

Mediations

Journal of the Marxist Literary Group



Volume 35, Number 1-2, Fall 2021/Spring 2022 • **Openings**

Published twice yearly, *Mediations* is the journal of the Marxist Literary Group. We publish dossiers of translated material on special topics and peer-reviewed general issues, usually in alternation. General inquiries and submissions should be directed to editors@mediationsjournal.org.

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Editors' Note

This issue opens up current discussions around the relationship between subjectivity, experience, and art, especially through the lens of Brazil. The articles and reviews contained here interrogate the role of art in the solidification of political subjectivity, as well as how political subjectivity impacts both the creation and reception of art. We begin with Bruna Della Torre's "Culture Industry, Subjectivity and Domination: Adorno and the Radio Project," which traces the development of Adorno's concept of the "culture industry" through his early works on music. The article examines four of the essays that resulted from Adorno's time on the Radio Project and articulates how each essay is a building block in his theory. Della Torre especially draws attention to how the culture industry as we understand it is about more than a standardization that undermines the autonomy of art and instead is a "transformation of the very way art is experienced." Rather than experience music as a coherent whole, radio and other popular music sources promote "atomized" or "quotation" listening, in which what matters is the audience's ability to recognize familiar moments of the music. This scholarly pre-history to *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* asks us to reexamine the relationship between technology and art in our current moment.

Moving from the experience of art to how art creates an experience of self, Fabio Akcelrud Durão analyzes two works by Carolina de Jesus and argues that her diaries exemplify how the lived experience of extreme poverty limits the ability of a construction of the self. "Locating the Self: Imputing and Resisting Identity in the Diaries of Carolina de Jesus," then, examines the distinct form of the diary, as opposed to an autobiography or biography, and how it leads itself to the creation of a "subjectivity not centered on the self." This self-less subjectivity, Durão argues, is a true representation of the horrible living conditions of the favela.

The second part of this issue is a dossier of three reviews of recently released Brazilian scholarship. The first, "Até Então (Until Then)," by Tavid Mulder, reviews *Dar corpo ao impossível: O sentido da dialética de Theodor Adorno* by Vladimir Safatle. Mulder reads Safatle's work as a "Hegelian challenge to the normative orientation of much recent Hegel scholarship." This challenge comes in the form of Adorno's negative dialectic and how Brazil's own dialectical position between "backwardness and modernization" opens up its possibilities. In the second, "Paulo Arantes and the Order of Time: Temporal Determinants of a Global Order," Silvia L. López examines

Paulo Arantes's *O novo tempo do mundo: e outros estudos sobre a era da emergência*. López highlights the urgency of Arantes's account of the fate of political discourse by expanding his reading of Reinhart Koselleck's *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and Pathogenesis of Modern Society*. The third review, "Anyway..." by Nicholas Brown, looks at two texts by Roberto Schwarz, *Seja como for: Entrevistas, retratos e documentos* and *Rainha Lira: Peça teatral*. The former is a collection of interviews and other nonfiction documents, while the latter is a play; by taking these texts together, Brown identifies the influence and importance of both Schwarz's scholarly and creative work to our understanding of the politics of Brazil, global capitalism, and art.

The issue concludes with two book reviews: Romy Rajan reviews *Insurgent Imaginations: World Literature and the Periphery* by Auritro Majumder and Brent Ryan Bellamy reviews Phillip E. Wegner's *Invoking Hope: Theory and Utopia for Dark Times*.

— Melissa Macero, for the *Mediations* Editorial Board

Culture Industry, Subjectivity, and Domination: Adorno and the Radio Project

Bruna Della Torre

Theodor W. Adorno's concept of "culture industry" was at the moment of its formulation and continues to be today associated with his assessment of cinema and jazz.¹ Culture industry is, thus, commonly understood as an adjective Adorno applied to measure if something is or is not an authentic piece of art. In that sense, one could watch a movie and then ask oneself: is this movie good, or is it "just" culture industry? Even though Adorno's reflections on cinema and jazz are not exempted from misjudgments, his theory of culture industry could be interpreted as a research program, one which Adorno developed throughout his entire life. This program comprises considerations on art and technology and a theory of how culture undermines subjectivity, helps individuals adapt to capitalist reality, and can eventually prepare the ground for authoritarian propaganda. This article analyses the early developments of this concept and hopes to contribute to its enlargement and to the recognition of its importance to understand the relationship between politics, technology, and culture in current society.

Every time there is a development of new communicational technologies, it entails many political consequences. We are now witnessing this complicated intertwinement between social media and the rise of far-right politics. During the Weimar years, German culture suffered a cartelization process, which was analogous to the cartelization of industry at the time. Alfred Hugenberg, for instance, an important member of the right-wing German National Party, "built up an empire in the communications industry and became the strident, enormously influential voice of the counterrevolution."² Radio and cinema would also become a central piece of Nazi propaganda. In a letter to Benjamin, from July 2nd, 1937, Adorno stated that he was interested in researching "mass art in monopoly capitalism" and would like to include the detective novel, new realism, decorative arts, cinema, as well as newspapers and radio in his considerations. Nevertheless, this plan would not be carried out by Adorno while in Europe.

In the late 1930s, the Nazi persecution continued to push intellectuals out of the country. Adorno arrived in the United States in 1938. For this exile to happen, Horkheimer made a last-minute arrangement: Adorno would work part-time for the Institute for Social Research in New York and part-time in a job that he had arranged for him – the Princeton Radio Research Project.³ Paul F. Lazarsfeld, an Austrian émigré who would later become the great name of American communication studies⁴ conducted the project, and Hadley Cantril and Frank Stanton were its co-directors. Adorno was delegated the task of developing the musical part of the project, called “Music Study.” When he embarked for America, however, he had no idea of what to expect from this Radio Project. The very use of this word “Project,” according to Adorno, translated into German as *Forschungsvorhaben*, was unknown to him.⁵

The project was based in an unusual place, considering its connection with Princeton University and the Rockefeller Foundation’s abundant resources, which funded it: Newark, New Jersey. This choice is related to Lazarsfeld’s role in the project’s organization, which was linked to his “Newark Research Center.” In Adorno’s words, “When I traveled there through the tunnel under the Hudson, I felt a little as if I were in Kafka’s “Nature Theater of Oklahoma.”⁶

The primary purpose of the project was to understand the effects of mass media on society, especially radio, magazines, and movies, but also books, news and politics. The role of the radio would become even more significant with Franklin Delano Roosevelt (and his series of “Fireside chats”) and with the deflagration of World War II, as it served primarily as a means of political propaganda.⁷ Despite Adorno’s previous work’s scarce affinities with the project, Lazarsfeld insisted on his participation as a specialist in music and, if part of that invitation was due to the solidarity with a fellow intellectual who escaped Nazi persecution, it was not reduced to this, given that Lazarsfeld was also a great admirer of Adorno’s music criticism.

Their collaboration, however, did not take root. When he arrived in the United States, Adorno’s goal was to apply the models he had developed in the essay “On the fetish character in music and the regression of listening” (1938) and in the fragments on Wagner written between 1938 and 1939, thus mixing sociological, technical and aesthetic analyses. What Adorno came across, instead, was so-called “administrative research,” a kind of market research that was not guided by academic criteria. As the Rockefeller Foundation funded the research, investigations had to take place within the Commercial Radio System’s boundaries and should provide empirical results.⁸ Lazarsfeld demanded, for example, a typology of listeners. Anyone who has read Adorno’s *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* knows that he would eventually develop a typology of musical hearing in the 1960s, and his experience in the radio project was an essential contribution to this later book. By the late 1940s, however, Adorno’s attempts to establish this typology were still incipient and found enormous resistance on the part of Lazarsfeld, who found it quite useless to classify a type of

listener from the following definition:

Sometimes music has the effect of freeing hidden sexual desires. This seems to be the case particularly with women who regard music as a sort of image of their male partner, to which they yield without ever identifying themselves with the music. It is this sort of attitude which is indicated by weeping. The amateur's weeping when he listens to music (the musician will practically never weep) is one of the foremost tasks of the analysis of the emotional side of music.⁹

For Lazarsfeld, this kind of characterization — which would later appear in Adorno's nomenclature as the "emotional listener" — was still a very abstract definition and without empirical validity.¹⁰

To grasp how the research project worked, the issue of musical taste, for instance, was investigated as follows: the listener pressed a button to indicate whether or not he or she liked a song (this example, once again, would appear years later in the *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*). Adorno refused to treat subjective reactions as if they were a primary and determining source of sociological knowledge. The "musical experience" itself, which cannot be verbalized for him, was thus obliterated. In the project, instead of starting from the subjective materials to achieve the objective social and psychological determinants, the research's point of departure was precisely the subjective and it remained within its realm.

This event also made Adorno aware of issues regarding the idea of "spontaneity," for the allegedly "spontaneous" reactions of the listeners were indisputably preconditioned. This question of "spontaneity" was one of Adorno's most significant divergence motifs within the research group. For him, the spontaneous appreciation of art did not refer to an alleged immediate experience of it, but precisely the opposite, that is, an experience not only previously informed, but also attentive.¹¹ In Adorno's words:

The phenomena with which the sociology of the mass media must be concerned, particularly in America, cannot be separated from standardization, the transformation of artistic creations into consumer goods, and the calculated pseudo-individualization and similar manifestations of what is called *Verdinglichung* — reification — in German. It is matched by a reified, largely manipulable consciousness scarcely capable any longer of spontaneous experience.¹²

According to Adorno, he could even dispense with philosophical analysis to illustrate this point with an everyday example:

Among the frequently changing colleagues who came in contact with me in the Princeton Project was a young lady. After a few days she came to confide in me and asked in a completely charming way, “Dr. Adorno, would you mind a personal question?” I said, “it depends on the question, but just go ahead.” And she continued, “Please tell me: are you an extrovert or an introvert?” It was as if she was already thinking, as a living being, according to the pattern of the so-called “cafeteria” questions on questionnaires, by which she has been conditioned. She could fit herself into such rigid and preconceived categories, as one can often observe in Germany when, for example, in marriage advertisements, the partners characterize themselves by the signs of the Zodiac that they were born under: Virgo, Aries. Reified minds are in no way limited to America, but are fostered by the general tendency of society. But I first became aware of this in America.¹³

Following his involvement in this Project, Adorno formulated a critique which would be present in many of his texts on art and culture, namely, the idea that there is a kind of objective spirit which organizes individual behaviors when it comes to cultural phenomena, the culture industry being one of them. However, according to Adorno, the notion of something “spiritual,” independent and autonomous to the individual, escaped the liberal scope of sociological conceptions in the United States. That is, the intellect was always associated with the person who carries it. One could confirm Adorno’s hypothesis by realizing how difficult it is to translate the German word *Geist* to English. All individuals have a “mind,” which is usually the preferred conversion for *Geist*, but the latter overflows individual minds, though also present in them. To cite another example of this, Adorno narrates an episode in which he explained a movement of Schubert’s Symphony in B minor to a small audience of radio listeners. At the end of the explanation, one of the participants said that Adorno had been compelling, however, had he dressed himself in Schubert’s clothes and worn a mask, it would be much easier to believe he was right. As the critic spoke from the “outside,” it was harder to trust that Schubert’s intentions while composing his work were those advocated by Adorno, as if the symphony did not possess objective aspects that would allow anyone to interpret it similarly.

Following the project’s guidelines, Adorno talked to listeners, applied surveys, worked with a jazz musician who was his assistant, and with many experts on empirical data, and from 1938 to 1941, was deeply involved in the research of American mass culture. As Adorno himself pointed out, it was precisely when he was confronted with the demand to “measure culture” that he came to conclude that culture is precisely what excludes a mindset capable of measuring it.¹⁴

During this time, Adorno wrote a series of essays. The best known and most read are those related to popular music. The consequence of their wider dissemination

might lead one to believe his participation in the radio project was limited to popular music analysis. Even though it has occupied part of his reflections, it is necessary to emphasize that Adorno was appointed as a classical music specialist. One of his main assignments was to analyze the impact of its radio transmission on listeners.

Adorno highlights four primary texts that resulted from this experience. These texts were written with the collaboration of an American sociologist (who was the translator of Durkheim and therefore had familiarity with European science) called George Simpson. In theory, Simpson should be Adorno's editorial assistant; however, he exerted quite an influence on Adorno's texts during the time. Versed in both American and European models of science, as Adorno wrote, he "not only encouraged me to write as radically and uncompromisingly as possible, he also gave his all to make it succeed."¹⁵ According to Adorno's testimony, Simpson helped him translate his ideas into American sociological vocabulary. The texts are as follows: "A Social Critique of Radio Music," published in *Kenyon Review* in 1945 and based on a 1940 lecture; "On popular music" published in *Studies in Philosophy and Social Sciences* in 1941; "Study of the NBC Music Appreciation Hour," which remained unpublished until 1994; and finally, "The Radio Symphony," published in the Radio Research compendium in 1941.

The collaboration with the project, which would be extremely fruitful for Adorno's intellectual experience and subsequent production, was permeated by many misunderstandings. Consequently, the "Music Study Project," the title of Adorno's part in Lazarsfeld's project, was canceled. Adorno then left for Los Angeles and dedicated himself in the four years that followed, along with Max Horkheimer, to the writing of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in which the concept of culture industry would display a more definite outline.

A Social Critique of Radio Music

Today the commodity character of music tends radically to alter it. In his day, Bach was considered and considered himself an artisan, although his music functioned as art. Today music is considered ethereal and sublime, although it actually functions as a commodity. Today the terms ethereal and sublime have become trademarks. Music has become a means instead of an end, a fetish. [...] This produces "commodity listening" [...] It is the ideal of aunt Jemima's ready mix for pancakes extended to the field of music.¹⁶

The epigraph above was extracted from the aforementioned text originally published in *The Kenyon Review* in the spring of 1945. It was inspired by a lecture Lazarsfeld had persuaded Adorno to deliver to his colleagues at the Princeton Radio Project in 1940, to clarify his assessment of music. Adorno's involvement in the project was marked by several moments like this, in which Lazarsfeld sought to integrate him and the other colleagues, since they did not understand his way of thinking and, as a result,

Adorno's collaboration stirred many conflicts.

The comparison between music and pancake mix was meant to demonstrate the deceptive character of the idea that radio would be able to deliver quality, custom-made, and unique music programming to each listener, as believing that a pancake ready-mix could provide something of the quality, freshness, and personality offered by a pancake made by a close aunt (not to mention that the flagrantly racist and sexist stereotype promoted by the products with the label "aunt Jemima"). At first sight, Adorno appears to be elitist in his evaluation; however, this is not a defense of the "exclusivity" of the work of art, but a critique of the contempt of culture that lies behind its treatment as any commodity one consumes ready-made. It should be noted that Adorno refers to an inversion that will be increasingly recurrent in his texts in this period. Music considered "ethereal and sublime" starts to function as a "commodity." The understanding of art depends, in this context, on the function it exerts.

A fundamental element of these writings, which caused a series of misunderstandings in Adorno's reception, is worth emphasizing. The texts, written in English, refer to the process of commodification of music, that is, the process of becoming a commodity of music. In English, however, the idea of "commodification" is significantly close to the idea of commercialization. It would seem that Adorno, thus, refers to the idea of "commodification" of music, in the commercial sense of the term, but he alludes to the process of "becoming a commodity" of music, which is quite different, as we shall see.

Adorno begins the text in question by stating that the radio tends to be approached in two different ways. The first is linked to market research – simply exposing several individuals to various treatments and observing their reaction. That is, sociologists usually map consumption from fractions of class, gender, age, among others. The second way, proposed by Lazarsfeld, deviates from the first, as it is guided by questions such as the following: "How can we bring good music to as many listeners as possible?" Lazarsfeld termed it "benevolent administrative research." At the beginning of the text, Adorno argues for the complementarity between Lazarsfeld's and his position, but what he does is completely demolish the former's view on the subject.

A few years later, Adorno would write that he considered it to be his "objectively proffered assignment to interpret phenomena — not to ascertain, sift, and classify facts and make them available as information."¹⁷ This, according to Adorno, corresponded not only to his idea of Philosophy but also of Sociology. Adorno thus scrutinizes Lazarsfeld's question. The first obstacle to confront the one who starts from this benevolent question, according to Adorno, is precisely to establish what good music is. Is "good" taken as "consecrated" by mere social convention? If the answer is yes, and Beethoven, for example, is taken as an excellent composer, states Adorno, "is it not possible that this music, by the very problems it sets for itself, is far away from our own situation?"¹⁸ In other words, is it possible to consider that it

has become something like a piece in a museum and thus is not able to convey us anything else? Is radio the best way to broadcast this kind of music?

Moreover, what does “broad audience” mean? Adorno argues that social critique of music on the radio has to consider some elements which seemed to be ignored by the project: the relation between the behavior of the listeners and broader social behavior patterns and the social position the radio occupies, as well as the role it plays in society as a whole.

For those accustomed to Adorno’s aesthetic and social critique — refined and challenging, even to the reader used to it — the text is curious, for Adorno focuses on the most “pedestrian” elements possible, in the sociological sense of the term, of which the project participants seem to have no idea. He argued that we live in a society where the primary purpose is the production of goods, which are produced for profit instead of the satisfaction of human needs; where the communication industry is monopolized, which results in a greater standardization of the cultural goods it produces and distributes; where, as the difficulties to reproduce such a society increase, the greater is the force to preserve, at any cost, the existing relations of power and property; where the antagonisms that permeate social life in capitalism are not restricted to the economic sphere but also structure cultural life.

Hence, distributing information about music would not be the same as fostering a musical culture. We can see here how Adorno’s interpretation draws on Walter Benjamin’s thesis of technological reproducibility, noting how the work of art, when reproduced on a mass scale, becomes one information among many others, which we will not remember soon after consumption. Adorno resorts, once again, to an empirical example. He analyzes the fans’ letters of a Midwestern educational radio, which broadcasts classical music and recognizes in them a kind of “standardized enthusiasm.” All letters are structured in a similar fashion:

Dear X, your music shop is swell. It widens my musical horizon and gives me an ever deeper feeling for the profound qualities of our great music. I can no longer bear the trashy jazz which we usually have to listen to. Continue with your grand work and let us have more of it.¹⁹

The standardization of the letters, which do not refer to any aspect of the musical fact of the program, leads Adorno to the conclusion that the listeners merely replicate the language utilized by the radio announcer, who challenges them to demonstrate their high cultural level while listening to their program on the radio.²⁰ This behavior is similar to that of “the fanatical radio listener entering a bakery and asking for ‘that delicious, golden crispy Bond Bread,’”²¹ echoing *ipsis litteris* the words of the brand’s advertisement.

The increasing standardization of the listeners’ reactions is an ideological effect of the radio, realized in spite of the intention of its producers. Music under the

yoke of radio “serves to keep listeners from criticizing social realities; in short, it has a soporific effect upon social consciousness.”²² Again, it is worth remembering Benjamin and his theory of the decline of experience in Modernity. Radio works here as an anesthetic,²³ a consolation at the end of a day of hard work, which differs from other goods (the stations that plays jazz, for example) just by transmitting more “sophisticated” merchandise. The standardization promoted by radio prevents the appreciation of music and creates a pseudo-individuality by imposing a product on the listener and making him or her believe that it was freely chosen.

The bankrupt farmer, writes Adorno, is comforted by the fact that Toscanini is playing only for him. In this case, music assumes a function that was unknown to it as art: it generates pride and self-satisfaction. This function assumed by music occludes its immanent meaning, preventing a real relationship between the subject and the consumed object, that is, the intention of the consumer of art has nothing to do with the work of art “itself” but is driven by the satisfaction of consuming a certain kind of “art,” like “classical music” and the particularity of each work of art itself ends up not being related at all with its consumption. At this point, Adorno points out, it is necessary to recognize that, although entertainment may have its uses, the ideological character of radio consists of a mix-up: Radio, while pure entertainment, presents itself as the vehicle of great music. In this text, Adorno takes up one of the aspects of the essay on “On the fetish character in music and the regression of listening.” The way the radio imposes how one listens to Beethoven, he writes, fixed on the melody and not on the whole, causes people to hear the Fifth Symphony as if it were quotations from the Fifth Symphony, i.e., in an atomized manner, which would lead to a regression of listening. Regression here must be understood as a psychoanalytical category and not just an aesthetic one. In short, a kind of “childish musical language” is thus created. One reencounters here the comparison with the pancakes: just as an entire society loses the ability to make a meal step by step when replacing it with a ready-mix of pancakes, in the long run rendering it unable even to feed itself independently, just like a child (one must recall that pancake is typically fed to children and appeals to the sweet and soft, easily chewable child’s taste buds), the same behavior emerges when it comes to so-called cultural goods, which are consumed ready, to the point where whole generations lose the ability to grasp a symphony as a whole. The pancake metaphor points to a process of reification and regression of all the senses in capitalism, from taste to hearing, which the experience in the United States made clear for Adorno.

At this point, Adorno explains the idea of a Sociology and a critique which aim to interpret phenomena, instead of just describing them, especially concerning the public:

We must try to understand them better than they understand themselves.
This brings us easily to conflict with common sense notions, such as

“giving the people what they want” [...] music is not a realm of subjective states and relative values [...] as soon as one enters the field of musical technology and structure, the arbitrariness of evaluation vanishes, and we are faced with decisions of right and wrong and true and false.²⁴

The core of what would later become Adorno’s sociology of art and his aesthetic theory is thus delineated, namely, the notion that theory should not relinquish the idea of truth.²⁵ Nevertheless, this no longer applies to the culture industry, whose relativism, produced by the varied supply of cultural products, dispenses with the idea of judgment.

Analytical Study of the NBC “Music Appreciation Hour”

This study, written between 1938 and 1940, is the only text from the period in which Adorno worked on the radio project that remained unpublished. Its first publication only occurred in 1994. The reason for this long adjournment was that the text simply did not please anybody. Adorno had insisted on criticizing a program that reached millions of students and was very consecrated in the US because of its allegedly democratic character, which was to “bring” classical music, previously restricted to small circles, for the middle classes which did not attend concert halls and also because of its supposedly pedagogical character.²⁶

Adorno analyzes the printed material of an NBC radio program, aimed at children and teenagers, with the chief objective of introducing listeners to classical music. The program was composed of four courses divided into series. “Series A” dealt with the physical aspect of the music, i.e., instruments and orchestra. “Series B,” in turn, concerned the imaginative aspect of music, whereas “series C” explored its “intellectual” aspects (what the program presented as the structure and form of pure music). “Series D” sought to show how music related to the life of its composer, operating as its expression. Adorno analyzes the four stages of the course systematically to demonstrate how the program of national scope and non-commercial use failed in its central intention of placing people in a real relationship with music.

He points out some of the program’s pedagogical and factual errors, analyzes its form, and proposes solutions to its problems. Recurring themes in Adorno’s oeuvre reappear or appear for the first time here. Some of them are worth underlining.

In the written material provided by NBC, one reads the following sentence: “Those who use their mind more actively are the ones who get the most fun.”²⁷ One encounters here the theme of aesthetic hedonism, which would be taken up by Adorno decades later in his *Aesthetic Theory*. Therefore, the radio program demands that the effect of the work of art and its validity is “fun.” This term appears repetitively in the program and, according to Adorno’s analysis, submits music to the criteria of the market, in the sense that something must be “pleasant” and “worth its money”²⁸ in order to circulate.

As such, musical appreciation becomes comparable, according to Adorno, to the fun one has while watching the World Series baseball game. In addition to attributing to works of art a function that is foreign to them as a formal principle, this type of approach produces a split in the appreciation of a work and its understanding: “any music which one listens to spontaneously, that is, with active comprehension of its context, ceases to be “relaxing” and no longer brings amusement.”²⁹ For Adorno, spontaneous appreciation of works of art involves attention and reflection and differs radically from a notion of immediate or relaxed apprehension.

The issue of convergence between pleasure and recognition is related to this question. This theme had already appeared in “On the fetish character in music and the regression of listening,” an essay in which Adorno discussed the process of reification of hearing that would lead to identification between “liking a song” and merely “recognizing it.” Adorno analyzes one of the theses transmitted by the program: “Music is not ours to enjoy until it is ‘out of the air’ and ‘in our heads.’”³⁰ One of the program’s goals was to guide the listener from the outside of a song to its interior, training them on recognizing musical themes, the easiest part of the song according to the program. Through contests, the program stimulated apprentice listeners to quickly recognize a song’s theme and thus ignored that which united the music as a totality, producing an atomized listening. In addition to the easier, but no less true interpretation that the notion of a song that comes “out of the air” and goes “in our heads” involves a relation of private appropriation of music, Adorno suggests that the exaggerated stimulus to the recognition of the themes promoted by the program encourages the identification between recognition and pleasure. However, this pleasure comes no longer from the enjoyment of music itself, but from the awareness that one recognizes the song. Once again, one who reads Adorno’s *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* will find here the seed of the typology of the “expert listener,” a person who may be well acquainted with the history of music and is able of quickly recognizing themes and composers but is incapable of establishing a direct relationship with it.

The identification of pleasure and recognition refers to an aspect of the concept of “culture industry” often overlooked precisely because of the lack of a more holistic reading of Adorno’s work, namely, the “function” that a work of art takes on in a given context. In the *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, Adorno illustrated this aspect using the example of Chopin. He states that Chopin’s music, marked by an aristocratic gesture that separates it from everyday life’s material traits, i.e., its characterization as “chamber music,” takes on a completely different function when it is inserted as background music in a Hollywood film, for instance. Thus, “with respect to class relations in particular, a music’s social function may diverge from the social meaning it embodies, even when the embodiment is as obvious as Chopin.”³¹ If this idea is combined with Adorno’s reflections on the radio, one notices how the way in which music is consumed can occlude the social meaning it embodies, that is, the function

that it exerts in a certain context might deviate considerably from its “intrinsic substance.”³²

This implies that one does not find in Adorno’s oeuvre an appreciation of “high culture” to the detriment of “popular culture,” identified here with culture industry. On the contrary, the “expert listener” characterization and the analysis of the relation between pleasure and recognition allow one to see how Adorno is himself a critic of the “fetish” of so-called high culture. “Culture industry,” understood through this prism, becomes a way of understanding how the very contents of works of art, as well as their form, are subsumed by their “function” in that system. In this case, there is an evident opposition between “disseminating information about music” and “teaching something about music.” Nonetheless, the concept of “culture industry” was still in its embryonic phase at the time.

Once again, it is worth mentioning an example of how Adorno arrived at these conclusions from the analysis of the program material. One of the course’s pedagogical proposals was to present each instrument’s sound as a unique personality and one that would imitate the sounds of nature; a clarinet would sound just like a donkey, for example. The idea was to make children recognize the input of each specific sound in the song. Adorno raises three problems related to this pedagogical proposal. Firstly, most orchestral music made use of their instruments as “disembodied sounds,” and the discovery that instruments could function as “personalities” came somewhat late and is attributed to Berlioz, Liszt, and Wagner. Then, the difficulty of recognizing each instrument’s personality would give rise to a second problem of a pedagogical nature. In a Haydn symphony, for example, it would be impossible to recognize these “personalities” because instruments would work amid the coherence of the parts: “A child waiting for the individual voice of the flute and its “message” necessarily will be disappointed or will strive to hear it by eliminating all musical sound “extraneous” to the flute, for the flute in Haydn has no such voice and no such message in itself.”³³

The pedagogical consequence of this method of teaching would be the breakdown of the child’s confidence in adults and frustration with the process of truly learning music. The child who hopes to hear this “instrumental personality,” which does not emerge, says Adorno, feels betrayed by adults. In addition, such a procedure would raise a third problem, namely the creation of a “technique-minded” learner:

A child who waits, when listening to a Haydn symphony, for the entrance of the flute, the violins, or the kettle drums, misses the music itself and becomes what may be called “technique-minded”; that is to say, the child concentrates on recognizing each instrument very much as the adolescent strives to recognize every motor car by its degree or pattern of streamlining. This attitude, which substitutes the means for the end, is a paradigm of what can appropriately be termed the fetishistic attitude toward music.³⁴

What is at stake in the excerpt above is the creation of a technical listening. It should be noted that Adorno's critique is not directed at the mass or the collective character of the radio. In the essay in question, Adorno does not mention that atomized listening could arise from the fact that radio produces distracted and fragmented listening — after all, it can be heard simultaneously with other activities such as studying, working, or doing housework. Nor does the focus of his criticism fall upon the radio technique itself. The main problem of what would later come to be known as “culture industry” is not only the standardization of its products, the loss of the autonomy of art in front of the entertainment industry but rather the transformation of the very way in which art is experienced. If aesthetic experience was one day linked to subjective formation – albeit exclusively for members of the aristocracy– the importance of understanding the immanent meaning of music was linked not only to an aesthetic question but also to a mode of organizing experience as a whole.

The fact that this was a class privilege is not definitive in this argument, because class privileges continued to exist, even in late capitalism, but experience was lost more and more throughout the social body. What Adorno regards as problematic is the dismantling of an experience — which was by no means unproblematic – in the name of an attitude towards art and so-called cultural goods that spread to other spheres, and which has at its core a reversal of means and ends, a blockage of spontaneity, an inability to comprehend an artistic (and social) phenomenon in its totality. Hence, he calls this behavior “fetishist” by referring to Marx.

The technical mind is one which knows only the various elements of an oeuvre but does not understand the relation of the parts to the whole, just as Marx described the mind of political economists, familiar with every single economic category, but completely unable to grasp how they were related in capitalism.³⁵ And without understanding, there is no criticism. Adorno seeks to comprehend the reasons for explaining why one no longer knows how to respond when confronted by works of art. This response does not lie in the collective character of the radio or the vicissitudes of its technological development, but in the way which what is called culture — and which Adorno and Horkheimer will call “culture industry” — deforms the structure of experience and replaces it with a “misleading substitute experience” [*trügende Ersatzerfahrung*],³⁶ transforming the appreciation of the public and even the “privileged” public into an attitude saturated with a technical mindset.

The Radio Symphony: An Experiment in Theory

“The Radio Symphony” came out in 1941. The essay's main idea is that the radio's proposal to bring serious music to its listeners by playing symphonies is not what it seems. Compared to the other texts produced by Adorno in this period, this is the most dated one. Adorno argued that the radio distorted the sound at the time, so the symphony was never adequately heard. Among the issues raised by the author, the main one referred to a technical question, which he considered to have been

overcome a few years later.³⁷ The transmission technology characterized by the AM band was not, in his view, neutral. The presence of what Adorno calls a “hear-stripe,” a kind of buzzing produced by the broadcast, would compromise the hearing of an orchestra compared to the experience of listening to it in a concert hall. His thesis is that the variations produced by radio in music while transmitting it undermines the symphonic proposal. Although new forms of transmission supplanted several technical aspects of the text, one of Adorno’s arguments endured: the idea of ‘atomized listening’.

The text consists of a case study centered on the outcome of the integral form of a Beethoven symphony when played on the radio. Its criticism’s main point concerns the impossibility of understanding the symphony as an integrated totality. Adorno analyzes the role of sound intensity in a symphony, the treatment of its structure, the production of a trivialization of music, and what he calls “quotation listening” promoted by radio transmission.

Far from the conventional definition of a symphony as the sequence between exhibition, development, and repetition, Adorno argues that:

What characterizes a symphony when experienced in immediate listening, as distinct not only from chamber music but also from orchestral forms such as the suite or the “tone poem,” is a particular intensity and concentration. This intensity rests musically upon the incomparably greater density and concision of thematic relationships of the symphonic as against other forms. [...] They imply first a complete economy of craft; that is to say, a truly symphonic movement contains nothing fortuitous [...] A Beethoven symphonic movement is essentially the unity of a manifold as well as the manifoldness of unity, namely, of the identical thematic material. This interrelationship of perpetual variation is unfolded as a process – never through mere “statement of detail.” It is the most completely organized piece of music that can be achieved.³⁸

Adorno understands the symphony as an inescapable relationship between parts and whole, between unity and diversity, and therefore criticizes everything that compromises this perception in radio transmission. The role of sound and what is called “absolute dynamics” play a significant role here. Adorno makes a comparison with architecture: just as the nature of the impression we have of a cathedral differs entirely from the impression we have of its model, so the impression we have of a symphony will depend on the intensity of the sound:

The power of a symphony to “absorb” its parts into the organized whole depends, in part, upon the sound volume. [...] To “enter” a symphony means to listen to it not only as to something before one but as something

around one as well, as a medium in which one “lives.”³⁹

The absolute symphonic dimensions, states Adorno, are linked to the experience of a symphonic space; in the private room, in contrast with a music hall, the magnitude of the sound would generate disproportions. Moreover, the collective dimension of the symphony is lost on the radio (both because one does not see the orchestra and because one usually listens to this music alone) and, in this condition of isolation and self-isolation, music would become something similar to a piece of furniture in a private room. This produces, according to Adorno, an “atomization of listening,” corresponding, in fact, to the atomization of the individual; at home, you can turn off the radio at any time, and this allows you to listen to only a few parts of the symphony, while in a concert hall one must obey specific rules that apply to everyone. Once again, one finds Adorno’s critique of a pancake-ready mix, that is, the idea that one is looking for something prefabricated, massified, and consumed individually, so that the spontaneity of a collective experience that takes place in a specific place and moment and that, unlike pancakes, one cannot take home and consume anytime one wants.

In this text, as in others mentioned here, Adorno exposes the connection of the phenomenon of ‘atomized listening’ with the preponderance of the theme in the symphonic listening stimulated by the radio, which would be defined as a ‘quotation listening.’ The radio symphony would produce a romanticization of music from the worship of reified details that obviate the relation between part and all. In Adorno’s words,

For by sounding like a quotation — the quintessence of the whole — the trivialized theme assumes a peculiar air of authority, which gives it cultural tone. [...] the anxiety of the listeners to recognize the so-called Great Symphonies by their quotable themes is mainly due to their desire to identify themselves with the standards of the accepted and to prove themselves to be small cultural owners within big ownership culture.⁴⁰

Beethoven’s symphony, Adorno points out, is replaced by the presentation of cast-iron items in this form of listening. However, that is the least essential element, for this person takes pleasure out of listening to what has the stamp of “great music,” not music itself. In this process, there is a kind of re-enchantment of the art that comes from its commodity form, which occurs after the process of loss of its aura, according to Benjamin’s concept of mechanical reproducibility.

On Popular Music

“On Popular Music” is undoubtedly the most crucial text of the period regarding the future construction of the “culture industry” concept. The text first appeared in 1941

in *Studies in Philosophy and Social Sciences* and dealt with standardization, pseudo-individualization, and the difference between serious and light music. The concept of pseudo-individuality was also the embryo of the concept of “personalization” later used in the *Authoritarian Personality* research.

The exposition of the differences between serious music and popular music is the starting point of the essay, and, like the study on NBC, this is a critical text to dissolve some stereotypes related to Adorno’s works. The definition of popular music is one of the main issues regarding the deconstruction of such stereotypes. Adorno points out that the difference between serious music and popular music does not lie in a difference regarding level, the former being “high art” and the latter “lower art.” Nor is the difference between them a matter of simplicity or complexity:

All works of the earlier Viennese classicism are, without exception, rhythmically simpler than stock arrangements of jazz. Melodically, the wide intervals of many hits such as »Deep Purple« or »Sunrise Serenade« are more challenging to follow per se than most melodies of, for example, Haydn, which consist mainly of circumscriptions of tonic triads, and second steps.⁴¹

What determines the difference between serious and popular features is that the latter has its structure determined by standardization. One of the main characteristics of popular music is that it offers an experience of familiarity that presupposes the whole beforehand and produces in its listener a tendency to pay much more attention to detail than to the relationship between the parts. The “novelty” in this kind of music comes only from the stylization of an ever-identical musical picture. In serious music, on the contrary, “every detail derives its musical sense from the concrete totality of the piece which, in turn, consists of the living relationship of the details and never of mere enforcement of a musical scheme.”⁴² In popular music, the details are replaceable, and their replacement does not alter the song’s overall meaning. Nowadays, this is very clear in the so-called pop music, although many people still advocate this type of production as something beyond entertainment.

Adorno analyzes the emergence of standardization, which, according to him, did not yet entirely arise from its industrial character, present only in the production and distribution of music that, within the scope of its conception, would be in an artisan stage. In the formulation of his *Aesthetic Theory*, the idea that cultural products are standardized even before their conception is a fundamental argument for understanding the phenomenon of the decline of the autonomy of art.

As Marx described, when a particular factory produces an innovation (which involved a specific technological or organizational development), it gains an advantage over the competition in a particular sector of the industry, but soon other factories imitate it in a “leap” (that is, without going through every single step of development).

Adorno argues that the same thing happened with radio music: one song becomes a hit, and then all others rush to imitate it, resulting in what Adorno calls “crystallization of patterns.” The analogy with Marx ends there, for, as Adorno shows, instead of competition driving innovation, the communications sector monopolized itself and made the public averse to any change.⁴³ To this day, this is visible not only in pop music but also in commercial cinema — in which superhero movies are filmed and re-filmed and multiplied every year — as in television — in which each country of the global South have their national versions of American variety shows.

The stylistic variation of the patterns disguises this identity and creates an illusion of individuality. Notwithstanding, one of the questions the essay raises, and which makes its diagnosis interesting nowadays, is the relation between this type of music and the creation of a system — at the same time social and psychological — of mechanisms of response (and behavior) incompatible with the notion of individuality in a liberal society. That is, the structural standardization of music establishes a feedback relationship with the standardization of responses. Such a system operates on several levels. In the scope of the audition, “the ear deals with the difficulties of hit music by achieving slight substitutions derived from the knowledge of the patterns.”⁴⁴ Popular music aims to create stimuli that draw the listener’s attention while continuing to fit into what is considered “natural music,” that is, known to him/her.

In the sphere of popular music, in which no primary material mean of life prevails, it is necessary to preserve the appearance of freedom of choice, which is based on notions such as “taste” — a criterion, moreover, that Adorno refuses altogether as far as aesthetic judgment is concerned. This appearance is generated by a process that occurs not only in culture but in the individual him-/herself. In that sense,

The necessary correlate of musical standardization is pseudo-individualization. By pseudo-individualization, we mean endowing cultural mass production with the halo of free choice or open market based on standardization. Standardization of song hits keeps the customers in line by doing their listening for them, as it were. Pseudoindividualization, for its part, keeps them in line by making them forget that what they listen to is already listened to for them, or ‘pre-digested’.⁴⁵

Popular music itself creates the listening habits of consumers. It produces its demand. That is to say; our subjectivity is produced by capitalism. This idea was already present in Marx when he affirmed: “production accordingly produces not only an object for the subject but also a subject for the object.”⁴⁶ The extreme example of pseudo-individualization would be, according to Adorno, jazz improvisations, which would have undergone a process of routinization. These improvisations would be firmly prescribed and delimited. The subservience of improvisation to standardization,

states Adorno, would reveal two crucial features of popular music's sociopsychological character. The first, previously mentioned, concerns how the development of detail in music remains connected to its underlying general scheme so that the listener does not find it strange. The second relates to the role of substitution in the process of improvisation, namely, to prevent the traces of improvisation from being taken as something other than ornaments, that is, as musical phenomena *per se*.

In so-called "consumption habits," identity appears as a multiplicity of choices, and differentiation is produced starting from what is undifferentiated; likewise, "popular music" is divided into several different types — this is even clearer today. The listener learns to distinguish different types, as well as a band from another, and proceeds more and more according to what one hears, just as today the indies differentiate themselves from the listeners of pop music by their hipster outfit and people are classified (and classify themselves) through the type of music they listened to in adolescence. Adorno points out that popular music now resembles a multiple-choice questionnaire: there is only one right answer, and it has a dualistic structure — either one likes it or not.

The complement to standardization is the "plugging". It refers to the way a hit is produced. Plugging has to do with making a song a hit by repeating it in the radio, cinema and so on until everybody knows it and recognize it. Adorno does not explore this vocabulary much in this text, but one cannot overlook the violence presupposed in terms of popular music, such as the hit and the beat itself. In a later text, Adorno would comment on the influence of a study by one of his colleagues in the project, Malcolm McDougald, called "The popular music industry," which deals with the manipulation of taste and the process of creation of popular music through repetition of the same songs on the radio. The role of repetition would be to break the resistance of the individual to sameness, to accustom one to it. This repetition has fundamental psychological importance since it provides an automatic response of conformation to the absence of a possible escape to this situation.

Highly standardized songs need to be repeated several times for the individual to remember them (which does not happen with serious music), but this eventually turns into a paradox since standardization and plugging make the songs too quickly forgettable. They need to be standardized and display something distinctive simultaneously. Adorno states that this "distinguishing feature must not necessarily be melodic, but may consist of metrical irregularities, particular chords or particular sound colors."⁴⁷

Still, plugging can also operate through advertising music and film as something glamorous. Adorno compares this glamor to neon signs:

Boredom has become so great that only the brightest colors have any chance of being lifted out of the general drabness [...] The term glamorous is applied to those faces, colors, sounds which, by the light they irradiate,

differ from the rest. But all glamour girls look alike and the glamor effects of popular music are equivalent to each other.⁴⁸

The glamor of popular music is an answer, says Adorno, to the listener's desire of strength that the music advertises. Let us reflect on how pop music today differs so little from advertising. The "plugging" can also operate through styles or personalities, such as the cult of jazz bands' leaders. Nonetheless, according to Adorno, this stimulates a musical language linked to dependency and childishness. If the music were good, it would not need glamor; if the individual could stand up to society, one would not need that kind of music. The lyrics and songs are then affected by children's language, analogously to the idea of Aunt Jemima's pancakes (Adorno cites the songs "Goody, Goody," "A-tisket-a-tasket," "Cry, Baby, cry"). Popular music repeats the same formulas, just like a spoiled child.

Popular music and plugging aim to connect repetition, recognition, and acceptance. One likes music because it is recognized, and music is recognized because it is repeated incessantly. Though serious music would also comprise a process of recognition, it would function then, in contrast, as a means for the understanding of music:

The musical sense of any piece of music may indeed be defined as that dimension of the piece which cannot be grasped by recognition alone, by its identification with something one knows. It can be built up only by spontaneously linking the known elements — a reaction as spontaneous by the listener as it was spontaneous by the composer — to experience the inherent novelty of the composition. The musical sense is the New — something which cannot be traced back to and subsumed under the configuration of the known, but which springs out of it, if the listener comes to its aid.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, the promotion of popular music inverts means and ends, and recognition becomes its prime purpose:

The recognition of the mechanically familiar in a hit tune leaves nothing which can be grasped as new by a linking of the various elements. [...] Hence, recognition and understanding must here coincide, whereas in serious music understanding is the act by which universal recognition leads to the emergence of something fundamentally new.⁵⁰

Five main elements constitute the process of recognizing popular music, according to Adorno: a vague remembrance (as all songs look alike, nothing is remembered as unique, but everything has a familiar tone); an immediate identification (it leaps from a vague memory to the complete identification of the music); the subsumption of the

label (which has the sense of associating music with its title, but also with its label); self-reflection in the act of identifying music (here Adorno refers to those individuals who subsume and identify the experience of listening with the identification of music, who rush to say the name of a hit and whistle to demonstrate to others their deep musical knowledge); and the idea of “psychological transference” (which concerns the tendency to attribute to the object the pleasure that comes from its possession, not from the object itself).

The analysis of the process of recognition is firmly anchored in the Marxist concept of “subsumption,” which is valid both in the sense of real subsumption of labor to capital and in the sense of absorption of non-commodified or old mercantile forms by the commodity form.⁵¹ A contradiction between form and substance emerges from this process.⁵² Here, Adorno draws a parallel of “commodity fetishism” with music and the socially diffused psychological relation with it; this relationship is marked by taking possession of the object, as something fixed, in the act of recognition and drawing pleasure from this possession. Adorno has in mind a person who takes pleasure in parading his/her knowledge about popular music, identifying bands, songs, and melodies in a group of friends. He uses the example of someone who says, “Wow! Night and Day is good!” Musical experience, or rather, the direct and immediate relationship with music is entirely obliterated by the fact that one takes pleasure from the act of recognition and not from music itself — in spite of the ideological effect related to one’s perception of taking pleasure from one’s object and not its consumption.

This mediation produced by the process of recognition (a process that takes place through the consumption of music), which completely ignores the music’s content, nevertheless applies both to the relationship with classical music and the relationship one has with popular music on the radio. For this reason, Adorno points out similar problems both in the symphonic musical program of the radio and in the transmission of popular music. Here, the social form transforms music’s content, subsuming it to the commodity logic, even if music is “free of charge.”

The notion of subsumption is fundamental for the theory of culture industry and results from the conjunction of Marx and Lukács’s reification theory and Marx’s theory of value. The theory of culture industry could also be related to the expanded reproduction process narrated by Marx, so that “culture industry” is understood as a social form of capital. In this sense, the transformation of the immanent meaning of an art object is produced by the function that it assumes. Form, imposed on a content that is foreign to it, ends up deforming it. According to Marx, the use-value appears in the act of consumption. In the act of the exchange, the value is realized, although the use-value is presupposed in the process. By applying the concept of subsumption in these texts to understand the relation capitalist society establishes with art (be it serious or popular music), Adorno argues that the process narrated by Marx is intensified. That is, the commodity logic would have developed to the point that it would even take over the sphere of consumption, precisely a sphere in which use-value (which attends

“the needs of the stomach or fantasy”⁵³) would supposedly prevail. The use-value no longer lies in music itself but is transposed to the consumption of music. Adorno recurs to dialects to demonstrate how value presents itself as use-value. If, as Marx described, use-value is subsumed by value, Adorno argues that, in late capitalism, use-value is subsumed twofold — since the use-value of consuming music replaces the use-value of music itself.

The gratuitousness of music and the various products of culture industry, however, help to conceal that, while listening to the radio, the subject is immersed in the reproduction of capital. For the listener, turning on the radio resembles the act of buying a commodity and enjoying it at home⁵⁴. However, it is precisely in his/her private room, where one does not pay to listen to the radio, that one is completely immersed in the sphere of exchange. This is becoming increasingly clear with the development of social media, the internet and its unlimited access to free content.⁵⁵

Marx experienced a type of capitalism in which the “immense collection of commodities”⁵⁶ resembled a small bazaar compared to the late capitalism in which Adorno lived. In 19th century, there remained an idea that consumption — although capitalist society was never guided by it — found its rationale in the use-values of a commodity, whether for fantasy or material life. Marx’s time did not witness compulsive buying disorder, that is, the pathologies of buying syndromes that reveal the real face of current capitalism, in which value becomes more and more autonomous: one buys due to the pure pleasure/anxiety of buying. As Leo Maar points out, “music, when situated in the constellation of a society structured by the realization of value, presents the terms of the possible conversion of exchange value into use-value: this is its fetish.”⁵⁷ The actual use-value of a commodity, which was already mere support, goes even further in this context. Once again, there is a *quid pro quo*; in this case, the value appears as use-value. Adorno is showing that this happens to radio music as early as the 1940s.

The subject of “free time” as labor time is also one of the text’s highlights. Following Benjamin’s argument about cinema, but with inverted signals, Adorno emphasizes how popular music appeals to “distraction” and “inattention” simultaneously:

The notion of distraction can be adequately understood only within its social setting and not in self-subsistent terms of individual psychology. Distraction is bound to the current mode of production, to the rationalized and mechanized labor process to which, directly or indirectly, masses are subject. This mode of production, which engenders fears and anxiety about unemployment, loss of income, war, has its ‘non-productive’ correlate in entertainment; that is, relaxation, which does not involve the effort of concentration at all. People want to have fun. A fully concentrated and conscious experience of art is possible only to those whose lives do not put such a strain on them that they want relief from both boredom

and effort simultaneously in their spare time. The whole sphere of cheap commercial entertainment reflects this dual desire. It induces relaxation because it is patterned and pre-digested. These characteristics serve within the masses' psychological household to spare them the effort of that participation (even in listening or observation) without which there can be no receptivity to art. On the other hand, the stimuli provided permit an escape from the boredom of mechanized labor.⁵⁸

This leisure time in which the worker is spared, Adorno argues, fits only to reproduce and restore one's ability to work. Both pseudo-individuality, boredom, and mechanization are articulated here. Leisure time offers the same mechanisms of the world of work and, through that, habituates the worker to it. The stimuli that film and radio offer present these mechanisms in the form of entertainment, which's presupposed product is boredom. This is why the mode of listening linked to this conjuncture has as its main characteristic distraction, in which recognition is an attitude that comes without effort. Otherwise, if it offered the masses something that involved a reflexive and critical effort that would require concentration, cinema and radio would make the world of labor unbearable, as unbearable as returning to strenuous work after a vacation. In that case, the secret would be — as Adorno sought to show in these and other texts — to equalize the tedium of holidays and that of the world of labor so that their indifference would produce the sensation that it is impossible to escape it. This is the plugging of capitalist society itself.

Together, these texts delineate not only a theory of popular art or even a theory of art in late capitalism, but rather a theory of ideology. This becomes clear when Adorno refers to popular music as "social cement," insofar as "the autonomy of music is replaced by a mere sociopsychological function. [...] And the meaning listeners attribute to a material, the inherent logic of which is inaccessible to them, is above all a means by which they achieve some psychical adjustment to the mechanisms of present-day life."⁵⁹

Adorno alludes to the question of function. The ideological function obliterates the music's material, the social content of music. Therefore, Adorno argues that this type of mediation promoted by media (which is both a technical and mercantile) turns popular music into a repressive phenomenon.

Adorno describes two types of popular music listeners: the "emotional listener," already analyzed in the other texts, and the "rhythmically obedient listener." Adorno's characterization of what happens to music under culture industry could dispense with the typology if we were just interested in Adorno's musical theory. But since we are also interested in relating radio and subjectivity, the typology is essential here, if not in its content, at least in its effort to grasp the role of radio music in producing administered, resigned individualities. This kind of exercise would be central in the formulation of the "authoritarian personality" and to establish its relation to culture

industry. In this typology, it is possible to glimpse a germ of the fundamental argument of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; the “rhythmically obedient type” of listener, according to Adorno, is more susceptible to a process of adjustment to authoritarian collectivism, without this manifesting itself in the form of any particular political position. For this type, for whom the whole experience of music is related to the beat,

To play rhythmically means [...] to play in such a way that even if pseudo-individualizations — counter-accents and other ‘differentiations’ — occur, the relation to the ground meter is preserved. To be musical means to them to be capable of following given rhythmical patterns without being disturbed by ‘individualizing’ aberrations, and to fit even the syncopations into the basic time units. This is how their response to music immediately expresses their desire to obey.⁶⁰

There is a clear association between pseudo-individualization and authoritarian personality as one of the former’s main traits is the radical adaptation to reality, which leaves no place for any negation or transcendence. Adorno suggests that, to adapt to the music of machines, one has to renounce one’s human feelings or, in other words, one must resemble them; reify oneself. The masochistic character will subsequently make an appearance.

The definition of the other type of listener, “the emotional one,” does not present many differences compared to the other texts except for one: in this essay, Adorno refers to the cinema to clarify his example. According to him, music and cinema provide a kind of confession of unhappiness — he is thinking about the people who cry in a romantic movie in the cinema — that reconciles the spectator with reality by producing an immediate relief that comes from the awareness of not being accomplished in this world. This example shows the complicated character of Adorno’s argument, which is not reduced to an idea that cinema alienates by making us believe that we are as happy as the stars of Hollywood. This is the reason why Adorno would write, in another text, that “mass culture is unadorned make-up. It assimilates itself to the realm of ends more than to anything else with a sober look that knows no-nonsense.”⁶¹ That is, ideology does not work only positively, affirming the existing society, but also negatively, that is, producing reconciliation precisely by offering a place for an experience of disillusionment.⁶² The popularity of shows such as *Mr. Robot* and *Black Mirror* point precisely to this trait these days.

Years later, Adorno would write that “Donald Duck in the cartoons and the unfortunate victim in real life receive their beatings so that the spectators can accustom themselves to theirs.”⁶³ The theory of culture industry as ideology is not a theory which states people welcome the illusions presented by culture industry because they are ignorant; in fact, “what appears to be ready acceptance and unproblematic gratification is very complex, covered by a veil of flimsy rationalizations.”⁶⁴ Adorno

rehearses here the idea that this process configures a sadomasochistic personality. Anyone who opposes this state of affairs is branded as someone who just does not know how to have fun. The abyss that separates individual and society, as well as the disproportion between them, causes individual resistance to yield, without ceasing to generate a series of reactions, such as rancor, which is pushed to deeper levels of the psychic structure:

Psychological energy must be directly invested to overcome resistance. For this resistance does not wholly disappear in yielding to external forces, but remains alive within the individual and still survives even at the very moment of acceptance. Here spite becomes drastically active.⁶⁵

However, passivity is not enough, for the individual must strive to adapt. The similarities with the so-called “thesis of the integration of the proletariat” are striking at this point, which argues in favor of my argument of culture industry theory as a theory of ideology in late capitalism.⁶⁶ For this reason, enthusiasm for culture industry, Adorno affirms, is often confused with fury; individuals “must transform the external order to which they are subservient into an internal order. The ego manipulates the endowment of musical commodities with libidinal energy.”⁶⁷ These excerpts demonstrate how culture industry administers hate and resentment since its emergence – which points to the fact that manipulation of these emotional drives by the alt-right today through social media is the update of an old mechanism.

Adorno makes a jest with the dancers who called themselves “jitterbugs.” This type of music related to swing was trendy in the 1940s in the US and was danced quickly. The word jitterbug is formed from the conjunction between the verb “jitter” (to act in a nervous, agitated way) and the noun “bug,” insect. The dancers, says Adorno, boast of the idea that they are insects that struggle. With an analysis of this behavior and its relation to music, Adorno concludes the text by stating that there is a complicated relationship between resistance and acceptance, the conscious and the unconscious:

Present-day mass reactions are very thinly veiled from consciousness. It is the paradox of the situation that it is almost insuperably difficult to break through this thin veil. Yet the truth is subjectively no longer so unconscious as it is expected to be. This is borne out by the fact that in the political praxis of authoritarian regimes the frank lie in which no one actually believes is more and more replacing the ‘ideologies’ of yesterday which had the power to convince those who believed in them. [...] Rather, spontaneity is consumed by the tremendous effort which each individual has to make to accept what is enforced upon him — an effort which has developed for the very reason that the veneer veiling the controlling mechanisms has become so thin. To become a jitterbug

or simply to 'like' popular music, it does not by any means sufficient to give oneself up and to fall in line passively. To become transformed into an insect, man needs the energy which might achieve his transformation into a man.⁶⁸

Adorno refers to an idea that would be dear to him from that point on, namely, that adapting requires at least the same effort than resisting society, that is, "to be transformed into an insect, man needs that energy that could affect its transformation into a man."⁶⁹

Notes on Adorno's Theory of Culture

In the first essay of the book *Prisms*, which names the book's subtitle, "Cultural Criticism and Society," Adorno alludes to the concept of "culture" as a supreme fetish⁷⁰ and as something in which one cannot place naïve faith. In his *Aesthetic Theory*, he endorses this idea, stating that "rabid criticism of culture is not radical. If affirmation is indeed an aspect of art, this affirmation is no more totally false than culture — because it failed — is totally false."⁷¹ These reflections could not have been written before Adorno's experience in the United States. According to his testimony,

In America, I was liberated from a certain naïve belief in culture and attained the capacity to see culture from the outside. To clarify the point: despite all social criticism and all consciousness of the primary economic factors, the fundamental importance of the mind — "Geist" — was quasi a dogma self-evident to me from the very beginning. The fact that this was not a foregone conclusion, I learned in America, where no reverential silence in the presence of everything intellectual prevailed, as it did in Central and Western Europe far beyond the confines of the so-called educated classes; and the absence of this respect inclined the intellect toward critical self-scrutiny. This particularly affected the European presuppositions of musical cultivation in which I was immersed. Not that I renounced these assumptions or abandoned my conceptions of such culture; but it seems to be a fundamental distinction whether one bears these along unreflectingly or becomes aware of them precisely in contradistinction to the standards of the most technologically and industrially developed country.⁷²

Adorno remained in the United States from 1938 to 1953. The sum of the texts on "culture industry" and related themes written by him in this period and the countless stories about his adventures in America, as himself liked to say, confirm how the formulation of the concept of "culture industry" derives from an intense experience of immersion in the US cultural and research environment. According to Adorno's

account, “I certainly knew what monopolistic capitalism and great trusts were; yet, I had not realized how far “rationalization” and standardization had permeated the so-called mass media.”⁷³ Nevertheless, this experience was fundamental to the understanding of the culture industry as something that would be part of the process of capital reproduction and accumulation, and also to the later development of Adorno’s reflections on art and culture and to his investigation of authoritarianism.

One of the most significant difficulties in understanding Adorno’s critical theory lies precisely in the fact that Adorno does not work with a definite concept of culture, as is the tradition of English Marxism, for example.⁷⁴ The concepts of “Enlightenment,” “culture industry,” “art,” among others, certainly establish a relation with the idea of culture, but the latter is not reduced to any of them.

According to Adorno, there is a separation between material life and spiritual life that results from the cleavage described by Marx between manual and intellectual labor. The autonomy of art, thus understood (and not in the Weberian sense of the rationalization of the spheres), carries with it the notion of freedom from praxis. Praxis is understood here as something linked to material necessities. Art as intellectual work is freed from these material moorings. Nevertheless, this autonomy entails a bad conscience. In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno shows how each work of art worthy of the name bears the mark of this separation in its form. However, by conceiving — in the older Marxist tradition — this separation as something problematic, Adorno never makes a simple defense of the idea of culture. In his words, “What distinguishes dialectical from cultural criticism is that it heightens cultural criticism until the notion of culture is itself negated, fulfilled and surmounted in one.”⁷⁵ It seems like the idea of culture needs to be denied so that its concept can be realized. The concept of culture carries with it the contradiction of society; that is to say, freedom “remains an equivocal promise of culture as long as its existence depends on a bewitched reality and, ultimately, on control over the work of others.”⁷⁶

Adorno’s philosophy carries a deep mistrust in culture, although it seeks to comprehend its emancipatory potential. The same goes for the idea of Enlightenment, which is also criticized in the book written with Horkheimer. For this reason, this book, as well as the set of essays in *Prisms*, mobilizes well-known critics of both culture and Enlightenment: Sade, Veblen, Spengler, Nietzsche, among others. Adorno’s critical theory feeds both from Enlightenment enthusiasts like Kant and its discontents and seeks to show the dialectic intertwinement between seemingly opposing terms at various times.

Nevertheless, this is not all. It is worth emphasizing that the very writing of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, always remembered by its approach to the traumatic event of Nazism, depended on the distrust of so-called “culture” made possible by living in the United States. The theory of “culture industry,” which in the debate with Benjamin takes the form of a dispute between autonomous art and political art, after the exile in America, also becomes (and perhaps mainly) not only a theory about the annihilation

of the autonomy of art, but of the individual him-/herself:

The negation of the concept of the culture is itself under preparation. The significant factor therein is the dismissal of such concepts as autonomy, spontaneity, and criticism: autonomy, because the subject, rather than making conscious decisions, both have and wishes to subjugate itself to whatever has been pre-ordained. The reason for this is that the spirit, which, according to traditional cultural concepts, should be its law-giver, at every instant now experiences its impotence towards the overwhelming demands of mere being. Spontaneity diminishes because comprehensive planning takes precedence over the individual impulse, predetermining this impulse in turn, reducing it to the level of illusion, and no longer tolerating that play of forces which was expected to give rise to a free totality. Moreover, finally, criticism is dying out because the critical spirit is as disturbing as sand in a machine to that smoothly-running operation which is becoming more and more the model of the cultural. This critical spirit now seems antiquated, irresponsible and unworthy, much like 'armchair' thinking.⁷⁷

Nowadays, with the rise of the far-right in the whole world, throwing sand in the machine is one of our primary and most urgent tasks. The issue of anti-intellectualism (the imperialism of "fun"), of the fragmentation of experience, of anger and resentment administration Adorno discovered in radio broadcasting of classical music is back in the center of our political and cultural debates. In 1967, Adorno delivered a lecture called "Aspects of the New Right-Wing extremism," which was recently published. He stated then that what characterizes the far-right is its unlimited domain of propaganda technique. According to this suggestion, any left-wing project has to construct a critical approach to culture industry as a system that undermines capitalism's critique and serves as a vehicle for propaganda.

Those who seek, opposed to Adorno, to show the autonomy or at least the intelligence of the products of culture industry, in doing so, lose the most substantial core of his critical theory, which consists precisely in apprehending these products amid their *function* in capitalist society. The "culture industry" is already hegemonic; it does not need pro bono advocates to stand up for it. Therefore, both critically and socially, one should apply, as Adorno put it, "Walter Benjamin's thought on critics whose task it is to uphold the interest of the public against the public itself."⁷⁸

Acknowledgements.

I would like to thank professor Fredric Jameson who read this article as a piece of my dissertation and encouraged me to pursue the argument and publish the research. I also thank Michael Schwarz for receiving me twice for research stays at the Theodor

W. Adorno's Archive in the Akademie der Künste in Berlin. Capes/Brazil funded this research.

Notes

1. Even among critical theory scholars, Adorno's approach to cinema and jazz is not very popular. See Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in mass culture," *Social Text*, Duke University Press, (1979) 130-148; Deborah Cook, *The Culture Industry Revisited* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996); Heinz Steinert, *Culture Industry* (Oxford/Malden: Polity, 2003); Miriam B. Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/Londres: University of California Press, 2011).
2. Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York/London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2001) 133.
3. See Detlev Claussen, *One Last Genius* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) and David Jenemann, *Adorno in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
4. Lazarsfeld was initially linked to the Institute of Psychology at the University of Vienna. His Austro-Marxist background had aroused his interest in the field of electoral studies and occupational choices. Contact with American market research made him realize a correlation between occupational choices, electoral options, and consumption habits. Lazarsfeld received a scholarship to study in the United States in 1933 and took with him the "new model" of research that resulted from a mixture of social psychology, market research, and statistics. This model would turn him into a reference in communication studies and soon become known as sociological research par excellence. Paul Lazarsfeld, "An Episode in the History of Social Research: a Memoir," *The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America, 1930-1960*, ed. Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969) 270-337.
5. Theodor W. Adorno. "Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America" *The intellectual migration: Europe and America, 1930-1960*, ed. Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969) 340.
6. Adorno, "Scientific Experiences" 342.
7. This was a significant concern of the Rockefeller Foundation, which funded the project, according to Foundation itself. See: <https://rockfound.rockarch.org/pt/communications>. Accessed October 12th, 2020.
8. Adorno's battle against empiricism did not start in America but gained corpus due to the Radio Research Project. According to Brian Kane, this is one of the main topics of *Current of Music*, and the Radio analysis composes an attempt to turn phenomenology against itself through dialectics. Brian Kane, "Phenomenology, Physiognomy and the 'Radio Voice,'" *New German Critique*, 43:3 (November 2016) 96.
9. Adorno apud Paul Lazarsfeld, "An Episode" 324.
10. Adorno's conception of empiricism was very much different from Lazarsfeld. Adorno conceived empirical reality as the social processes that produced reality as we perceive it in an immediate sense. So, the factual was taken as a product of empiricism, not as its equivalent. On the contrary, Lazarsfeld was not interested in the discovering of the subjacent processes that constituted empirical reality but in the morphology of radio consumers.
11. Adorno had developed this idea in his essay "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" of 1938. The idea that the ability to listen to music regressed to the earlier stages of

civilization was linked to the annihilation of a subjectivity capable of establishing a spontaneous relationship with art. If we use his formulations somewhat freely, we could emphasize that if Adorno observed this phenomenon in the so-called classical music, his intentions are confirmed by the all-pervasive attention deficits today, which prevent not only the focused listening of a symphony, for example. Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening", *Essays on Music*, ed, Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 255.

12. "Scientific Experiences" 346.
13. "Scientific Experiences" 347.
14. "Scientific Experiences" 347.
15. "Scientific Experiences" 351.
16. Theodor W. Adorno, "A Social Critique of Radio Music," *The Kenyon Review*, Vol. 18.3/4 (Summer-Autumn, 1996) 231.
17. "Scientific Experiences" 339.
18. "A Social Critique" 230.
19. "A Social Critique" 233.
20. Adorno refers here to something that would be very relevant in sociology a few decades later: the problem of the relationship between "taste" or consumption and class society. Pierre Bourdieu, for instance, would dedicate himself to prove how culture is an essential element of class differentiation in many of his works. Adorno is grasping the phenomenon here and would return to this point in *Introduction to Sociology of Music*. Unlike Bourdieu, however, Adorno thought it was possible to distinguish between the function of art consumption and each work of art's truth content. See *La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979).
21. "A Social Critique" 234.
22. "A Social Critique" 232.
23. In re-reading the essay on "The Work of Art ..." Buck-Morss demonstrates through Benjamin's theory of the decline of experience that mass culture could exert an anesthetic effect on its reception instead of an aesthetic effect exerted by the work of art. The contrast between art and mass culture would also be contraposition between Aesthetics, understood as the sphere of perception, and Anaesthetics, rightly understood as the sphere of non-perception, of anesthesia. Comparing mass culture and drugs becomes recurrent in Adorno's texts after he arrives in the United States, bringing forward familiar themes to our time, such as "addiction to television and computer games," among others. See Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Essay Reconsidered Artwork," *October* 62. The MIT Press (1992): 3-41.
24. "A Social Critique" 234-235.
25. In Adorno's words: "without values nothing is understood aesthetically, and vice versa. In art, more than in any other sphere, it is right to speak of value. Like a mime, every work says: 'I'm good, no?'; to which what responds is a comportment that knows to value." Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Bloomsbury Revelations, 2013) 417.
26. See Bernard H. Haggin, *Music in the Nation* (New York: Duel, Sloan and Pearce, 1949).
27. Introduction to series B. apud Theodor W. Adorno. "Analytical Study of the NBC Music Appreciation Hour," *The Musical Quarterly*, 78.2 (Summer 1994) 356.

28. "Analytical Study" 355.
29. "Analytical Study" 356.
30. "Analytical Study" 358.
31. Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976) 62.
32. This kind of reflection will reappear in several moments of Adorno's work, as in *Prisms*, when he states that Bach "is changed into a neutralized cultural monument, in which aesthetic success mingles obscurely with a truth that has lost its intrinsic substance. They have made him into a composer for organ festivals in well-preserved Baroque towns, into ideology." Theodor W. Adorno, "Bach Defended against His Devotees," *Prisms* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997) 135.
33. "Analytical Study," and "Music Appreciation Hour" 330.
34. "Analytical Study," and "Music Appreciation Hour" 331.
35. See Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One* (London/New York: Penguin Books/New Left Review, 1976).
36. Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften, Band 8* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972) 80.
37. This was not the first time Adorno concerned himself with the influence of the mechanical musical apparatus on hearing. In his writings in the *Musikblätter* Journal, he analyzed the effects of the gramophone. See Thomas Y. Levin, "For the Record: Adorno on Music in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," October. 55 (1990).
38. Theodor W. Adorno, "The Radio Symphony," *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 255.
39. "The Radio Symphony" 257.
40. "The Radio Symphony" 264.
41. Adorno, "On Popular Music" 441.
42. "On Popular Music" 439.
43. Currently, the works of Scholz and Srnicek show that the success of social media companies is utterly dependent on a monopolistic character. This phenomenon highlights the topicality of Adorno's analysis. See Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), and Trebor Scholz, *Platform Cooperativism. Challenging the Corporate Sharing Economy* (New York: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 2016).
44. "On Popular Music" 442.
45. "On Popular Music" 445.
46. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1904) 280.
47. "On Popular Music" 448.
48. "On Popular Music" 449.
49. "On Popular Music" 453.
50. "On Popular Music" 453.
51. The subsumption process also refers to the absorption of pre-capitalist forms and their transmutation under the aegis of capital. The concept of subsumption [*Subsumtion, subsumieren*] has a long history in Marxism. It appears in *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, the first volume of *Capital* (Chapters 11, 13, 14 - Marx differentiates the formal and the real subsumption of labor to capital) and the *Grundrisse*. This

concept is then further developed in the unpublished Chapter IV of Book I of *Capital*. Even though it is not indisputable that Adorno has read Chapter IV and the *Grundrisse* in 1938, he was undoubtedly familiar with the volume I of *Capital* and the works of Lukács's and Alfred Sohn-Rethel's, where the concept is also present.

52. When subsumed by capital, this form without substance gains a substance - labor - that is strange to it, generating a reverse of the Hegelian dialectic. The idea is that the relation between capital and labor has this form, contradictory and, in a certain sense, dislocated. This disengagement would thus determine all the disagreement of the forms emanating from it. See Moishe Postone. "Lukács and the Dialectical Critique of Capitalism," *New Dialectics and Political Economy*, ed. R. Albritton and J. Simoulidis (Houndsmill, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
53. *Capital* 125.
54. "Theodor Adorno was interested in the social power of dissemination, which he discusses as 'reproduction,' where what is reproduced is both 'the music' as such and its reproductive potential, which implies replication and degradation, but also reproduction with respect to the listener." Babette Babich, "Adorno's radio phenomenology: Technical Reproduction, Physiognomy and Music," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 40.10 (2014) 959.
55. Undoubtedly, those who believe in the "gratuitousness" of the culture industry's contents live an illusion that was already visible at the time of the propagation of the radio, but which is now set wide open by the obligation of data sharing and not only for targeted advertising. See Platform Capitalism.
56. *Capital* 125.
57. Wolfgang Leo Maar, "The Production of Society Through Culture Industry," *Revista Olhar*, 2.3 (June 2002) 14.
58. "On Popular Music" 458.
59. "On Popular Music" 460.
60. "On Popular Music" 461.
61. Theodor W. Adorno, "The Scheme of Mass Culture," *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (London/New York: Routledge, 2001) 78.
62. Many readers of the Frankfurt School, such as Fredric Jameson, have sought to demonstrate that the products of so-called "mass culture," however commodified they may be, contain utopian elements, such as modernist works of art. See Jameson, 1979. However, the idea that "culture industry" is also permeated by criticisms of the status quo, of a never attended happiness desire, among others, appears in Adorno's several texts in this period. In that sense, the concept of "negativity" and experience [Erfahrung], which Adorno attributes to the autonomous art and the presence of critique and utopia, diverge. The critique of the system and the utopian elements, according to this view, reconcile much more than they deny culture industry if we highlight the function Adorno attributed to the elements of refusal, disillusionment, or utopia.
63. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. eds. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr; trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002) 110.
64. "On Popular Music" 462.
65. "On Popular Music" 464.
66. One of the most controversial points of *Critical Theory* lies precisely in this idea that one of the

forms of capitalist domination occurs in the form of self-domination. This is part of their efforts to understand how the contradiction between capital and labor – which still bears the foundation of capitalism – did not have class struggle as an immediate result. On the contrary, the working class seemed to act more and more against their interests. In the 1930s, the Institute's research began to investigate some elements considered regressive in the working class, which would lead it or at least part of it to support Hitler in Germany. Fomented by this post-competitive capitalism, a personality of a sadomasochistic feature has arisen, according to the Frankfurt School, and to understand it, they combined Freudian psychoanalysis with the reflections on the process of reification developed by Lukács in the 1920s. Important examples of this conjunction are present in the chapter on anti-Semitism in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Adorno's texts on the relationship between democracy and propaganda – "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda" [1951] and "Democratic Leadership and Mass Manipulation" [1958]. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse develops this thesis of the integration of the proletariat aiming the welfare State in the US and the leveling of classes in the sphere of consumption and labor that would blur the contradiction between the working class and the bourgeoisie. The idea is precisely that consumption fulfills a function of integration by uniting the proletariat and bourgeoisie and disintegrating both classes as mass.

67. "On Popular Music" 466.
68. "On Popular Music" 468.
69. "On Popular Music" 468.
70. *Prisms* 22.
71. *Aesthetic Theory* 402.
72. "Scientific Experiences" 367.
73. "Scientific Experiences" 340, 341.
74. E. P. Thompson, Raymond Williams, and Terry Eagleton are examples of this tradition of culturalist bias, even if this culturalism is conceived in materialistic terms.
75. *Prisms* 27-28.
76. *Prisms* 22.
77. Theodor W. Adorno, "Culture and Administration", *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London/New York, Routledge, 2001) 123.
78. "Culture and Administration" 129.

Locating the Self: Imputing and Resisting Identity in the Diaries of Carolina de Jesus

Fabio Akcelrud Durão

I

Carolina Maria de Jesus's life story is one of the most interesting chapters of Brazil's cultural history in the last 60 years — but not because of the reasons normally adduced, the construction of a subaltern identity and the belonging (or not) to the literary canon sometimes attacked.¹ On the contrary, as it so often happens in vehement critical instances, responses and reactions are absorbed by the text being commented on representing more internal structural positions than insightful unveiling. This is why the most advisable procedure is an indirect one, tackling the problem obliquely, by way of a detour rather than head on.

As we know from its morphology, the "autobiography" may be translated as the writing of the self, in opposition to "biography," which could be thought of as a kind of writing *about* the self. This may appear a simple and relatively uncontroversial definition, formed as it is by ordinary words, two nouns, two articles and a preposition; and yet, if we look close and long enough it starts to show an abyss within itself: for centuries philosophy has been meditating on what the self is, without ever acquiring a firm, not even irrefutable, but at least minimally uncontroversial toehold from which deductions could follow; and for decades now literary theory, with authors such as Blanchot, Derrida and company, has been probing into the unfathomable depths of writing, conceived as a locus of irreducible difference, uncontainable productivity, insurmountable otherness etc. Indeed, for both "self" and "writing" that recommendation is true, which says that there are some concepts that should not be viewed directly, because when looked in the face they won't take you very far, for what is accumulated in them by far surpasses what a definition can give. However, interestingly enough, the greatest difficulty as well as the strongest source of productivity in the expression "writing of the self" resides not in the nouns, but in the preposition itself. The ambiguity of the genitive, which refers both to subject

and object, suggests that this is a kind of writing not only *belongs* to the self, but has a role in its *constitution*. From this very simple kernel — a preposition! — a whole poetics can be developed: if viewed in conjunction, they can reinforce each other, the self becoming it-self through its own possession in words: storytelling as a way of making sense of oneself, narration as endowing life and time with meaning. This is a logic of predication, whereby the subject and its attributes contribute to the making of one another: the more specific the latter (the attributes), the clearer the image of the former (the subject). Here the idea of “attributes” must be taken very loosely, for they can be made to include adjectives and/or actions, because both adjectives and actions are simultaneously linked to, and transform, the subject — in a certain sense, autobiographical actions can be thought of as adjectives teleologically stretched in time. But “writing” and “self” can also be considered in an opposite direction, as strong terms in tension, in which case the self and writing are dissonant regarding each other, writing not as a property of the self, but as something that tries to capture the self in different, more negative ways. For instance, one form this dissonance could assume would be that of a relation of contradiction, whereby the self strengthens it-self the more it abandons itself to something other, especially writing itself. As an example, think about all autobiographies that deal with the annihilation of self, as in such catastrophic events as Auschwitz or the lost boys journeys of Sudan; or, on a different note, those narratives which problematize the formation of the feminine self in a patriarchal world. This is no longer a predicative and cumulative logic, but rather a disruptive one; it thrives on the paradoxical gesture of being an agent in the act of divesting oneself of agency, of showing how hard it is to be able to properly say “I” (not to mention “am”). Writing now becomes a practice of oblivion and surrender, of a destitution of the self, again, by means of it-self.

What may seem to be a sheer verbal exercise, totally dependent on the English syntax, in fact conceals a distinction of the utmost relevance. The self that gets hold of itself through writing as accumulation appears as a solid entity; by means of narration, it manages to convey the sense of a particular identity, something the writer claims belongs only to herself as a sum of her idiosyncratic specificities, including both, as already mentioned, adjectives and actions, internal disposition and its mixture with outside world. Autobiography’s nightmare is something derived from this: a multitude of authors, all of them shouting at the same time, as in the street fairs we still have in Brazil — a crowd of writers bawling at you: “Look at my autobiography; look at my experience! How special I am, how different!” This slightly hallucinating scene in fact reproduces the logic of the world of commodities, according to which each product promises to be different from all the others. What is hellish about this is that the repetition of the claims for alterity in the end generates the greatest sameness which incidentally is just the opposite of the logic of minimalism, whereby the emphasis on reiteration results in the highlighting of details and the

smallest variations, which suddenly appear momentous. And as in the world of commodities, the result of this dialectic of claims to novelty is a vague, indistinct feeling of frustration, of being cheated of something, a promise which wasn't fulfilled, because its own presupposition already renders it unfeasible.

The self that divests itself offers a divergent dynamics, one not of substance, coherence, accumulation or specificity, but rather of disjunction, nonidentity, and discontinuity, to mention only a few modes negativity may assume in this writing of the self. As was mentioned before, the poetics at stake here is an open one, leaving plenty of space for authorial ingenuity and critical imagination to devise their own respective compositional and analytical tools². Fashioning the appearance of the self – how, where, when, under which guise etc. it should appear — is a matter for technical ingenuity on the part of the author, as it is a question for the interpreter to detect precisely in such strategies the formal principle wherein subjectivity is sedimented. The case to be investigated below, however, is of a different nature, for here the obstacle for the constitution of the self is not to be found in style as a cover up, a shield of writing; neither is it the result of a supposed incompatibility between the instrument of description and the events that must be described, as in Auschwitz or the writing of catastrophe as a whole; nor is the impediment to be ontologically ascribed to the sheer density of language, as in say, the necessarily structuring function of grammar or the hierarchizing role of syntax (as in the extremely different projects of Cage and Lacan), in which case subjectivity should be searched in the ruptures, silences, fissures in the organization of the text considered as a flow of language. If there is something of a “Where is Waldo?” in the interpretation aiming at figuring out where subjectivity can be strongly located in autobiography, then in the case to be discussed subjectivity is not beyond, as it were, but this side of literary expression. Hindrances here are not related to identity traits such as the author's gender or race, nor are they imposed by the being of language and its abundant recourses; rather, they have to do with the way extreme concrete poverty obstructs the self. If in the first case I mentioned, that of the formation of the self through the accumulation of attributes, one could speak of too much self, however strange that may sound (but think how productive this is to read Walt Whitman), here there is too little self, as we shall see why, for limits are imposed from below, from misery and scarcity.

II

Carolina Maria de Jesus published her first diary, *Quarto de Despejo*, or trash room, in 1960; the reception of the book since then has generated one of the richest episodes in recent Brazilian cultural history. The intention here, however, is less anecdotal than theoretical, for hers is a fruitful instance to reflect on the relationship between literature and poverty, self-expression and need. The central claim to be unfolded, as already suggested, is that utter destitution hinders, almost in an anti-Fichtean way, the self-positing of the “I”; as a consequence, we will proceed to consider investments

of subjectivity not centered on the self. Two quite dissimilar zones of subjectivity, as it were, will be proposed those of (1) a quite particular representation of the space of literature as a realm of redemption and order, and (2) of a resistance to fit identity stereotypes both inside and outside diegesis.

But before proceeding, a few comments on the diary as form in the context of autobiographical composition. To be sure, a diary is not an autobiography in the strict sense of the word. It lacks that focal point, the moment of writing, the concentrating perspective that at the same time gives shape to life and so easily distorts it; to use the terminology proposed by Benveniste a long time ago, the occasion of the enunciation, which includes the decision to write, as opposed to the enounced, that which is narrated. In contradistinction to the retrospective horizon of autobiography proper, the diary presents a succession of little points of view corresponding to the structure of days, which do not coalesce into a whole built by the author.³ And yet, of course, the diary is not a random structure, and when we think of how it enacts each day, how it is open to the future, it becomes possible to consider it as a theatrical kind of autobiography, which is a very different conception from the usual representation of the diary as the genre of intimacy. This will be particularly relevant in case of Carolina de Jesus.

Her life story is a fascinating one. A black woman, she was born in 1914, just twenty-six years after the abolition of slavery, in the small and impoverished city of Sacramento, in the State of Minas Gerais. Her experiences of childhood and of her first years as an adult are told in *Bitita's Diary*, published in French in 1982 and translated [sic] into Portuguese in 2014. This is a very interesting text that among other things shows how Jesus's life was never fixed, how she kept going from one place to another always looking for minimally satisfactory conditions of life and decent work. All this roaming came to an end when she moved to São Paulo City to work as a domestic servant, but was soon dismissed when she got pregnant and had to move to a shanty town, a *favela*, making a living as a scavenger collecting paper and metals to sell by the weight. What is really surprising about Carolina de Jesus is that having attended school for only two years she could not only read but had literary aspirations. This desire to become a writer, I would like to argue, is the first instance in which a strong subjective impulse can be identified, albeit a diffuse one. Interestingly enough, this is a drive on the verge of delirium, as we shall see. The story of how *Child of Darkness* came into being is telling enough: in 1958, Audálio Dantas was a reporter of *Folha da Noite*, a newspaper of wide circulation; he was doing a news report on a new children's playground at the Canindé slum, a recent settlement of extremely poor people next to the Tieté river in São Paulo City. Favelas were not exactly new, but the increasing speed of urbanization, much fueled by migration from rural areas, had given them a new magnitude, making them harder to be ignored. While engaging in fieldwork Dantas heard: "What a shame! Grown-ups taking toys from children!" [...] The men continued to swing smugly and she warned: 'You just wait and see; I'm going to put

you all in my book’.”⁴ He approached that curious figure, a favela dweller writer!, and after talking to her found a host of manuscripts, 20 notebooks in total, including a diary describing the daily ordeal of a resident of the slum.

This gesture must be emphasized in all its strangeness: someone from the slums proclaiming herself a poetess is such a strange speech act, mixing as it does the disparate spaces of the slum and high culture, that it is difficult to decide whether it is the result of utter audacity or at least mild insanity.⁵ Be it as it may, this otherwise unlikely utterance worked as fiat lux for progressive reporter Dantas, thus unleashing a particularly rich social and cultural process. That was a time of social unrest and the political atmosphere was propitious, in Brazil and abroad, for a book like *Child of the Dark*: the first edition, 10,000 copies, was all out in three days; new prints came out one after the other but had to be stopped when the printing machinery of Francisco Alves Press broke due to overwork; the diary would be translated into 13 languages and is estimated to have sold more than 1,000,000 copies worldwide. What deserves attention to here is the role played by literature in the economy of the diary as well as in Carolina de Jesus’s psyche. I already pointed to the trigger, the sentence Dantas overheard, a statement that turned delirium into prophecy; now one should add that the writing of the diary is itself an important topic in *Child of the Dark*, and that it is always seen as vehicle of power. Thus we read at some point:

When those female witches invade my shack, my children throw stones at them. The women scream:

“What uneducated brats!”

I reply:

“My children are defending me. You are ignorant and can’t understand that. I’m going to write a book about the favela, and I’m going to tell everything that happened here. And everything that you do to me. I want to write a book, and you with these disgusting scenes are furnishing me with material.”

Silvia asked me to take her name out of my book. She said:

“You are a tramp too. You slept in the flophouse. When you end up, you’ll be crazy.”⁶

Or, a little further on:

“Today was a blessed day for me. The troublemakers of the favela see that I’m writing and know that it’s about them. They decided to leave me in peace. In the favelas the men are more tolerant, more understanding. The rowdies are the women.”⁷

Moreover, the writing of the book is also connected to the world of money:

Senhor Gino came to ask me to go to his shack. That I am neglecting him.
 I answered: no!
 I am writing a book to sell. I am hoping that with this money I can buy a
 place and leave the favela. I don't have to go to anybody's house. Senhor
 Gino insisted. He told me:
 "Just knock and I'll open the door."
 But my heart didn't ask me to go to his room."⁸

It is important not to think that literature is just an instrument to leave the favela, for Carolina de Jesus is not an opportunist; she lacks the kind of consciousness that would allow for a neat means-ends distinction, the rational calculation that would organize the successive steps in way of self-interest: even for a clear strategy of self-preservation a minimum of surplus is needed. Instead, literature *represents*, in both meanings of the term, the world outside the favela. Going a step further, we can see that the desire for literature also permeates the style itself of the diary, which is marked by a weird mixture of registers. Words with a typical literary flavor coexist with the most primary errors of spelling: "bed" is never called "cama," but "leito"; "sun" is never "sol," but "astro rei"; "wash" is seldom "lavar-se" and very often "abluir"; on the other hand "educação" is rendered "iduação," "projeto," "progeto," and verbs in the plural as rule don't get their endings. The same holds for the use of verbs. In Portuguese the placing of pronouns related to verbs is a sensitive part of grammar; in general, placing the pronoun "se" after the verb is an immediate sign of written, cultured language. Jesus uses a very formal structure of pronouns but doesn't manage to make the verb agree with the noun, which is a feature of uneducated speech. Her language, in sum, is a kind of Frankenstein; this makes for a unique style, which can be enjoyed in its own right, but more importantly than that in it we can witness the drive to transcend the terrible world of the favela, which is forcefully described there.

This investment in culture is systematic in all of Carolina de Jesus's writings, some of which we will analyze in a moment. Whenever she wants to praise someone, the first word that comes to her mind is "cultured" (*culto*), and whenever asked about the solution for Brazilian problems something related to culture comes just after necessity to decrease the price of food — the *gêneros alimentícios*, a formal expression Jesus repeats so much that it almost becomes a character in the narrative. But note how projective this image is: in Jesus's diaries there are scarce references to literary works, and no critical comments on the very few of them which are mentioned. More than a means to leave the favela, then, culture and literature are viewed as entities from another world, which in a sense, of course, they are, composing a realm of order, which, it is possible to surmise, plays a stabilizing psychic role for Carolina de Jesus. (The big irony is that this representation of literature as something of immense value at once transcendent and very practical is much more interesting than the one based on identity that present-day defenders of Jesus use to claim that she is a literary

author.⁹⁾ proposed one totally marked by a hierarchy of values, to the current one we have in literary theory, which conceives of literature as sheer play of power motivated by group strategies or personal self-interest. Be it as it may, the point here is that in Jesus's case idealization is too weak a word to describe her relationship to culture, for in this psychic investment and projection, and precisely because of its irreality, we can detect a strong autobiographic manifestation.

But let's move on to the second claim. One aspect that has not been sufficiently emphasized in the recent growing bibliography on Carolina de Jesus is the commercial planning and marketing campaigns surrounding her diaries. *Child of the Dark* was preceded by a number of newspaper articles, interviews and the like; moreover, Dantas and the editors of Francisco Alves Press were shrewd enough to encourage Jesus to continue writing during and after the publication of *Child of the Dark*. *Casa de Alvenaria* — literally "cinder block house" — came out in 1961 and was translated into English as *I'm going to have a little house* in 1997. This is a very interesting book, for here Carolina de Jesus records her expectations for the publication of *Child of the Dark*, and the puzzling experience of moving out of the favela, of enjoying financial comfort and public notoriety. The first aspect in text deserving note is its role in demythologizing the Hollywoodian Cinderella syndrome: if life were a film, Jesus's monstrous fame would be the perfect happy ending pointing to everlasting joy, but unlike what the movies keep telling us, success here, as in social life in general, is a problem rather than redemption. Then there is the question of intertextuality, for by registering the success of *Child of the Dark* and Jesus's role inhabiting the world created by it *Cinder Block House* engulfs its predecessor, which becomes an internal force in the text; or, if we want to invert the focus, *Cinder Block House* represents an attempt to come to terms with *Child of the Dark*. Jesus is not only the subject who wrote the first diary, but also the figure that emerges from it and confronts the writer of the second. This actantial duplication, as it were, helps us advance the following, namely that a significant subjective trait can found here in the way Jesus fails to perceive, let alone to adapt, to the role and the image different people assigned her. In *Cinder Block House* we see Jesus meeting politicians, State governors, senators congressmen, mayors; we see her in high society circles, in receptions and book launches, and we see her being interviewed in different parts of Brazil and abroad. All these individuals surrounding her in one way or another were expecting her to take the place of a representative of the *favela*, a voice that could speak for the subaltern. Jesus could have chosen a position in the Right or the Left ends of the political spectrum. Aligning herself with the former, she could have proposed to help alleviate the public's conscience through her own example, or she could volunteer to sell her voice to publicize palliative measures; conversely, from a leftist position she could join the fight for deep social change through economic reform or political revolution. At the very least she could have negotiated a modest public employment in exchange for the use of her image in an electoral campaign. But what she did

was nothing of the kind; Jesus managed to not fulfill anything of what was expected of her: if intellectuals were searching for popular authenticity, she was a staunch defender of order, including hard labor, female submission and individualism; the black movement had reason to be embarrassed by her admiration of white culture and her almost unbelievable defense of racial democracy in Brazil;¹⁰ and the public in general who might expect to see a humble poor woman, thankful for her new position, found an outspoken, opinionated individual. *Cinder Block House* ends formally well with Jesus going to see a staging of *Child of the Dark* and after the play participating in a round table to discuss it. As opposing voices clash, she is disoriented and in the middle of the tumult writes: "What confusion for me."¹¹ This is a sentence that very much summarizes this diary of displacement.

I believe that in such lack of communication, in this failure to recognize what other people were expecting of her, one can detect an interesting subjective position. Note that it is not the case that Jesus refused the gaze of the other, for in negation there would already imply determination; she simply could not understand what was desired of her. Now, what is amazing in this logic is that it found its way out of the pages of *Cinder Block House* to be established in the relationship between Jesus's writing and the reception of her work, both the mushrooming secondary bibliography that has been appearing in the last 20 years and the numerous public honors being lavished post mortem on her. The underlying methodological principle here is that in certain cases the reception of a text is not just an addition, not something that comes from the outside, but rather an agent that transforms it in its own immanence. What institutions and most critics want to do to the image of Carolina de Jesus today is the same thing the characters in her second diary were doing to her. Both, for different, albeit sometimes overlapping, reasons need a heroine, someone to meaningfully inhabit the past, either to foster social conciliation or feed the struggle for identity politics, which, as usual, has reached Brazil some twenty years after its appearance in the United States.

But to conclude: even as incomplete as this discussion of Carolina de Jesus might have been, it allows us to reach a general idea, namely, the favela is a negative place and that any attempt to redeem it, however imbued of the best intentions, is doomed to fail. It is useless to find a representative of the favela, an identity of the favela or a heroine of the favela; what must be done instead is simply its destruction and replacement by humane communities. In other words, nothing short of a collective and general response to the problem can put an end to it. Through her struggle with language, by her desire for literature as a utopic realm and with her incomprehension about what was desired of her Carolina de Jesus makes this clear, in a quite oblique way, by writing herself.

Notes

1. Two earlier versions of this text were read at the 25th Chinese Foreign Biographical Society International Conference and at the 2019 MLG conference. I would like to thank Profs. Zhao Baisheng and Nicholas Brown for the invitations and the discussions that took place on both occasions.
2. In *Modernism and Coherence: Four Chapters of a Negative Aesthetics* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008), I tried to develop a model determinate denial, on the part of literary works, of that which is predicated to them through criticism.
3. To be sure, the writer can adapt the diaries entries in the end in order to fit a posteriori intention, which distorts the form, depriving it of what is most interesting in it.
4. “[A]onde já se viu uma coisa dessas, uns homens grandes tomando brinquedo de criança! [...] Os homens continuam no bem-bom do balanço e ela advertiu: — Deixe estar que eu vou botar vocês todos no meu livro!” (emphasis in the original) Audálio Dantas. “Nossa irmã Carolina” In Jesus, Carolina de Maria. *Quarto de despejo: diário de uma favelada*. (São Paulo: Livraria Francisco Alves, Editora Paulo de Azevedo Ltda, 1960) 9.
5. Farias (2017) observes that Jesus used to go to newspapers offices and that she had appeared in print in 1940 as in Rio’s *A Noite* (Jan 9, 1940); still, by the time Dantas found her, she had already given up having her work published. Without Dantas’ support and vision, which included privileging the diaries over the fiction and verse, Carolina de Jesus would never have become a celebrity she was then and now.
6. Carolina Maria de Jesus. *Quarto de despejo. Diário de uma favelada* (São Paulo: Ática 2014 [1960]) 24 [Trans *Child of the Dark*. 1962].
7. De Jesus, *Quarto de despejo. Diário de uma favelada* 25 (July 15, 1955).
8. *Quarto* 31 (July 27, 1955).
9. As could be expected, the debate on whether Jesus’s writings are literary or not is a ferocious one, mobilizing as it does feelings of outrage from both sides. What this discussion shows is that the polemics as a whole is misguided, for the idea of literature that emerges from such abstract confrontation is intrinsically unfruitful. Instead of asking whether it is, it would be much more productive to inquire what it *does* to literature. This is what I attempted to do in the case of Arthur Bispo do Rosário, another Brazilian outcast. See Fabio Durão, “Arthur Bispo do Rosário: The Ruse of Brazilian Art,” *Wasafiri*. 30 (2015) 32-39.
10. E.g. “I think I should be happy because I was born in Brazil where there is no racial hate. I know that the whites hold power. But they are human beings and the law is the same for everybody. If one could compare all the whites in the world, Brazilian whites would be the best.” Interestingly enough, too, after leaving the shanty town Jesus gets herself two white maids, one after the other. *Carolina Maria de Jesus Casa de Alvenaria* (São Paulo: Editora Francisco Alves 1961) 120.
11. *de Jesus, Casa de Alvenaria* 149.

Tavid Mulder. "Até Então (Until Then)." *Mediations* 35.1-2 (Fall 2021/Spring 2022) 45-54. www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/until-then

Dar corpo ao impossível: O sentido da dialética de Theodor Adorno

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Autêntica Editora, 2019

320 pp

US \$49.97

ISBN: 978-8551304556

Até Então (Until Then)

Tavid Mulder

Vladimir Safatle's new book, *Dar corpo ao impossível: O sentido da dialética de Theodor Adorno* (*Giving Body to the Impossible: The Meaning of Theodor Adorno's Negative Dialectic*, 2019), shows that he ought to be counted among the impressive list of dialectical thinkers in Brazil: Antonio Candido, Roberto Schwarz, Paulo Arantes. We might thus ask, before discussing Safatle's book, why has such a rich dialectical tradition emerged in the periphery? It is not simply that the dialectic has been taken from one context and "applied" in Brazil. The dialectic is premised on the rejection of such methodologism, that is, the idea that principles can be justified first and then put into practice. Instead, the dialectic always begins in the middle of a conceptually mediated socio-historical situation. The historical context in which the Hegelian dialectic itself emerged has been brilliantly reconstructed by Paulo Arantes in his *Ressentimento da dialética* (1996), a work that unfortunately remains largely unknown outside the Portuguese-speaking world. Arantes traces the emergence of the dialectic to Germany's peripheral status relative to classical bourgeois society, to the disjuncture between radical philosophical theory and intransigent political institutions from which intellectuals were alienated. The socio-historical conditions for the dialectic were brought into relief for Arantes by Roberto Schwarz's diagnosis of the same sort of dissonance between ideas and reality in nineteenth-century Brazil, when the elite cynically adopted liberal ideology despite its blatant contradiction with the slave economy.¹ While Schwarz shows how liberal ideas reveal their truth when they appear "out of place" in the periphery, Arantes historicizes the Hegelian dialectic and uncovers its political content.

We might say that what Arantes does for Hegel in *Ressentimento da dialética*, Vladimir Safatle does for Adorno in *Dar corpo ao impossível*. Safatle, indeed, suggests that his reconstruction of Adorno “could perhaps only really occur in a country like Brazil” (249). Working through the negative dialectic in the periphery, Safatle historicizes Adorno’s thought and uncovers its radical potential. In this way, Safatle challenges the view that Adorno’s negativity commits him to nihilism and political passivity. Safatle shows, instead, how the negative dialectic preserves the force for social transformation through its process of dissolving worlds, through disclosing contradictions that reveal latent tendencies that until then seemed impossible. Moreover, Safatle insists that Adorno’s work continues, rather than breaks with, the Hegelian dialectic. Safatle’s book is far-ranging, and he offers engaging discussions of links between Adorno’s negative dialectic and a host of non-dialectical thinkers, including Freud, Heidegger and Deleuze. But I’d like to focus in this review on what I take to be the most compelling aspects of the book, namely, Safatle’s discussion of the Hegel-Adorno relation and his argument for the significance of the negative dialectic in the periphery. I’ll conclude the review by asserting, even more emphatically than Safatle himself does, that the periphery constitutes a condition for the possibility of the negative dialectic in *Dar corpo*. To do so, I’ll make explicit how this dialectic, by incorporating truths revealed in the way the periphery demands “a certain stabilization in anomie” (250), a way of following and violating norms at the same time, highlights the limitations of normative readings of Hegel and emphasizes the need to bring Hegel and Adorno together to account for both the resilience of norms when they have lost all authority and for the possibility of radical social transformation.

The first section of *Dar corpo*, “The Emergence of the Negative Dialectic: Hegel, Marx, Adorno,” reconstructs the fundamental concepts of the negative dialectic—totality, contradiction, non-identity, the infinite, materialism—in order to argue that Adorno’s philosophy articulates and develops Hegelian dialectics. Adorno’s critics hold that he, having abandoned the positive-rational moment of synthesis in the dialectic, commits himself to nihilism or a conception of the non-identical that boils down to Kant’s thing-in-itself. Relatedly, Adorno’s incessant insistence on negativity appears to rule out any political action, in particular the possibility of structural transformation. But Safatle shows, by detailing Adorno’s theoretical debts to Hegel and Marx, that the disintegrating character of the negative dialectic is inseparable from the emergence of a true totality. Safatle insists that what animates Adorno’s project is the sort of movement Hegel describes in the 47th paragraph of the *Phenomenology*. “Appearance is the arising and passing away that does not itself arise and pass away,” Hegel writes before then offering the peculiar image of “the Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk; yet because each member collapses as soon as he drops out, the revel is just as much transparent and simple repose.”² Gillian Rose, in her essay “From Negative Dialectics to Speculative Thinking,” points to the same passage as evidence that Adorno strays from Hegel, but Safatle, without naming Rose,

explains how this movement of “arising and passing away” defines an “emergent dialectic” shared by Adorno and Hegel. Emergent properties belong to the whole, not the individual parts, and an “emergent dialectic” thus “comprehends that the actualization of the productive force of totality implies structural transformations” because it “dissolves the identity of the parts,” “as if the emergence of totality had the power to retroactively cause its moments” (35). The negative dialectic, therefore, does not disavow totality. It retains it as a critical category that reveals the falsity of the existing whole and the possibility for “the emergence of that which could be different and has not yet begun” (35). Because it deals with what “has not yet begun,” the negative dialectic does not delineate what is merely possible in a given situation. Rather, it produces modes of collapse, the disintegration of worlds, making possible what, to use Safatle’s oft-repeated Portuguese phrase, *até então* (until then) appeared impossible. The significance of this negativity, for Safatle, ought to be grasped in light of the context of the mid-twentieth century welfare state. Unlike, for instance, Habermas’s theory of communicative action, which takes for granted the grammar of social relations in the welfare state and limits itself to procedures for resolving conflicts within those relations, the negative dialectic negates the modes of integration into the total state.

To adequately reconstruct ideas of dialectical collapse and the emergence of totality, Safatle turns to the concept of contradiction. For someone like Axel Honneth, contradiction indicates the “normative deficits of phenomenon in relation to their own concepts” (49). Or, in a more familiar understanding of Adorno, contradiction might seem to designate “an object devoid of concept” (50). Such a notion of contradiction would commit Adorno to a sort of Kantian philosophy in which finite concepts remain tragically inadequate to the infinite. But Safatle insists that Adorno, like Hegel, holds to an internal relation between contradiction and the infinite, such that the infinite “describes *forms of self-relation that are immediately self-negations and self-determinations*” (50). We might think here of how Hegel reads *Antigone* in terms of the collapse of Greek ethical life. “[T]he Greek polis,” Safatle writes, “shows itself to rest on a principle that, once realized, enters into contradiction with the limits of its own modes of determination” (59). Safatle proceeds to argue that this conception of the infinite as self-realization and self-negation lies at the heart of Adorno’s account of authentic works of art. Schoenberg’s *Moses and Aron*, for instance, exhibits for Adorno the “preestablished disharmony” whereby artworks “faithful to their truth content must destroy themselves in the process, since their procedures of integral construction must be posited and must fail” (71). Throughout these examples, Safatle traces contradiction as a real, not merely logical, force that “destroys the world as stable horizon of experience and social life” (57), allowing for the emergence of unprecedented configurations.

A question raises itself at this moment: how can the negative dialectic refuse synthesis and retain the category of totality? In order to answer this question, Safatle

begins by underscoring Adorno's critique of Hegel's figures of reconciliation: namely, the state, World Spirit, and the identity of subject and object within the absolute. This leads Safatle to formulate two ways of understanding totality as a dialectical category. In the first case, which he associates with Georg Lukács, totality consists of deterministic relations. The necessary character of these relations allows Lukács to hold his concept of imputed class consciousness, that is, to deduce the consciousness the proletariat should have if it grasped the totality of capitalist social relations. In the second case, totality is understood in terms of process, "as a system open to periodic and infinite disequilibrium, since the continuous integration of new elements initially experienced as contingent and indeterminate reconfigures the meaning of the rest" (89). In light of the latter conception of totality, Safatle discusses Adornian mediation and mimesis. As Adorno insists, mediation is not a middle between extremes. Mimesis, accordingly, cannot be understood as some sort of common denominator between subject and object. Instead, mimesis consists in mediation in the extremes. The subject, in this form of mimesis, "finds, within itself, a 'nucleus of the object,' in the sense of an opacity belonging to the resistance of what objects to the integral presentation of consciousness" (92). This would appear to run counter to the image of the Hegelian subject assimilating all difference, but Safatle shows how Adorno's concept of mimesis takes inspiration from Hegel's statement, "The being of the I is a thing (*das Sein des Ich ein Ding ist*)" (94). A more significant disagreement between Hegel and Adorno could be found in the notion of universal history. Adorno takes issue with the sacrificial logic of Hegel's philosophy of history, the way particulars get instrumentalized for the realization of the universal. Against Hegel's optimistic view of historical progress, Adorno famously writes in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that "no universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb" (101). And yet, Adorno does not simply dismiss the concept of universal history, holding, instead, that it "must be constructed and negated" (100). Universal history is a "permanent catastrophe," but this definition is not simply nihilistic because it "presupposes a social suffering following from the consciousness of something unrealized in history" (101). Even though it is on the question of totality that Adorno would seem to definitively break with Hegel, Safatle's discussion shows that "the difference between Adorno and Hegel" might be better understood "as a strange difference between Hegel and himself" (110).

Mimesis also figures centrally in Safatle's account of Adorno's materialist twist on Hegelian dialectics. If mimesis consists of self-recognition in the object, it necessarily entails for Adorno a "somatic dimension of modes of relation" (135). Marx himself anticipated such a thought in his critique of Hegel's abstract conception of alienation. Safatle argues that when Marx speaks of overcoming alienation through appropriation, he does not evoke a "relation of property." Instead, he gestures toward what Adorno will formulate as mimesis, a "synthesis that operates at the level of sensibility," a "relation between non-identities that mutually transform each of the

terms in relation" (134). In this discussion, Safatle draws out the connection between property as a legal category and as a form of logical predication. The proletariat, he compellingly proposes, lacks properties in both senses. This conception of the proletariat, for Safatle, lies behind Adorno's apparent rejection of class politics. Adorno may have turned away from "organizing as a class" because it was "based on the acceptance of an ontology of properties" (139), but Safatle shows that Adorno, for all his pessimism, enables a conception of the proletariat as "an ontological position linked to generalized dispossession as the condition for effective action, along with being linked to the expression of negativity and the irreducibility to predications as the fundamental position of the subject" (140-141). This move, with and away from Adorno, highlights Safatle's impressive ability to historicize the dialectic. Safatle argues that Adorno formulates the negative dialectic as a critique of the welfare state, of its forms of integration. But Safatle does not simply restrict Adorno's thought to his historical context. Working through the negative dialectic in the periphery, where the welfare state never achieved the stability of mid-century Europe, Safatle can both see the historical limits of Adorno's thought and the current possibility of extracting radical potential from his work. Now, in the ongoing collapse of modernization, "critique can once again insist on the dynamics necessary in the emergence of political subjects" (128).

Some readers may express skepticism at this interpretation of Adornian politics. After all, didn't Adorno reveal his conservative side when he failed to support student activists in the sixties? In response to this skepticism, Safatle neither condemns Adorno nor vaguely suggests that he had good reasons for dismissing this activism. Safatle holds that Adorno never renounced revolutionary praxis. He discusses in detail Adorno's responses to development of the SPD, his worries about the rise of neonazism and his recognition that the student movement in Germany failed to connect with workers. This leads Safatle to formulate thoughts on the role of intellectuals. Refusing both the idea of the intellectual as a spokesperson for the proletariat and the picture of Adorno comfortably contemplating the scene from the "Grand Hotel Abyss," Safatle insists that "the intellectual class has a disintegrating function that only appears in an effective form when it assumes for itself the desire for revolutionary praxis, when its non-participation is active" (216).

This discussion of intellectuals continues when Safatle turns Paulo Arantes. Moreover, at this point in the argument, Safatle makes explicit the role of the periphery in his reconstruction of the negative dialectic. As Arantes and Roberto Schwarz have persuasively demonstrated, thinking about Brazil is inseparable from the dialectic because of the need to recognize the identity of opposites: backwardness and modernization, liberal ideology and slave labor. The periphery is characterized by a duality of mental life, in which "synthesis by integration ends up confirming what should be overcome or incessant passages in opposites that could even lead to an unprecedented coexistence between modernization and archaism, that is, to a certain

stabilization in anomie” (249-250). In this context, Safatle articulates a negative dialectic that would bring about the “dissolution of solidarity among opposites” (251), rather than seek to integrate them as in the conservative modernization of, for instance, the Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade. Paulo Arantes exemplifies for Safatle such a negative critique, “a dialectic that would refuse to give a positive answer to the dilemmas of duality” (250). We can see this in Arantes’s work, which, as I indicated earlier, elaborates on the notion of “out of place ideas” and the fertile observation that the peripheral situation closely resembles that of Hegel and the German idealists. Arantes takes up Marx’s insight that the German idealists, unlike early political economists, faced political institutions that refused to carry out their ideas. Moreover, in contrast to French political thinkers, they lacked a social base that was moved to action by their philosophical programs. On the one hand, this context leads to the characteristically exaggerated role attributed to ideas in German idealism. “[T]he history of intellectuals,” Safatle writes, appears as the “history of an extreme oscillation between figures of ineffectivity” (256). But, on the other hand, it also underlines the emergence of the dialectic as the possibility of “a certain alliance between subaltern classes and the intellectual class,” an alliance that would bring about “the force of dissolution of the very worlds of intellectuality, its progressive movement of real transformation, giving an organized ground to the abstraction of indeterminate negation” (260). This analysis leads Arantes to an anti-philosophical stance, since philosophy primarily serves to legitimate state power in late twentieth-century Brazil. But Safatle insists that Arantes does not abandon philosophy; rather, it remains implicit in his work. Drawing on Arantes’s own work on German nihilism, Safatle argues that Arantes embodies a “true nihilism” that does not lament unrealized possibilities or withdraws into paralysis. Instead, this true nihilism “puts into action a ‘negative energy’ that can only be understood as the consequential taking of a position on the nullity of everything that is finite,” leading “to the implosion of the finite” (265). Arantes’s more recent work, *O Novo Tempo do Mundo* (2014), stands out for Safatle because it renders explicit these philosophical commitments and their links to the “negative energy of the subaltern classes” (260). This work diagnoses the collapse of a certain Hegelian conception of history, but rather than despair at this loss, Arantes connects it to the negativity—and hence possibility—of the 2013 insurrection in Brazil.

Safatle closes out *Dar corpo* by revisiting a debate between Roberto Schwarz and Bento Prado Jr. on the national novel. Polemically, Safatle argues that the negative dialectic is most effectively at work not in Schwarz, but in the contribution of Prado, the “anti-dialectical thinker par excellence” (272). Schwarz, following in the footsteps of Antonio Candido, speaks of a dialectic of *malandragem* (roguery) in his influential essay known in English as “Objective Form.” But Safatle insists that “there is no dialectic of *malandragem*” (263), at least not in the negative sense that he articulates in this book and in the sense that Schwarz articulates in his own work on Machado de Assis.

In constantly passing back and forth between order and disorder, the dialectic of *malandragem* stabilizes a situation in anomie rather than embodies “a negative energy that pushes the structure to ruptures and revolutionary transformations” (263). Moreover, Safatle takes up Prado’s critique that Schwarz rejects the autonomy of literature in assuming “the continuity of consciousness and being, between lived experience and structural knowledge” (272). It is Prado, not Schwarz, who remains faithful to the Adornian idea that “art becomes social through its opposition to society” (274), by determinately negating, not copying, social relations.³ In mid-twentieth century Brazil, the novelist who best exemplifies this negativity for Safatle is João Guimarães Rosa. His novel *Grande Sertão: Veredas* (1956) must be read against the background of the horizon of “integration” and “social pacts” that underlined national development projects (277). This work exhibits “the transformative force of contradiction,” not through the sort of “dynamic of integration” one finds in Oswald de Andrade, but in “a disintegration capable of opening space for the total reordering of contents” (280). More specifically, *Grande Sertão* carries out this negativity through its characteristically “inappropriate” language. It is, in other words, a language that cannot be conceived as belonging to pre-existing identities, a language that undoes the identitarian basis of developmentalist social pacts. Politically, *Grande Sertão* does not simply seek to “expand the horizon of possible demands to be recognized” (289). More profoundly, through this language of inappropriation, it dissolves the “modes of constitution of demands,” opening space for the “emergence of what until then were nonexistent enunciating subjects” (289). In this way, aesthetic autonomy appears not as moral autonomy, which is premised on individual self-determination. Indeed, aesthetic autonomy appears “as heteronomy from the point of view of moral autonomy,” but by making “worlds collapse,” aesthetic autonomy constitutes the “practice of heteronomy that is the true autonomy” (296).

In a response to reviews of her book *Mourning Sickness*, Rebecca Comay asserts, “We don’t need Hegel to tell us” what has become the calling card of contemporary Hegelians like Pippin and Pinkard, namely, “that normative authority is precarious, that it is socially and historically constituted, and thus inevitably loses traction.”⁴ Instead, Hegel confronts the “more painful question” of how norms “impose a kind of normativity even in the absence of all authority.”⁵ To elaborate this aspect of Hegel’s thought, Comay draws on Freudian psychoanalysis, but “normativity in the absence of all authority” aptly describes what Safatle takes to be a central dilemma of mental life in the periphery, namely, that norms must be simultaneously followed and violated. Indeed, I would argue that the periphery offers a rich ground for thinking through the limitations of normative readings of Hegel that center on practical contradictions and institutional rationality. The history of Brazil offers no shortage of examples in which the inadequacy of rules fails to generate a normative pressure to transform the rules or the practices they govern.

In this way, the contradictions of the periphery might seem to confirm Adorno’s

pessimism about historical progress when compared to Hegelian optimism. We might recall Adorno's statements about how late capitalism has eroded the very bourgeois ideals that used to be the basis of immanent critique. But Safatle's *Dar corpo* suggests something quite different, a radical potential drawn from Hegel and Adorno and made possible paradoxically by the peculiar "stuckness" of the periphery. The recurring experience in the periphery of practical contradiction *without* overcoming makes a normative interpretation of Hegel appear inadequate. If such an interpretation rests on a "subtle teleology" of "gradualist ... conceptual improvement,"⁶ the dualisms of peripheral social life suggest a blockage in movement. But a blockage not only impedes gradual conceptual improvement. It also builds up energy until it erupts as the dissolution of a world, of a normative horizon of expectations and interpretations. This is why Safatle suggests that this book could perhaps only have been written in Brazil. In thinking through the peripheral situation alongside other dialectical thinkers, Safatle recognizes the centrality of modes of collapse in Hegel's dialectic and he shows us that we can agree with Adorno that there might be nothing worth fulfilling in bourgeois society without this committing us to a pessimistic paralysis since what until then—"até então"—seems impossible undergoes in the hands of the negative dialectic "a redescription that opens new possibilities for action" (123).

Notes

1. Luiz Philipe de Caux and Felipe Catalani, for instance, suggest that Arantes extends Roberto Schwarz's notion of "ideas out of place," showing how it "does not only apply to the Brazilian case, but can help explain the emergence of the dialectic itself at the beginning of the 19th century in Germany." Luiz Philipe de Caux and Felipe Catalani, "A passage do dois ao zero: dualidade e disintegração no pensamento dialético brasileiro (Paulo Arantes, leitor de Roberto Schwarz)," *Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros*, 74 (2019), 121.
2. G. W. F Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by Terry Pinkard, Cambridge University Press (2018), 27.
3. This is, I feel obliged to clarify, a misreading of Schwarz. As Schwarz insists in the "Objective Form" essay, successful works of literature cannot be understood as a mere illustration of a pre-existing social structure. A novel compels conviction as a plausible account of social relations through the "almost total separation" of "the novelistic sphere" and reality. Roberto Schwarz, *Two Girls and Other Essays*, Verso (2012), 24.
4. Rebecca Comay, "Hegel: Non-Metaphysical, Post-Metaphysical, Post-Traumatic (Response to Lumsden, Redding, Sinnerbrink)," *Parrhesia* 17 (2013), 54-55.
5. Comay, "Hegel" 54.
6. "Hegel" 57.

O Novo tempo do mundo: e outros estudos sobre a era da emergência

Paulo Arantes

Biotempo, 2014

459 pp

US \$15.93

ISBN: 978-8575593677

Paulo Arantes and the Order of Time: Temporal Determinants of a Global Order

Silvia L. López

To think of the future involves drawing a horizon of expectations into which our concepts are embedded. It means to acknowledge an internal temporal structure to them that speaks of an orientation and a relation between a fictional anteriority and a not yet realised futurity. Such has been until now a basic assumption and experience of our modern understanding of the world in all its diachronic synchronicity. Current epochal discussions regarding the end of the horizon of expectations of modern times seem to indicate a shift in this understanding, bringing with it a series of critical-theoretical problems that are not simply philosophical, but also fundamentally political. How we come to understand "the new time of the world" relates directly to the afterlife (*Nachleben*) of critical theory in it.¹

There is no reason for me to elaborate here dominant time theories about the stretched present, where the past loses its depth of focus and where the future has arrived presentifying our life-time (*Lebenszeit*).² The direct link between the acceleration of innovation and data gathering, that in turn produces more presentification technologies and corresponding forms of subjectivation. New forms of global asynchronicity generate new, but not unfamiliar inequalities. Some of these discussions go back some decades, think of Virilio among many others, but they have taken a new turn with important consequences in the discourse of the Anthropocene.³ In it the future is not only detemporalized into the permanent catastrophic present of anthropogenic activity, but it is populated by the normed and atemporal notion of species, disfiguring the historical categories of past and future.

Taking seriously the state of perpetual emergency that the Anthropocene announces would require an understanding of how the distance between the horizon of human expectations and its distance from human experience has been reduced so drastically, and with it the temporal determinants of the future and the past. The cancelling of that historical distance has infiltrated an ever expanding present necessary for coinciding with a future, which in principle has already arrived. The idea of a species-in-the-now, whose conceptual constitution is necessarily *après coup*, becomes the functioning term in the revision of our temporal-historical categories and hence of our understanding of politics.

In his book *O novo tempo do mundo*, Brazilian Marxist philosopher Paulo Arantes offers an analysis of what he calls “the new time of the world” in an era of decreasing expectations. According to Arantes, the Braudelian world temporality, as we had known it, has come now to a full disarticulation. Its zero hour, the events between 1789-1815 which initiated a political storm until then unknown in the modern world, inaugurated and crystallised a system of values supported by capitalist compulsion and unending accumulation. Following Wallerstein, Arantes argues that the capitalist strata extracted two lessons from the revolutionary uprisings in Europe and the New World. The first lesson was the threat that the new Robespierres unleashed as the plebeians of the world. The slaves of Santo Domingo, the European peasantry, and the *sans culottes*, to cite three examples, showed how a world struggle over the accumulation of capital was being forged. These revolutionary uprisings were intensely fought because of the unprecedented threat they presented to the polarised structures of the capitalist world system. They configured the first true anti-systemic revolts of the modern world.

The defeat of the 1848 revolution, which Reinhart Koselleck had interpreted as the triumph of the bourgeoisie against the reactionary strata of the Ancien Régime, Arantes reads as the moment of the geocultural invention of something akin to a technology of the management of risks provoked by an excess of expectations; a kind of astute normalization of social change. This was the second lesson learned, derived perhaps as mere consequence from the Great Fear that the unleashing of an anti-hierarchical democratic avalanche would alter the process of accumulation. It was only through the acceptance of gradual transformation that the world bourgeoisie would have its chance at containing it and reducing its rhythm. According to Arantes, this is how the new temporal horizon of the world came to consolidate itself. Its vanishing point was an expectation very different from the prognosis calculated by absolutist power and by the evolution of the political mechanism to direct the system. To control it and dominate it became the job of modern politics.

Arantes rereads Koselleck (for whom the meaning of the new in modernity is a new temporal understanding [*Neue Zeit*] which accompanied the capitalist acceleration of progress) to illuminate how the culture of legitimation of historical capitalism

became visible in the growing scale of the planet over the past two hundred years.⁴ The capitalist world economy was an immense field of expectations that, while antagonistic, was still unified in an unknown future, so unknown that to know it and to control it became the continuous job of politics. In his radicalized reading of Koselleck, brushing it against the grain of the world-systems theory, Arantes concludes that the role not only of critique but of politics itself had been the management of this horizon of expectations.

To fully understand the framework of Arantes' *O novo tempo do mundo* and its implication it is important for us to engage with Koselleck's ideas in his book *Crisis and Critique: Enlightenment and Pathogenesis of Modern Society*. What are the temporal determinants of crisis and revolution in a global order? Are we living in a truly crisis conscious time that, much like once pre-revolutionary France, prophesies revolution? Why or why not? Are its political prognosis and its historico-philosophical concealment themselves aspects of the very phenomenon of crisis itself as Koselleck argued with regard to the politics of Enlightenment during the era of Absolutism? It seems that today's crisis is the subsumption of the political to the economic in an era of indetermination whereby future oriented utopian ideologies are systematically undone. This ideological operation sets us back to pre-enlightenment temporal political determinants, this time not of an Absolutist character but of a neoliberal one that require us to articulate again a politics of critique and of global determinate readings that recover the very temporal dimensions of a term, that once upon a time both announced and elided a revolutionary moment.

Reinhart Koselleck's account has two fundamental strengths that make him a thinker of choice for Arantes. First, his account of the emergence of critique and crisis is not philological, but rather a historical-semantic explanation of the emergence in the late eighteenth century, as terms proper to a particular form of temporality. Second, his is a political reading, conservative as it may be, of why critique reaches its limits vis-à-vis the very social position of its own enabling class. An attentive reading of Koselleck allows us to understand on the one hand, why and how the hostility to critique dates back to Absolutism and finds its way all the way to the present, and on the other hand, how a demand for the normativization of critique has brought it under the very order of dominant reason, as expressed today in the discourses of its current hegemonic political formation, that of liberal capitalist democracies. It seems as if in the current crisis, we find ourselves in the situation exactly opposite to the one Koselleck described as "a crisis conscious time that once prophesied revolution, and whose political prognosis and its historico-philosophical concealment were themselves aspects of the very phenomenon of crisis itself." It is important to explore how we arrived at this inversion.

Crisis, Critique, and the Threat of Revolution

In his book Reinhart Koselleck seeks to illuminate, through the connection of the terms critique and crisis, the relationship between an utopian philosophy of history and the revolutionary period that commences in 1789. Koselleck argues that the *Illuminati's* failure to make the connection between the critique they practiced and the crisis that was forthcoming led to the conjuring of the crisis and at the same time to its political obfuscation. The political significance of crisis remained hidden and stored in historico-philosophical images of the future proper to the philosophy of history they advanced.⁵

To understand the significance of this argument, we must first revisit some of Koselleck's assumptions about the semantics of historical time in the eighteenth century. It is during the Enlightenment, according to Koselleck, that the term "modernity" (*Neue Zeit*) differentiates itself into a term that acquires both a qualitative meaning with respect to the newness of the era and a transcendence of future orientation (*Neueste Zeit*). This reorientation of the term and the opening of a particular semantic space is possible at the moment when Christian eschatology declines, science advances, and the awareness of the New World is firmly in place. It is in the decades around 1800 when the terms "revolution," "progress," "development," "crisis," "Zeitgeist," all acquire temporal indications which were not present previously. Time is no longer the medium in which all histories proceed; time acquires a historical quality and becomes a historical and dynamic force in itself. The concept of history, as expressed for the first in the collective and singular form "*Geschichte*," acquires a new meaning in and for itself, apart from a particular subject or object.⁶

Modernity cannot be understood then simply as a periodizing category, but must be understood rather as a rupture in the quality of historical time itself. The characteristics of the historical matrix of modernity which determine it as a quality of social life include the valorization of the present over the past as its negation and transcendence, the opening up toward an indeterminate future that is only possible if the present is conceived of as surmountable and as a future relegation to the past, and the tendency toward the elimination of the historical present itself as the perpetual transition between a continually changing past and an indeterminate future.⁷

This distinct kind of temporality affected as well the internal temporal structure of our political concepts, which became instruments for the direction of historical movement, hence making possible for the first time for political rivals to make reference to each other in true ideological terms.⁸ It will be important to remember this detail for the argument I will offer in the next pages regarding the relationship between the current crisis, the erasure of political discourses that are identified today as ideological and, hence, pregnant with a future oriented temporality, that was once defined as utopian.

Of particular interest is the question he poses regarding how the prognostication of revolution comes about and, specifically in the case of the Enlightenment, how

exactly is it that the threat of revolution that so endangered the Absolutist state could live on long after the *Illuminati* were gone. For him the answer lies in the power of the philosophy of history articulated by the *Illuminati* and the way in which their plan of conquest was perceived as a threat by those under attack. Koselleck explains, “While the Masons in this document of 1742 did not yet claim to encompass history totally nor to determine the future, the *Illuminati* did identify the course of history with their plans, wishes, and hopes. Historico-philosophical legitimation was one — and perhaps the most important aspect of their plan.”⁹

Twenty years later he will retake this point in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* and formulate it with even greater clarity:

It was the philosophy of historical progress which first detached early modernity from its past, and with a new future, inaugurated our modernity. A consciousness of time and the future begins to develop in the shadows of absolutist politics, first in secret, later openly, sustained by an audacious combination of politics and prophecy. There enters into the philosophy of progress a typical eighteenth-century mixture of rational prediction and salvational expectation. Progress occurred to the extent that the state and its pronostication was never able to satisfy soteriological demands which persisted within a state whose own existence depended upon the elimination of millenarian expectations.¹⁰

The point here is that the *Iluminati*’s plan to bring about the collapse of the State was temporally projected into the future, but the paradox of their self-historical identification of plan and history was that no direct politics ever entered into their moral self-confidence of how the State would collapse by itself. It is in this sense that Koselleck understands that their moral-philosophical stance shrouds the possibility of revolution, while conjuring it at the same time.¹¹ Revolution prophesied, but the dialectic of society and politics invested the struggle with a radicalism completely out of proportion to the social position of the bourgeoisie.

Let’s return then to Koselleck’s original question of how revolution is prophesied and how its threat was able to live on. On strictly historical grounds, he passes a negative judgment on the position of the *Illuminati* for advancing a position that exacerbated tensions at that specific historical moment through a dualistic position that morally intensified the battle, while veiling it politically. We can be easily convinced by his historical explanation, but we can also pass a different political judgment on it. We could argue, for example, that it is precisely with the emergence of a philosophy of history of future orientation that allowed for prophesying of revolution, but that it was that which allowed its threat to live on. Clearly, revolution was not the causal outcome of a philosophy of history with new temporal determinants — Koselleck himself accepts that political decisions were already pre-empted by the

French Revolution — however, the argument is not whether the *Illuminati* could have brought about revolutionary change in the political sphere, but rather how their future-oriented philosophy of history allowed for the threat of revolution to permeate the very political sphere that it sought to transform and transcend. This is not a minor detail in the history of a century that we remember today as the century of revolutions. From the revolutions of 1848 all the way to the Commune, the spirit of the age was one that bet its existence on the possibility of radical transformation, in a language always pregnant with historico-philosophical images of the future.

Since the end of the Cold War, we have grown accustomed to the hegemony not only of liberal technocratic political discourses, but also to philosophical-theoretical positions defined by contingencies, multiplicities, multitudes, agonistic antagonisms that are purely formal, which prophesy not only no future oriented revolutionary change, but that are, hence, at no risk of leaving any kind of political threat behind. While they may seem to sit on opposite sides of the political spectrum, they must be thought of as being part of one political continuum. We have been indoctrinated to believe that any position that advances a historical-philosophical program of utopian transformation, not only is not faithful to its time, but that it conjures *après-coup* all those terms that belong to the modern past: ideology, revolution, utopia. It is as if by an act of will, the historical semantic universe we inhabited before 1989 was taken away from us and declared as no longer existing. No self-respecting intellectual would dare to live in the ruins of the future's past after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Or so at least it seems to have been in the European-North American axis, until the eruption of the present crisis.¹² My interest here is not to repeat the well-known historical and intellectual reasons for why post-cold war ideologies of western democratic virtue become the ruling discourse of the present, but simply to point out that with the discourses of “the end of history” came also the impossibility of imagining its transformation.

The temporal determinant of the political-semantic field became the present as culmination of a history that found itself in no need of utopias of radical transformation. I can't offer here a detailed historic-semantic account proper to the political discourses of the post-cold war period, but I invite us to think of the theoretical preoccupations of the dominant liberal repertoire, deeply seated in the atemporal universe of rights, norms and justifications that seem to have prescribed and regulated the theoretical terms in which politics was to be thought about in our times. Popular democracies, socialisms of the 21st century, or new constitutional forms that broke with those of liberal representative democracies were considered, until yesterday, political forms that belonged to places historically lagging, still stuck in primitive imaginaries of utopian orientation.

It is in this sense that the current political-theoretical indeterminacy and the very clearly future-oriented destruction of the European welfare State that we are currently witnessing are two aspects of the single phenomenon of crisis. If the

dialectic of society and politics invested the struggle against the absolutist State with a radicalism completely out of proportion to the social position of the bourgeoisie at that time, at this historical juncture we find ourselves at its precise opposite moment: the lack of prophesied revolution is directly linked to a constitutive discourse of capitalist democracies, always contingent and open and with no future-oriented plans, that have dominated the political, theoretical and philosophical self-understanding of Europe. Socialist and conservative governments alike have subsumed even the weakest of their political ideas to the economic logic of austerity and reform that the markets demand.¹³ Ostensibly, accepting *tout court* that it is the one and only path for the survival of capitalist democracies, the European political classes have become the public administrators of market capitalism at the expense of the political projects that once defined them. At this point, one welcomes the problem of an enlightened radicalism out of proportion to the social condition of the working populations of Europe. Instead, a different turn of fate announces itself for the European working classes in an era of political indetermination but of absolutely determined neoliberal economic rule which has subsumed the political to the economic, thereby defining the terrain under which German capital and the troika (ECB, EC, and IMF) will rule all its territories and its populations.¹⁴ The retraction of politics and the capitulation to the now sovereign-market has the air of absolutist times, as if an accelerated rewind to the desolate situation of what once was pre-revolutionary Europe.

It is under these circumstances that the question of the historical future that is inherent in crisis returns to us with a vengeance and demands answers dictated by its modern defining temporal determinant. As Arantes argues, the ascribed presentism of societies dominated by the autonomization of globalized global markets in the post-cold war period mark the space of world time, entirely dominated by the planetary logic of instantaneity. It is activated by the end of a *horizon d'attente* of the Cold War; there is no more travelling of the distance between experience and expectation. It simply announces the substitution of politics by the management of the destruction of the present. "Urgency" becomes the organizing principle of the central category of a "permanent" conjuncture, hence Arantes's definition of "an atemporal present of perpetual urgency." The Anthropocene and its species actor enter the stage. The future arrives at the present full of negations as a kind of apocalypse of the integrated. The collapsing of a horizon of expectations, the conversion of politics into a management of the now, announces the arrival of the future in the now and forecloses a politics that at its conceptual core had a temporal structure that allowed for an after, après the atemporality of the new regime of time of the current world order.

In Arantes's view the end of politics is a consequence of the consolidation of a new temporal horizon, whose vanishing point was an expectability very different from the prognosis calculated by absolutist power and by the evolution of the political mechanism to direct the system. The end of the cold war inaugurates a triumphant era of decreasing expectations, already fabricated in the 70s and 80s when the

liberal Keynesian consensus comes to an end, and implements what Arantes calls the atemporal time of perpetual urgency (27-28). That is the new time of the world, according to the premier Marxist philosopher of Brazil. For Arantes the future has arrived in the form of the destruction of the present, where the reduction of the horizon of expectation has been reduced to the zero sum game of the very present we live in. In his radicalized reading of Koselleck, brushing it against the grain of the world-systems theory, Arantes concludes that the role not only of critique but of politics itself was the management of this horizon of expectations. Now we have arrived at the zero hour of politics, namely that of its extinction.

With Paulo Arantes we begin to understand that we inhabit a time of exception, a time where the promise of emancipation has been sequestered and suspended in “o novo tempo do mundo” — a new global time of permanent war in which the future has arrived announcing its own end. A time in which the future’s past is not more than a historico-philosophical image of what once the bourgeois revolutions promised, except this time understood under the temporal order of global capitalism. It is here, perhaps, where a different fate of critique reveals itself: in the fracture of the world still readable by critical theories with global aspirations and those who have been disciplined to fulfill a service philosophy of capitalist democratic republicanism, that at the current moment of political indetermination has already failed the European working populations, apparently condemned to return to the temporal political determinants prior to their own emergence. What does it mean for critical thinking to imagine a future that appears to have already arrived? How do we read now ideas, concepts, programs, that remain imbedded in the mute letter of a time passed but whose now-time is yet to be realized? Contesting the way we have come to understand history and the historicity of our current stretched present is a foremost task for critical theory, that in all is archaic after-life (*Nachleben*) cannot but promise to resist this new geological colonization of our conceptual world. At stake is the restoration of the horizon of the political, refusing the fate of European politics. Without it the critique of the present becomes folded into the very extinction of politics and incorporated into presentist species ontology, where the actualization of the structure of fear-time at a planetary scale becomes the most successful end to the human revolutionary imagination.

Notes

1. As coined by Paulo Arantes in his book *O novo tempo do mundo: e outros estudos sobre a era da emergência* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2014).
2. Helga Nowotny, *Eigenzeit: Entstehung und Strukturierung eines Zeitgefühls* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1989).
3. The proposal was first made by chemist Paul J. Crutzen and marine science specialist, Eugene F. Stoermer in 2000.
4. Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Boston: MIT Press, 1998).
5. Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis* 9.
6. The classic description of this process is found in Koselleck's *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
7. Modernity is obviously not exhausted as concept in historical semantics but has its origin in the temporality of the accumulation of capital and its social and political consequences for the formation of capitalist societies. My interest, in this paper, is restricted to a very concrete problem, namely that the workings of a temporality specific to a philosophy of history that allowed for the prognostication of revolution.
8. Koselleck, *Futures Past* 250 and passim.
9. *Critique and Crisis* 131.
10. *Futures Past* 21.
11. *Critique and Crisis* 132-3.
12. Which could date for heuristic purposes as starting with the financial collapse of 2008.
13. For a comprehensive political-economic analysis of the crisis of capitalist democracies see Wolfgang Streeck, "The Crises of Democratic Capitalism," *New Left Review* 72(2011): 63-71. Praised by both the *Financial Times* and Perry Anderson of *New Left Review* it is positioned to become the standard interpretation of the crisis. We must not forget, however, that as director of the Max Plank Institute, Streeck was a close adviser to chancellor Schröder and directly involved in the neoliberal policy recommendations to that administration, that have been part and parcel of the very crisis in which Europe finds itself.
14. For a devastating critique of this new old Europe see Perry Anderson, *The New Old World* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2011).

Nicholas Brown. "Anyway..." *Mediations* 35.1-2 (Fall 2021/Spring 2022) 65-78. www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/anyway

Seja como for: Entrevistas, retratos e documentos

Roberto Schwarz

São Paulo: Editora 34, 2019

447 pp.

R\$91.00

ISBN 978-8573267495

Rainha Lira: Peça teatral

Roberto Schwarz

São Paulo: Editora 34, 2022

128 pp.

R\$54.00

ISBN 978-6555250961

Anyway...¹

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"Everyone," wrote Friedrich Schlegel, "contains a novel." Characteristically, Schlegel's fragment has a sting in its tail: "Not everyone needs to write it out." Roberto Schwarz's recent collection of "interviews, portraits, and documents" suggests that Schlegel's irony is misplaced. Through Schwarz's eye for novelistic detail, the world — that part of it known as "Brazil" — teems with unwritten novels. A famous essayist and professor of aesthetics, one of the first Brazilian women of her generation to enter the faculty ranks, recalls her surprise that visiting professors from France (among them Claude Lévi-Strauss) lectured from notes, and shared their bibliographies with students. A historical shift — the professionalization of scholarship, its separation from the decorative status of a class adornment (legible in the old catch-all Brazilian honorific, "Doctor"), a process that remains incomplete in Europe and North America — is registered subjectively, in a mild shock at a foreign way of doing things. Brought up in a patriarchal, rural setting (but with a vanguardist and leftist model in a cousin, the great Modernist poet Mário de Andrade), she notes that she had not a single female role model, and that despite her admiration for the women she grew up with,

she would have to “put them in parentheses” (393). The phrase is the tip of an iceberg that is at once affective, social, and historical.

The portrait of a museum director, descended from a wealthy family and son of a great painter, reveals that “there is more in common than we are accustomed to admit between the materialism of a landowner and the acumen of a leftist administrator” (404). A right-wing intellectual (and eventual speechwriter for disgraced president Fernando Collor) is a vicious critic of the Left — but cares more about literature than he does about politics. A bohemian intellectual milieu develops around São Paulo’s Municipal Library in the late 1950s, where “there was a group that read a great deal of existentialism in Spanish, while the faculty read the same books in French and regarded themselves as more serious” (274). The bohemians “write and poetize as they can, some very well. Later most of them disappear.” But one who doesn’t is recognized by the television industry as “a beast for work” and becomes a prolific and celebrated writer of telenovelas (274-75). On going to the United States Schwarz finds the university milieu disagreeably masculine and the workload preposterous — the Americans having “developed a technique for textual description [...] that made it possible to write twenty acceptable pages without ideas” — but on returning home he finds the pace so slow that he tries “to continue the rhythm that to me had seemed, there, a horrible sacrifice” (286). Even a book review contains insights that are, in their coordination of feeling with historical movement, novelistic: “People who care about art can’t shake a sense of the unquestionable superiority of the modernists as artists; at the same time, they sense that the modernists, unequalled in their accomplishments, were not equal to the difficulty of modernity” (356).

Perhaps most astonishing is Schwarz’s portrait of literary critic and drama theorist Anatol Rosenfeld, who died in 1973 but whose impact on Brazilian theater — in particular the assimilation of Brechtian theory and practice — can be felt to this day. Leaving his doctorate at Humboldt University half-finished, Rosenfeld fled in 1937 to Brazil, where he initially lived hand-to-mouth pulling weeds at a eucalyptus plantation. The task posed a problem for the recent immigrant, who couldn’t tell the weeds from the seedlings. But Rosenfeld’s immigrant story, so tightly circumscribed by contingency — think only of how different the story would be if, like Adorno, he had already finished his dissertation and begun to establish a reputation — also contains an element of freedom. Schwarz lets us know that his own father, a lawyer emigrating from Vienna, had been sent to load bananas at the port of Santos — a placement he had sensibly declined. Rosenfeld’s immersion in Brazil is then both an historical accident and a deliberate project. He learns Portuguese in the interior, takes on arbitrary employment that doesn’t involve seedlings, and eventually makes his living as a traveling salesman. (It is hard not to be vaguely reminded of Seo Vupes in João Guimarães Rosa’s *Grande Sertão*.) Learning the hinterland from top to bottom, he becomes widely known as the “salesman of two valises” — one for his wares, one

for the books he needed to continue his studies. Returning to the city of São Paulo, he begins his intellectual career as a journalist for the *Crônica Israelita*, whose audience, as its name announces, is the small and insulated community of recent Jewish immigrants to São Paulo — a community whose horizons are, in comparison with Rosenfeld's, as narrow in their own way as those he moved among in the interior must have been in theirs. As Schwarz puts it in his presentation of another remarkable document — the 1880 autobiographical letter of Luiz Gama, a former slave, to Lúcio de Mendonça — “as in a good realist novel, the unexpected turn strips bare the logic and the virtualities of a social formation, showing what in the exception belongs to the rule, what the exotic owes to the everyday” (345). As with Luiz Gama's letter, *Seja como for* makes us think, among other things, of “the Brazilian literature that might have been, but wasn't” (345).

Two other documents — both pertaining to Schwarz's time in Paris in political exile during the Brazilian dictatorship — serve as bookends. The book begins with a chilling document that Schwarz comments on only by titling it, more or less, “Off-Stage.” It is a summary, dug up from the archives of DOPS, the Department of Political and Social Order — that is, the secret police — of Schwarz's landmark essay “Culture and Politics in Brazil, 1964-69.”² A broadly Adornian analysis of the contradictions facing an intellectual and artistic Left whose organic links with concrete politics had been brutally severed by the régime, Schwarz's essay is bluntly described as concerning “techniques for agitation in the student milieu through theater, cinema, literature, and television” (11). The characterization, attributing the work not just to Schwarz but to his “team,” is not entirely false, but it is self-serving, puffing up the instrumental political utility of an essay “whose English translation,” according to the summary, “is already in the relevant CIA archives” (13). Already, astonishingly, a certain outline of the document's author begins to emerge. Schwarz's essay was first published in French (in Sartre's “cryptocommunist” [12] *Les Temps modernes*), and our protagonist takes repeated pains to emphasize the “18 hours of labor” (11) that he spent making the translation, which he is anxious to say has not been properly edited (12), but “would not require a great deal of correction to make perfect (13). He goes on to describe the length of the text in pages (“in small type” [12]), and the hours he estimates it would take to edit and re-type. From these mortifying and no doubt pecuniary banalities, our commentator launches into a paranoid description of the “collective castration” the Left has planned for Brazil, intimating that Schwarz's essay is part of a coordinated plan to corrupt “established institutions, traditional values of society: family, religion, sex, money, personality, etc., etc.” (13) Isn't that “etc., etc.” peculiar? It is as though our protagonist's wide-eyed, high-cold-war paranoia is, in the end, pro forma. After describing the Left's goal as an “enslaved society, at the mercy of the beneficiaries of destruction,” and after fantasizing about the possible cultural “counter-action” that a right-wing intelligentsia could undertake on the basis of an analysis of the text, the commentary unexpectedly ends on an entirely different note.

“Well, nobody will take the author Roberto Schwarz for a fool — not after reading his prose, which has little truck with foolishness. On the contrary” (14). Who is this person, who combines the poor expatriate student (anxious that his intelligence and work be properly valued) and the right-wing ideologue (possibly too intelligent to drink his own Kool-Aid) with the connoisseur of critical prose? Suddenly a phrase one might have passed over acquires new significance: “The article... was written... between October 1969 and February 1970” (11). How does he know?

If the book begins in, if not tragedy, then at least high tension and possible treachery, it ends in farce. In Paris Schwarz was a political exile, but also a graduate student. With his Master’s from Yale (directed by René Wellek) already in hand, he pursued a PhD in Latin American Studies at the Sorbonne/Paris III. Schwarz’s dissertation would become his first great monograph, *Ao Vencedor as batatas* (*To The Victor, The Potatoes!*, recently translated into English).³ But first he had to pass his defense. The last document of the book is a long letter Schwarz wrote home in 1976, after his scheduled defense, to his old professor and mentor, the great sociologist and literary scholar Antonio Candido. It begins:

Dear Professor,
Please don’t fall out of your chair, but the person who writes to you is not yet a doctor. (425)

What follows is a description of the twists and turns that led to this contretemps, which was in the end, as Schwarz’s tone makes clear, more or less easily resolved, despite the subjectively high stakes: “Obviously I trust my work more than the judgment of the committee. But it is also the case that people express their sympathy mainly because there is no money, work, or title on the horizon. In short, I passed a restless night” (427). The cast of characters is large — even Schwarz’s mother has flown in for the occasion — but the main ones are Schwarz himself on one side — ambitious, already aware of his possible place in Brazilian letters and of the historic accomplishments he and his generation of Brazilian intellectuals had begun to realize — but also aware of the potential for self-inflation that comes with ambition and ability; and on the other, his dissertation committee, who have status and security and some level of intellectual accomplishment, but turn out to be complacent, lazy, and incompetent in varying degrees. The comedy derives mainly from the fact that Schwarz’s principal antagonist — known to be politically conservative — expects to “demolish” the dissertation, while Schwarz for his part, despite his anxiety, relishes the idea that, one way or another, an ideological confrontation is going to take place around his work. But the antagonist turns out not to have the intellectual resources for the confrontation, and the more politically sympathetic committee chair hadn’t read the dissertation. “Instead of the opposition I had expected, between the right-wing intellectual and the intimidated little professor, the friction was between a

thickwitted bully and a negligent bureaucrat, whose interest now lay in cleaning up the mess made by the former" (435). In the end the aggressor recuses himself from the committee, asking for Schwarz's understanding of his nonsensical reasons for doing so — "the ogre solicits the human sympathy of the little man he was set to demolish" (428) — and the whole process is postponed to another day. The mirror image of Gilda de Mello e Souza's impression of visiting French intellectuals of an earlier generation, the letter paints an unflattering portrait of European intellectual life — but one that, *mutatis mutandis*, anyone reading this review is sure to recognize.

Seja como for is, in the main, a collection of interviews; I have described the most surprising aspects of the book but not the most characteristic ones. As is to be expected in a collection of interviews, there is considerable repetition in the questions. But while all of the interviews are of value — my copy is thoroughly marked up — a few of them stand out as of particular interest. Schwarz extends himself when he is pressed by interlocutors of sufficient intelligence, intransigence, or sincerity. The interviews naturally presume a degree of familiarity with Schwarz's work, and in what follows I will do the same.⁴

The first interview of particular note is rather a "debate" — the word is a little less antagonistic in Brazilian — on Schwarz's 1990 monograph on Machado de Assis (brilliantly translated by John Gledson and published in 2001 as *A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism*) between Schwarz, Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, Francisco de Oliveira, José Arthur Giannotti, Davi Arriguci, Jr., Rodrigo Naves, and José Antonio Pasta, Jr.⁵ Readers familiar with Brazilian letters will recognize this as an assembly of some of the most significant figures in Brazilian historiography, philosophy, literary theory, and art history. Right off the bat, Schwarz is pressed by Alencastro and Oliveira on a central aspect of the work that has — no doubt because literary studies in English is, with notable exceptions, theoretically eclectic on matters of interpretation — gone relatively unremarked in English-language commentary. Namely, that the meaning of Machado de Assis' great novels — their malicious x-ray of the ideological structure of a decadent ruling class — was, for something like a century, hidden in plain sight. Don't novelists write for their contemporaries? asks Alencastro, reminding us that the 1880s was a peculiar interlude in the life of the Brazilian upper classes, within an economic and ideological structure that was already unaccounted for in mainstream historiography. Since Brazil was suddenly importing Occidental culture and gewgaws that the dominant countries had begun to manufacture for export to their own overseas territories, the lack of fit between imported European culture and Brazilian daily life was not as rarified an observation as Schwarz makes it appear. So are we not then dealing with two readings? On one hand, a caricatural aspect, which would have been clear to Machado's contemporaries, and a more slashing, destructive aspect that in fact is "another reading," emerging from the concerns of a much later posterity, with its own critique of its ruling classes? And de Oliveira follows up with the corollary observation that despite the aesthetic strength of the novels of

Machado's late period, their ideological impact was nil, in an historical moment when other authors were significant voices on political and social questions.

Schwarz's answer is comprehensive, touching both on Machado's few contemporaries who appear to have read him with uncommon perception, and on Machado's contemporary neighbors in their disabused view of Brazilian society, who were not literary liberals but rather the most pessimistic and disillusioned stratum of conservative politicians. Schwarz insists that the meaning of Machado's novels, while manifold and complex, is unitary. "Of course one can say that this tougher construction is an *a posteriori* elaboration of the critic, seventy years later. But in Machado's case this simply doesn't work, since there are a number of entirely deliberate moments in his fiction where he signals his intention" (67). (Schwarz does not respond directly to de Oliveira's amplification — perhaps simply acknowledging that aesthetic success and political impact are goals that do not necessarily overlap). Schwarz goes on to point out that a similar thing happened with Baudelaire, whose politics, always a matter of "laughing in *petit comité*" (69) were recuperated for criticism only after 1968. And indeed, this kind of meaning-loss may be more the rule than the exception. The politics of aesthetic autonomy developed by Schiller were lost to most of his contemporaries and then completely dissolved in the intellectually conservative second two thirds of the 19th century, to be excavated by Lukács only in the 1930s — and to be lost again for the past fifty years. Meanwhile Schiller continued to be read, performed, and appreciated under all kinds of political régimes (this is the deeper mystery), and Schiller's aesthetic ideology was appropriated and transformed in myriad ways that had little enough to do with the original undertaking. In a less political vein, the aesthetic project of English literary impressionism was understood in its moment only by the impressionists themselves — and perhaps not consciously even by all of them — and was only given a clear, explicit form more than a hundred years later by Michael Fried in his recent book, *What Was Literary Impressionism?*

Perhaps Schwarz's strongest support (and an answer to the mystery of an appreciative misunderstanding) comes, unexpectedly, from Giannotti, who defends an opposing interpretation of Machado's late novels as essentially melancholic and satirical in a more universalist, 18th-century mode. If Giannotti can defend this (traditional) interpretation, which is a descendant of the satiric one imputed by Alencastro to Machado's contemporaries, then we are not dealing with an historical meaning and a modern construction, but rather simply with competing interpretations, which both must face the court of interpretive judgment. The fact that Machado was in some respects personally conformist can't decide the question. (Giannotti: "Your misunderstood author was the president of the Brazilian Academy of Letters!" Schwarz: "That's like saying Engels was a factory owner" [75-76].) The character of Counselor Aires, in Machado's very last novels, represents, perhaps, precisely this figure of nonconformism in *petit comité*. But at the same time, Giannotti (like Machado's contemporaries) knows something he does not know he knows. As

anyone can attest who has tried to teach Johnson, Pope, or Swift, it is precisely the aspect of their work that Giannotti claims for Machado — universalizing moral satire — that strikes us today as insipid. Johnson and Pope are largely dead to us, and Swift maintains his interest precisely where he turns his own universalizing moralism against itself. As a novelistic “The Vanity of Human Wishes,” *The Postumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* loses all interest. What we respond to, whether we know it or not, is the particular flavor of Brás’s malice, a distinctly modern *haut-goût* that asserts itself from the novel’s first sentences. Once we begin to follow that scent, we are in Schwarzzian territory.

The debate has much more to offer, but in order to move on I will make only one further observation, which is that the whole conversation is made possible on the basis of an autochthonous Brazilian-studies discourse. Not necessarily in a nationalist sense — Schwarz’s work derives as much from Marx, Lukács, and Adorno as it does from Maria Sílvia de Carvalho Franco, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso; and the same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for his interlocutors — but in the sense that the debate emerges from concrete theoretical problems that themselves emerge from concrete historical and political nexuses. The more cosmopolitan, eclectic Latin American Studies discourse seems — at least to me, an outsider to both discourses — painfully abstract in comparison.

Also meriting a close reading is the interview titled “Tug-of-War over Lukács.” It is certainly peculiar, in that the interviewer has understood little of Schwarz’s work and not that much more of Lukács’s; interviewer and interviewee are constantly talking at cross-purposes. At one point well into the interview, Schwarz, whom Perry Anderson has called “the finest dialectical critic since Adorno,” is asked: “Do you consider yourself a dialectician?” (133).⁶ It is frustrating and amusing by turns. At the same time, Schwarz here spells out his relation to Lukács without the circumspection that has always seemed to me to accompany his remarks on the subject. On one hand, it has always been clear that Schwarz’s aesthetic commitments are far more generous, in every sense of the word, than Lukács’s. On the other, Schwarz’s early work, particularly the first monograph on Machado de Assis, is — in its account of European realism, its understanding of the relationship of artistic form to historical reality, and its commitment to artistic form as a kind of *aboutness*, as making modally distinct but yet insistent claims to truth — strongly marked by Lukács, in ways that are never repudiated, and in fact remain, if I am not mistaken, crucial even when latent. For many of us these correspond intuitively to a “bad Lukács” and a “good Lukács,” but that’s hardly a dialectical solution: Lukács himself would not have seen daylight between his sympathetic account of Schiller’s aesthetics and his critique of Flaubert’s. What mediates between the two?

First: “One might say that Lukács’s analysis presupposes... a certain unity of the nation. [...] In countries like ours of Latin America, the relevant unity is not national; [... T]hey belong to a unity that is transnational from the beginning,

and in order to understand them, we have to understand the other pole; a significant pole of all the Latin American countries is external" (131-2). Second: "Lukács constructed a model for the European history of ideas and of the novel that depended on a general historical evolution from feudalism to capitalism to socialism. This is a powerful construction. He shows how this development is actively functioning in the work of [European] philosophers and novelists. If we return to Latin America, we can see that this sequence doesn't exist here and is therefore not universal. [...] We all know that colonialism and colonial slavery don't precede mercantile states and are an entirely modern phenomenon" (128-129). One sees how Schwarz's own critical insights immediately entail a critique of these two related blind spots in Lukács's thinking. The dialectical interplay of these two poles of the colonial system, a back-and-forth whose very existence troubles the stageist model, is fundamental to Schwarz's work, and might even be said to be the fundamental discovery of his intellectual generation. Lukács's presuppositions, an asset in thinking through European literature and philosophy in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, when a national transition to a bourgeois order is broadly the order of the day, would become a liability exported to the Brazilian context.

It also seems to me, though Schwarz does not say so directly, that they become a liability exported to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, even in Europe, and might serve to mediate between the "good" and the "bad" Lukács. Lukács seeks — and rarely finds — a proletarian realism that will have the same representational power as the great bourgeois realisms. But the proletarian experience of a transition to "socialism in one country" does not make contact with the cutting edge of economic and political developments in the same way that the bourgeois experience of a transition to capitalism in one country had done. In that way the decidedly marginal experiences that occupy, say, Joseph Conrad — who registers, in a conservative key, Fernando Henrique Cardoso's dialectic of a European liberalism that is false in Europe because it is false in its colonies — will have a pulse on realities that a James Hanley or Willi Bredel cannot imagine.

There is a great deal more in this book: a tantalizing brief essay on the opening pages of Machado's *Esau and Jacob*, which begins to open up the mysteries of the novelist's very last novels and of their elusive protagonist, Counselor Aires; glimpses of an immigrant childhood where, receiving an indifferent secondary education, Schwarz is an intellectual at home — his parents had attended Lukács's seminars in Vienna in the 1920s (117) — but an athlete and knockabout at school, ambivalent about going to college (270-271); useful overviews of most of Schwarz's major critical work; valuable reflections on everything from May 1968 to the state of contemporary Brazilian culture and politics. But I would be remiss if I did not single out one more long interview, with a sharp and well-prepared group of Master's students in Comparative Literature at the University Federal do Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN) in Natal. Here we catch a glimpse of Schwarz the pedagogue, generous with his influences and

bibliography, opening up vistas and lines of flight within Brazilian literature and culture from Graciliano Ramos to Carlos Drummond de Andrade to Guimarães Rosa to Caetano Veloso, gently nudging students away from unproductive lines of thinking and toward ideas that are likely to be fruitful. It is a model, to be sure, but also full of useful insights. The passage on Guimarães Rosa and Alencar alone contains a good essay or two.

One can't help looking at *Seja como for* from yet a third angle. Suspended over the whole book is the question of the fate of Brazil.

Fifty years ago [i.e. after the 1964 coup], those who marched for God, family, and property were those left behind by modernization, representatives of the old Brazil, who struggled not to disappear even though it was their side who had won. It was as if the victory of the right, with its trousseau of obsolete ideas, had been an accident and wasn't sufficient to put the lie to the favorable movement of history. Despite the defeat of the advanced party, it continued to be possible — so it seemed — to believe in the work of time and the existence of progress and of the future. The neo-backwardness of bolsanarism, equally scandalous, is of another kind, very far from belonging to the past. The de-laicization of politics, prosperity theology, firearms in civil life, attacks on radar cameras, hatred of organized labor, etc.: these are not thrift-store items, leftovers from another time. They are antisocial, but they are born on the terrain of contemporary society, in the vacuum left by the ruin of the State. It is quite likely that they will be in our future, in which case those passed over by time will be us, the enlightened — without forgetting that the beacons of modernity have lost much of their light. (330)

As readers will be aware, Brazil imminently faces, at the least, a difficult and polarized election season and likely political violence; whatever the outcome (*seja como for*), the Bolsonaro régime is clearly making preparations for a hard coup (as opposed to the parliamentary coup that ultimately brought Bolsonaro to power). The whirlwind to be reaped in Brazil after the half-century-long capitalist counteroffensive is not qualitatively different than it is in the United States or much of Europe, but only quantitatively — and often not even that.

What is world-historical in Brazilian culture since the 1950s — and in this Brazil punches far above its weight — is intimately connected to the great class rapprochement between the progressive, anti-imperialist bourgeoisie and the “proletariat” in the broadest sense, the mass of those who, separated from the means of production, have no other means of subsistence than to sell their own labor — whether or not the resources exist to exploit that labor. This rapprochement was the social content of the pre-revolutionary period, which was brought to a close

by the coup of 1964. It is the condition of possibility and social meaning of Cinema Novo; of Bossa Nova and MPB as much as the autonomous samba of a Paulinho da Viola all the way up through Marisa Monte, Marcelo D2, Lenine, and beyond; of the architecture of Lina bo Bardi and her cohort and descendants; of the poetry of Ferreira Gullar; even, in however mediated a way, of the great concretisms of Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, and Hélio Oiticica. It is also the condition and social meaning of Roberto Schwarz's generation of scholars: Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Maria Sílvia de Carvalho Franco, Paulo Arantes, Francisco de Oliveira, and many more. As the quote above suggests, the impulse at the root of this cultural explosion continued its productivity long after the social movement that sustained it had been cut short: the Master's students conducting the interview mentioned a moment ago have gone on by now to publish their PhD dissertations as books, but conversations like theirs can still be had in university classrooms in Brazil, and in the right rooms, after hours, amateur and professional musicians can still be heard making extraordinary music together. Moreover, the works that have taken inspiration from this development are permanent. As Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil put it, in perhaps the world's only Adornian pop song, movements like Cinema Novo and Bossa Nova

Saved us
In the eternal dimension
But⁷

Or, as Schwarz puts it here, giving credit to Hans Magnus Enzensberger for the thought, "It's easier to transform underdevelopment into art than it is to overcome it" (321) — which is not to say that transforming underdevelopment into enduring works is easy. But on the terrain of the real, holding out hope for a Benjaminian redemption is cold comfort. It is no accident that Veloso's bleakest song about Brazil is the one that places hope in deliverance.⁸

The question of "What is to be done?" is, except for a few salutary suggestions, not taken on in these pages. Central to any Marxism worthy of the name is the Hegelian dictum, variously referenced by Marx: *Hic Rhodus, hic salta!* Whatever action is to be taken has to take place on the terrain on which we actually stand; in other words, what is to be done can only be accomplished on the ground of the actual political-economic-social-ideological situation. So our Rhodes is here — but where is that? What time is it?

In *Seja como for*, whose pages span several decades, Schwarz does not take on an extended analysis of the current political-economic-social-ideological situation in Brazil. That analysis instead takes the surprising shape of Schwarz's new closet drama, *Queen Lyre*. Indeed, the shape is not as surprising as all that. If Schwarz has written a novel he is keeping it secret, but he is the author of two books of poetry and a wonderful Brechtian-Machadian play, *The Dustbin of History*; he is also the Portuguese

translator of several plays from the German, including Ferdinand Bruckner's *Pains of Youth* and three by Brecht. *Queen Lyre* begins, as the title suggests, as an adaptation of *King Lear*: the Queen of Blue Zealand (that is, Dilma Rousseff) must keep her three ambitious daughters in check: Valentina (the Left, and the Queen's favorite), Austéria (big capital, finance, and neoliberal exigency), and Maria da Glória (agribusiness, "traditional values," and clientelism). But *Queen Lyre* has bigger problems than her daughters, and what begins as a tidy allegory quickly runs off the rails. Indeed, by the time we meet Lyre and her daughters, we already know that massive protests are brewing from below; from somewhere above, conspiracies are being hatched. The protests will take place; the Queen will be deposed; and in a *rex ex machina* that, except for the fact that it really happened, would be a perfect Brechtian non-sequitur of an ending, the King, who has been languishing in prison for the duration of the play, is released.

Of course the plot can hardly astonish, because it is just recent Brazilian history — as with Brecht in this mode, to say characters are "thinly disguised" would be wrong, because the disguise is so thin as to be an impudence, like robbing a bank in sunglasses. ("O Coiso," for example, The Tool, is a derogatory nickname given to Bolsonaro in the real world.) If I am not mistaken, the composition of the play lies not so much in the plot — except for the ending, at once Brechtian and factual, which is a master-stroke — or in the satire, which is certainly present and often satisfying, but in giving form to the polyphony of contemporary Brazilian political discourse. Observations, ideologies, and truisms (observations needn't be false to be in bad faith, and even correct observations by sympathetic characters can reveal their most abject compromises; ideologies only function if they have a relation to truth; some truisms are true) circulate and fail to circulate, have their intended effects, have other effects, or have no effect. Our sympathies, and the author's, lie (how could they not?) with characters like Rita, a former communist and now working-class mother who is re-radicalized over the course of the play. But even the most sympathetic characters' understanding of the situation is partial or, worse, optimistic; and some of the least sympathetic characters are the most cunning — a characteristic that involves, at the least, a sense of reality.

To do justice to this orchestration would take a separate essay. But in closing I want to draw our attention to the last two scenes. In the penultimate, "The Picnic of the Winners," the forces unleashed by the coup are not easily controlled: says one bourgeois matron, "I'm more horrified by The Tool than I am by the redistribution of wealth" (112). A bourgeois gentleman immediately puts her straight: "My lady, we are not talking about civilization or bad faith. We're talking about private property, which is something else altogether." American readers will recognize the dynamic: replace "private property" with "tax relief." This intra-class tension soon turns into a bloodbath: first the Fool is killed (his identity was never in doubt: his dying words are "If the intellectuals don't fulfill their duty, the unctuous and deadly crime that

demeans our country will forever remain in the shadows" (115), then the Queen, the working class Left and the student Left, and offstage the princesses; but then the coup plotters, and then their agents. At the end of the scene one of victors proclaims: "We will be legions of loose Tools, armed to the teeth, fighting *lucha libre*. The idea is to re-found humanity for the next thousand years or so" (117). The dreadful victory is complete.

But the war of all against all is, even in the most reactionary ideologies, only a pretext for society and not a plausible model of society itself; and we know from the newspapers that this is not the end of the story. The final scene, titled "The Second Investiture of the King," is a dramatic monologue that takes place in the former King's prison cell, seeming to compress in its two pages the entire term of Lula's imprisonment. Near the beginning, he is certain of being released: "They need me to clean up their mess" (119) — which would seem delusional, except we know that by the end of the scene he will in fact be released. "I am the only one in this country," the King reasons to himself, "who talked to everyone. [...] It is obvious that with me in prison, no national negotiation is possible. Therefore, when they shut me up here, it was precisely to put an end to negotiation" (120).

Now he is free. To mend the "ragged quilt" of Brazilian society? Or to take the fall for its failures? We will see. The King's final words, and the final words of the play: "I would prefer not to be heckled on the way out" (120).

Notes

1. I would like to thank Milton Ohata for his comments on a draft of this essay.
2. Roberto Schwarz, “Cultura e Política, 1964-69,” in *O Pai de família e outros estudos* (Rio: Paz e Terra, 1978) 61-92; John Gledson, trans., “Culture and Politics in Brazil, 1964-69,” in Roberto Schwarz, *Misplaced Ideas* (New York: Verso, 1992) 126-159.
3. Roberto Schwarz, *Ao vencedor as batatas* (São Paulo: Editora 34, 2000); Ronald W. Sousa, trans., *To the Victor, the Potatoes!* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2020).
4. I have attempted an introduction to Schwarz’s work elsewhere. See “Roberto Schwarz: Mimesis Beyond Realism,” in *The Sage Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory*, ed. Beverly Best et al. (London: Sage, 2018) 465-478.
5. Roberto Schwarz, *A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism: Machado de Assis*, trans. John Gledson (Durham: Duke, 2001).
6. See also Paulo Eduardo Arantes, *Sentimento da dialética na experiência intelectual brasileira: Dialética e dualidade segundo Antonio Candido e Roberto Schwarz* (Rio: Paz e Terra, 1992).
7. Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil, “Cinema novo,” *Tropicalia II*, Phillips, 1993.
8. Caetano Veloso and Gal Costa, *A Luz de Tieta*, Natasha, 1996. It also sets Veloso’s words to a gorgeous Bahian *bateria* (performed by the all-female Didá Banda Feminina) in the context of a modern pop recording, under the supervision of producer Jacques Morelenbaum, an accomplished classical cellist. This is not to say that Veloso’s politics and Schwarz’s politics are the same. As many readers will know, that is very far from being the case. As is natural, the explicit politics of the great Brazilian figures of the second half of the twentieth century runs the gamut. But if their greatness has something in common, and I think it does, it has to do with this class rapprochement — which itself appears in many forms, not all equally enlightened.

Romy Rajan. "Internationalism and the Global Moment: Rereading World Literature." *Mediations* 35.1-2 (Fall 2021/ Spring 2022) 79-84. www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/internationalism-review

Insurgent Imaginations: World Literature and the Periphery

Auritro Majumder

Cambridge Univ. Press, 2021

288 pp

US\$99.99

ISBN: 978-1108477574

Internationalism and the Global Moment: Rereading World Literature

Romy Rajan

Scale, and its application, have occupied literary scholarship and particularly the category of World Literature over the last few decades, and have been divisive issues in this field. Perhaps it is because of such a divisive character that World Literature has been the site of many productive debates about which literatures can be compared and why some have resisted such comparisons in the past. While scholars like David Damrosch¹ and Pascale Casanova² have explored how literary analysis is affected by a shift in its site from the nation to the world, their analyses have often traced this shift from Europe outwards to the rest of the world. More recent work by Nirvana Tanoukhi and Oded Nir situates such scalar issues within the context of globalization, claiming that the need to map possibilities of representation has become more acute during our times.³ Work of the latter kind has been crucial in allowing a conception of a literary modernity that is singular — connected across national lines that are often too narrow to contain the frequently international influences upon constituent works of world literature.

Auritro Majumder's recent book, *Insurgent Imaginations: World Literature and the Periphery* offers a possible way out of such false binaries of the universal and the particular through his novel concept of "peripheral internationalism." Majumder's take on this subject is refreshing in its defense of internationalist forms of resistance without overlooking the specific local literary and cinematic histories of his archives. He looks for these moments of opposition to different forms of capitalism, including imperialism, not in the future but in past examples of such cross-cultural

collaborations. Most importantly, he excavates such instances in spaces designated as peripheral to global capital through “texts [that] forge the foundations, arguably, for a tradition of world literature that provincializes the ‘West’” (12). Drawing on Timothy Brennan’s reading of Giambattista Vico and Hegel, *Insurgent Imaginations* calls for a processive conception of the aesthetic — one that enables us to see World Literature as the product of labor, “labor understood, expansively, in the Hegelian sense of the term, as intentional, purposive human activity” (2). Such aesthetic labor, performed often as a part of struggles against repressive authority, allows for the imagining of social and political change.

The debt to Vico is evident in the title as the analysis hinges not on the specific moments of resistance but on the imagined forms of internationalist resistance available in fictional and non-fictional writings of the twentieth century. Majumder’s argument situates his archives in this humanist tradition traceable to Vico, Hegel, and Marx, counterposing imagination to the profusion of data that is currently available to us. Rather than focusing on the fixed and finished nature of such data, imagined forms of resistance in the aesthetic sphere map the unfolding of events and possibilities. Majumder’s main claim is based on this processual understanding of imagination as he argues that literary form itself facilitates an understanding of the social relations that animate history and make political changes possible. Research on World Literature has, in recent years, evinced a justified interest in the evolution of forms, most notably in Pheng Cheah’s *What is a World?* where he argues for a return of historical readings that question the central concept of the world, or its formation (“worlding”). Majumder draws on such work as Cheah’s along with other scholarly traditions that have unearthed histories from below such as the Subaltern Studies group. His work is, however, distinguished from the latter by its ability to see the local as an entity that is intertwined with the international. In a turn reminiscent of Nancy Fraser’s transnationalization of the Habermasian public sphere, *Insurgent Imaginations* calls for the internationalization of local, and often vernacular histories. Again, it is the formation of a *world* through forms, including literary forms, that allows Majumder to make a claim for re-reading World Literature through neglected already-international peripheral literatures.

Majumder points out how peripheral attempts at understanding and challenging imperialism shapes global history through cross-cultural connections and solidarities which are often self-evident enough not even to be mentioned explicitly. In a list of archives ranging from non-fiction writings by M.N. Roy, the twentieth-century Indian revolutionary leader, to Aravind Adiga’s contemporary Indian Anglophone novel, *The White Tiger* (2008), Majumder traces a history of such solidarities that have gone unnoticed. *Insurgent Imaginations*, however, goes beyond a mere collection of references to such solidarities (a valuable contribution in itself). Majumder reads an internationalist import in literary forms developed by Bengali writers such as the playwright Utpal Dutt, and the novelist and short-story writer, Mahasweta Devi,

arguing that literary form operates in their works “as concrete embodiments of historical conjunctures and simultaneously as examples of resistance to the reification of historical teleology” (120). Such histories are not merely inserted into a larger pre-existing history that is then assigned primacy, the accusation that has often been levelled against such historiographic attempts. According to such criticism, the subsumption of smaller sub-national and national narratives to the metanarrative of capital neglects the untranslatable cultural differences among constituents of World Literature. *Insurgent Imaginations* rejects this false binary of the local and the universal, citing literary form as a means through which each produces the other.

In suggesting that current scholarly impasses may have their answers in re-readings of the past, *Insurgent Imaginations* locates the multiple crossings of form that have animated leftist writing of the twentieth century and beyond, in both fiction and non-fiction. Majumder finds answers to the confusion between the local and the universal in a period when the two were not separated as strictly as they are at present. The work begins with a discussion of two seemingly unconnected figures from world history — the Bengali writer and Nobel laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, and Mao Zedong, and the cross-cultural interactions brought about by the contemporaneity of Indian Independence (1947) and the Chinese Revolution (1949). Such connections are further explored in subsequent chapters and the scope of the work is expanded to include Latin American *Cinema Novo* and figures from American labor and racial justice movements. Majumder sees in the work of Mrinal Sen the influence of *Cinema Novo* directors such as Cuban Julio Garcia Espinosa and the Argentinians Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino alongside more local inspirations from Bengali writers such as Jibanananda Das and Manik Bandopadhyay. Such influences are also not straightforward and form networks that are often difficult to unravel for the contemporary viewer: the Bengali dramaturge Utpal Dutt’s street theater, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s Kamiriithu experiments, and the revolutionary model plays of the Chinese Cultural Revolution are connected not merely by their near-simultaneous productions but also by their desire to create literary mediations under similar economic conditions. Such networks connect such works to an earlier Brechtian tradition and in the case of Dutt, also draws on 1960s collaborations between Indians and African Americans, as seen in his stage adaptation of the Scottsboro case, *Manusher Adhikarey* (1968). Tagore’s vision of *visva-sahitya* (World Literature) offers not merely a means of linking literatures from the periphery but also a method for understanding those attempts at universal humanism that trace their origins to the periphery. It is such a process of unraveling international connections that *Insurgent Imaginations* calls for, particularly by recuperating models of peripheral literatures such as the one offered by Tagore.

Referring to the Brazilian critic Ismail Xavier’s evocative phrase, “allegories of underdevelopment” (85), Majumder argues that a reexamination of earlier works of literature and film as allegories allows us not to move past the local. Rather,

such works reveal “not the existence of an ideal reality transcending individuals and circumstances, but how these latter are surfeit with overarching yet invisible universals” (85-86). Works of *visva-sahitya* are thus, not just universals disguised as the local but attempts at realizing the universal immanent in the local. This offers a way of (if not a way out of) addressing the impasse that current scholarship on World Literature often finds itself mired in, oscillating between celebrations of difference and quests for representational models suited to global capitalism. Majumder’s focus on works of vernacular Bengali literature allows for an examination of the always-already international nature of the peripheral. Such analyses of the international have much in common with Nick Couldry’s assessment of the transnational, which he points out is always embedded in the local, rendering any strict separation between the two fallacious. Couldry suggests that apart from the theoretical validity of such a position, the practical possibilities of local resistances (that acknowledge their transnational character) necessitate more studies such as the one Majumder undertakes.⁴ Discussions of Devi’s acclaimed short story, “Draupadi,” for instance, take into account both the ways in which she has been decontextualized in the Anglo-American academy as a global writer, as well as Devi’s own methods of “negotiating demotic contestations over the world” (121) Majumder painstakingly situates Devi’s work in traditions of Bengali literature, but this does not prevent the analysis from seeing the “emerging contours of a horizontal solidarity” in the work (130). On the contrary, it is by seeing international pressures that are intrinsic to the local, that he offers a fuller picture of Devi’s work.

Similar pressures are an integral part of the work of a writer like Arundhati Roy, who, as the author of the Booker Prize-winning novel *The God of Small Things* (1997), is an even more celebrated global literary figure than Devi. Majumder focuses on Roy’s non-fiction, pointing out the narrative element in such works, specifically in *Walking with the Comrades* (2011), her essay on the Naxalite movement led by the *Adivasis* (indigenous communities) in India that has largely gone unnoticed. The choice of a piece of journalistic writing is an interesting one, as it allows Majumder to tease out the nuances of Roy’s own narrative persona as a character within her essay. This carefully cultivated persona enables Roy to leverage her own celebrity to mock liberal pretensions to solidarity with those on the margins. It simultaneously offers an opportunity to understand the traditions of journalistic writing into which Roy falls into – much like with Devi and her literary predecessors, Majumder is careful to situate Roy in a longer history of Indian journalistic writing that includes Satnam’s *Jangalnama: Travels in a Maoist Guerrilla Zone* and D. Markandeya’s *Jaitrayatra* (victorious journey). Both works detail insurgent movements in the Indian hinterland while tracing the source of their inspiration to similar twentieth-century movements across the global periphery. Roy’s work is thus not unique, but forms part of a larger corpus that interrogates those forms of imperialism that joins *Adivasis* with “Vietnam, the US empire, the Cold War, and pan-Africanist Black struggle” (157).

Not all forms of peripheral internationalism offer modes of anti-capitalist resistance, though. Aravind Adiga's novel, *The White Tiger*, offers an example of how strategies and theoretical contributions of the Left are often appropriated to generate consent for neoliberal strategies, by the Right, or rather, a group that activist and author Tariq Ali calls the "extreme centre." Ali points out that the emergence of such a dogmatic center has led to the adoption of "middle-of-the-road policies" at the expense of radical solutions, even when faced with abject poverty and man-made environmental apocalypse.⁵ While Adiga does offer strategies for understanding contemporary Indian reality beyond trite confrontations between the universal and the particular, Majumder argues that the novel's denouement devolves into an endorsement of the "freedoms" bestowed by neoliberal policies. What the plot fails to accomplish, however, the form of the novel retains — animated by "formal principles of discrepancy and incongruity" (174), it foregrounds "the overarching problematic of uneven development of social form" in India (178).

Such a reading retains the project's emphasis on developing newer scales of analysis for world literature and also advances the recently renewed interest in Leon Trotsky's theory of combined and uneven development among literary scholars. Such an interest has depended as much on the work of Neil Smith and Doreen Massey in Geography as it has on Justin Rosenberg's work in International Relations, among other contributions. In literary theory, the reemergence of Trotsky owes much to the Warwick Research Collective, which defines world literature "as the literature of the world-system — of the modern capitalist world-system, that is."⁶ Much like Majumder, the collective also conceptualizes world literature through unevenness, eschewing false binaries of the local and the universal. While Majumder does mention the collective, one wishes that he had engaged at a deeper level with its work, especially since the specific socio-economic events that underwrite the works of world literature and film are not always immediately apparent. This is, in a sense, understandable since Majumder's focus remains on how literary works can map the cognitive and the affective dimensions of uneven development that is a feature, rather than a flaw of global capitalism. *Insurgent Imaginations* explores how such unevenness is allegorized by writers and filmmakers from the periphery, suggesting that it is not specific moments like Bandung alone that matter but also imagined solidarities that develop on the peripheries that are not always as clearly definable. Such solidarities do, however, offer the utopian possibility of tracing the processes through which global capitalism operates. As one is faced with the difficult yet necessary task of imagining such moments of collective resistance that resist being rerouted into capitalist networks, Majumder posits twentieth century literary activism as a repository of international encounters that demonstrates the possibilities of an insurgent imagination.

The book's contribution, in the final analysis, is to our current understandings of World Literature, which has too often in the academy come to signify a collection

of disparate non-Western national literatures rather than a heuristic. *Insurgent Imaginations* seeks to reclaim World Literature from such narrow definitions and position it against fixed groupings of literatures and canons, arguing that it should consist of the intertextual linkages between constituents that are in a constant state of flux. World Literature thus becomes an opportunity to reclaim the unnoticed and buried connections between the literatures of the third world, a space that Majumder admits is an abstraction, albeit only in relation to capital. The book thus allows readers to reevaluate literary works and scholarly debates of the past (notably the Fredric Jameson-Aijaz Ahmad debate in a fascinating analysis), while insisting on viewing such works through the collective challenges they posed to imperialism.

Notes

1. David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton UP, 2003).
2. Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, Trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Harvard UP, 2004).
3. Nirvana Tanoukhi, "The Scale of World Literature," *New Literary History*, 39.3 (2008): 599-617. And Oded Nir, "World Literature as a Problem of Scale," *Scale in Literature and Culture*, Eds. M. Tavel Clarke and D. Wittenberg (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
4. Nick Couldry, "What and Where is the Transnationalized Public Sphere?," *Transnationalizing the Public Sphere*, Ed. Kate Nash (Polity Press, 2014).
5. Tariq Ali, *The Extreme Centre* (Verso, 2015).
6. Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature*. (Liverpool UP, 2015).

Invoking Hope: Theory and Utopia for Dark Times

Phillip E. Wegner

University of Minnesota Press, 2020

272 pp

US \$28.00

ISBN 978-1517908867

We Need Hope

Brent Ryan Bellamy

We need hope. I do not need to recount the reasons. We each know the litanies. We all know the threats.

Phillip E. Wegner's book participates in the project we call theory, utopia, and reading each for the sake of hope. Wegner explains and historicizes hope in a deeply personal manner. What I mean by personal in this context could be mistaken to indicate idiosyncrasy on the part of the author. The book relies on what he describes as a "disposable canon" (16). Wegner situates his selection of interlocutors, "While I am convinced that the close and creative reading of all the texts I engage with in these pages is a valuable education in its own right...I hope that the discovery of the motivation of these choices becomes another occasion for intellectual delight as well as teaching" (16). What could he mean? Well, in the book's structurally focused latter half, *Invoking Hope* swings from W.E.B. DuBois's *John Brown* (first published in 1909) to Karen Blixen's story "Babette's Feast" (published under the nom-de-plume Issac Dinesen in the June 1950 issue of *Ladies Home Journal*) and then again on to the Adam Sandler-Drew Barrymore flick *50 First Dates* (2004) and Kim Stanley Robinson's *2312* (first published in 2012) only to conclude with David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (first published in 2004). The heading "Utopia" introduces this half of the book, and utopias have long been, well, idiosyncratic. We all know the adage, one person's utopia is another's immiseration. Still, for me, the work of the personal in Wegner's book can be traced to his commitment to maintaining an idiom consistent across his works. Wegner harvests his explanatory mode from the works of Badiou, Barthes, Bloch, Lacan, Jameson, and others. He plants and tends a deeply thought garden of

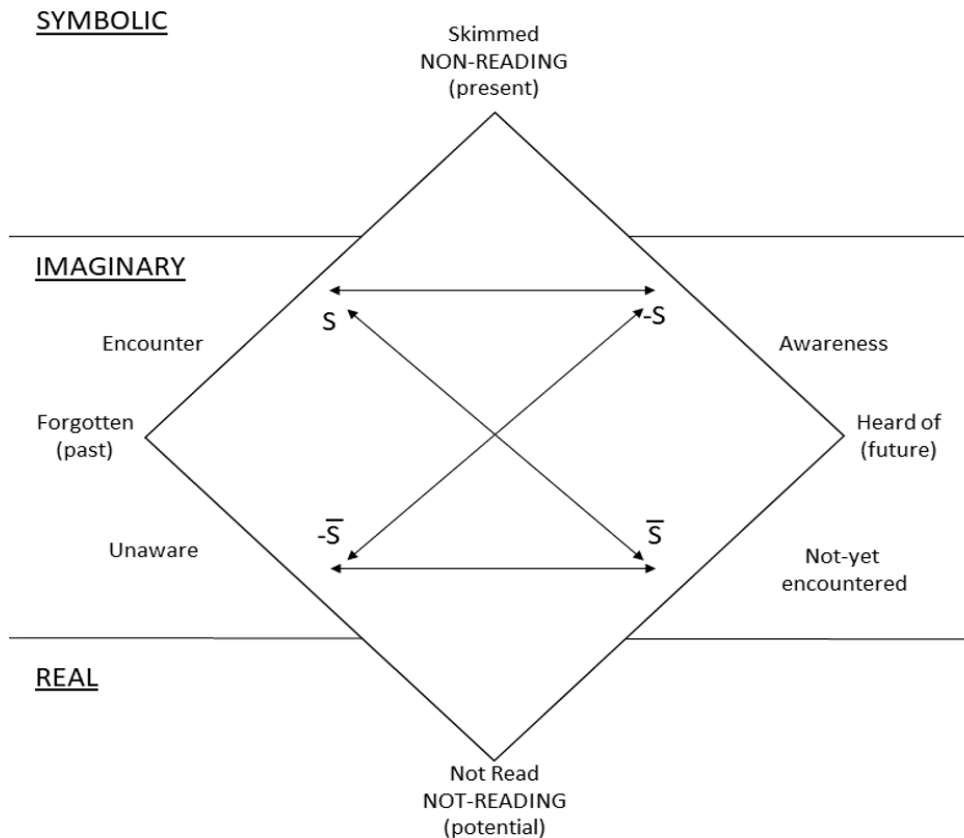
expression across his ongoing project of thought and writing. Call it an oeuvre or life's work, if you will, but in the age of the media conglomerate franchise I have come to think of it as the Wegniverse.

Let me explain.

First, Wegner's work has never shied from popular culture, nor from genre writing in his analysis. As a graduate student, for instance, I learned about the possibilities of the Lacanian quilting point from Wegner's insightful periodization of *The Terminator* (1984) and *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991) across the symbolic first death of the Cold War (see *Life Between Two Deaths: U.S. Culture, 1989-2001*): the unstoppable, emotionless threat represented by the machine in the first film transforms into a big, lovable father-figure of a machine in the second. Wegner's investment in theory and continental philosophy does not preclude his curiosity in popular culture.

Second, Wegner's commitment to the project of theory exceeds any one master signifier in the field. As he suggests at the outset of *Periodizing Jameson: Dialectics, the University, and the Desire for Narrative*, we need to add a synthetic practice to the declaration "Always historicize," namely "Always totalize" (31): a practice that is not only structurally minded, but historically attendant. The first half of *Invoking Hope* follows the heading "Theory" and demonstrates Wegner's capacity to blast, smite, and transcend theoretical interventions, historicizing them and drawing them together into a larger structural arrangement. Such a perspective emerges through Wegner's critique of the university. Here Lacan's three orders meet Greimas's semiotic square, as repurposed by Jameson. Wegner concedes that he does the heavy lifting for this explanation in *Periodizing Jameson* (*Invoking Hope* 40): readers familiar with that title will keep up here.

Third, there is a shared language across Wegner's texts. *Invoking Hope* participates in the Wegniverse from its chapter design down to its sentences that grows out of the theory. I think the best example of how Wegner uses this transcoded structural device of the Greimassian semiotic square can be found in chapter 2, "Toward Non-Reading Utopia" where Wegner takes up Pierre Bayard's *How to Talk about Books you Haven't Read* (2007). The opposing terms here are "encounter" and "not-yet encountered" and the determining contradiction is "awareness" and "unaware." Put succinctly, there are books we have forgotten and books we have heard of, book we are skimming and books we're not reading (skimming here has to do with Bayard's claim and Wegner's elaboration that nonreading exposes the truth: we never really read a book, we always, to some extent, nonread it). I happen to find the semiotic square much more legible than an all too quick description of it, so here you are: a semiotic square layered with Lacan's three orders to represent the possibilities of non-reading (73).



Here the encounter with the symbolic neatly fits with the act of reading in the present (thank you for nonreading this review!). The imaginary is the demesne of those books we've forgotten or transposed into our generalized understanding and of those books we know we ought to take a look at or a listen to. Finally, the realm of the real is one of where possibilities reside: which titles are we unaware of and have not-yet encountered?

Fourth, you don't need to read each entry to benefit from the larger project (sorry Phil!), which is, from the work of Bloch, to train our desires! In a sense, Wegner endorses non-reading in the way Bayard would have it: "all 'reading is first and foremost non-reading' (23; qtd. in Wegner 71). Along with Bayard, Wegner pushes the utopian horizon of non-reading by allowing it to modify what we consider reading in the first place. He explains, "any communication we offer of a book, verbal, written, or otherwise, is a locally and deeply contingent act of *writing* that book." Crucially, he adds, "this is the case even if such writing takes place in our heads and only for the audience of our future selves" (74) — Wegner adds a whole new meaning to

honeycomb universes, in this case they are the honeycombing vertiginous iterations of readings, some deeply personal github only accessible through conversation, gesture, reading, and writing. I tell my students that writing and thinking happen at once. The reconsideration of reading itself inspires an update to the axiom: “All reading is writing and all writing is a creative act” (13).

These points may help to justify or explain my own encounter with Wegner’s invocations as a massive, sprawling project that stretches across time and space. Grounded as it is in institutional history, I find *Theory and Utopia for Dark Times* to be sufficiently materialist in its refutation of post-critique. It encourages me to read a demonstration of criticism rather than, as Wegner offers in his introduction, a non-reading of post-criticism. It makes a case that finally converges in an argument for hope. Even if nonreaders struggle with certain chapters the overall project is worth it: both as a cohesive argument that undermines anti-political thinking and as a kind of proof for trusting and then explaining one’s intuitions about culture, theory, and utopia.

If none of this convinces you to read the book, let me try another approach for the literary historians. Wegner’s reading of W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley’s “The Intentional Fallacy” (1946) and “The Affective Fallacy” (1949) as a Badiouian event in the history of the Anglophone university is a worthy reconsideration of dialectical thinking and how to position literary criticism within the academy that spurred a diversifying generation of students well-equipped with the capacity to close read (56). Nonreaders curious about critical university studies, Plato’s *The Republic*, Badiou, and new criticism will be interested in skimming this chapter.

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