Mimetic Rationality: Adorno's Project of a Language of Philosophy

Harro Müller

Theodor W. Adorno repeatedly addressed issues concerning the conception of language and the critique of language. In his early "Theses on the Language of Philosophy" he states emphatically, "All deceiving ontology is especially to be exposed by means of a critique of language."[1] In *The Jargon of Authenticity* he writes: "Contemporary German ideology is careful not to pronounce tangible doctrines, whether liberal or even elitist. It has slid into language. . . . The fact that such language is actually ideology, i.e. socially necessary *Schein*, 'appearance,' can be shown from within it. This becomes obvious in the contradiction between its 'how' and its 'what.'"[2] In the posthumously published *Graeculus Fragments*, which followed *Minima Moralia*, he notes, only a month before his death: "The linguistic manner of Marx has long since been suspicious to me. But what if an incisive critique of the entire thing were to be carried out starting with the language. For example the derivative rhetoric and use of metaphor—does this not bear witness against him, from the perspective of the philosophy of history?"[3] Yet Adorno did not develop a theory of language.

1. An English translation of this important early text appears in Donald A. Burke et al., eds., *Adorno and the Need in Thinking: New Critical Essays*, trans. Samir Gandesha and Michael K. Palmarek (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 39.

2. Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederick Will (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), xxi. Translation modified. Hereafter cited as *JA*.

3. Theodor W. Adorno, "Graeculus (II): Notizen zu Philosophie und Gesellschaft," *Frankfurter Adorno Blätter* 6 (1997): 38.

New German Critique 108, Vol. 36, No. 3, Fall 2009
DOI 10.1215/0094033X-2009-012

Nor can one claim that when it came to the theory of language he, who frequently demanded that philosophy be pursued only in close symbiosis with scientific research,[4] lived up to his own expectations in even the most rudimentary way. Nor did he—looking now only at the more narrowly philosophical tradition—engage intensively with the famous H-series of German philosophers of language (Johann Georg Hamann, Johann Gottfried Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt). Adorno consigns the first two to the precritical, pre-Kantian camp (*HF*, 108, 292). His lip service to Humboldt hardly suggests a deep immersion in Humboldt's writings,[5] especially given that Adorno always characterized the hermeneutic tradition from Humboldt through Friedrich Schleiermacher to Wilhelm Dilthey as idealistic and unworthy of serious consideration.[6] Nor can one speak of a systematic treatment of twentieth-century positions on the theory of language or linguistics. He read Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* in the 1930s, but as late as the 1960s it served him only as a foil for demarcating positivist unreason, generally without cognitive investment. Adorno does not seem to have found Wittgenstein's immensely suspenseful, extremely sharp-witted *Philosophical Investigations*, which were available in German after 1960, worth reading. He probably did not take in a single line of the extremely interesting and astute works on linguistic theory written in the 1960s, with great cognitive investment, by such authors as Hans-Georg Gadamer, J. L. Austin, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, W. V. O. Quine, and Richard Rorty. The same is probably true of the classic authors Charles Sanders Peirce, Gottlob Frege, Ferdinand de Saussure, Karl Bühler, Roman Jakobson, and Noam Chomsky. Adorno did plan to hold a seminar in 1967 on French structuralism, in which he wanted to look at Claude Lévi-Strauss and Lacan.[7] This seminar never took place; I have found no traces of a reading of Lacan in Adorno's writings. For Adorno, who liked to think of himself as belonging to the rather hyperbolically termed "most advanced consciousness," it may be symptomatic that in 1968 he thought that the linguist and cofounder of phonology Nikolay Trubetzkoy, who had died in 1938, was a colleague living and

4. Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom: Lectures, 1964–1965*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 168. Hereafter cited as *HF*.

5. Theodor W. Adorno, "Gloss on Personality" and "On the Question: 'What Is German?'" in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 164, 213. Hereafter cited as *CM*.

6. Jürgen Habermas, "Die Zeit hatte einen doppelten Boden: Theodor W. Adorno in den fünfziger Jahren," in *Adorno Porträts: Erinnerungen von Zeitgenossen*, ed. Stefan Müller-Dohm (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007), 15–24. Hereafter cited as "Die Zeit."

7. Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*, ed. Christoph Gödde, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 103. Hereafter cited as *IS*.

teaching in Vienna (*IS*, 103). Thus it comes as no surprise that at the Adorno conferences of 1983 and 2003 Adorno's conception of language was not considered as a separate topic, and Sybille Krämer, in her compendium on theory of language, lists Wittgenstein, Jürgen Habermas, and Niklas Luhmann, among others, but does not find Adorno worthy of inclusion.[8] In his book on the dialectics of modernity and postmodernity, the Frankfurt School philosopher Albrecht Wellmer offers a rather brief discussion of Adorno's conception of language.[9] In the introduction to his lecture course Language Philosophy, he mentions that Adorno's critique of language "combined philosophical generalities with their historical-critical concretion" before moving on to discuss Wittgenstein, Donald Davidson, Martin Heidegger, and Gadamer.[10] In his 2007 collection Wellmer includes an introductory essay, originally published in 1991, in which he compares Adorno and Wittgenstein.[11] Several recent edited volumes on the current state of analytic philosophy, which treat their subject in detail with perspicacity and a certain degree of sharp-wittedness, do not mention Adorno—if I see it correctly—even in a footnote.[12]

So perhaps we could just say, "Adorno, it's only history," and let it go at that. But this, at best, would be one side of the coin. It is true that, for Adorno, if one is to believe Habermas, the relevant history of philosophy—by which is meant academic philosophy—came to an end with Henri Bergson, Georg Simmel, and Edmund Husserl in Göttingen, and to this extent the Frankfurt School's discourse, for all the catalytic power of its aesthetic theory, had something old-fashioned about it ("Die Zeit," 22). But Adorno was a thinker who always knew that for humans there could be no absolute beginning. His entire intellectual profile—especially when it comes to formulating problems of the conception and critique of language—represents a reworking of impulses, intuitions, suggestions, notions, thoughts that he has gleaned from Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Kraus, Ernst Bloch, Siegfried Kracauer, Georg Lukács, and Walter Benjamin,

8. Ludwig Friedeburg and Jürgen Habermas, eds., *Adorno-Konferenz* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983); Axel Honneth, ed., *Dialektik der Freiheit: Frankfurter Adorno-Konferenz 2003* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005); Sybille Krämer, *Sprache, Sprechakt, Kommunikation: Sprachtheoretische Positionen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001).

9. Albrecht Wellmer, *Zur Dialektik von Moderne und Postmoderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), 72–77. Hereafter cited as *ZD*.

10. Albrecht Wellmer, *Sprachphilosophie: Eine Vorlesung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), 11.

11. Albrecht Wellmer, *Wie Worte Sinn Machen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007), 255–65.

12. William G. Lycan, ed., *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2006); Michael Devitt and Richard Henley, eds., *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Language* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006).

productively emending and independently carrying them forward. These are all thinkers who situated themselves or found themselves situated essentially outside the discourse of academic philosophy. Nietzsche's ideas about definition and concepts, Kraus's seismographic language critique, Bloch's utopian modus, Kracauer's physiognomic and symptomatic method, Lukács's concept of reification, and Benjamin's of mimesis and constellation stimulated Adorno in significant ways. To this should be added Adorno's careful reading of Sigmund Freud; his lifelong intensive concern with the "languages" of art, especially music; his critical continuation and rethinking of idealist and materialist positions (Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx); his in-depth work on phenomenological (Husserl) and critical-rational (Max Weber–Karl Popper) positions. The philosopher from whom he received the greatest number of intellectual impulses was Nietzsche.[13] The existential tradition, with its strictly nominalist theory of language, also plays a certain role; not for nothing did Adorno write his *Habilitationsschrift* on Søren Kierkegaard. In the 1930s he gave Heidegger's *Time and Being* an attentive reading; whether he read many other works by Heidegger is at best doubtful. At least, the textual basis of his confrontation with Heidegger is rather narrow, both in *The Jargon of Authenticity* (1963) and in his lecture course Ontology and Dialectics (1960–61), in which the late Heidegger's famous concept of "framing" (*Gestell*) appears as "scaffolding" (*Gerüst*).[14] As for analytic philosophy (Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore, etc.) and the Viennese Circle (Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, Otto Neurath, etc.), during his time in Oxford Adorno elected to regard them from some distance. Symptomatic is the fact that the first volume of his correspondence with Max Horkheimer contains some brusque and polemical remarks on these forms of language philosophy, while the second volume and its commentaries are completely mute on related positions. Evidently, reformulating analytic language philosophy as ordinary language philosophy did not interest him.

Be that as it may, the greatness, the profundity, the richness and capacity to stimulate of a thinker are revealed not in the profile he establishes by plowing through masses of intellectual meanings and materials or tirelessly discoursing on one new position after another, but in his ability to pursue complex thoughts persistently, originally, and with stringency, and to present them in a textual form that invites ever fresh contemplation, completion, rethinking, and newly productive responses and reformulations.

13. Theodor W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 172.

14. Theodor W. Adorno, *Ontologie und Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), 15.

I do not want to provide a historical reconstruction of Adorno's thought experiments but begin instead by setting forth four presuppositions of his thought—"It is impossible to do without such suppositions"[15]—that were consistent and crucial determinants of the form his philosophy would take. These are his repudiation of *prima philosophia*; his plea for a relational, differential construction of concepts; his postulate of radical secularization; and his demand that there should be consequences for the form of presentation, consequences that are linked to his mode of philosophical approach. Then I present his complex, mimetic-rational conception of language in such a way as to make clear Adorno's position on the conception and critique of language, where he stakes out the position from which he observes, and how he links the critique of society and language nonreductively, driven by his initial intuition to formulate "philosophy in an authoritative sense, without either system or ontology."[16] The conclusion of the essay consists of a montage of quotations into which I insert an explicatory section.

I

Perhaps it makes sense, in writing about an author whose major theoretical work bears the title *Negative Dialectics*, to begin with a negation. Jacob Burckhardt's motto was "Above all, no philosophy of history." For Adorno, it is "Above all, no *prima philosophia*." What does this mean? Adorno's fundamental intuition is that all philosophy founded on a single principle—all monist theories—not only is dogmatic and apologetic but also formulates fantasies of dominance.[17] "To attempt to derive the world, in words, from a principle is the behavior of someone who would like to usurp power instead of resisting it" (*MM*, 88–89; trans. modified). Spokespersons for first philosophy always act as if they have everything in the bag, and know it all; in the process, the search for what came first, which is at the same time a search for last things, always winds up in infinite regress.[18] Fetishism and hypostasized concepts are the logical methods of this search. When it comes to the theory of truth, *prima*

15. Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie: Zur Einleitung*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973–74), 2:282. Hereafter cited as *PT*.

16. Theodor W. Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics: Fragments of a Lecture Course, 1965–1966*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 31. Hereafter cited as *LND*.

17. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1974), 98. Hereafter cited as *MM*.

18. Theodor W. Adorno, *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique; Studies in Husserl and the Phenomenological Antinomies*, trans. W. Domingo (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), 14, 29. Hereafter cited as *AE*.

philosophia, in thrall to imaginary dreams of empowerment, casts its lot with warmed-over theories and their reductive arguments, buttressed by doctrines of invariance. What are some of the candidates for this kind of treatment? More or less at random, we could name air, water, fire, earth, Being, logos, spirit, idea, God, Nature, material, history, reason, life, man, consciousness, self-consciousness, subjectivity, subject, ego, self-awareness (*Selbstgefühl*), feeling, will, the will to power, language, and more. In the given circumstances, what might Adorno have to say, for example, about the linguistic turn?[19] If one understands, by the linguistic turn, that language replaces consciousness or self-consciousness as the first or final foundational concept, he would be in strict opposition. On the other hand, if one understands by the linguistic turn that human feeling, knowing, cognizing, and acting are dependent on language, without being reducible to language in any strict sense, Adorno would agree.[20]

The rejection of *prima philosophia* is linked to a plea for a *secunda philosophia*. To put it ironically, philosophy does not begin with the number 1, but always with the number 2. The number 2 calls the legitimacy of 1 into doubt and embarks, in divergence, on the search for the number 3—unable ever to give proof of strict synthesis (3), but perhaps pointing in its direction. Thus, according to Adorno, we must always mark differentiations, differences, distinctions, relations that are not strictly reducible to a foundational basic term. For example, one may set up the relation immediacy/mediation, in which case the important thing is to consider the immediate in what is mediated and the mediated in what is immediate, in order, in this way, to avoid the phantasm of the primal—that the immediate is the origin of the mediated. This reflection not only renders all theological or strongly metaphysical positions vulnerable to the charge of conceptual absolutism, and rejects them; it also negates all strongly transcendental forms of argumentation, since—if I see it correctly—the oppositional pair transcendental-empirical, like the oppositional pair friend-enemy, cannot be turned recursively. This idea is linked to the thesis that concepts are always historical-systematic, without the historical being reducible to the systematic or vice versa. Thus Adorno fights constantly, unrelentingly, against relativist positions with their assumptions of arbitrariness, against absolutist positions masquerading as systems, against naively realistic positions with their simplistic assumptions of correspondence, and against the numerous forms of positivism and its various postulates of givenness. In the process

19. Richard Rorty, ed., *The Linguistic Turn* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).
20. Cf. Wellmer, *Sprachphilosophie*, 17–23.

Adorno needs a space where he can locate his recursive, autological, historical-systematic operations, and he calls it "intellectual experience" (*geistige Erfahrung*),[21] "full, undiminished experience in the medium of conceptual reflection" (*LND*, 82). The concept of experience (*Erfahrung*) has the great advantage of combining active and passive moments (experiencing, having an experience).[22] It can be applied to external perceptions and to internal somatic, psychic, and mental events, and it simultaneously marks the place where determinate and indeterminate, immanent and transcendent, prelinguistic and linguistic, intuition and concept, the nonidentical and the identical, the intrasubjective, intersubjective, and transsubjective can rub up against each other productively. Not for nothing does Adorno speak of intellectual experience, thus combining experience and intellect in such a way that spiritual experiences can always also be turned back again onto intellectual experiences, so that something new can emerge: "Knowledge comes to us through a network of prejudices, opinions, innervations, self-corrections, presuppositions and exaggerations, in short through the dense, firmly-grounded but by no means uniformly transparent medium of experience" (*MM*, 80).

From these two suppositions the third results with a certain inevitability; it is implicit in the first two. I mention it explicitly because it is of great, indispensable importance for Adorno's ethos of salvation, which is aimed at unmet obligations (*Unabgegoltenes*). Here it is: "No theological content will remain unchanged; every content will have put itself to the test of migrating into the secular, the profane."[23] It is easy to see that with the rejection of *prima philosophia* is also meant the rejection of theology, to the extent that the latter is a doctrine of God as the first and ultimate cause. In the distinction between immanent/transcendent, this form of theology must always take its stand on the side of the "transcendent" and conceive "immanent" as dependent on the former. This figure of thought and argument is a theology of origins, which Adorno strictly rejects. If what one wants—in strict adherence to a hermeneutic of suspicion—is not to dispatch this distinction with the help of ideology or the critique of religion, but instead to salvage it critically, to translate it into the secular, then the following consideration comes to mind. One reverses the order,

21. As is well known, *geistig* can also be translated as "spiritual"; however, given this passage's emphasis on the cognitive, "intellectual" seems more appropriate here.—Trans.

22. The distinction is more marked in German, where the active term (*eine Erfahrung machen*), literally translated, would be "to make an experience."—Trans.

23. Theodor W. Adorno, "Reason and Revelation," in *CM*, 136. Translation modified.

starts with the historically or systematically situated distinction immanent-transcendent, and turns it recursively: then immanent is at once immanent and transcendent. This manner of proceeding makes possible a radical historicization, because the distinction, without ontologizing historicity, now tells us that what is, is not everything; history is not a completely closed torture chamber, not a walled-in, no-exit abode of catastrophe, but makes new things possible and allows acts of freedom: "Every individual trait in the nexus of deception is nevertheless relevant to its possible end. Good is what struggles free, finds language, opens its eyes. In its condition of struggling free, it is interwoven with history, which, without being unambiguously ordered toward reconciliation, allows the possibility of the latter to flash up in the process of its moving on."[24]

In his early, programmatic text, "The Actuality of Philosophy," Adorno considers what procedural methods are appropriate for a philosophy that has departed, energetically, from a subject position that was ahistorical, identical, and transcendental,[25] without wanting to become a basic overarching science (*LND*, 57). Sailing between the Scylla of nominalism (ostentatious references to *Dasein* as "being there"—*Dies-da-Bestimmungen*) and the Charybdis of realism (idealist hypostasization), he makes his plea for interpretation as a philosophical procedure that claims the status of evidence while remaining conscious of its fallibility. He suggests a technical procedure of "varying experimental conditions," wants to present "models," and attempts to take on the "risk of experimentation" ("Actuality," 127, 131, 133; trans. modified). As a whole, it is a plea for reflexive, fallible methods of writing, for the essay as a form of representation that—proceeding experimentally—exhibits its own methodologies because its concepts are neither constructed from a first principle nor rounded into a final one.[26] It is a form that in its methodically unmethodical, coordinating method of proceeding takes account of the consideration "that man is no creator, that nothing human is creation" ("Essay as Form," 165). All his life Adorno wrote essays, experiments. His aphorisms are miniature essays; *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory* are books composed of essays. Constitutive for the writing of essays are problems of representation

24. Theodor W. Adorno, "Progress," in *CM*, 148. Translation modified.

25. Theodor W. Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," trans. Benjamin Snow, *Telos*, no. 31 (1977): 125. Hereafter cited as "Actuality."

26. Theodor W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form," trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor and Frederic Will, *New German Critique*, no. 32 (1984): 152. Hereafter cited as "Essay as Form."

(*Darstellungsprobleme*), to which Adorno always devoted the most serious attention, both theoretically and practically.

II

Adorno's conception of language is encompassing. There are languages of humankind, of animals, of art, of nature, of things. Human language is linked to social production/reproduction, interwoven with the forms in which living, mortal human beings live out their lives, always yoked to relations of power. Adorno loves two-part formulations. For him, therefore, human language is always expression and communication/sign,[27] expression and sense/intellect/spirit (*geistiger Gehalt*),[28] expression and stringency, in itself and for others ("Skoteinos," 105), *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*,[29] *constituens* and *constitutum*, particular and general/universal (*AT*, 204), characterized by autarchy/autonomy and *fait social*,[30] mimetic and rational/stringent/conceptual/speculative ("Skoteinos," 89–148), expressive and signifying/discursive/argumentative (*GS*, 11:432–50), and so on. His conception of language is not a theory of communication (Karl-Otto Apel, Habermas, Luhmann), whose variously constituted theoretical architecture (ultimate foundation, despite all deflationary moves: pragmatic neo-Kantianism, methodological antihumanism) Adorno would have rejected more or less vehemently. It is neither a sentence-based theory that takes the—usually propositionally conceived—sentence (standard example: The current king of France is bald) as the starting point of the work of theory. Nor is it a text-based theory that starts, in principle, with units larger than a sentence. Instead, it combines a prepropositional word-based theory with a postpropositional constellation theory: in other words, subsentence with suprasentence forms, without distinguishing clearly among category, concept, term, and metaphor, and without defining the scope of the constellations. With this flexibly designed conception he gains a great deal but also loses a lot, because he simply fails to discuss, in whole or in part, many phonetic, phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical, semantic, and pragmatic linguistic

27. Theodor W. Adorno, "Skoteinos," in *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 104–5. Hereafter cited as "Skoteinos."

28. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 278. Hereafter cited as *AT*.

29. Theodor W. Adorno, "Charmed Language: On the Poetry of Rudolf Borchardt," in *Notes to Literature*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991–92), 2:204. Hereafter cited as *NL*.

30. Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, 20 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970–86), 8:30. Hereafter cited as *GS*.

problems. On the other hand, Adorno sees very clearly not only that linguistic practices are linked to nonlinguistic ones but also that language—"in its very own objective substance social expression" (*MM*, 219)—includes intrasubjective, intersubjective, and transsubjective aspects.[31] Hence those critics of Adorno who accuse him of having an outdated subject-object dialectic[32] miss the mark when they claim that he neglects the intersubjective dimension of language.[33] Those critics who vainly attempt to saddle Adorno with an intentional theory of language and meaning are also on the wrong track (Wellmer, *ZD*, 77). In *Against Epistemology*, Adorno's engaged confrontation with Husserl's phenomenology, he writes unmistakably: "'My' I is in truth already an abstraction and anything but the primal experience as which Husserl advertises it. The relation of possession defines it as something highly mediated. 'Intersubjectivity' is assumed by it, not merely as some pure possibility or other, but as the real condition of being an I, without which the limitation to 'my' ego cannot be understood" (*AE*, 230; trans. modified). Thus language, in a sense, belongs to the historical a priority of humanity, to the quasi-transcendental, unquestionable human tradition from which there is no escape, but toward which one may comport oneself in different ways, including as an active agent and innovator, by thinking, speaking, and acting in language, with language, about language, or at times against language. A rarely cited passage from Adorno's Husserl book gives ample evidence of this and shows once again that Adorno cannot be counted among those who adhere to an intentional theory of language and meaning: "But thought, through language and sign if nothing else, is prescribed to every individual, and to think its meaning 'for oneself' contains, even in the most extreme opposition, a moment of semblance: the part of individual thought that belongs to the individual thinker is negligible in both form and content" (*AE*, 60; trans. modified). Adorno, it must be said, paid scant attention to the implications of this sentence for the theory of representation.

Ultimately, Adorno's conception of language relies on a consideration that—so far as I can see—he never stated explicitly, but that results, in a strict sense, from all that has been detailed above. Language is more, richer, and at the same time less, poorer than "reality." Language contains a more, since it

31. See Christoph Demmerling, *Sprache und Verdinglichung: Wittgenstein, Adorno und das Projekt einer kritischen Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), 139–51.

32. See Brian O'Connor, *Adorno's Negative Dialectic: Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

33. See Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon, 1984–87), 1:389–92.

is not possible to observe—for example—identity, angels, or sentences about "everything." Indeed, even such simple words as *because*, *as*, and *and* or *or* are not perceptible. At the same time, language is less, poorer, than "reality," because it is forced into massive abstraction and is quite incapable of catching up with a reality that is manifold, multidimensional, and singular. It is well-known, for example, that it is possible to perceive many more colors than can be articulated in language. One must only try to give a precise description of the rich palette of the fall foliage in order to experience, in a flash, the poverty of language. Language, therefore, is less and more, is poor and rich at the same time; logically, it is a paradox; rhetorically, an oxymoron. Between language and reality, as a result, there always exist relations of asymmetry that, strictly speaking, cannot be resolved into a synthesis. There is no Archimedean point where less and more, poor and rich meet in the middle; for in such a case we would find ourselves back, once again, at *prima philosophia*. Hence, for Adorno, language, in its finitude and lack of capacity to be conclusive, contains an indispensable rhetorical aspect, an unavoidably performative dimension,[34] which always points toward its irresolvably paradoxical point of departure.

I would now like to clarify the extent and contours of Adorno's conception of language by asking where and how Adorno positions himself and his writing within the aesthetic, philosophical, and scientific forms of the linguistically transmitted production of knowledge, truth, and cognition. Here is a quotation from *Negative Dialectics*: "Philosophy is neither a science nor . . . a poetry of thought, but a form that is as mediated as it is distinct from what is different from it. Its suspended state is nothing but the expression of its inexpressibility. In this respect, it is a true sister of music" (*ND*, 109; trans. modified). Adorno constructs a tripartite field: art, philosophy, science. Philosophy is situated in the middle, is independent, reducible to neither art nor science, just as art is not reducible to philosophy or science, or science to art or philosophy. To this extent, all three fields, to borrow one of Heidegger's unlovely metaphors, are "equally original" (*gleichursprünglich*). For philosophy, therefore, there can be neither a resignation in favor of art nor a resignation in favor of science. Philosophy is mediated with and distinct from art, is the sister of art, of music and—following the logic of the image, although, typically, not made explicit by Adorno—mediated by and distinct from science, the brother of science.

34. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge; New York: Seabury, 1973), 55–57. Hereafter cited as *ND*.

Now the model is further complicated by the fact that it is structured both continuously/gradually and discontinuously/qualitatively. The mimetic-constructive aspect of language is continually in transition, passing through shades and gradations. Art works mimetically/constructively, philosophy works mimetically/argumentatively; science, in its extreme forms of pure formalization and strict mathematicization, seems to work purely according to formal logic, but has forgotten its own mimetic origins and is therefore—since questions of validity (*Geltung*) cannot be strictly separated from questions of genealogy (*Entstehung*) and vice versa—also dependent on mimetic moments. This can be demonstrated without difficulty based on the premises prescribed for formal systems (*IS*, 51–52).

Yet there is a whole series of discontinuous, qualitative differences to be noted. Art is aconceptual or at best distantly conceptual; philosophy attempts to use concepts to think beyond concepts; science employs either classificatory, that is, inductively or deductively organized systems of concepts, or formally derived constructs. Art is suggestive-enigmatic, philosophy ambiguous, science unambiguous. Art articulates the qualitative; philosophy combines quality and quantity; scientific research restricts itself to purely quantifiable results. Mimetic-constructive art has no argumentatively demonstrable connection to objects; philosophy combines expression with reference to objects; science is purely focused on objects. Art is play, philosophy has at least a playful side, science is serious. Art and philosophy, with their different means of representation, refer to the inexpressible, the unsayable, the unspeakable, the nonapparent, the nonidentical, the nonintentional, to freedom from domination, redemption, reconciliation, and peace: "Peace is the state of differentiation without dominance, with the differentiated participating in each other."[35] The formal sciences, forgetful of their mimesis, do not possess this capacity to point beyond; they offer formally or conceptually closed systems with unambiguous definitions. This, admittedly, is science in its false, extreme form. For the form of scientific sociology that Adorno envisioned, he strictly defends the validity of the normative and qualitative. He models sociology as a normative/empirical science and thus accentuates the gradual, not the qualitative, difference between philosophy and science.

Horkheimer and Adorno, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and Horkheimer, in *Eclipse of Reason*, presented this systematically constructed model in its historical and genealogical context, describing and explaining its developmental

35. Theodor W. Adorno, "Catchwords," in *CM*, 247.

history in all the continuous-discontinuous, qualitative-quantitative dimensions they had assigned to it, but without abandoning the normative claims inherent in their own conception.[36] The historically and philosophically grounded intuition on which *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is based is described by Horkheimer as follows: "The true critique of reason will necessarily uncover the deepest layers of civilization and explore its earliest history. . . . One might say that the collective madness that runs rampant today, from the concentration camps to the seemingly most harmless effects of mass culture, was already present in embryo form in primitive objectivization, in the first man's calculating view of the world as prey" (*ER*, 176; trans. modified). The universal history sketched out by Adorno and Horkheimer, to be construed and repudiated, respected and despised (*HF*, 93), is the history of crises that have become radicalized over time. The origin of this continuous crisis is manifested in the conflict between the rational and the mimetic. Human history as the catastrophic history of progress begins with this difference. How are we to think it? First, it is easy to see that both the rational and the mimetic are profoundly ambivalent in their structures. Rational are those methods of proceeding that identify objects as objects, that make them calculable, predictable. The essential process here is conceptualization, which, while it may free humanity from the spellbound context of mythic compulsion, simultaneously does violence to things, because—intent on the general—it excises the particular, cuts it to fit, manipulates things as prey.

From its inception, the rational has an instrumental aspect that leads to formalization and dequalification, a trait that, over the course of history, as a consequence of socioeconomic formations and the development of bourgeois capitalist society with its scientific system, has been massively strengthened. At the same time, it must be emphasized that this conceptual "rape" of the world also has its intellectually autonomous, independent, surplus side (*ND*, 106; *PT*, 1:113), so that conceptions like those of Nietzsche and Ludwig Klages, which position concepts, categories, as directly derivative (*abkünftig*) from life, cannot be made compatible with this more ambivalent, progressive-regressively marked genealogy of concepts.

It is not for nothing that Adorno always saw the task of philosophy as transcending the concept by means of the concept (*ND*, 15). Thus, while in relation to the rational we use the word *identify* transitively—to identify x as y—for

36. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Continuum, 2004); Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947). Hereafter cited as *DE* and *ER*, respectively.

the mimetic we employ it intransitively, to "identify" (oneself) with something (*LND*, 91–92). If, in the case of the rational, the identity principle reigns supreme, with the mimetic it is not, strictly speaking, the principle of differentiation but that of similarity that wins out: "Only as language can like recognize likeness" (*LND*, 180). The mimetic, with its ambivalent valence, is associated with words like imitation, adaptation, similarity, responsiveness (*Anschmiegung*), surrender, elective affinity, mitigation, disintegration, shock, shudder, horror, rage, scorn, assimilation with death.[37] Mimesis, in the wake of Gabriel Tarde, Benjamin, and Roger Caillois, includes "the sensually receptive, expressive, and responsive [*sich anschmiegend*] behaviors of the living" (Wellmer, *ZD*, 12) and shows itself in the expressive, rhythmic-melodic moments of language and in onomatopoeic words like *cuckoo*. Thus everything depends on the relationship between the rational-constructive and the mimetic-expressive; between the principle of identity, with its formal-logical syllogisms, and the principle of similarity, with its preferred use of homology (genetic structural affinity), analogy (functional similarity), isomorphism (structural similarity), and isotopism (partial identity of characteristics). Between the rational and the mimetic there exist complementary relationships. They are mutually and reciprocally requisite, complementary, and exclusionary. To this extent, there can be no strict form of synthesis between the rational and the mimetic but always only precarious, internally fragile balances, which one might possibly term disjunctive syntheses. But perhaps, in the sense of the foundational propositions set out above, there really is no possibility of getting from 2 to 3, for at the instant when I identify something as something, I cannot also identify myself with this something. The transitive and intransitive forms of the verb *identify*, in other words, cannot be fused into a single moment. Instead, if one thinks them both together as a single moment, what results is a paradox, which must be unraveled differently in each individual case, without its being possible to give any methodological rule for it.

It would be utterly wrongheaded to make either the mimetic or the rational into an absolute. If I make mimesis absolute, the result is regression into the "horror of the diffuse" (*ND*, 158), or *Weltanschauung*, with its reifying effects (*ND*, 18). If I make the rational absolute, however, it results in forms of instrumental reason without exit. Both are forms of self-enslavement, of the closed myth from whose spell no escape is possible. For Horkheimer and Adorno, now, the course of world history is such that despite art and philoso-

37. Cf. Josef Früchtl, *Mimesis: Konstellation eines Zentralbegriffs bei Adorno* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1986), 8–10, 258–65.

phy, methods of instrumental reason have become massively established in science, politics, and the economy and have brought about something like mimesis-oblivion. "Language today calculates, identifies, betrays, inspires murder, it does not express" (*DE*, 252). Horkheimer could not yet have gotten wind of the "pictorial turn"; thus he formulates: "The formula supplants the image, the calculating machines the ritual dances" (*ER*, 115). Horkheimer and Adorno's partly empirically corroborated, constructive philosophy of history, with its minimal anthropological premises, which—following a rhetoric of exaggeration—is presented, with a grand gesture, in fragmentary form, is further buttressed by another argumentative pattern, which also combines historical and systematic patterns. It is the structural homology between ontogenesis and phylogenesis that allows Horkheimer and Adorno to stylize the childhood of individual human beings, whose mimetic capacities appear undistorted, as a broken promise of happiness: "Humanity has had to do dreadful things to itself before the self, the identical, manly, goal-directed character of humanity was created, and something of this is repeated in every childhood" (*DE*, 33).

Yet we find Adorno, in the Kierkegaard book, giving the following, very flowery (*überschwenglich*) formulation, in the language of creation metaphysics: "The moments of fantasy are the festivals of history. As such, they belong to the free, liberated time of childhood. . . . As in the child creation reproduces itself in miniature, fantasy imitates creation through miniaturization."[38] In *Minima Moralia* there is a more sober-minded version that describes the mimetic capacities of children, their ability to be happy, in a way that I would like to render somewhat loosely as follows: If a child identifies with a hippopotamus, likens itself to a hippopotamus, transforms itself into a hippopotamus, calls itself a hippopotamus—"I am a hippopotamus"—then the child is a hippopotamus, and this is an act of mimetic assimilation and not an act of nominal assignment of meaning; at the same time the child is not the hippopotamus, for after all it no longer lives in the era of magical prehistory and no longer has to say "mutabor," as in the fairy tale, to change from the form of the hippopotamus back into the form of the child (cf. *MM*, 228). Childhood—not youth, as in Nietzsche and the movements that followed him—is the period of life to which Adorno refers again and again, because in childhood a promise of happiness, a happiness that is admittedly refracted but memorable and indispensable, is articulated.

38. Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 139.

In this section I first present fundamental concepts of Adorno's conception of language (use of foreign words, tautology, paradox, definition, equivocation), followed by his concepts of constellation, representation (*Darstellung*), and truth. After that, I show how Adorno's conception of language is linked to the conception of freedom, and how the conception of language, the presumption of freedom, and assumptions about the theory of time are interwoven.

Language as a practice is closely linked to nonlinguistic practices and forms part of the social relations of power and authority that obtain at any given time. In all possible linguistic phrases and turns of speech, from everyday language to the language of science, Adorno, with his interest in the critique of power and language, sniffs out reifications, hypostasizations that legitimize conditionalities as unconditional, derivatives as primary (*CM*, 248), and magically turn culture into second nature (*HF*, 121–22). Thus Adorno enters a heartfelt plea for the foreign word with its capacity to break up naturalistic effects: "Every foreign word contains the dynamite of enlightenment."[39] He deontologizes language and condemns all forms of substantialist naming metaphysics—Heidegger's philosophy being a case in point—as imitations of substantiality without an objective link to reality.

Adorno thoroughly distances himself from any belief in the magic power of *Urworte* (*GS*, 18:156); he does not follow the strong metaphysical assumptions of Benjamin's conception of language, or his conceptual politics with their frequently authoritarian modus. The metaphysics of naming can, at best, be reformulated in terms of constellations, whereby the constellations refer to the names, the unsayable: "Words, however, remain concepts; the names are not the things themselves, as the idea suggests. . . . The hope of naming lies in the constellation of the concepts that each gathers around itself, for the purpose of that correction" (*LND*, 178). In the "era of the 300 basic words" (*DE*, 202), he fights against fancy nouns (*Edelsubstantive* [*JA*, 6]); against "bleating" (*LND*, 151); against "watered-down language (*Gewäsch*), the linguistic form of stupidity" (*GS*, 8:267); against speech in mechanical tongues that pretend to be sacred (*JA*, 7–10); against all the forms of communication that aim only at getting something across and deny their relation to expression and objects (*JA*, 8–9). Language descends to the level of the pure token and displays a commodity form, is part of a society based on exchange that has erased everything qualitative in the interest of quantification: "The law according to which the fatality of human society unfolds is that of exchange" (*GS*, 8:209). In language, one can frequently find tautologies and paradoxes—for Adorno,

39. Theodor W. Adorno, "Words from Abroad," in *NL*, 1:190. Translation modified.

diminished forms of dialectical thought (*ND*, 140–43). He is particularly allergic to tautologies; no sooner has he fished one out than further reflection almost seems superfluous. Thus, for example, in his lecture on "the concept of philosophy," he has this to say about Heidegger's philosophy: "Actually such a philosophy says nothing else than that it 'is,' it turns into tautologies. The opening words of one of Heidegger's lectures on the philosophy of language are: 'Language is language. Language speaks. Language is language. Language is language that speaks.'"[40] This is enough to demolish Heidegger in Adorno's eyes. He does not assume the burden of unraveling tautologies. Yet he himself employs plenty of paradoxes, one of his favorite means of thought and argumentation, although he always wants to turn them back into something more fluid and dialectical, without attempting to achieve systematic closure or definitional unambiguousness.

Adorno's suspicion of paradoxes is grounded in part in the fact that paradoxical formulations presuppose strong assumptions of identity—something against which his whole manner as a thinker struggles. His relationship to definitions is more than ambivalent. One can "deduce" from his theory of concepts that definitions—especially prestated verbal definitions—have an arbitrary character, betray a legalistically administrative turn of mind, and are strict barriers to the undiminished movement of the experience of thought: "No one is so utterly intent on definitions as the amateur" (*GS*, 8:267). Naturally, Adorno is not simply against definitions; ultimately, however, he would like to place definitions at the end of a movement of thought and experience that makes a place for the object, immerses itself in it. Philosophy's conceptualities are equivocal, and there are good and bad equivocations. They are "philosophical artifices, through which the dialectic of thought hopes to realize itself in language" ("Skoteinos," 115; trans. modified). As speech that is ambiguous, that has two or more meanings, such conceptualities indicate that concepts do not exist in a one-to-one relationship with reality; rather, they mediate identity and difference in themselves, and in this way point to the speculative moment in the creation of the concept. Examples of positive equivocations, which Adorno mentions repeatedly, are the concept of progress and the concept of positivism, which, in their different usages, also aim at something in common. Thus positivism refers to what is positively given while linking it to a positive point of view (*GS*, 8:508). In the widely accepted division into thesis and argument Adorno also scents hierarchical, reifying elements. Consequently, he argues

40. Theodor W. Adorno, "Der Begriff der Philosophie: Vorlesungen Wintersemester, 1951/52," in *Frankfurter Adorno Blätter*, vol. 2 (Munich: text + kritik, 1993), 30.

that texts should combine conceptual structure, with its inherent tendency to abstract, classify, and dissect, its in some sense inevitable arbitrariness, with expression, and that they should do so in a manner that approaches the ideal of nonargumentative thought ("Skoteinos," 141).

Philosophy should create textual fabrics in which concepts that have been made dynamic refer to each other productively in multiple ways. Adorno's principal metaphor for the fabric of the text, which is of course also a metaphor, is the constellation. Texts that operate by constellation are characterized by their generation of conceptual magnetic fields that create multiple combinations of expression and signification. One might assume that the term *concept* has a negative valence and *constellation* a positive one, but this is not the case. If I take the concept of the constellation as absolute, I fall into relativism, thinking that is arbitrary (*beliebig*), and standpoint philosophy (*Standpunktphilosophie*). If I take the individual concept as absolute, I fall into conceptual absolutism, which suggests a metahistorical, timeless identity of concepts and aims at a "transcendental signified." Adorno's entire theoretical and practical striving is an attempt to avoid these two traps. This can succeed only if one pays the most acute attention both to the individual word and to the constellation. "The linguistic constellation and the manically intent gaze at the individual word that it requires complement one another" ("Skoteinos," 107; trans. modified). Hence the problem of representation is central for Adorno. Texts are to be written, composed, in such a way as to prefer coordination to subordination ("Essay as Form," 169–70), parataxis over hypotaxis.[41] They achieve this by organizing themselves—borrowing a means from Arnold Schoenberg's twelve-tone music—as equidistant from the center. Texts constructed in this way are essays.[42] One could—with a nod to Heinrich Mann's conception of the novel—call them a "poetry of democracy." This manner of proceeding does not result in the successful creation either of provable systems of statements (formal science) or of art, which conveys a spiritualized mimesis in the "secularly preserved form of prayer"[43] and which—whether aconceptual, distantly conceptual, or quasi conceptual (*AT*, 73)—may produce its own transcendence (*AT*, 78), but is simultaneously stricken with blindness: "Works of art are nei-

41. Theodor W. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," in *NL*, 2:134–36.

42. See Shierry Weber Nicholsen, *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno's Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 103–10.

43. Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Contemporary Relationship of Philosophy and Music," trans. Susan H. Gillespie, in *Theodor W. Adorno: Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 141.

ther absolute, themselves, nor repositories of the absolute. For their participation (μέθεξις) in it, they are stricken with a blindness that immediately darkens their language, a language of truth: they have it and do not have it" (*AT*, 193; trans. modified). The resulting texts are neither scientific nor artistic but philosophical—are texts that, as a fabric, weave together expression and stringency. Their stringency—stringency is sedimented content, content sedimented stringency (*HF*, 32)—necessarily contains a rhetorical, performative element. The latter points to the fact that stringency and expression, stringency and mimesis, stringency and experience cannot be brought into conformity. "Stringency" (*Stringenz*) replaces the previously often used word "evidence" (*Evidenz*), while the term *plausibility* (*Plausibilität*), although preferred by many others, does not appeal to Adorno with his claims to objectivity; it is too easily linked to historical relativism and its assumptions of arbitrariness (*Beliebigkeit*). Thus philosophy must combine the moment of stringency, of compelling force (*Verbindlichkeit*), with that of living experience or expression, "even though these two elements can never harmonize entirely" (*HF*, 133).

Adorno's particular conception of language does not adhere to any correspondence or adequacy theory of truth—no matter how one conceives such a theory structurally or otherwise. Rather, despite all immersion in the object, cognition is always exaggeration: "Cognition is, and by no means *per accidens*, exaggeration."[44] Cognition both is the case and simultaneously points beyond itself (*HF*, 184); in other words, it contains a necessarily transcending element. To this extent, Adorno yokes attenuated correspondence-theoretical and attenuated coherence-theoretical assumptions in a way that admits of no resolution[45] and is, strictly speaking, unable to provide the comparative term to make it possible to judge the extent of the exaggeration. Beyond contentism and formalism, the ground of exaggeration is fundamentally impenetrable. This form of exaggeration, which cannot be overtaken metatheoretically and therefore always proceeds methodically-unmethodically, should, however, be distinguished from hyperbolic uses of language employed strategically or instrumentally. There are plenty of these in Adorno, who was always on the lookout for opportunities to foreground the unusual, exceptional in critical theory as compared with traditional theories, to increase the power of its fascination for the public. The sentence cited above, "The law according to which the fatality

44. Theodor W. Adorno et al., *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, trans. Glyn Adey and Divis Frisby (London: Heinemann, 1976), 35.

45. See Harro Müller, "Theodor W. Adorno's Theorie des authentischen Kunstwerks: Rekonstruktion und Kritik des Authentizitätsbegriffs," in *Authentizität: Diskussion eines ästhetischen Begriffs*, ed. Susanne Knaller and Harro Müller (Munich: Fink, 2006), 62.

of human society unfolds is that of exchange," is an example of such a rhetorically and strategically employed exaggeration, for the reduction of the history of humankind to a law—even that of exchange (*Tausch*)—cannot be reconciled with the nonreductive starting point of Adorno's philosophical technique, which always begins with the number 2. It would make sense to couple the transitive verb *tauschen*, which means "exchange," with its intransitive German counterpart, *sich austauschen*, which means "to communicate," and to reflect on the "reifying" and the "genuinely mimetic" (*DE*, 187), the intra-, inter-, and transsubjective dimensions of this relation. That Adorno, in part, knew better is shown by the following quotation: "Totality, in the democratically governed countries of industrial society, is a category of mediation, not immediate domination and subjection. This includes the fact that, in industrial economies based on exchange, it is by no means possible, without further ado, to deduce everything social from its principle. Contained in it are innumerable noncapitalist enclaves" (*GS*, 8:549).

Texts that operate by constellation are thus at once speculative and transcending. They contain a metaphysical dimension, because they are the fact and yet always point beyond themselves. Philosophy "always actually has or embraces its object only by overshooting it, by being more than the mere object" (*PT*, 1:68). This is speculative metaphysics, and Adorno, his whole life long, held fast to this kind of metaphysics—immanent transcendence within the immanent. It realizes the moment "of free, unleashed [*nicht gegängelt*], nonregimented thought. This is why one should hold fast to it. It embodies . . . the moment of speculation" (*PT*, 2:167). Thus Adorno's principal method, from the beginning of the 1930s, is interpretive critique: "To interpret actually means to become aware of the trace of what, in what is, points beyond mere existence—and this by the power of critique, in other words precisely by insight into the finitude and mortality, the inadequacy and fallibility of mere existence" (*HF*, 138; trans. modified). Adorno's metaphysical constellation theory is simultaneously a normative theory, which not only preserves the subject-object dialectic[46] but also insists on the inevitability of speculative distinctions between essence and appearance—whereby essence is essentially nothing other than the history stored up in phenomena—and the irreducible connection between questions of genesis and validity. Only in this way is it possible to win the battle against relativism and its sibling, absolutism, although it remains a battle-

46. See O'Connor, *Adorno's Negative Dialectic*, 15–44.

field without any final victories, for Adorno knows that one cannot escape a "residue of relativity and arbitrariness, both in the choice of words and in presentation as a whole" (*LND*, 178). He also knows that the problem of discursive selection, control, and channeling (*Kanalisierung*), which Foucault formulated so acutely, is posed with varying urgency and that, to this extent, one must continuously enact the power-knowledge discourse, even while criticizing the relation between knowledge and power. For this reason, the aspect of speculative metaphysics and the aspect of performative rhetoric go hand in hand and demonstrate their mutual unavoidability.

At the same time, the acts of metaphysical interpretation by the philosopher who immerses himself in the object, and whose long, patient gaze grants the objects their rights, demonstrates an irreducible moment of freedom. Adorno's speculative metaphysics is a philosophy of freedom. Yet freedom, for Adorno, is not anthropologically invariant. It is neither general nor unchangeable, is not a timeless quality, a gift from heaven, or an otherworldly happenstance. For him, freedom is a "historical category through and through," whose identical conceptual core is constantly changing and which nevertheless sustains identity within change. In this way Adorno hopes to hold at bay both the danger of making the concept of freedom into an absolute, and that of dissolving it into limitless (*schrankenlos*) change (*HF*, 180–81). Like individuality, freedom is something emergent, possibly transient, is historical even as a category of reflection (*HF*, 70–71). Rational freedom is interwoven with the mimetic. There is an impulse that belongs to it; if one wants to act freely, it is necessary to give oneself a jolt (*HF*, 212–17, 228).

What is true for the concept of freedom is also true for the counterfactual concepts that Adorno frequently employs and that combine negative and positive determinations: the expressionless, the unsayable, the unspeakable, the nonintentional, the nonidentical, the open, freedom from domination, reconciliation without domination, redemption, peace, and so on. These, too, are historical concepts, tied to their secularized contexts of genesis/validity and essence/appearance. Their conceptual intensions and extensions have been rendered historically dynamic—by no means are these historical-systematic concepts to be understood as metahistorical, timeless, or strictly identical, for in that case they would have to be severely criticized as strong metaphysics, and their counterfactual validity would be rendered ineffectual. An important corollary of this form of historical-systematic concept formation is that the future possibilities of their use are impossible to foresee or predict. To this extent, as Adorno says, it is not merely that one should avoid painting a picture of utopia—there *is* no utopia in any emphatic sense, for in view of

the unpredictability of the future uses of concepts and of the counterfactual, historical-systematic concepts themselves, we cannot identify any location from which it would be possible to observe utopia.

Adorno frequently emphasized that one can be certain only of the negative. Perhaps this assumption must be partially revised—although not at the level of certainty. Precisely in view of the radical historicization that Adorno pursues, and given the asymmetrical conception of time that is constitutive for modernity in the contemporary present, with its mix of past presents and present pasts, there is a need for imagining present futures and future presents. In this process, it is necessary, for future presents, to fix one's imagination on the point of intersection or gap (*Schere*) between present futures and future presents. The future presents, admittedly, can be circumscribed only hypothetically and tentatively, with historical-systematic concepts, the latter being open categories of reflection that generally do not elude fallibility. These are not regulative ideas, much less constitutive concepts. For there is a difference, which must be acknowledged and which makes every strict synthesis impossible: the present future and the future present are strictly disjunctive, no matter whether one imagines the place where the difference is marked as thin or thick, fleeting or lasting. The fragile truth content of future presents cannot—as was shown above—be foreseen in the present future, using the fragile truth contents that it has at its disposal. To this extent, modern society is in a permanent crisis, one in which possibilities, risks, and dangers are intermingled. This crisis, according to Adorno, is always also a crisis of language. The nonidentity of historical-systematic concepts, however, with their inferential and interferential references,[47] which make it impossible to identify the present future with the future present, is perhaps the decisive precondition for the presumption of freedom that drives the whole of Adorno's thought. To this extent, Adorno defends a natural, reflexive historicism that goes beyond all ontology, idealism, system philosophy, materialism, realism, naturalism, and positivism, and that makes necessarily normative claims. Beyond the fallacy of beginnings ("Actuality," 35), and beyond the deception of constitutive subjectivity (*ND*, xx), Adorno formulates a metaphysical-speculative philosophy of immanence that is susceptible to things and is able to articulate itself in a variety of ways, in the mimetic-rational play of constellations constructed out of fallible, inconclusive language, with its intra-, inter-, and transsubjective traits.

47. See Uwe Wirth, "Vorüberlegungen zu einer Logik der Kulturforschung," in *Kulturwissenschaft*, ed. Uwe Wirth (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008), 47–51.

III

"It is my opinion that it is not possible to think a right thought at all, if one does not want what is right; that is to say, unless underlying this thought, as the force that actually inspired it, there is the desire that it should be right, that human beings should enter into a condition in which senseless suffering comes to an end and in which—I can only express it negatively—the spell hanging over mankind is lifted. For thinking is always also . . . a moment of practice" (*LND*, 53; trans. modified).

"Philosophy must become more sensitive to the muted testimonies of language and plumb the layers of experience preserved in it. Each language constructs a spiritual substance embodying the thought forms and belief patterns rooted in the evolution of the people who speak it. It is the repository of the variegated perspectives of prince and pauper, poet and peasant" (*ER*, 165–66; trans. modified).

In the 1950s the Germanist and ex-nationalist Erich Trunz had applied for a position at the university in Frankfurt. Horkheimer and Adorno used their influence to prevent him, the editor of the Hamburg Goethe edition, from being offered the position. In his lecture on negative dialectics Adorno mentions Trunz and writes in his lecture notes: "Quotation showing the barbaric language of '*Geisteswissenschaft*': 'in the 17th century, in German literature, the subjective aspect had not yet had its turn [*war noch nicht zum Zuge gekommen*]' (Trunz).—Con(nection) of Form + Content here" (*LND*, 181).[48] We don't know what Adorno explained in the lecture, since there are no tape recordings. There is, however, a paragraph in a text on his teacher Reinhold Zickel—unpublished during Adorno's life—that exemplifies how Adorno's precisely observant physiognomic gaze can weave together the critique of language and of society in a stringent, accurate, and at the same time exaggerating way based on a brief linguistic syntagma—"someone hasn't had his turn yet." It is a procedure that has not found its equal in either the second or the third generation of critical theory and that awaits productive further development, if, that is, one is to define the task of critical theory today as to describe comprehensively, interpret, and explain the pathologies of reason, the pathologies of modernity.[49]

48. The figure derives from chess.—Trans.

49. See Axel Honneth, *Pathologien der Vernunft: Geschichte und Gegenwart der Kritischen Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007).

The distaste for hackneyed [*stehend*] phrases of very recent vintage, the stereotypical reach for the no longer current saying, is at the same time disgust at what they mean. Beloved, in German postwar jargon, is the phrase that someone "hasn't had his turn yet." In blinking agreement, this takes for granted that the situation of universal competition is the norm of life, including intellectual life, and mindlessly parrots the verdict that condemns individuals to the mechanism of competition, which ultimately reverts to a new *bellum omnium contra omnes*. The world, in this expression, is presented as closed, a game of chess or checkers in which the pieces are given, the moves are largely predictable, and the life of the individual depends essentially on whether he actually gets to have his turn, whether he has the minimal chance to do what is anyhow inevitable, and not on his will, freedom, and spontaneity. This linguistic gesture, as interpreted by Karl Korn, who may even approve of this state of affairs, remains disgusting. Anyone who talks like this, in claiming to have complete foreknowledge of the prestabilized game, all of whose moves are predicted by the theory of openings or endgames, affirms that everything, to borrow a phrase from the closely related realm of the administered world, is in order. But to the extent that the repulsive clichés point to things that are themselves repulsive, they also have their truth. Unwittingly, they betray the extent to which the fate of the unsuccessful individual contradicts his human destiny, remains external to him, accidental and unjust in respect to what he is for himself—by no means accidental when measured against the dominant historical tendency. Often, a fate like this will become attached to the very thing at which someone was better than the people who have "made it." But the dismal era doesn't allow us to depend even on this. (*GS*, 20.2:756)

Translated by Susan H. Gillespie