THE NONIDENTICAL IN ADORNIAN AESTHETIC SPACE

This is a short outline of the topics that will be the core of my Master’s thesis. Please note that this thesis is still in progress and will evolve through engagement with philosophical texts and debates during the writing.

The following thesis aims to offer a specific reading of the conceptual figure of the nonidentical in Adorno's work. It is proposed to compare this concept with other concepts found in his production from the *Aesthetic Theory*, deepening its themes, and, where possible, questioning the concepts themselves.

The first part will discuss the immanent connection between *Aesthetic Theory* and *Negative Dialectics* in light of the figure of the nonidentical. The figures of comparison will be mainly Kant and Hegel.

The second part will pay attention to the presence of the figure of the nonidentical in the context of the autonomy-praxis relationship. It will propose a correlation with contemporary thinkers, including, Christoph Menke, Georg Bertram, Arthur Danto and Albrecht Wellmer.

The third part will deal with the figure of the nonidentical in relation specifically to Adorno's musical writings, following the *Aesthetic Theory* reference.

FIRST SECTION

NEGATIVE DIALECTICS AND AESTHETIC THEORY: AN IMMANENT CONNECTION UNDER THE BANNER OF THE NONIDENTICAL

The first section proposes to look at *Aesthetic Theory* as an experimentation of what is exhibited in Negative Dialectics: a chance to test these ideas in re. The interpretation is to trace the origin of the conceptual figure and at the same time its reformulation by Adorno. An attempt will be made to compare it with the Hegelian *Bestimmte Negation* and the nonidentical; on the one hand and with the Kantian nuomenon on the other. This comparison, proposed by Adorno, aims to grasp even more deeply the paradoxicality of the negative dialectic.

The comparison with Hegel will also take place in relation to determinate negation, that is, knowledge of the nonidentical. It will be affirmed how Adorno, in an opposite and symmetrical way, conceives his theory precisely as an immanent critique of, what he described as, "positive, idealistic dialectics," thus an immanent critique of the Hegelian system.

However, it will not simply be a matter of applying *Negative Dialectics* to *Aesthetic Theory*. Rather, I will set out to see that what emerges from *Aesthetic Theory* requires a radical rethinking of the premises presented in *Negative Dialectics* and previous works. Here, this relentless logic of a dialectic that admits of no synthesis or conciliation finds a place in art. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno creates a philosophical analogon of what he had described as "new music." This leads to the difficulty in giving a definitive form to the set of themes treated, since *Aesthetic Theory* can no longer be subjected to a logic of linear progression or to the unity of a theme to be developed.

Although art constitutes one of the dominant themes of Adorno's production and is present as early as the 1920s, it is mainly in the "immanent connection" between *Negative Dialectics* *and Aesthetic Theory* that the role he assigns to art and aesthetics within his thought is made precisely clear. Pivotal themes are the complexity, irreducibility and contradiction inherent in the reality that the nonidentical represents. What cannot be completely traced to conceptual categories or identified in a definite way constitutes the core of the nonidentical.

In light of these considerations, I will begin by presenting the theoretical construction that Adorno develops in *Negative Dialectics*. It is based on the thesis that if today's world presents itself as a totalitarian order that reduces the individual to its appendage, this situation is reflected at the logical-philosophical level in the domination of the universal over the particular, the concept over the empirical existent.

It will be emphasized that Adorno's philosophy is not anti-rationalist and anti-conceptual at all, but an immanent (thus internal) critique of the concept. It will be stated how the negative dialectic is a conceptually articulated critique of the concept.

The term "aesthetic" in *Aesthetic Theory* is to be taken literally. It is a space of both experience and concept in which traditional aesthetic-philosophical categories are shown to be in a dialectically subversive interrelationship of any possibility of defining some essence of art (thus transforming *Aesthetic Theory* into a "theory of art). Thus, it can be argued that aesthetics is understood as a constitutive mode of the whole territory of philosophy and not as its delimited region.

It will thus be understood how the conclusions Adorno reaches in *Negative Dialectics* necessitate the turn to *Aesthetic Theory*.

Finally, I will dwell on the fact that Adorno's work is not called "Art Theory," as its subject matter might have suggested, but “Aesthetic Theory”. No longer will aesthetics be understood within the narrow confines of a discipline or branch of philosophy, but rather as the decisive space in which to bring into play the critical power of philosophical thought. It is precisely in such a space that the knot of the relationship between immediacy and mediation is tightened in the form of mutual negativity.

SECOND SECTION.

The second section will be divided into two parts. The first part aims at highlighting the main connotation of Adornian thinking: a logic of the aesthetic and the artistic in the key of negative dialectics. In the second part, on the other hand, an attempt will be made to establish a comparison between the text Aesthetic Theory and the contemporary German debate: central figures will be Georg Bertram, Christoph Menke, followed also partially by Arthur Danto and Albrecht Wellmer.

A LOGIC OF THE AESTHETIC AND THE ARTISTIC IN THE KEY OF NEGATIVE DIALECTICS.

In the first part I will proceed by offering a thread between the major conceptual plexuses (work of art as objective thing and field of tensions, *Erscheinung*, subjective mediation and *Apparition*, *Rätselcharakter* and *Wahreitsgehalt*). The intent is to compose a kind of synoptic picture to highlight the connotation of negative dialectics of Adornian reflection.

The intention is to read *Aesthetic Theory* not so much as the outcome of that diagnosis of the modern that has already appeared in *Dialectics of the Enlightenment*, but rather as a starting point; that is, as a beginning of a post-dialectical reflection (i.e., after the dialectic has shown itself to be "negative") on the relationship between the rational and the aesthetic, between ratio and mimesis. Indeed, by triggering a self-reflexive dialectic within the work of art, Adorno's aesthetic thought acts, thus, more in a dissolving sense of its object than in a finalistically (re)constitutive sense. In sum, the mimetic instance in art can be seen as a moment in which the nonidentical becomes present, as the distorted and critical representation of reality introduces an element of discontinuity and contradiction into the aesthetic experience, thus offering an alternative and critical view of the world.

This will take place from the eminently mimetic nature that the work of art possesses. It will investigate how the work of art results as a kaleidoscopic web of conflicts and frictions between heterogeneous components that have the common denominator in the configuration of artistic creation. Having ascertained that the nature of configuration is inherently dialectical, instances that are effective in artistic concreteness in antinomian pairs will be investigated. I will proceed with the first antinomian pair namely, mimesis and construction, in order to assert that the work of art is eminently mimetic in nature. It will proceed from a recognition of the mimetic instance as an instance of affinity with the nonidentical. The goal is to recognize how the mimetic instance can be seen as a point of contact (and emersion) with the concept of the nonidentical, specifically as a perspective through which the nonidentical can emerge and manifest itself.

In sum, the notion of *Naturschöne* in Adorno's thought becomes a kind of pathway for experiencing the nonidentical within reality, thus counteracting the tendency toward simplification and conceptual identification The *Naturschöne* will then be considered as the trace of the nonidentical in things subject to the dominion of universal identity, insofar as some manifestations of nature can offer an aesthetic experience that resists conceptual categorization. Following Adorno's suggestion, it will be grasped through the aesthetic experience of what is beauty in nature that it is possible to grasp a trace of the nonidentical, the incommensurability and complexity that resist conceptual categorization. It will then consider how the most modern form of regressive integration of mimetic impulses is achieved by the current system through the *Kulturindustrie*.

Similarly and with the same purpose, *Wahreitsgehalt* and *Doppelcharakte*r will be examined next: on the one hand, works of art are social facts; on the other, they are constructs innervated by an unquenchable instance of autonomy. Much attention will be paid to the monadological entanglement of the work of art, by virtue of a content that in artistic creation exceeds that which is merely recognizable and identifiable.

THE PRACTICE-AUTONOMY NEXUS

In light of the previous considerations, the second section of Part II will focus on the praxis-autonomy nexus. The autonomy of art in Christoph Menke's Aesthetics of Negativity [*Ästhetik der Negativität*] will be considered. If Menke's reflection relies on Adorno's Aesthetic Theory (particularly the antinomy of aesthetic appearance) it will be discussed how the sovereignty of art is realized through its autonomy. I will then examine the works of Georg Bertam, pointing out possible divergences and convergences; all through a comparison with Aesthetic Theory.

Methodologically, key aspects of the anti-hermeneutic promise of the aesthetics of negativity in Menke will be examined. Key concepts for conducting a comparison with Adorno will also be those of *Literalität der Kunst*, *Entautomatisierung*, *Nicht-Können*.

Next, the praxis-autonomy nexus in Georg Bertram will be analyzed, where autonomy appears as self-referentiality [*Selbstbezüglichkeit*], in a conception of art as reflective practice. Guiding concepts of reflection will be *Formgesetz*, *Utopie* and *Promesse de bonheur*.

PART THREE.

A "NEW" MUSIC

The figure of the nonidentical is central to the musical writings of Theodor W. Adorno, particularly in his analyses of modern and contemporary music. The purpose of this third part is to propose an analysis of the figure of the nonidentical in Adorno's musical writings.

I will turn to the primary work of aesthetics, *Philosophie der neuen Musik*.

I will briefly dwell, in light of the considerations in the previous section, on some key points necessary to understand how we arrive at the dissolution of the aesthetic as the only perspective in which art retains its distinctive qualification, namely, formal autonomy. I will start by considering the two trends in contemporary music, neoclassicism and dodecaphony: on the one hand, Schoenberg, and on the other, Stravinsky's harmony. As complementary faces of the same phenomenon, they will be analyzed synchronously by virtue of that relationship between autonomy and heteronymy which, if not grasped, would make it paradoxical to analyze the products individually and fully understand the failure of the work of art. At this point, it will be necessary to consider certain assumptions that were already foreshadowed within the work *Philosophie der neuen Musik* and only find explanation in later years. Specifically, the reaction by art to that process of communicative assimilation by the *Kulturindustrie* will be examined from this perspective. Two concepts that both address the crisis of modern art, albeit looking at it from slightly different perspectives, will be emblematic: *Entkunstung* in Adorno, and *Dekadenz* in Lukács

Following the analysis of the composers Schoenberg and Stravinsky, it will be underlined how the concept of the nonidentical is central to the Adornian analysis of the music of Beethoven, Berg, Schubert, Wagner, and Mahler and Webern. Specifically, atonality and serialism will be examined, and in general how and whether the introduction of new sounds and production techniques of the above-mentioned composers may or may not constitute a musical experience that embodies the nonidentical.

An attempt will next be made to analyze, through the prism of the nonidentical, the context of sound and structural experimentation in free jazz, through figures including Miles Davis, John Coltrane, John Cage, and Area.

Taking into account the critiques of jazz in Adorno's production, an attempt will be made to identify a potential liberation from the homogenization and reproduction of the cultural industry, how and if it could be interpreted as an expression of the nonidentical in music.

It will aim to understand whether and how the concept of the nonidentical can manifest itself in a musical environment through sound experimentation, improvisation and the search for transgressive and emancipatory modes of expression in free jazz and the music of the Italian group Area.

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I specify that this is currently only an indicative bibliography, not final and exhaustive, as it is not yet agreed in detail with my supervisor. For this reason, texts by Hegel, Kant, Lukács and Benjamin are not yet included.

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