Enlightenment, modernism, structuralism and psychoanalysis. Key themes include the disavowal of binary oppositions, a focus upon deconstruction, anti-essentialism; a focus upon the complexity of our life-worlds and the importance of mediation in exploring social life within the context of technologization, globalization and what Piccone calls 'the permanent crisis of the totally administered society' (1993: 3) marked by 'conformist political theory ... mass society, pseudo culture and new class dominations' (1993: 9).

44. Op. cit. NicholSEN (2002b).
45. The research in which this image was produced sought to develop alternative forms of representing and analysing the lived experiences of refugees and asylum seekers living in Nottingham and London. The research was conducted between 1998 and 2002 with the participation of refugees and asylum seekers from Bosnia- Herzegovina and Afghanistan. The participants were the co-creators of the research. The research was contextualized within the UK Arts Council's concept of cultural diversity and was premised upon the vital role of the arts in sociocultural regeneration. Our project drew upon processes of participatory action research (PAR) and participatory arts (PA) as 'ethno-mimesis' to produce critical theory in practice/praxis. Praxis is understood as purposeful knowledge within the context of the need to raise awareness of the lived experiences of refugees and asylum seekers and to challenge myths and stereotypes. For example, the kind of myths created in the press referenced in the work of Article 19 and the Cardiff School of Journalism and earlier in this chapter.
46. Op. cit. NicholSEN 1997, p. 3.
47. K. Tester, *The Social Thought of Zygmunt Bauman*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
48. Op. cit. NicholSEN, 1997.
49. S. NicholSEN, *The Love of Nature and the End of the World*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002a.
50. Becker-Schmidt, R. (1999) 'Critical theory as a critique of society: Theodor Adorno's significance for a feminist sociology' Chapter 5 in O'Neill, M. (ed.) *Adorno, Culture and Feminism*, London, California and New Delhi: Sage, pp. 104–18.
51. Ibid. p. 105.
52. Flower Macannel, J. (1999) 'Adorno: The riddle of femininity' Chapter 7 in O'Neill, M. (ed.) *Adorno, Culture and Feminism*, London, California and New Delhi: Sage, pp. 141–60.
53. Ibid. p. 143.
54. Ibid. p. 142.
55. Ibid. p. 144
56. Ibid. p. 144.
57. Ibid. p. 144.
58. Op. cit. NicholSEN, 2002b.
59. Meštrović, S. (1997) *Postemotional Society*, London: Sage.