Adorno's Mimesis and its Limitations for Critical Social Thought

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ABSTRACT: Adorno's philosophy has enjoyed a resurgence of attention in political theory over the past decade. In this paper, I challenge contemporary efforts to adopt his critical theory by arguing that his conceptions of mimesis and negative dialectics, which are central to his thought, are ultimately unsatisfactory. I begin by critiquing the normative content of the negative dialectic, and then move on to explore its problematic relation with mimesis. In the following sections I argue that mimesis cannot do the normative work that Adorno requires of it. Rather, his idea of mimesis fails to inform critique (understood as 'negative' thought), relies on a problematic pre-modern idea of authenticity, and is incompatible with theoretical analyses of modern complex societies.

KEY WORDS: *Adorno, critical theory, negative dialectics, mimesis.*

> The identity of experience in the form of a life that is articulated and possesses internal continuity – and that life was the only thing that made the narrator's stance possible – has disintegrated. (Adorno[1])

Over the past decade or so, Theodor Adorno's work has enjoyed a renaissance in social and political theory. Numerous thinkers have turned to his work to anchor contemporary theorizing on culture, aesthetics, rationality, epistemology, capitalism, and modernity.[2] Nevertheless, while much of this newer literature seeks to understand the positive contributions Adorno can make to contemporary theory, the main criticisms of his thought have focused on two problematic aspects of his work: his purportedly 'elitist' aesthetic theory, considered by some to be little more than a philosophically abstruse defense of Schönberg and other modernists against the 'the culture industry',[3] and his reductive conception of reason as instrumental, best exemplified in his and Horkheimer's discussion of Odysseus in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Indeed, a great deal of recent scholarly literature tries to defend him from these charges. In this essay, I want to pursue a dif-

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ferent topic that has garnered significantly less attention from social theorists, though one that is of central importance to his work. I will consider Adorno's idea of mimesis, a concept that remains somewhat underdeveloped in his work but is nevertheless crucial to understanding his social theory and is relevant to any assessment of his ability to provide an actual social-theoretical (rather than strictly philosophical) explanation of the pathologies and challenges of modernity. For Adorno, our present life is one of estrangement – we are estranged from ourselves, from fellow human beings, and from nature. Mimesis, understood as the 'assimilation of the self to the other', represents both the long-lost ideal of autonomy that animates much of his work and the crucial normative standpoint from which he critiques modern societies.[4] It is the fulcrum of his thought. Nevertheless, it receives little sustained treatment in his writings, instead being presented through allusions to what it is not. Exploring this concept will provide a better appraisal of how both first-generation critical theory and, more generally, aestheticized models of social theory in the Adornian mold, continue to fall short of outlining just what autonomy is.

This essay proceeds in several steps. First, I briefly outline Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of modernity and instrumental rationality. By understanding the problems of modernity as they see it, we can begin to identify what an alternative should look like, and also how they view the status of critique in light of the totalizing aspects of modernity. Then I turn to Adorno's later works and reconstruct his notions of the negative dialectic and mimesis as relevant categories for social critique, two complementary concepts that underscore his model of autonomy. I will argue, however, that his conception of the negative dialectic ultimately leaves undertheorized its normative standing as well as its relation to mimesis. I next move to mimesis and show how, once it is properly understood, it cannot do the normative work that Adorno requires of it. Rather, Adorno's idea of mimesis fails to inform critique (now understood as negative thought) in any substantive way; relies on a problematic, unmediated conception of authenticity; and is incompatible with social analyses of modern complex societies.

Adorno's idea of mimesis is distinct from Hegel's reconciliation as inclusive overcoming, but its relations to negative thought and mediation are unclear. As such, Adorno – and many of the social theorists and aestheticians who follow him – are hardly 'high modernists',[5] regardless of their claims to support rational reflection, individual autonomy and the like. While Adorno thought of himself as a rationalist who superseded the reductive elements of Enlightenment thought,[6] his theory provides an unsatisfactory alternative to the present modern condition. Adorno's project exhausted itself not because it ran into a pessimistic cul-de-sac in its critique of reason, as Habermas argues, but because the idea of mimesis was never compatible with modernity.[7] Regardless of his intentions Adorno's theory of mimesis and negative thinking often seems pre-modern, and thus his social theory cannot provide an adequate answer to the challenges of modernity. This, in any case, is what I will argue.

The Pathologies of Modernity

From its inception, critical theory was meant to be a supra-disciplinary approach to investigating the new challenges posed by the decline of the revolutionary proletariat, the rise of modern bureaucratic states and mass politics, and the spread of capitalism and reification to all spheres of life. The Lukácsian dream of revolutionary praxis – theoretically informed transformative action carried out by 'the universal class' – disappeared with the development of totalitarianism and welfare capitalism in the industrialized world.[8] For the early critical theorists influenced by Lukács, any analysis of these developments required drawing on both empirical and philosophical sources in order to grasp accurately the extent of domination and the possibilities of real change. Max Horkheimer's programmatic essay 'Traditional and Critical Theory' outlined the novel aspects of this approach. For Horkheimer, traditional theories have historically failed to maintain a properly critical stance toward their object of study and to themselves. Against idealism (certain forms of neo-Kantianism and Hegelianism), positivist social theories, vulgar materialism (the Marxism of Engels and Kautsky), and irrationalism (the 'life' philosophies), critical theory distinguishes itself by remaining committed to a) empirically grounded analysis using the best social scientific techniques available, b) critical evaluations that rely on explicit normative principles that can be rationally justified, and c) practical assessments of how real social change could occur. Such an approach, then, is dialectical, in the words of Horkheimer, because it maintains a critical relationship with its object of study (society), an awareness of its own historically situated normative standpoint, and a commitment to change. Of course, critical theory does not stand in complete opposition to these various intellectual traditions: its own sources in Kantian critical reason, Hegelian dialectics and phenomenology, Marxist emancipatory materialism, Nietzschean radical critique, and Freudian conceptions of subjectivity means that critical theory represents a reconfiguration of western critical social thought.

Horkheimer eventually abandoned this original formulation and moved with Adorno into greater philosophical reflection, most famously in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.[9] This turn away from empirically informed critique toward abstract philosophy has been well documented elsewhere.[10] What is important for our purposes is to understand the nature of their social critique following this move and the assumptions of an emancipatory alternative it rested on. Already in this text we see an implicit engagement with the idea of mimesis.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno provide a polemical reading of the Enlightenment. The traditional understanding of the Enlightenment tracks the expansion of human emancipation with the development of our rational faculties in all areas of life. Kant, of course, is the central thinker in this story.[11] For Kant, reason dissolves the unreflective assumptions we inherit from tradition and authority, permitting the species to advance by subjecting all questions and issues – even rationality itself – to rational critique. The Enlightenment,

then, represents the move away from intellectual immaturity toward freedom and autonomy based on reason. Transcendental reason comprises the idea of human freedom (autonomy), and this in turn has political and social consequences. No authority or form of political organization is legitimate if it cannot stand up to rational critique. As Kant sees it, free individuals exercising their rational faculties can overcome the tension between pure reason and practical necessity and create free societies through the use of practical reason. The Enlightenment is the struggle for true emancipation.

For Adorno and Horkheimer, however, Enlightenment contains within it the seeds of domination. Humanity's control of nature, expanded and perfected through scientific methods, comes to dominate the *relations* between people and, eventually, the *inner nature* of individuals. The ends of a just society – freedom and emancipation – become subordinated to the scientific rationality of efficiency and routinization as the means become ends in themselves. Scientific rationalism becomes the only legitimate form of reason, and rationality transforms itself from substantive rationality to a desiccated instrumental form, with no ability to interrogate its ends. Domination acquires a new face in the modern era, as Weber among others had pointed out earlier.[12]

With this transformation, knowledge – rational scientific knowledge of the world – becomes a form of power. Nature has value only to the extent that it can be exploited, and to facilitate this it must be subjected to classification and quantitative assessment and consequently stripped of any other non-instrumental value it may have. It is disenchanted and becomes thoroughly objectified. What is novel about this critique is the way the authors draw certain connections between myth and Enlightenment. In their reading, Enlightenment is not so much the supersession of mythical ways of understanding the world and ourselves, as it is a way of further expanding the horizon of domination. Myth and Enlightenment are not opposites but rather inextricably linked, reacting to the same set of problems with essentially the same types of responses.

Both myth and Enlightenment are rooted in the same needs: self-preservation and the diminishment of insecurity, and both are a response to the fear of nature. Myth seeks to control nature by invoking magic to make nature intelligible and subject to control, evident for example in the use of rituals and sacrifices to win the favor of gods and shape natural forces. Ritual gives some predictability to the world, now open to manipulation by humans. And yet myth and Enlightenment are in a dialectical relationship to one another. 'Just as myth already entails enlightenment, with every step enlightenment entangles itself more deeply in mythology.'[13] Myth is transformed into enlightenment as nature is transformed into a mere object, and the power (scientific knowledge) that emerges from this transformation results in a further alienation of humans from nature.[14] The greater the expansion of the Enlightenment, the greater the alienation. 'Enlightenment is mythical fear radicalized.'[15]

Of course, Horkheimer and Adorno do identify certain differences between

the two. Myth attempts to dominate nature through re-enactment, that is, ritual, and does not propose a radical differentiation between thought and nature, certainly not of the sort found in science.[16] Enlightenment dominates by distancing itself from nature and grounding 'reality' in the realm of ideas and classificatory schema. Nevertheless the two are at their core intertwined. Both see intelligibility of the world as fundamentally connected with its domination. And in both, the status of the method – science on the one hand, magic on the other – is immune from critique. Neither science nor magic is open to reflexive interrogation, since this would undermine the entire epistemological framework upon which each rests.

The distancing from nature in order to dominate it that is found in Enlightenment rational thought is repeated at the level of subjectivity. Turning to the myth of Odysseus, both authors argue that Odysseus's goal of self-preservation was achieved only through repressing certain instinctual drives. Odysseus fought the seduction of nature in the sirens' songs and later the seductions of the lotus-eaters by ensuring the preservation of the 'I' through the renunciation of his desires. He fought, in other words, the mimetic desire to return to nature. He was successful in this, but at great psychological cost. For such repression is the product of a rationalized rejection of the self. Repression is at the origin of subjectivity, for only by separating oneself from natural inclinations can one preserve one's very sense of self. Reason gives us self-preservation and a unified ego, but only through the renunciation and sacrifice of irrational drives. When faced with the Cyclops, Odysseus once again rejects himself in order to save himself – he denies his subjectivity by calling himself 'no-man' to elude capture and death. And when presented with the possibility of happiness in the sorceress Kirkê's 'flawless bed of love',[17] he allows himself only a mitigated form of satisfaction – sexual satisfaction without succumbing to the full happiness that she promises. He gave her his body, it seems, but not his soul. Complete happiness threatens his autonomy for it demands that he relinquish control over his desires; instead, he seeks to preserve himself for his wife Penelope and the bourgeois life based on property, family and male autonomy that awaits him at home in Ithaca.

Odysseus, then, is the quintessential rational actor who repudiates part of his nature in order to preserve his autonomy. The Freudian dimension[18] to this is evident, of course: through renunciation, Odysseus keeps at bay the seduction of nature personified in the sirens and the lotus-eaters. By rejecting the eternal pleasures of Kirkê, he maintains his commitment to the bourgeois value of family. And through military adventure and the challenges posed by the Cyclops, he becomes a hero. Consciousness emerges only with the rational suppression of drives.

Finally, instrumental rationality comes to dominate our interactions with one another. Bureaucratic state apparatuses, enjoying little democratic accountability, exert their power through classifying and ordering citizens (now merely subjects) in the most efficient manner possible. Politics disappears and is replaced by effi-

cient and rational techniques of administration, with civil society reduced to an epiphenomenal veneer over the power of state capitalism in all of its forms. Even in the realm of art, all aesthetic objects are commodified, their value reduced to economic measures of utility, always fungible.[19]

For Adorno and Horkheimer, reason emerges as the instrument of domination over nature, inner nature and finally social relations between people. Adorno and Horkheimer expand Marxist and Lukácsian critiques by locating domination not merely in the commodity form or reification, but in all dimensions of society – domination is constitutive of how we interact with nature, with each other, and with ourselves. Enlightenment reason, collapsed into instrumental rationality, reduces every decision to a utilitarian choice bereft of the insights of aesthetic or moral knowledge. The Enlightenment world is a barren world, rich in commodities but absent of real meaning or freedom. 'Enlightenment is totalitarian.'[20]

This, at least, is the reading of modernity that Adorno and Horkheimer give us. Most of the critiques of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* have focused on whether their reading of Enlightenment and instrumental rationality is plausible; whether, in other words, modern life is in fact so one-dimensional, to borrow from Marcuse. Habermas and Benhabib among others have questioned this reading of reason, and Habermas has criticized Horkheimer and Adorno for retreating into philosophical abstraction, which prevents them from identifying the real loci of resistance in existing society. Indeed, Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action* can be read as an effort to remove philosophy from its privileged status and return to social theorizing, understood in the original sense of a critical theory outlined by Horkheimer in 'Traditional and Critical Theory'. Such a return is accomplished on completely new grounds of communicative action and rationality.[21] For our purposes, however, what are interesting are the assumptions of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Habermas has noted that the authors' use of reason to investigate and ultimately discard reason lands them in a performative contradiction, undermining the coherence and intelligibility of their entire project.[22] That may be so. But is also worth asking what, exactly, they have in mind as an alternative to existing society.

While the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is a largely a work of immanent critique and postpones a sustained elaboration of a theory of freedom, we can nevertheless identify some key features of an alternative social theory in this book. Beginning in this work and continuing elsewhere, the authors seek to develop an alternate critical reason to the instrumental rationality of modernity. Such an alternative is substantive (rather than merely formal and instrumental) and sensitive to context. Its rationality eschews the utilitarian impulse to reduce all phenomena to a logic of exchange and therefore exploitation, where value is determined according to the interests of the rational subject, and unlike positivism, it remains reflexively critical of its own presuppositions.

To grasp this, consider the issue of formality. Kant provides us with the classic formal model of reason in his categorical imperative. The categorical imperative

is a moral principle that requires that the maxim generated by an act be universally valid – whether a particular action can be justified according to context is irrelevant. As such, the categorical imperative emphasizes the importance of consistency and non-contradiction.[23] While broadly sympathetic to the importance Kant places on critical reason, particularly the need to subject moral challenges to rigorous critical scrutiny, Horkheimer and Adorno feel that the problem with the categorical imperative lies precisely with its formality. By ignoring context and closing off any deliberation or reflection on desired ends, Kant rejects all consideration of particularity that poses the greatest challenge to practical moral action. Privileging formality allows the subject to retain the illusion that it is possible to separate oneself from the world in order to judge the moral validity of an action. Formality, and the epistemological distancing necessary to preserve formal moral reason, is fundamentally alienating; the subject is alienated from herself and from the world through the requirements of formal reason. The categorical imperative, in their reading, relegates all moral action to a simple proceduralism, in the process becoming a reified normative code that is indifferent to real ethical challenges.[24] As an alternative to this, Horkheimer and Adorno advocate a type of rationality that remains sensitive to context, and resists downplaying the moment of moral decision-making on the part of the subject. Indeed, as Adorno writes elsewhere, reason must preserve an appreciation of the importance of qualitative differences: 'a thinking in which we do not think qualitatively is already emasculated and at odds with itself'.[25] The goal is to cultivate a rationality that counters reification and formalism, and retains vibrancy and sensitivity to the given situation. It must allow for continuous interrogation of its own assumptions and presuppositions and remain wary of becoming formalized, and thus dead. '[A] true praxis capable of overturning the status quo depends on theory's refusal to yield to the oblivion in which society allows thought to ossify.'[26] Adorno later reframes this as a critique of Kant's formalist theory of freedom, where following certain rules allegedly produces freedom:

> The substance of its own freedom – of the identity which has annexed all non-identity – is as one with the 'must,' with the law, with absolute dominion. This is the spark that kindles the pathos of Kant. He construes freedom as a special case of causality. To him, it is the 'constant laws' that matter.[27]

In some respects, there is a similarity between Adorno and Horkheimer's conception of critical reason and Aristotle's *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, which points toward a situated form of reason that nevertheless is not completely reducible to the pressures of contingency.[28] However, their critical reason is more than this.

The Negative Dialectic

As a challenge to the alienation of formal reasoning and positivist science, Adorno and Horkheimer emphasize the importance of the present moment – 'the sanctity of the hic et nunc'.[29] A more appropriate rationality requires sensitivity to context and the ability of the subject to make informed judgments, judgments which are reducible *neither* to purely instinctual desires *nor* to appeals to a transcendental, detached moral law. Indeed, in the former case there is no judgment per se because there is no choice – one simply follows one's (opaque) desires, like Nietzsche's birds of prey.[30] Morality requires agency, for otherwise all action is overdetermined and responsibility disappears. The latter case rests on the fiction of a division between subject and object: that is, on the rational agent who can separate herself from the world and assess it 'accurately' and 'neutrally', and then employ a formal moral procedure to ascertain the proper course of action. A conception of rationality which demands maintenance of the distance between subject and object fails to take into account richer forms of interaction and appreciation, in the process reducing everything outside of the subject to mere nature, to be used and exploited.

A critical rationality takes seriously the intuitive nature of morality, or the ways that we orient our behavior through an internal normative sense that directs us toward freedom, but which is not wholly reducible to pre-reflective desires. The key to understanding this is the idea of mimesis. Mimesis refers to the reconciliation of the world and consciousness, of objectivity and subjectivity. A mimetic rationality seeks to find the ways in which the subject's experience of the world is not merely instrumental but requires the subsumption of object into subject and vice versa. It aims to reconcile the subject with three different types of 'objective' phenomena: with (external) nature, with the subject's inner nature, and finally with fellow humans. Such rationality, however, is diachronic: it does not end at some definite point, as if there were some final, fixed telos, but instead engages in an interminable dialectic. It demands reconciliation but resists it as well. This is because both objectivity and subjectivity are themselves historically situated and therefore change over time, and consequently any predetermined attempt at fixing a final point of reconciliation would provide a false mimetic moment, a false enlightenment. We can grasp the nature of Adorno's understanding of rationality through his discussion of the negative dialectic.

As Adorno sees it, the Hegelian form of the dialectic represents an improvement over Kant's transcendental categories, which seek fixed (and thus reified) conditions for knowledge. Hegel rightly historicizes rationality by showing how reason itself emerges (or is grasped) differently during different historical epochs.[31] Nevertheless, Adorno believes that Hegel's dialectic suffers from several shortcomings: first, it is idealist, and therefore misses the necessary material component that any satisfactory model of rationality must include.[32] It cannot explain real, concrete material social relations. Second, and more importantly, Hegel's

dialectic assumes that contradictory moments of identity and non-identity can be reconciled in a higher moment of identity. Hegel is correct to criticize Kant for assuming that any surplus experience is not merely unintelligible and thus irrational, and instead reframes contradictions through a search for those mediations that can explain them. He errs, however, in positing an indefensible teleology that privileges the eventual convergence of identity and non-identity. As Adorno reads Hegel, the latter's sense of contradiction is non-identity as identity.[33] 'To equate the negation of the negation with positivity is the quintessence of identification; it is the formal principle in its highest form.'[34] Adorno claims that what is needed is the preservation of non-identity, of the moment of resistance to all identitarian (and thus totalitarian) resolutions which mean the end of reflective thought and thus reason. In true mimesis,

> . . . neither the undistinguished unity of subject and object nor their antithetical hostility would be conceivable in it; rather, the communication of what was distinguished. Not until then would the concept of communication, as an objective concept, come into its own . . . In its proper place, even epistemologically, the relationship of subject and object would lie in the realization of peace among men as well as between men and their Other. Peace is the state of distinctness without domination, with the distinct participating in each other.[35]

We have something like a Hegelian 'reconciliation' today, Adorno argues, but it is a *forced* reconciliation; it is a more subtle and total domination than that found in the past, when injustice was easier to grasp experientially and concrete resistance was still possible. 'Satanically, the world as grasped by the Hegelian system has only now, a hundred and fifty years later, proved to be such a system in the literal sense, namely that of a radically societalized society.'[36] The present 'reconciliation' is based on a logic of equivalence, where all qualitative differences are reduced to quantitative functions that allow everything to be exchanged.[37] What we need is a negative dialectic, a dialectic that preserves non-identity in thought as the cornerstone of resistance.[38] This is difficult to achieve, for insofar as a subject grasps an object in thought, the subject identifies with it, at least partially. '[T]he appearance of identity is inherent in thought itself, in its pure form. To think is to identify.'[39] And yet what is crucial is that the subject not reify this relation. 'Dialectics is the consistent sense of non-identity.'[40] Negative dialectics, as a form of non-identitarian thought, eschews transcendental idealism in favor of immanent critique. It always springs from the present condition, and is not imposed exogenously.

Non-identitarian (or negative) thought nevertheless remains rather underspecified in Adorno. Some thinkers have turned to Adorno's use of the philosophical category of 'concept' to spell out the nature of non-identitarian thinking.[41] To understand this, we need to have a sense of what is meant by 'concept'. In the most general sense, we can say that reason encounters the world *either* through abstraction, or speculative knowledge (through the use of logic or the calculus, for example), *or* through concrete engagement (say through the study of actual human relations). The first is 'formal', or related to pure thought, whereas the second is

'substantive', or related to actuality. To the extent that philosophy grasps the connection between thought and actuality (or form/substance, mind/matter, etc.) it has grasped the underlying philosophic 'concept'. In Hegel, as we have seen, the concept refers ultimately to identity, and thus reconciliation. Jay Bernstein resists this Hegelian move and instead takes seriously Adorno's claim that philosophy 'must strive, by way of the concept, to transcend the concept'.[42] Bernstein sees thought as deploying concepts to unwrap the non-conceptual while resisting a false equivalence between the two. In this reading, concepts include a 'logical axis through which thought identifies different particulars . . . as belonging to the same concept' as well as 'a material axis composed of the mediating moment of the object, image, language and tradition'.[43] He expertly investigates the duality of the concept itself, the way that it necessarily includes an internal residue of non-conceptuality and thus points to its own transcendence. Bernstein's careful examination of Adorno's use of the concept gives greater depth to Adorno's claim that the non-identical is 'the thing's own identity against its identifications'.[44] The problem, however, is that it remains unclear what the content of such a transcendence – that is, what critical thought – actually looks like. If an ethical moment is to emerge from negativity, how do we apprehend it?

Bernstein argues that 'ethical fugitive experiences' are 'forged in resistance',[45] and comprehension of the internal nature of the concept – its identitarian component as well as its negation – creates a space for such a resistance. Similarly, Adorno believes that negative thinking is not only reactive, but also emancipatory. Both thinkers argue that the incredible productive achievements of modern capitalism mean that the material conditions necessary to minimize suffering and actualize freedom are present in existing social relations, even if they are hidden by powerful forms of domination and inequality. To the extent that this 'concrete utopian possibility' exists, as Adorno argues, 'dialectics is the ontology of the wrong state of things', of the false (ideological) appearance of the world that masks utopia. 'The right state of things would be free of it: neither a system nor a contradiction.'[46] The right state of things is the mimesis of the subject with nature, with herself, and with fellow humans.

But this remains at best unclear, and arguably even begs the question. For how do we know that transcending the concept through a negative dialectics results in a kind of resistance that is *normatively* desirable? Note that I am not arguing, as Habermas does in his reading of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that Adorno's radical critique of reason *using* reason results in a performative contradiction; I am willing to accept that non-identitarian rationality may serve as a counterweight to modern instrumental reason. Rather, my concern is that non-identity, the transcendence of the concept by the concept itself, does not provide us with the theoretical tools necessary to specify which form of transcendence is desirable, and which is not. It is not enough to claim that transcendence (or radical critique) is by its very nature desirable. To argue that is to say, effectively, that there is nothing to distinguish Adorno from romanticist irrationalism. But Adorno is not Schiller.[47] The celebra-

tion of resistance for the sake of resistance gets us nowhere, and in any case the use of the dialectic is supposed to draw a distinction between truly emancipatory and simply reactionary (or at least theoretically uninformed) thought. But what, then, is negative thought as resistance?

We may, for instance, use the term 'resistance' to denote a situation where the concept is not permitted to 'rest' when it achieves internal coherence (when it is self-satisfied with its own internal rationality); but it *does not follow* that this 'resistance' to internal harmony is somehow normatively progressive. The problem here is with the term 'negative' in negative dialectic: 'negative' is employed both descriptively as a type of method (a type of dialectic) *and* normatively as the desirable method which points toward ultimate emancipation. The link between negativity as description on the one hand and as normative critique on the other is never adequately explored by Adorno because he uses the term in two different ways without carefully distinguishing them. In Adorno, 'negative' corresponds first to the attempt at avoiding the collapse of subjectivity and objectivity into identity (into a concept); and second to the normatively desirable exercise that points toward the real emancipation of humanity, that is, toward eventual mimesis. The first is a *descriptive* point about dialectical thought. Dialectical thought that does not achieve reconciliation is negative, for it continuously negates what *is*. The second is a *normative* claim about what we want. Here, negativity is used critically and points toward free and full human life. He moves between the two without showing conclusively why the former is logically connected to the latter. The former, however, is possible without necessarily being compatible with the latter: we can define negative thought as X without necessarily endorsing it as normatively superior to other forms of thought Y or Z. Shorn of a discussion of the link between the two, we have nothing more than an assumption that they are inextricably connected to one another. Indeed, Adorno cannot show such a connection, because it would require positing a necessary logical relation that is itself unsustainable in the face of the negative dialectic.

Could we say, perhaps, that the idea of mimesis provides a way out of this? Adorno seems to argue that, while negative thought is always in tension with what *is*, it clears a space for reflecting about what could (and *ought* to) be. Mimesis, as we recall, refers to the ultimate, undistorted identification of the subject with nature, with her inner nature, and with fellow human beings. Insofar as negative thought refuses to equate progress with the present reified state, such thought orients us, however gingerly, toward a future, displaced mimetic condition. The estrangement of the present condition, captured negatively, contains within it a trace of utopia: 'consummate negativity, once squarely faced, delineates the mirror image of its opposite'.[48] Mimesis, as the 'mirror image of the opposite', may then help give direction to negative thought.

Mimesis, Utopia, and Modernity

So, negative dialectics may clear a space for critical thought and the possibility of emancipation. Very well. Up to now, I have delineated a notion of mimesis based on the subject's transcendence of the alienation inherent in the subject–object dichotomy. Here, I want to pursue this idea of mimesis a bit further through Adorno's discussion of aesthetics, and see whether it provides the normative orientation necessary for critique to avoid becoming irrationalist, untethered, and possibly reactionary.

In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno argues that the aesthetic realm is the proper domain for modern mimesis: 'the mimetic element . . . is indispensable to art', and art is 'the indigenous domain of mimesis'.[49] For Adorno, an authentic work of art resists interpretation through reduction to (non-aesthetic) social categories, and simultaneously engages the individual through a complex process of interpretation and reinterpretation. Authentic artworks contain the contradictions of the broader society in which they are embedded, but their meaning is never 'given'. Conflicts over interpreting artworks reflect the complexity of the contradictions they contain. At best, we can have only a partial understanding of art, at least until society itself contains no contradictions that could be mirrored in the aesthetic domain. In true dialectical fashion, Adorno argues that we can grasp the significance of art in several ways: through sensitivity to art's mediations with itself, with existing epistemological categories and classificatory schema, and with society as a whole. The most successful artworks are those that show hidden social contradictions without reducing themselves to pure propaganda, and thus becoming something less than art: 'Insofar as a social function can be predicated for artworks, it is their functionlessness.'[50] In this respect, an artwork's 'truth content' is not about whether it depicts the world accurately, as in a correspondence theory of truth, but instead concerns art's normative disclosure of a 'true' (free) future society. 'In the world we live in today there are always things for which art *is* and what is *true*, between arrangements for living and for humanity.'[51] Thus, the positive aspect of aesthetic truth is rooted in those autonomous artworks that resist all easy accessibility and instrumentalization in the here and now, the *hic et nunc*.[52] Through such resistance, they point to a mimetic future where life and art will be subsumed into one another. Mimesis, then, is the complex interpenetration and ultimately assimilation of the subject with nature, with itself, and with fellow human beings.

Nevertheless, this notion of mimesis is problematic for several reasons. I will make three points here: first, concerning the inadequacy of mimesis to steer critique in the proper direction; second, concerning the seemingly pre-modern intuitionism of Adorno's idea of mimesis, which undercuts his claims of modernist theorizing; and third, concerning the actual content of mimesis and its inadequacy for critiquing modern societies.

First, it is unclear that mimesis provides anything like a normative orientation

for critique. Adorno seems to argue that mimesis is like a lighthouse on the horizon, directing radical critique and ensuring that it does not crash on the shoals of irrationalism and reactionary politics. But though perhaps mimesis is desirable, the link between it and critique remains undertheorized. There are perhaps two ways of correcting this. We could argue, first, that the critical subject already possesses a notion of mimesis that can orient radical critique. That is, knowledge of the mimetic condition, as a utopia, exists prior to, or at least separate from, critique itself. This, it would seem, is unsustainable on Adorno's own grounds. To posit a prior ahistorical conception of mimesis is to collapse into reified thought, into a 'frame-covered, never changing realm' which is 'true for untruth only'.[53] It would be even less historically sensitive than Hegel's philosophy of history, which at least takes seriously the notion that philosophical reflection is always limited by its historical epoch, even if Spirit's direction can ostensibly be teased out of this.[54]

Alternately, we could claim that the process of negative thinking *itself* allows for the emergence of recognition of true mimesis, and thus critique includes within it its own compass. This seems to be what Adorno says, but it is only as speculative claim, not an argument; to make this an argument we would need to know what *about* negative thinking allows for this recognition to emerge. We would need, in other words, some internal positive claim about how to direct negative thinking, or at least a positive notion of how to detect the mimetic undertones of critical thought. But the very idea of this is undermined by Adorno's version of radical critique, which is suspicious of any positive claim as a form of reification. I am not arguing that we need to appeal to fixed external norms to guide critique, nor am I arguing for a practical handbook on ethical decision-making. Rather, I am arguing that even a form of critique which is anti-foundationalist still needs to address the issue of how it deploys itself, and be able to make a distinction between desirable forms of critique and undesirable ones. To say that awareness of true mimesis emerges from radical critique is to say that a positive claim will emerge, without specifying how and why this happens. It is to take for granted what remains to be proven.

Regardless of which approach one takes, the connection between mimesis and critique remains at best tenuous. It cannot be otherwise precisely because Adorno cannot give us an argument about how awareness of mimesis emerges from critique. At most, all he can give us are illustrations, such as in his analyses of Schönberg and Stravinsky[55] or jazz.[56] If anything, these more concrete discussions highlight the subjectivism of his claims about mimesis and critique, since it is unclear even on his own terms that the conclusions he reaches necessarily follow from his negative dialectical method or concern for mimesis, rather than from personal prejudice.[57] Critique and mimesis require a surfeit of imagination to connect them, a Kierkegaardian leap of faith. And this is hardly dialectical.

A second issue concerns the idea of mimesis itself. Adorno often claims that mimesis is not a reversion to a lost form of life, but can be understood in the

modern condition as well, even if only imperfectly.[58] However, his mimetic authenticity does not represent the overcoming of deformed modernist rationality; if anything, it seems incompatible with the challenges of modernity and thus inadequate as a source of critique from within the modernist stance. Let me explain.

Mimesis refers to the condition where humans are reconciled with nature and do not engage it only for the purpose of exploitation.[59] Furthermore, they are reconciled to themselves – they no longer repress natural drives through a deformed (instrumental) rationality à la Odysseus, but instead find more complete and satisfying forms of self-expression and being. And lastly, their relations with others are not instrumentalized and hierarchical, but rather are based on equality. But such a model of utopia cannot explain how complex societies, characterized by internal differentiation and rationality, can be anything but pathological. The idea of mimesis as an ultimate goal *by definition* rejects complex forms of mediation, for mimesis is assimilation. It is unsatisfactory to say that mimesis represents the transcendence of modernity by moving beyond social differentiation, the division of labor, rationality, etc., without indicating *what* about this future condition is modern (or post-modern), and not pre-modern. To speak about mimesis (and utopia) as a future condition means that it must have some connections to the (admittedly deformed) present. The future must be rooted in the present in some way, unless all we seek is destruction of the present and a return to the past. Adorno's hostility to any positive articulation of 'modernist' mimesis means that he is ill-equipped to explain the basis of a free modern society. What he terms transcendence occasionally seems more like a reversion to the past or pre-modern forms of social organization, though of course he would protest any such charge.

Adorno rejects reason as inherently repressive and social complexity as reifying in nature. Even authentic art, the 'domain of mimesis', operates as such a domain only to the extent that there are social contradictions in the first place. That is, authentic art is authentic only to the extent that it captures and refracts these existing social contradictions without being instrumentalized itself. When (or if) these contradictions are overcome, we achieve freedom, or 'utopia' in Adorno's terms. At this point authentic art becomes superfluous and can be discarded, for it no longer has a critical function. While the animating impulse of Adorno's critique of contemporary art (as part of the 'culture industry') originates in his concern over reification, he conceives of an emancipated society as one where art is no longer needed: authentic art is transcended and mimesis achieved, and the negative dialectic also loses its purpose. Negative dialectical thought *itself* is transcended by the new mimetic conditions. What replaces this thought? It is unclear, though in a world of assimilation with no mediations, the guiding moral and critical framework seems to be some form of naturalism, bereft of social differentiation.

I am not arguing that Adorno is a closet naturalist, one who seeks to return to a 'simpler' or more 'authentic' pre-modern time. His criticisms of Heidegger and other anti-modernists make this clear.[60] But perhaps another way to frame my

concern is to ask what makes modern societies *modern*. If we can make a plausible claim about this, we can say something about how Adorno's utopia might be connected to modernity and not simply become a reversion to the past. I have already made some claims about this: I have argued that societies are modern insofar as they are internally differentiated, exhibit a sophisticated division of labor, and rely on complex forms of rationality to coordinate social action and maintain stability. No doubt we can add more to this, such as a proliferation of social subsystems (political, legal, scientific, economic, etc.) each with specific languages, norms, and organizational structures, but also maintaining highly mediated relations with one another; greater depersonalization and abstraction of social relations; the emergence of a discourse of rights and autonomy; and a plurality of ethical perspectives (what Rawls calls the fact of reasonable pluralism), among other things. All of these points have in common a focus on pluralization and social differentiation.[61] That is to say, modern societies are defined by complexity, even if politically and socially they result in more powerful, totalizing forms of domination, as the critical theory tradition has long argued quite convincingly. What is relevant to our discussion is that Adorno's idea of mimesis maintains a radically oppositional stance toward social complexity. Rather than identifying how we could articulate a theory of freedom that speaks to modern social relations – and thus remain modern – mimesis characterizes freedom as largely an unmediated condition. Such a condition cannot be squared with contemporary social life, which necessitates *institutionalized mediations* (such as law, administrative bureaucracies, labor markets, etc.) for modern societies to function. The brute fact of large societies with significant internal differentiation requires that all of our pressing normative concerns – concerns over popular will and sovereignty, justice, freedom, and so forth – include theorization of necessary correlate institutional mechanisms for their actualization. In other words, any normative theory of freedom must take seriously the character of modern life if it is to serve a *useful* critical purpose. This is not to say that it necessarily need be Habermasian. But to return to Horkheimer: if a theory is to be *critical* – and not merely utopian in the pejorative sense – it must have both an evaluative component that relies on explicit, rationally justified normative principles, *and* also provide the grounding for practical assessments of how real social change could (and ought to) occur. Mimesis falls short on both of these accounts. It does not take seriously contemporary social complexity.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have sketched what I believe are some significant problems with Adorno's theory of mimesis and negative thought. While Adorno gives us a powerful reading of modern domination, his solution is woefully underdeveloped. I have argued that his conception of negative dialectics fails to address its own normative foundations, leaving us with little more than the hope that negative thought will result in something desirable. Such an approach cannot explore its

own foundations in any thorough way precisely because it cannot articulate, on its own terms, a positive normative orientation. While Adorno seemed to think that mimesis could serve as a normative horizon with which to orient critical thought, he never satisfactorily explains the connection between the two ideas. Indeed, the idea of the concept transcending the concept, in Bernstein's formulation of negative dialectics, is not connected in any clear way to mimesis. The two terms – negative dialectic and mimesis – seem incompatible insofar as one points toward reconciliation and the other toward tension. Finally, the idea of mimesis itself has no purchase in modern societies, and remains largely impotent as a critical device for highly differentiated societies with complex needs. Adorno was at his best in drawing our attention to the complex and subtle ways that modernity transforms reason into domination. In this regard, he is a seminal thinker of the modern condition. But his answer to domination ultimately belonged to the pre-modern world.

Notes

1. Theodor Adorno (1992) 'The Position of the Narrator in the Contemporary Novel', *Notes to Literature*, tr. Shierry Nicholsen, vol. 2, p. 31. New York: Columbia University Press.
2. On recent literature, see Tom Huhn (ed.) (2004) *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Stefan Müller-Doohm (2004) *Adorno: An Illustrated Biography*. London: Polity Press. J. M. Bernstein (2001) *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Espen Hammer (2005) *Adorno and the Political*. London: Routledge. Peter Uwe Hohendahl (1997) *Prismatic Thought: Theodor W. Adorno*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press. Eric Krakauer (1998) *The Disposition of the Subject*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. Christoph Menke (1999) *The Sovereignty of Art*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaart (eds) (1999) *The Semblance of Subjectivity: Essays in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Colin Hearfield (2004) *Adorno and the Modern Ethos of Freedom*. London: Ashgate. Hauke Brunkhorst (1999) *Adorno and Critical Theory*. Cardiff: University of Wales. Lorenz Jäger (2004) *Adorno: A Political Biography*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. (2005) 'Adorno: Critique, Ethics and Knowledge' special section, *Constellations* 12(1).
3. Jim Collins (1989) *Uncommon Cultures: Popular Culture and Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge. More generally Umberto Eco (1986) *Travels in Hyperreality*. London: Picador Press. But also see David Jenemann (2007) *Adorno in America*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota.
4. Theodor Adorno (1997) *Aesthetic Theory*, tr. Robert Hullot-Kentor, p. 329. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
5. A term used by Seyla Benhabib in her critique of Adorno. See Seyla Benhabib (1990) 'Critical Theory and Postmodernism: On the Interplay of Ethics, Aesthetics and Utopia in Critical Theory', *Cardozo Law Review* 11: 1435.
6. For a careful articulation of this see Brian O'Connor (2004) *Adorno's Negative Dialectic: Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
7. Jürgen Habermas (1982) 'The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Max

Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno', *New German Critique* 26 (Spring/Summer): 13–30.

8. Georg Lukács (1972) 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, pp. 83–222. Cambridge, MA: MIT.

9. The move away from social theory is already evident in his 1940 essay, 'The Authoritarian State'. There, he struggles with finding the proper standpoint for critique in societies that are totalized and have absorbed any spaces for critical activity. In Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (eds) (1988) *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, pp. 95–117. New York: Continuum). On his broader move toward philosophical reflection, see Axel Honneth (1995) 'Critical Theory' in *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995. Axel Honneth (1993) 'Horkheimer's Original Idea: The Sociological Deficit of Critical Theory', *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, pp. 5–33. Cambridge, MA: MIT.

10. Adorno continued to produce sociological works throughout his life, particularly on music and culture (as well as some more overtly political pieces). His substantial works, however, were largely theoretical. For a discussion of this, see Martin Jay (1996) *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923–1950*. Los Angeles: University of California Press. Rolf Wiggershaus (1995) *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance*. Cambridge, MA: MIT. David Held (1980) *Introduction to Critical Theory*. Los Angeles: University of California. Douglas Kellner (1989) *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

11. Immanuel Kant (1999) 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?' and 'On the Common Saying: "This May be True in Theory, But it does Not Apply in Practice"', in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (1998) *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (2003) *Critique of Practical Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

12. Max Weber (1978a) 'Chapter III: The Types of Legitimate Domination', *Economy and Society*, vol. 1, pp. 212–301. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. (1978b) 'Chapter XI: Bureaucracy', *Economy and Society*, vol. 2, pp. 956–1005. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

13. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (2002) *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, p. 8. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

14. Ibid. p. 6.

15. Ibid. p. 11.

16. Ibid. 7: 'not through an increasing distance from the object'.

17. Homer (1961) *The Odyssey*, tr. Robert Fitzgerald, 10. 379. New York: Doubleday.

18. Sigmund Freud (1989) *Civilization and its Discontents*, tr. James Strachey. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

19. Horkheimer and Adorno (n. 13), pp. 94–172: 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception'.

20. Ibid. p. 4.

21. Jürgen Habermas (1984, 1987) *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. See esp. 'The Tasks of a Critical Theory of Society', vol. 2, pp. 374–404.

22. Habermas (n. 7), p. 26. Also see Peter Hohendahl (1985) 'The Dialectic of Enlightenment: Habermas' Critique of the Frankfurt School', *New German Critique* 35 (Spring/Summer): 3–26.

23. Immanuel Kant (1990) *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 2nd edn, tr. Lewis White Beck. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co.

24. Adorno was consistently critical of formal Kantian rationality (or, to be more precise, Marburg neo-Kantianism of the early 20th century). Already in 'The Actuality of

Philosophy,' he writes that Kantianism 'has preserved its self-contained form as a system, but has thereby renounced every right over reality and has withdrawn into a formal region in which every determination of content is condemned to virtually the farthest point of an unending process'. Theodor Adorno (2000) 'The Actuality of Philosophy', in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian Connor, p. 25. Oxford: Blackwell.

25. Adorno (1995) *Negative Dialectics*, p. 43. New York: Continuum.
26. Horkheimer and Adorno (n. 13), p. 33.
27. Adorno (n. 25), p. 250. He then goes on to write, 'Formality is itself a bourgeois trait: on the one hand, it frees the individual from the confining definitions of what has come to be just so, not otherwise, while on the other hand it has nothing to set against things as they are, nothing to base itself upon except dominion, which has been raised to the rank of a pure principle.' Ibid. pp. 250–1.
28. Aristotle (1984) *Nichomachean Ethics*, tr. Hippocrates G. Apostle, bk Z. Grinnell, IW: Peripatetic Press.
29. Horkheimer and Adorno (n. 13), p. 6.
30. Friedrich Nietzsche (1989) 'On the Genealogy of Morals' *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, tr. Walter Kaufmann, pp. 44–6. New York: Vintage Books.
31. Hegel (1977) *Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. A. V. Miller, pp. 9–10, 37–40. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Also see Simon Jarvis (1977) 'The "Unhappy Consciousness" and Conscious Unhappiness: On Adorno's Critique of Hegel and the Idea of a Hegelian Critique of Adorno', in Gary Browning (ed.) *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Reappraisal*, pp. 57–72. London: Kluwer Academic.
32. Here, I will ignore the old canard that Hegel's idealism prevents him from understanding concrete social relations, a misrepresentation perpetuated by Marx and unfortunately still accepted today. But see Shlomo Avineri (1992) *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
33. Adorno (n. 25), p. 5.
34. Ibid. p. 158. Whether this is an accurate criticism of Hegel is a different issue entirely. Hegel's criticism of identitarian thought is clear from his discussion of the French Revolution and the Terror in Hegel (n. 31), p. 362.
35. Adorno (1988) 'Subject Object' in Arato and Gebhardt (n. 9), pp. 499–500.
36. Adorno (n. 25), p. 27.
37. Adorno draws here from Marx's discussion of the commodity form.
38. Ibid. pp. 143–61.
39. Ibid. p. 5.
40. Ibid.
41. See Yvonne Sherratt (2002) *Adorno's Positive Dialectic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Deborah Cooke (2001) 'Adorno, Ideology and Ideology Critique', *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 27(1): 1–20. Deborah Cooke (2005) 'From the Actual to the Possible: Non-Identity Thinking', *Constellations* 12(1): 21–35.
42. Adorno (n. 25), p. 15. Elsewhere, Adorno writes, 'Insight into the constitutive character of the nonconceptual in the concept would end the compulsive identification which the concept brings unless halted by such reflection. Reflection on its own meaning is the way out of the concept's seeming being-in-itself as a unity of meaning.' Ibid. p. 12.
43. J. M. Bernstein (n. 2), p. 33.
44. Adorno (n. 25), p. 161.
45. Bernstein (n. 2), p. 447.
46. Adorno (n. 25), p. 11.
47. Indeed, he argues that irrationalism 'has lost all claims to make sense out the empirical world which presses in upon it, and become resigned to the "living" as a blind and unenlightened concept of nature': in Adorno (n. 24), p. 25.

48. Theodor Adorno (2002) *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, p. 247. London: Verso.

49. Adorno (n. 4), pp. 41, 92.

50. Ibid. p. 227. Elsewhere, he writes, 'This is not the time for political works of art; rather, politics has migrated into the autonomous work of art, and it has penetrated most deeply into works that present themselves as politically dead . . .' Adorno (n. 1), vol. 2, pp. 93–4. Also see Frederic Jameson (1996) *Late Marxism: Adorno, or the Persistence of the Dialectic.* London: Verso.

51. The Hegelian ramifications of this move to posit truth against existing conditions are unmistakable. Adorno (1956) 'Modern Music is Growing Old', *The Score* 18: 29.

52. 'Social struggles and the relations of classes are imprinted in the structures of artworks; by contrast, the political positions deliberately adopted by artworks are epiphenomena and usually impinge on the elaboration of works and thus, ultimately, on their social truth content. Political opinions count for very little . . .' Adorno (n. 4), p. 232. This is not to say that authentic works are apolitical, for art is 'practical insofar as it determines the person who experiences art and steps out of himself as zoon politikón'. Ibid. p. 243.

53. Adorno (n. 25), p. 33.

54. G. W. F. Hegel (2003) *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, p. 23. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

55. Theodor Adorno (2006) *Philosophy of New Music.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota. (1997) *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. (2002) *Essays on Music.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

56. Theodor Adorno (1989) 'Popular Music', in *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, pp. 21–38. New York: Continuum. (2002) 'Commodity Music Analysed', in *Quasi Una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, pp. 37–52. New York: Verso. (1988) 'On the Fetishistic Character of Listening in Music and the Regression of Listening', in Arato and Gebhardt (n. 9), pp. 270–99.

57. Anyone who espouses Adorno's critique of jazz and improvisation would do well to read Derek Bailey (1992) *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music.* New York: Da Capo. Paul F. Berliner (1994) *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

58. Walter Benjamin was quite influential on Adorno's idea of mimesis. See Benjamin (1986) 'On the Mimetic Faculty', in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz. New York: Schocken. Anson Rabinbach (1979) 'Doctrine of the Similar', *New German Critique* 17 (Spring): 60–4.

59. In a number of places, Adorno seems to be intimating this naturalist framing. Discussing the mimetic moment in *Aesthetic Theory*, he writes 'precisely the auratic element has its model in nature' (n. 4, p. 274) and notes the 'weakness of thought in the face of natural beauty' (p. 73).

60. Theodor Adorno (2003) *The Jargon of Authenticity.* London: Routledge Classics.

61. This is, obviously, a very general sketch of the elements of modern societies. While I am not proposing here to give a theory of modernity or modern social formations, one can find various perspectives on these issues in Emile Durkheim (1997) *The Division of Labor in Society.* New York: Free Press. Hans Blumenberg (1983) *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, part 1. Cambridge, MA: MIT. Jürgen Habermas (n. 21); Max Weber (1978) *Economy and Society*, 2 vols. Los Angeles: University of California Press. Agnes Heller (1999) *A Theory of Modernity.* London: Blackwell Publishers. Danilo Zolo (1992) *Democracy and Complexity: A Realist Approach.* University Press, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press. Ulrich Beck (1992) *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity.* London: SAGE.