

Such glimpses of lived experience appear now and then in the pages of *Littérature et politique en Océanie*. To the observer of the future, they suggest an intellectual class of the twenty-first century which, having created the envelop of an orthodoxy, let's call it the post-colonial consensus, now chafes at its authority. It is seldom in the imagination of those professing an emancipatory discourse that successful emancipatory discourse someday transitions into an orthodoxy that hates emancipation. How it bridles this hate tells us everything about how emancipatory any such discourse ever was.

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A COMPANION TO ADORNO (*Blackwell Companions to Philosophy*). By Peter E. Gordon, Espen Hammer and Max Pensky (Eds.). Hoboken NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2020. 660 pp.

Noting the half-century that has now passed since Theodor Adorno's untimely death in August 1969, the editors of Blackwell's mighty new symposium on all aspects of the Frankfurt thinker's theoretical legacy announce that, in the intervening years, 'the landscape of his critical reception has transformed and diversified in manifold ways' (xv). The narrative of Adorno's trajectory was for many years of a return from transatlantic exile to a postwar Germany, in the western half of which he played a conscientious, if agonised, role as a public intellectual, displaying an ever more fastidious refusal of accommodation either with the currents of official culture or the oppositional politics that would coalesce in the militant students' movement of the late 1960s. On this account, his erstwhile Marxist commitments congealed into a mannered distaste for engagement, his philosophical work ascending into a neo-metaphysical airless ether, until aesthetic themes alone were finally all that preoccupied him. As the Blackwell editors put it, however, 'By the turn of the millennium, Adorno had reemerged in scholarship in a rather new guise, as a thinker whose works were best understood in their full independence as contributions to defining questions of the philosophical canon' (xv). Since then, there has scarcely been a time that has failed to seem right for another compendious collection of essays on Adorno, but the present volume proves to be one of the more signal achievements of recent years.

Bertolt Brecht, who scarcely took the first generation of Frankfurt thinkers seriously, once remarked that nobody who lacked a sense of humour would stand a chance of understanding dialectics. By much the same token, nobody who lacks a gigantic range of cultural and philosophical reference, and one that is ever vigilant for the first trace of oxidation into ideology in any of its component parts, will find themselves equipped to take on the entirety of Adorno's thought. Blackwell's volume has been neatly classified into seven overarching sections: Intellectual Foundations; Cultural Analysis; History and Domination; Social Theory and Empirical Inquiry; Aesthetics; Negative Dialectics; and Ethics and Politics. These parameters enable the contributors, drawn from the global mandarinat of commentators on Adorno and the Frankfurt School with very few obvious omissions, to address very nearly the full scope of Adorno's published output, as well as certain of his academic lectures, radio talks and interviews. Nobody has felt much inclined

to take on the notoriously intractable work of Adorno's Oxford period, on Husserlian phenomenology (the work translated into English as *Against Epistemology*), and there is surprisingly little discussion of his critique of German existentialism, *The Jargon of Authenticity* (1964), but the primary texts – the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (co-authored with Max Horkheimer, 1947), *Minima Moralia* (1951), *Prisms* (1955), the three volumes of *Notes to Literature* (1958-65), *Negative Dialectics* (1966) and the posthumously published, unfinished *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) – are each subjected to productive, animated and often critical readings that will mostly prove to be of great value to the growing international body of Adorno scholars.

The question of Adorno's parallax shift with regard to the structuring principles of Marxist theory is addressed by Peter Osborne. Concerned that Adorno is often guilty of shining a peripheral negative light on to a whole systemic field, which he then characterises as a reified totality, Osborne contends that his thought might often be seen as having transformed the methodological apparatus of Marx's *Capital* into a structural model of the whole of society or culture – this, despite the fact that, as early as 1931 in his inaugural lecture in the philosophy faculty at Frankfurt University, Adorno had already conceded that any attempt to grasp social being as a totality was now doomed to failure. Osborne suggests that Adorno has missed his own implicit point that society is not a static structure but a historical process, but this overlooks the fact that a critical consciousness of this process can no more remain rooted in an ontological stance towards it than can the subjects caught up within it. In discussing Adorno's dialectical interpretation of the relations between the individual and society, conceived in terms of psychological development, Osborne further worries that, in essays such as 'On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening' (1938), Adorno subscribes to a prescriptive psychological model of self-evolution and maturity, perhaps inherited from Marx's metaphor of the primitivism of the commodity fetish, misreading Adorno's own analysis as a 'historically contradictory liberalism' (311). To dispense with the idea of comparative maturity, as though there were no functional difference between the social consciousness of an enraged adolescent and, say, a university research director seems a reckless wager on egalitarianism that risks throwing out the baby of grounded critical theory with the bathwater of suspected normativity. What appears 'historically contradictory' in the lens of conceptual orthodoxy might well turn out to be exemplary dialectics, and there is nothing of liberalism, either of the Victorian or Habermasian stamp, in addressing the fate of the individual under the impress of social reification.

Maeve Cooke makes a valiant effort at finding ways through and around the theory-praxis impasse of Adorno's political philosophy, particularly as it manifested itself in his controversial official abstentionism during the confrontations of 1967 and 1968. She is properly sensitive to the anti-instrumentalist nuances of his social critique, its refusal of the bourgeois Hegelian notion of continuous progress towards enlightenment, and its insistence that the individual subject's sense of injury, subjugation, and of having been cheated are the primary objective evidence that the system has failed. Nonetheless, she clings to the notions of 'pessimism' and 'resignation' in characterising Adorno's thought, and appears to suggest that he abjures the notion of slow incremental changes in society, which is hardly supported by his writings. The self-transformation she recommends, as exemplified in the political teachings of Martin Luther King, could as easily be made to conform to the proposition from the essay on fetishism in music, that 'only individuals are capable of consciously representing the aims of collectivity'.

In one of the volume's outstanding contributions, Max Pensky addresses the continually tantalising question of the metaphysical remainder that Adorno's late work, in particular *Negative Dialectics*, wished to requisition from the ascendancy of historical materialism. The something-other that remains after all sublation, the excess in the object that identitarian thinking cannot quite cover in the concept, the promise of redemption in classical theology, the gesturing towards a finally fulfilled inaugural human history in determinist versions of the Marxist tradition, the creeping quotidian intimation that there must be more to life than this, to which everybody alive is intermittently subject, is not to be wished away by the triumph of reason or the materialist explication of origins. As Pensky writes, what Adorno sought was 'the possibility of a metaphysical experience without idealism' (515), which might well constitute a partial knowledge of the existing faulty totality. In related vein, Brian O'Connor asks whether the famous technique of 'immanent critique' propounded by the first Frankfurt thinkers can lead to the uncovering of truth by determinate negation, producing in the process a changed philosophy that might begin truly to express the wealth of real experience, given that such a task inevitably remains dependent on whatever textual monoliths it finds itself addressing.

Adorno's aesthetic writings have undoubtedly generated the largest volume of critical comment in recent years, not all of it managing to avoid the disarming motivation that talking about art is a whole lot more congenial than talking about Auschwitz. Owen Hulatt's essay on the notion of aesthetic autonomy raises a number of objections to Adorno that fail to grasp the historical dialectic in his theory. Hulatt gives the impression of still looking fruitlessly for a system, while his own experiential model of aesthetic reception presumes that critical reflection on the non-aesthetic elements – social criticism, philosophical problems – stands at an exclusive remove from aesthetic appreciation itself, as though consciousness of art lived only in the immediate experience of it, with no opening for reflection before and after it. Hulatt's representation of the truth-content of an artwork is limited to an assertoric or propositional model, and the claim that, for Adorno, 'their mechanisms of representation and appearance are hermetically sealed' (362) appears to have confused the functional autonomy that Adorno claimed for artworks vis-a-vis society with their sensual and semantic capabilities.

As so often, it is Adorno's animadversions on popular music, especially the commercial jazz of the mid-century, that constitute the chafing point for those who are simultaneously magnetically attracted and sorely irritated by his thought. Andrew Bowie's contribution raises more questions than it settles in this area, not least in the contiguity of his charge that Adorno is too sweepingly inclusive in his definition of jazz with his own endorsement of the claim that a better term for the genre would be 'Black American Music', a capacious category that would see everything from rag to rap, James Scott to Nipsey Hussle, tidied into it. Jazz ceased to be the music of resistance to black oppression the minute white musicians moved into it, which is to say, at its outset, and while those who flinch at Adorno's critique of the commercial basis of jazz in manufactured hit songs are always ready to talk about John Coltrane, Charlie Parker and Ornette Coleman, interestingly few of them have anything to say in the context about Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday or Sarah Vaughan, still less Kenny Ball or Cleo Laine. There is an elided dialectic of subjectivity and objectivity in the aesthetic response of audiences to jazz that is absent from the theoretical defence of it. Working on the radio project at Princeton, Adorno already noted the tremor of relief that goes through a nightclub crowd when the band launches into something familiar after a wander through terra incognita, a phenomenon

that tends to undermine the argument retailed by Bowie that live performance is the key to understanding the seriousness of jazz, as distinct from the massive recorded output it has been happy to generate from the moment of its inception to the MP3 era. The claim here that jazz, in all the indignity of its appropriation by the culturally conservative and the comfortably off, is 'a powerful counter to the return of forms of oppression and exclusion' (135) carries more than the suspicion of crossed fingers.

Blackwell's editors have convoked a handsome body of scholarship that goes a long way to matching the heterogeneity of its subject matter. The inevitable editorial oversights – Adorno dying a year too early here, Alban Berg possibly having written his Violin Concerto a year after his own death there, the repeated invocation of a composer called Kurt Eisler (a little-known confrère of the great Hanns Weill) – are fewer and further between than they might have been in a collection this size. That Adorno's positions, often argued from the rhetorical fringe, from a squeezed margin of experience at the edge of the tidal currents of conformity, still elicit a mixture of provoked demurrals and exasperated forbearance, is continuing testimony to their incendiary nature. Despite the occasional careless locution in this volume, they were never intended to be a fixed corpus of dogma, but equally they are more than marginalia to an ethically frangible postwar society and the sclerotic commercial culture that serves it, the arteries of which have only narrowed further in the era of music downloads, online petitions and the bedlam of social media. It would be possible to disprove many of the contentions Adorno advanced throughout the forty years of his active intellectual life, and still not dispense with him, because his theoretical practice is first and foremost a methodology, a matter of patient negative attention to the enormities and calamities of the historical process and the sufferings they engender, deny, and then aggravate.

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AESTHETICS: A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION. By Bence Nanay. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. 144 pp.

With hundreds of titles in Oxford's *Very Short Introduction* series, including volumes covering most of the branches of philosophy, one may wonder why it took so long to get one in aesthetics. Those studying aesthetics may not be surprised, but Bence Nanay's *Aesthetics: A Very Short Introduction* is a welcome addition.

Aesthetics has become too frequently discussed in the context of art, to the point where any distinction between philosophy of art and aesthetics seems almost superficial. Nanay addresses right away this common conflation by stating directly that aesthetics is not the same thing as philosophy of art. "If an experience is worth having for you, it thereby becomes a potential subject of aesthetics" (3). This claim, in a way, sets the stage for the rest of the book. While many of our aesthetic experiences involve art, it is important to realize, as Nanay notes, "Aesthetics is everywhere" (2). Aesthetics is the study of the experiences that are evoked by objects, which include artworks but also goes beyond art.