

From phenomenology to critical theory

The genesis of Adorno's critical theory from his reading of Husserl

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Abstract

This article investigates the importance of the evolution of Adorno's interpretation of Husserl for the formation of his own philosophy. The weakness of Husserl's notion of immediate data is revealed within the light of Hans Cornelius's *Transcendentale Systematik*. When Adorno discovers in his *Habilitationsschrift* the importance of the social setting and ideological function of theory, he departs from Cornelius' transcendentalism as norm for his reflection - and this insight is deployed against Husserl. Henceforth, Husserl's philosophy is interpreted as idealist, as a *prima philosophia*, as a philosophy of identity and totality and ultimately in service of the totalitarian political tendencies.

In this article I would like to investigate an aspect of Adorno's work that has attracted relatively little attention, namely his earliest development and in particular his relation to Husserl's phenomenology. My aim is not to provide an exhaustive presentation of the early Adorno but to trace the genesis of his thought, right from the beginning, insofar as it depended on a criticism of Husserlian phenomenology. In doing so, I shall situate the development of Adorno's reading of Husserl within the framework of his early fidelity to Cornelius' work and then of the birth of his own philosophy in the 1930s. In conclusion, it will be indicated how the mature Adorno finally submitted phenomenology to his meta-criticism.

With the exception of some youth essays, the first work of importance by Adorno in philosophy is his thesis *Die Transzendenz des Dinglichen und Noematischen in Husserls Phanomenologie*. This text does not play an important role in the subsequent philosophical development of its author and was published only posthumously. It

constitutes, however, with the retracted *Habilitationsschrift* (entitled *Der Begriff des Unbewußten in der transzendentalen Seelenlehre*¹) the so-called transcendental phase of Adorno's thought,² which came to a close before 1930, when the characteristic Adornian philosophy started emerging. That his thesis merits our attention could be justified in two ways. On the one hand it represents the point of departure from where the subsequent turn could be better appreciated and in this way it helps us to understand the whole of his philosophy better. On the other hand it is the starting point of a very long involvement in the interpretation of phenomenology.

Now, let us take a look at the profile of Adorno as reader of Husserl.

1 The given: the transcendental idealism of Hans

Cornelius

That Adorno submitted himself to the influence of his mentor, Hans Cornelius, and especially to his work *Transcendentale Systematik*, is unequivocally testified. In the preface to *Die Transzendenz des Dinglichen und Noematischen in Husserls Phanomenologie* Adorno declared that the book of Cornelius functions as a measure and a methodical guide:

I link up with the 'Transcendentale Systematik' and its terminology and see my task actually as clarifying the difference between the insights exposed in it and Husserl's 'Ideen', insofar as it deals with the theory of the thing itself. Also, where it is not explicitly cited, there is an obvious connection between my research and the 'Transcendentale Systematik' that does not require further elaboration.³

Similarly, in the introduction to *Der Begriff des Unbewußten in der transzendentalen Seelenlehre*, Adorno says:

The basic determinations of the transcendental philosophy exposed here link up closely with the epistemological researches of Hans Cornelius whose founding of the 'Transcendentalen Systematik' is presupposed for all that follows and with whose researches our observations would correspond also there where it does not make an explicit appeal to it.⁴

In other words, it is not a question of an occasional inclination to the thought of his mentor, but rather a standing adherence to it.⁵ Thus, the appropriate place to start to

situate Adorno vis-a-vis Husserl would be the work of Hans Cornelius. The aim of the following remarks on the philosophy of Cornelius is then to find access to the transcendental idealist Adorno of the 1920s. The influence of the mentor on Adorno (and on Horkheimer too) should not be disregarded.

During the first phase of his intellectual development Cornelius attempted to provide philosophy with a rigorously scientific basis. At that stage he thought that such a scientific foundation would be constituted by data of experiences (*Erlebnisse*), that is, by the facts of the consciousness (*Tatsachen des Bewusstseins*), which lend themselves to a sufficient investigation by psychology. However, after receiving criticism from Husserl, he dissociated himself to an extent from his own psychologism. But instead of converting himself to the capacities of the intentional consciousness, he tried to refute the theory of eidetic intuition and moved closer to Kantianism - he started searching for the foundation of universally valid judgements in the unity of consciousness. An influence from Gestaltism is perceptible in the fact he now underscores the interconnection (*Zusammenhang*) in which all experiences were embedded. Thus, turning against all atomistic psychologisms whatever they were, he laid stress on the interconnections between different lived or subjective experiences. The terminology of '*Erlebnisse*' (experiences) and '*psychische Tatsachen*' (psychological facts) consequently makes room for the so-called '*unmittelbar gegebene Gegen-stande*' (immediately given objects). This notion refers to 'the only objects given without any mediation of concepts and thus, the only ones capable of providing a reliable basis of the consciousness'.⁶ The immediately given objects are linked through a set of relations that act as condition for the emergence of givens. The conditions for immediate givens are at the same time the conditions for the possibility of experience in general and these conditions correspond more or less with the Kantian categories. By this development Cornelius wanted to make the transition from idealism to empirism.⁷

Having established the leading notions of Cornelius' philosophy, we are now ready to examine Adorno's first reading of Husserl.

2 Contradiction in the conception of immediate data

Husserl's phenomenology presents a theory of knowledge and, says the young Adorno, as such it should be put to the test as to what it teaches about the thing or the object. This evaluation is worked out within a framework where the philosophy of Cornelius is the measure; Tiedemann correctly describes this first work of Adorno's as school philosophy (*Schulphilosophie*).⁵ It is only within the light of the *Transcendentale Systematik* that the weakness of Husserl's *Ideen*,⁹ and in particular of its conception of the immediate data (*unmittelbaren Gegebenheiten*), becomes visible. These weaknesses are responsible for a contradiction around which the problem of Adorno's thesis is formulated:

... on the one hand Husserl demanded the founding of all thing-like being only by going back to the immediate facts. On the other hand he considers the things as 'absolute transcendentals' that might show themselves epistemo-logically only in their relation to the consciousness, but whose own being should in principle be independent of the consciousness.¹⁰

In other words, a tension is created between being as consciousness and being as reality. This tension is doubled on the level of theory between its transcendental idealist components and its transcendental realist components.¹¹

According to Adorno's analysis, this contradiction is first and foremost apparent in the Husserlian notion of immediate experiences. In order to found philosophy as a rigorous science, it would be necessary to return to the things of which science is science, but what Husserl does, is to return to the things while claiming that they are immediately given to the consciousness. The difference is important: the things are not experiences; whereas experiences are immediate data, the things are given only indirectly.¹² This disjunction necessitates, first, the methodical suspension of all judgements about the reality of the things (this is the phenomenological *epoché*), which should then be followed up by studies on the rich plurality of states of consciousness. The investigation of the consciousness reveals that every consciousness is a consciousness of. Subsequently, phenomenology is the meticulous examination of immediate data, i.e. consciousness of, because this bodily presence constitutes the legal source of true knowledge.¹³ But if in phenom

ology it is really a matter of merely the consciousness of, how is it possible that no actual thing is necessary for the being of the consciousness? How is it possible that an abyss can exist between the consciousness of which is supposedly necessary and absolute on the one hand and on the other the fortuitious, relative reality?¹⁴ This abyss opens up where the phenomenologist wanted to search for the immediate data. However, writes Adorno, the things claimed by phenomenology to be immediately present to the consciousness are in fact re-presented in the consciousness by means of the memory. Thus, Husserl shares the presupposition with Brentano that every immediate given of the consciousness is accompanied by an act of experience; this false presupposition 'has indeed above all guided the tendency, which is difficult to overcome, to *objectify* all objects immediately. In fact a mediated experience is still necessary for the knowledge of all thing-like objects, since these objects can, according to their nature, only be given mediately.'¹⁵

Husserl's error was, then, to have made a direct link between perception and that which is perceived, between *cogitation* and *cogita-tio*, instead of excluding the latter completely by an *epoche*.¹⁶ By doing this he failed to realize that the notions 'cogitation' and 'cogitata' represent the distinction between being indirectly given and being directly given. Had Husserl respected the distinction between 'ways of being given' and 'transcendental data', he would not have turned a blind eye to the symbolic function of the consciousness of things, because it is this distinction that engenders the distinction between symbols and that which is symbolized.¹⁷

Still following Adorno's analysis, this negligence from Husserl is mirrored in the equivocal notion of *noema*. Husserl concedes that things cannot be experiences and this compels him to situate the *noema* of the things outside of the consciousness, even though, as appearances to the consciousness, the *noema* are, strictly speaking, immanent to the consciousness.¹⁸ It is the phenomenological *epoche* (the procedure by which the distinction between non-reduced things and the reduced 'things' are established) that gives rise to the ambiguity of the *noema*.¹⁹ Furthermore, this procedure that was supposed to allow us to reconstitute the transcendental things that are articulated in the infinite flux of *Abschattungen* of the consciousness, leaves us with a phenomenology as an atomistic or Mosaic psychology.²⁰ An atomistic psychology will always be incapable of providing us with the things as constituted in

eine gesetzmäßigen Zusammengang of the phenomena.

This last remark leads us to the young Adorno's thoughts on the nature of things. Things are neither transcendent, nor experienced, they are the rules for experience (and not the cause of experience); they are thus immanent to the consciousness where they function as rules for the the interconnection (*Zusammenhang*) of appearances -

Things are not single experiences, but correlations *between* experiences -laws for their lapse. As such they are, however, completely and in the strictest sense immanent to the interconnection of the consciousness.²¹

The experiences are constituted by the interconnection of one's personal consciousness, which is the foundation of every true statement. These last remarks represent at the same time the elements of Cornelius's transcendental idealism that are scattered through the thesis of Adorno and with the aid of which he both criticizes the Husserlian phenomenology and proposes a remedy for it.

3 The turn away from the transcendental idealism

After his thesis Adorno did not again devote a study solely to Husserlian phenomenology, that is, before his essays of 1937 (*Zur Philosophie Husserls*) and 1939 (*Husserl and the Problem of Idealism*) and then again in 1956 (*Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*)¹¹ - all of which will be discussed later. That means that, in order to follow the changes in his reading of Husserl, it is necessary to make a few big leaps in time. To facilitate these leaps, I shall make a few comments on the turn by which Adorno departed from the transcendental philosophy. For this purpose we shall have a look at the *Habilitationsschrift* and the three texts of the early 1930s,²³ which signal the emergence of a new Adorno, the Adorno of the book on Kierkegaard.

I have already cited Adorno's declaration of support for the transcendental philosophy of Hans Cornelius, which is still in *Der Begriff des Unbewußten in der transzendentalen Seelenlehre* (the abolished *Habilitationsschrift* of 1927), for Adorno the umbrella under which he develops his perspective on the unconscious. Here he uses the philosophy of his mentor to put his finger on the inconsistencies in the then contemporary and apparently popular notion of the unconscious. How is a philosophy

of the unconscious to be identified?

We now generally call philosophies of the unconscious in the first instance all doctrines that affirm the independence of the validity of its statements from the consciousness, and which asserts that there is for them some or other mode of cognition (mostly such that is based on a transcendent foundation of the 'thing as such') independent from the consciousness, that enables them to make statements that are absolute and surpassing in principle the statements that are founded in the consciousness.²⁴

Such a philosophy is clearly contradicted by a transcendental philosophy that deals precisely with the transcendental or fundamental conditions of all possible knowledge, conditions that would be situated nowhere else than immanent to the consciousness. On the other hand, to recognize the consciousness as the stable foundation of all existence is not possible for a philosophy that contests the dignity or the integrity of the consciousness - in other words, for a philosophy of the unconscious.

By the idea of the unconscious that Adorno puts forward, he attempts to show that the whole of the 'unconscious' could be exhaustively interpreted as structures belonging to the consciousness itself. Thus, the unconscious embraces on the one hand a layer of forgotten experiences, of experiences blotted out of the memory and on the other hand a layer of ordered relations, which are the rules of categories, non-accessible to direct experience because they are the condition of the possibility of the consciousness.²⁵ It is within this framework that Adorno proposes suggestions for the correction of Kant's philosophy of the categories, and searches for a connection with Freudian psychoanalysis - a long-standing fascination of Adorno's. Why the Freudian theory? Because, according to Adorno, it is there that one could find a way of reflection on conscious meanings and on the mental laws discoverable by the reason.

We consider *psychoanalysis* as the appropriate epistemological method for knowing the unconscious state of affairs. We choose it especially because it corresponds to a particular extent to the demands of the transcendental method, but then also because of all the psychological disciplines it alone is directed at the analysis of the intra-

temporal interconnection of consciousness. We understand psychoanalysis, with the exclusion of all therapeutical intentions as well as all biological hypotheses, as an analysis of the interconnection of consciousness aimed at knowledge of regularities and the individual state of affairs of this interconnection, insofar as it is unconscious. It corresponds first of all with the transcendental method in its fundamental concepts, it is like the latter founded in the presupposition of the unity and regularity of the process of consciousness ... It is, like the transcendental method, essentially an analysis of interconnection, moving from the whole to the parts. But it also agrees essentially with the findings of the transcendental research of the unconscious in the content of its findings.²⁶

In the excerpt from his conclusion it appears clearly to what extent Adorno in 1927 still stayed loyal to the transcendental philosophy. But this loyalty opens up to declarations about the aim of his work that put him in a frame that has little in common with the epistemology of Cornelius,²⁷ and which was still entirely absent from the first work on Husserl. That Adorno keeps himself busy with the problem of the unconscious is not to be explained merely by epistemological motivations, but rather by the fact that the popularity and confusion in the notion of the unconscious arose from a 'deep time-historical necessity'.²⁸ What is it all about?

The aim of his research is to put a theory of the unconscious in place against the use of this notion in vitalistic or organic theories, where it serves to oppose 'rationalism' by contesting the dignity or integrity of the consciousness (as I have already indicated). The debate against such theories is justified by the conviction that every theory exercises a function that is determined by its surrounding social reality. What, then, is this dangerous function that lies at the origin of the popularity of the notion of the unconscious and that would at the same time be the justification for Adorno's criticism?

The theory of the unconscious contradicts the social order in force as an economic-rational order. This fact invites the suspicion that the theory supplements that which lacks in reality, and that which lacks in reality is sublimated (*verklrdrt*) by theory - in other words, the theory functions as an ideology.²⁹ The ideology of the unconscious tends to justify a reality (independently of the processes of economic production) into

which one could withdraw oneself from the economic forces. But - if one follows the transcendentalizing reinterpretation of Adorno - what is passed over in silence is that the economic consciousness is managed by the unconscious that does not exist independently from it. That is why the idea of an independence with regard to the economy (which is claimed by the theories of the unconscious) translates or mirrors the rare luxury of economic independence. With this chain of thoughts the following conclusion is reached:

The ideological function of the doctrine of the unconscious continues itself by the positive estimation of those unconscious forces that throw the individual back on him/herself and turn him/her away from social relations, from which he/she believes him/herself to be independent and from which the individual draws him/herself into a private existence, instead of letting him/herself too far in with the possibility of its change.³⁰

Undermining the 'dignity of reason' is then not only aimed at turning away from the social reality, but also at defending a social order that is established when business organizes itself illegitimately and blindly according to its power and its urges. In this way, the ideology of the unconscious shelters exploitation, imperialism and fascism, which are supposedly the consequences of unconscious and fateful necessities, given the fact that they are without any rational foundation. These 'necessities' are often put on the account of the sacred or of divine will.³¹

If one follows this view of the social functioning of theories of the unconscious, it becomes clear why Adorno understands his own work as a demystification (*Entzauberung*) of the unconscious. He demystifies the clandestine powers and urges on the one hand by demonstrating that the unconscious is a form of the *Zusammenhang* of the consciousness, namely a 'transcendent general and necessary regularity' (*transzendentale allgemeine und notwendige Gesetzmäßigkeit*) and on the other hand by adopting the perspective of psychoanalysis that provides him with knowledge of the unconscious without loading it with a metaphysical pathos.³²

What is the relevance of this excursion on the rejected *Habilitations-schrift* for the understanding of Adorno as reader of Husserl? It announces a change of perspective with regard to that which served as his norm - Cornelius' transcendental philosophy.

Even though he made this philosophy once again his own, Adorno adopted a new level of judgement on the theory of knowledge (be it Cornelius' transcendental philosophy or Husserl's phenomenology), which takes epistemology finally to be a product of the society from which it emerged. In doing so, Adorno anticipates his own later cultural criticism.

This change of perspective is accentuated even more clearly in the three short texts of the beginning of the 1930s, where several important subjects for the later Adorno come to the fore: aesthetics, nature and history, language, Lukacs and Benjamin, among others. The background of these themes is the adoption of a kind of dialectic materialism.³³ Here, Husserl is already interpreted within the framework of the evolution of the phenomenological movement³⁴ to which he gave birth as well as of the philosophy of the 20th century.³⁵

The position accorded to Husserl in this context is significant. The claim of philosophy to be able to seize reality in its totality has turned out to be illusory, says Adorno, and this crisis is nothing else than the crisis of idealism.³⁶ The cornerstone of every idealist system is precisely this claim that the autonomous reason is capable to seize in itself and from itself the whole of reality. Recent philosophy (recent at the time of Adorno's essay), here, in particular, phenomenology, attests that this crisis of idealism is 'the effort, following the disintegration of the idealist systems and with the instrument of idealism, the *autonome ratio*, to gain a trans-subjective, binding order of being'.³⁷ The analysis of immediate data remains subjected to the jurisdiction of reason (*Rechtsprechung der Vernunft*) which is the last instance of the relation between reason and reality. Husserl's philosophy could not be characterized as a system that is not idealist enough any more (as the young Adorno would have had it), but to the contrary, as a system that remains too faithful to the idealism that it tries to overcome.

This thesis, presented somewhat cryptically by its author (and which comes from his academic inaugural lecture at the University of Frankfurt, entitled *Die Aktualitdt der Philosophie*) was developed in detail in his article of 1939, published in 1940 in the United States under the title *Husserl and the Problem of Idealism*.

4 Husserl as idealist

There could remain no further doubt concerning Adorno's change of interpretation of Husserl, when the former writes:

It appears to me that Husserl's philosophy was precisely an attempt to destroy idealism from within, an attempt with the means of consciousness to break through the wall of transcendental analysis, while at the same time trying to carry such an analysis as far as possible.³⁸

How did he develop this conviction? It is the notion of the categorial intuition of the *Logische Untersuchungen* that provides access to this problem. The categorial intuition, later the *Wesensschau* of the *Ideen*, is the intellectual manoeuvre by which Husserl attempted to hold together two ambitions that drive his phenomenology: on the one hand, the positivist Husserl wants to return to the things themselves, he wants to take the immediate data as the only source of true knowledge; on the other hand, the rationalist Husserl wants to maintain the reason as the final authority for the validation of truths, judges Adorno.³⁹ The two forces are held together by the notion of intentionality, according to which the truths of reason are 'meant' or 'signified' by lived experiences. But since the intentional act in itself does not yet guarantee the existence of the intentional object, Husserl reinforces intentionality by its intuitive fulfilment (*intuitive Erfullung*), which is supposed to assure a notion of truth independent of its constitution. With this complex of notions Husserl claims to have found an objectivity against the relativism of psychologism and this without falling into a naive positivism. But quite the contrary, says Adorno, Husserl in this way attributes general and necessary features to experiences that in reality are conferred on them by the process of the reason and Husserl also attributes immediateness to reflection, only due to experiences. This 'naive logical realism' means that for Husserl thought is affected by the truths of reason in a way analogical to the way in which the senses are affected by the things themselves in Kant's philosophy. Thus Adorno concludes that the categorial intuition is not a discovery of phenomenology, but rather once again an attempt to hold together an analysis of the consciousness and the being in itself of truth.⁴⁰

More important than the details of his analysis is the perspective that Adorno proposes of this Husserlian idealism. The foremost reason for the paradoxes in phenomenology

(which I have previously indicated) are to be found in the fact that Husserl tries to overcome idealism by using the idealist tool *par excellence*: the analysis of the structure of the consciousness and of thought. Husserl is anti-idealist in his refusal of a kind of spontaneity of the spirit and in his motto of the return to the things themselves; but his wish to find an absolute point for all reflection leads him to an analysis of the data of the consciousness, of which the unity serves as the ultimate instance of jurisdiction on the data. Adorno concludes:

The doctrine of essence which was regarded as the main anti-idealist stroke of Husserl's finally reveals itself as the summit of idealism: the pure essence, the objectivity of which seems to spurn any subjective constitution, is nothing but subjectivity in its abstractness, the pure function of thinking, the 'I think' in the sense of the Kantian unity of consciousness.⁴¹

This interpretation is taken even further in *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*.⁴²

5 Husserl and the *prima philosophia*

My project was to follow the itinerary of Adorno as reader of Husserl up to the threshold of his own philosophy. We have arrived at our goal, but I shall permit myself to finish this trajectory by examining the image that Adorno provides of Husserl in one of his most important texts: the introduction to the *Metakritik*. The subtitle of the book - *Studien über Husserl und die phänomenologischen Antinomien* - should not mislead us into believing that it is just about commentaries on the founder of phenomenology. In the preface Adorno expresses the need to explain in principle and according to the concrete model the question of the possibility and of the truth of a theory of knowledge. Within this framework, the philosophy of Husserl serves as the opportunity, rather than the goal.⁴³ This book is about the philosophy of Adorno, rather than that of Husserl. Here we are already at the heart of Adorno's philosophy - according to Tiedemann, Adorno in 1968 still considered the *Metakritik* as his most important work after *Negative Dialektik*.⁴⁴

As stated, the question here is on the possibility and the truth of theories of knowledge, but in such a way as to present a metacriticism, which is an

important notion of which we have seen the emergence of some characteristics, already in the study on the unconscious, and which will still be important for our discussion that follows. Let us start with a provisional orientation that I borrow from Martin Jay: 'metacritique meant going beyond the realm of philosophy *per se* into its social and historical underpinnings, without, however, reducing it to them in the manner of a vulgar sociology of knowledge.'⁴⁵ How does the philosophy of Husserl give an opportunity for such a metacritical reflection?

The key to this interpretation of Husserl comes from a remark in the *Ideen* that characterizes the work site of phenomenology as a 'sphere of being of absolute origins'.⁴⁶ The philosophy of Husserl is, as *Ursprungsphilosophie* (philosophy of the origin or of origins), a late prolongation of the old tradition of the *prima philosophia*. The essence of a first philosophy is independent of that which is identified by that philosophy as first, as the principle. However, its essence is found in the principle of *identity* contained by that philosophy. Everything should be deemed equivalent to this principle. And since everything is equivalent to it, the principle founds a claim to *totality*. In order to claim the equivalence of the totality, the principle should be immediately accessible, irreducible, in itself.

But there is a problem that Adorno uncovers here, namely that the notion of 'first' itself is in need of mediation in order to become of force, since its immediateness becomes reflection's own only by the mediation of thought.⁴⁷ The claim of totality made by a philosophy of origin, obtains a totality only by the mediation of its own thought. Thus the first philosophy becomes idealist. Husserl (we discover once again here by parting from his involvement in a project of a philosophy of the origin) stays loyal to the essence of idealism. How does this idealist first philosophy function? Adorno answers:

Since the philosophical first must always already contain everything, spirit *confiscates* what is unlike itself and makes it the same, its *property*, spirit *inventories* it. Nothing may slip through the net. The principle must guarantee completeness. The accountability of the stock becomes axiomatic. Availability establishes the bond between philosophy and mathematics . . .⁴⁸

It would be superfluous to follow up the details of the reflections on mathematics,

since readers of the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* recognize in this very important citation the main elements developed some 15 years previously by Adorno and Horkheimer; in the *Metakritik*, once again, we find the theme of the coalition between power and knowledge. The two authors wrote about the reason of the Enlightenment:

. . . number became the canon of the Enlightenment. The same equations dominate bourgeois justice and commodity exchange . . . Bourgeois society is ruled by equivalence. It makes the dissimilar comparable by reducing it to abstract quantities. To the Enlightenment, that which does not reduce to numbers, and ultimately to the one, becomes illusion . . .⁴⁹

- which is also valid in the present text that expresses the relation between philosophy and mathematics in the following way: 'Numbers are an arrangement for making the non-identical, dubbed "the Many", commensurable with the subject, the model of unity.'⁵⁰ But what is the use of reflections on mathematics in a study of Husserl, where the latter's philosophy of arithmetic is not even taken into account? It is that the Husserlian idealism is driven by the same logic as mathematics; his *prima philosophia*, constructed on the principle of a subject that would be purified of all ontological remains, aims at 'the development of a doctrine of being under the conditions of nominalism and the reduction of concepts to the thinking subject'⁵¹ and it is precisely this subject that 'draws up an inventory of and 'confiscates' everything that is not identical to itself in order to assimilate it into his own identity. In this way is perpetuated the spirit of equivalence that reigns in the bourgeoisie or middle-class society and of which one could identify two dominant values: first, the bourgeoisie denigrates the event of the new;⁵² and second, Husserl's phenomenology turns out to be a theory of possession that goes along with its shift towards neutrality and privatization.⁵³ In this way, by merging the subject and object in order to win the domain of immediate origins, the first philosophy buys the origin at the price of knowledge, and this, to such an extent that it loses its critical possibilities.⁵⁴

This process of assimilation (and exclusion) of the subject is the method. The method is the course taken starting from that which is already established and pursuing that which follows in a regular way from it - this is why every method presupposes a principle - and thus the methodical reasoning meets nothing that disturbs it from outside.⁵⁵

Husserl plays this game in the *epoche*: 'Doubt simply shifts judgement to preparing for assuming the vindication of pre-critical consciousness scientifically in secret sympathy with conventional sensibility.'⁵⁶ This kind of approach is typical of methods: the separation with regard to its subject reflects the social separation between intellectual and physical work; furthermore, the generality of the method is the fruit of specialization.⁵⁷ By assimilating everything to its own identity, the subject (as the principle of the first philosophy) comes close to the structure of an analytical judgement, a process that serves to raise the status of the subject. This splendour too reflects the social position of the philosopher, whose enlarged status is

. . . the reflex to real powerlessness and insecurity. They are the self-deafening roar through positivity of those who neither contribute to the real reproduction of life nor actually participate in its real mastery. As middlemen, they only commend and sell to the master his means of lordship, spirit objectified into method.⁵⁸

As a philosophy of identity, the first philosophy (which reveals itself in the form of a system⁵⁹), is finally in the service of the total state and of fascism, according to the severe conclusion of Adorno.⁶⁰

But the system of the first philosophy is put in danger by experience;⁶¹ the non-identical is never completely dissolved in the system⁶² -it is this conviction that drives the cultural criticism of Adorno. The logical core of this criticism is the interconnection between social processes and philosophy: 'The real life process of society is not something sociologically smuggled into philosophy through associates. It is rather the core of the contents of logic itself.'⁶³ Thus the metacriticism is a social phenomenon striving to say the unsayable in the interest of the non-identical.

Notes

- 1 Both of the aforementioned works were collected in *Philosophische Priih-schriften*, vol. 1 of Adorno's *Gesammelte Schriften* (henceforth abbreviated as *GS*). Except where indicated otherwise, all translations are my own.
- 2 According to the essay by Carlo Pettazzi that is precisely entitled 'La fase trascendentale del pensiero di Adorno: Hans Cornelius' [The Transcendental Phase of Adorno's Thought: Hans Cornelius], *Rivista critica di storia delta filosofia* 23 (1977): 436-49.
- 3 *GS* I, 11: 'An die "Transcendentale Systematic" und ihre Terminologie kniipfen wir an und sehen unsere Aufgabe recht eigentlich darin, den Gegensatz zwischen den dort vorgetragenen Erkenntnissen und Husserls "Ideen" - soweit es sich um die Theorie des Dinges an sich handelt -deutlich zu machen. Auch wo nicht ausdrücklich zitiert ist, besteht zwischen unserer Untersuchung und der "Transcendentalen Systematik" ein ohne weiteres ersichtlicher Zusammenhang.'
- 4 *GS* I, 87: 'Die Grundbestimmungen der Transzendentalphilosophie, die hier aufgefuhrt werden, schlieSen sich streng an die erkenntnistheoretischen Untersuchungen von Hans Cornelius an, dessen Begründung der "Transcendentalen Systematik" für alles Folgende vorausgesetzt wird und mit dessen Forschungen unsere Betrachtungen sich auch dort in Uberein-stimmung meinen, wo sie sich nicht ausdrücklich auf jene berufen.'
- 5 In the following account of the thought of Cornelius, I follow the meticulous study by Carlo Pettazzi, *Th. Wiesengrund Adorno. Linee di origine e di sviluppo del pensiero (1903-1949)* (1979), in particular pp. 40-9.
- 6 '. . . oggetti che sono gli unici ad esserci dati senza mediazione alcuna di concetti e quindi gli unici a poterci fornire una base sicura delle conoscenza' Pettazzi (1979: 43).
- 7 Cf. Rolf Tiedemann, 'Editorische Nachbemerkung' (1971), in Adorno (1973-86), *GS* I, p. 382.
- 8 *ibid.*
- 9 In fact, Adorno's research in his thesis treats only a small part of Husserl's philosophy. His analyses are centred on sections of the *Ideen* (§§27-50, 76-8, 84-99, 128-53 - which can be easily determined by referring to the footnotes),

which are in some isolated instances clarified by references to the *Logische Untersuchungen*.

- 10 According to the 'Resume der Dissertation' (*GS I*, p. 375): 'einerseits fordert Husserl die Begründung alles dinglichen Seins einzig durch Rückgang auf die unmittelbaren Gegebenheiten, andererseits gelten ihm die Dinge als "absolute Transzendenzen", die zwar nur in ihrer Bezogenheit auf das Bewusstsein erkenntnis-theoretisch sich ausweisen, deren eigenes Sein aber prinzipiell unabhängig vom Bewusstsein sein soll.'
- 11 Cf. *GSI*, p. 73.
- 12 Cf. *GS I*, p. 26.
- 13 According to the 'principle of all principles' in Husserl (1976: §24).
- 14 Following the *Ideen* §49, which is often cited by Adorno: 'Zwischen Bewusstsein und Realität gähnt ein wahrer Abgrund des Sinnes. Hier ein sich abschattendes, nie absolut zu gebendes, bloß zufälliges und relatives Sein; dort ein notwendiges und absolutes Sein, prinzipiell nicht durch Abschattung und Erscheinung zu geben' [In so far as their respective senses are concerned, a veritable abyss yawns between consciousness and reality. Here, an adumbrated being, not capable of ever becoming given absolutely, merely accidental and relative; there, a necessary and absolute being, essentially incapable of becoming given by virtue of adumbration and appearance] (1982: 111).
- 15 *GS I*, 29: 'hat wohl vor allem die schwer zu überwindende Neigung geführt, alle Gegenstände sofort zu *verdinglichen*. Für die Erkenntnis aller dinglichen Gegenstände ist in der Tat stets ein vermittelndes Erlebnis notwendig, weil diese Gegenstände . . . ihrer Natur nach nur mittelbar gegeben sein können.' This criticism of Adorno's is in fact a citation of the criticism levelled by Cornelius against Brentano.
- 16 Cf. *GSI*, p. 31.
- 17 Cf. *GS I*, pp. 30-1, 44.
- 18 Cf. *GS I*, pp. 74-5.
- 19 Cf. *GS I*, p. 75.
- 20 Cf. *GS I*, pp. 32, 33, 45, 73.
- 21 *GS I*, p. 34: 'Dinge sind nicht einzelne Erlebnisse, sondern Beziehungen *zwischen* Erlebnissen - Gesetze für ihren Verlauf. Als solche aber sind sie dem Zusammenhang des Bewusstseins durchaus und im strengen Sinne immanent.'

- Cf. also *GS I*, p. 88 where Adorno clearly brings out the essential characteristics of the transcendental philosophy that he supports at this stage.
- 22 The first two were collected in *GS XX/1* and the second in *GS V*.
- 23 Taken up in *GS I*, they are: *Die Aktualitdt der Philosophie* (pp. 325-44), *Die Idee der Naturgeschichte* (pp. 345-65) and *Thesen iiber die Sprache des Philosophen* (pp. 366-71).
- 24 *GS I*, p. 88: 'Wir nennen nun Philosophien des UnbewuSten allgemein zunachst alle Lehren, die die Unabhangigkeit der Giiltigkeit ihrer Aussagen vom BewuStsein behaupten und vorgeben, dafi ihnen irgendeine von BewuStsein unabhingig Erkenntnisweise - zumeist eine solche, die auf einen transzendenten Grund der "Dinge an sich" bezogen wird - gegeben sei, die sie zu absoluten, den in BewuStsein griindenden Aussagen prinzip-iell iiberlegenen Aussagen befahige.'
- 25 Cf. Fred R. Dallmayr, 'Phenomenology and Critical Theory: Adorno', *Cultural Hermeneutics* 3 (1976): 367-405 (371).
- 26 *GS I*, p. 314: 'Als angemessene Methode zur Erkenntnis der unbewuSten Tatbestande sehen wir die *Psychoanalyse* an, wir wahlten sie gerade, weil sie in besonderem Umfang den Forderungen der transzendentalen Methode entspricht, dann aber auch, weil sie allein von alien psychologischen Disziplinen auf die Analyse des innerzeitlichen BewuStseinszusammenhanges sich richtet. Wir verstehen sie, unter AusschuS aller therapeutischen Absichten sowohl wie aller biologischen Hypothesen, als Analyse des BewuStseinszusammenhanges zur Erkenntnis von GesetzmSigkeiten und einzelnen Tatbestanden dieses Zusammenhanges, soweit sie unbewuSt sind. Sie stimmt zunachst in ihren Grundbegriffen mit der transzendentalen Methode iiberein, ist gleich jener gegriindet auf die Voraussetzung der Einheit und GesetzmSigkeit des BewuStseinsverlaufs ... Sie ist wie die transzendente Methode wesentlich Analyse des Zusammenhanges, geht von dem Ganzen auf die Teile. Sie stimmt aber auch in ihren inhaltlichen Befunden wesentlich mit den Ergebnissen der transzendentalen Unter-suchung des UnbewuSten zusammen.'
- 27 That this is the case seems already clear in a comparison of the elements of the transcendental philosophy that Adorno highlights in his text; Pettazzi as researcher on the whole of Cornelius' oeuvre confirms this interpretation (cf.

- 1979: 46-7).
- 28 GS I, p. 316: 'tieferer zeitgeschichtlicher Notwendigkeit.'
- 29 Cf. GS I, p. 318.
- 30 GS I, p. 319: 'Die ideologische Funktion der Lehren vom UnbewuSten setzt sich darin fort, dafi die positive Bewertung jener unbewuSten Krafte das Individuum auf sich selbst zurickwirft und von den sozialen Verhaltnissen ablenkt, von denen es sich unabhingig glaubt und denen es sich in privater Existenz entzieht, anstatt sich mit der Moglichkeit ihrer Veranderung allzu weit einzulassen.'
- 31 Let us note as an aside that, according to Adorno, this analysis of his confirms the understanding of the unconscious in Nietzsche's philosophy of power (cf. GS I, p. 320) - an observation that marks the beginning of a long involvement with Nietzsche.
- 32 GS I, p. 320.
- 33 Cf. GS I, pp. 336, 338 and 365.
- 34 Cf. GS I, pp. 327-31 and 346 where Adorno follows every time the scheme: Husserl-Scheler-Heidegger.
- 35 Cf. GS I, pp. 326-33.
- 36 'Die Krise des Idealismus kommt einer Krise des philosophischen Totalitatsanspruches gleich.' GS I, p. 326.
- 37 GS I, p. 327: '. . . die Anstrengung, nach dem Zerfall der idealistischen Systeme und mit dem Instrument des Idealismus, der autonomen ratio, eine iibersubjektiv verbindliche Seinsordnung zu gewinnen.' Translation from O'Connor (2000: 26).
- 38 GS XX, p. 120.
- 39 Cf. GS XX, pp. 128-9.
- 40 Cf. GS XX, p. 132.
- 41 GS XX, p. 134.
- 42 The article that I have just commented on was the result of the research that Adorno undertook during his stay in Oxford. It makes part of a larger group of analyses that were published in the *Archiv fur Philosophie* -among them the text that was taken up in the *Gesammelte Schriften XX* under the title *Zur Philosophie Husserls* - and that were reworked in the *Metakritik*. It is as such that they will make part of the current discussion.
- 43 GS V, p. 9:'. . . soil an einem konkreten Modell die Frage nach Moglichkeit und

- Wahrheit von Erkenntnistheorie prinzipiell aufgerollt werden. Husserls Philosophie ist Anlafi, nicht Ziel.' [. . . should be explained in principle and according to a concrete model the question of the possibility and truth of a theory of knowledge. Husserl's philosophy is opportunity, not goal.]
- 44 In the *Editorische Nachbemerkung*, *GS V*, p. 386.
- 45 Jay (1984: 58).
- 46 'Seinsphäre absoluter Unsprünge', *Ideen* §55 (Kersten's translation [1982: 129]) and *GS V*, pp. 12 and 29.
- 47 Cf. *GS V*, pp. 15-16: 'Als Begriff ist das Erste und Unmittelbare allemal vermittelt und darum nicht das Erste. Keine Unmittelbarkeit, auch kein Faktisches, in dem der philosophische Gedanke der Vermittlung durch sich selbst zu entrinnen hofft, wird der denkenden Reflexion anders zuteil denn durch den Gedanken' [The first and immediate is always, as a concept, mediated and thus not the first. Nothing immediate or factual, in which the philosophical thought seeks to escape mediation through itself, is allotted to thinking reflection in any other way than through thoughts]. (O'Connor's translation, 2000: 117.)
- 48 *GS V*, p. 17: 'Indem das Erste der Philosophie immer schon alles enthalten soil, *beschlagnahmt* der Geist, was ihm nicht gleicht, macht es gleich, zum *Besitz-* Er *inventarisiert* es; nichts darf durch die Maschen schliipfen, das Prinzip muifi Vollständigkeit verbiirgen. Die Zahlbarkeit des Befafteten wird zum Axiom. Verfügbarkeit stiftet das Biindnis von Philosophie und Mathematik . . .'
- (emphases added). For the translation see O'Connor (2000: 118).
- 49 *GS III (Dialektik der Aufklärung)*, pp. 23-4: '. . . die Zahl wurde zum Kanon der Aufklärung. Dieselben Gleichungen beherrschen die biirgerliche Gerechtigkeit und den Warenaustasch . . . Die biirgerliche Gesellschaft ist beherrscht vom Aquivalent. Sie macht Ungleichnamiges komparabel, indem sie es auf abstrakte Grdfien reduziert. Der Aufklärung wird zum Schein, was in Zahlen, zuletzt in der Eins, nicht aufgeht . . .'
- For the translation see O'Connor (2000: 159-60).
- 50 *GS V*, p. 18: 'Die Zahlen sind Veranstaltungen, des Nichtidentische unter dem Namen des Vielen dem Subjekt kommensurabel zu machen, dem Vorbild von Einheit.' For the translation see O'Connor (2000: 119).
- 51 *GS V*, p. 13: '. . . eine Doktrin des Seins zu entwickeln unter den Beding-ungen des Nominalismus, der Zuruckfiihrung der Begriffe aufs denkende Subjekt.' For

- the translation see O'Connor (2000: 115).
- 52 Cf *GS V*, p. 46: '. . . die Abwertung des Neuen überhaupt, ist urbürgerlich: aus Bekanntem soil nichts Unbekanntes, kein anderes hervorgehen können.' [. . . the low estimation of what is new as such, is primarily bourgeois: nothing unknown, nothing that is different should be able to proceed from what is familiar.]
- 53 Cf. *GS V*, p. 17 cited above. The notion of philosophy as theory of possession corresponds with that of a nominalist theory that confiscates that which is not equal to itself. On this point one could consult Dallmayr's detailed analyses in 'Phenomenology and Critical Theory: Adorno' (1976: 384).
- 54 Cf. *GS V*, p. 29.
- 55 Cf. *GS V*, p. 19.
- 56 *GS V*, p. 20: 'Der Zweifel verschiebt bloß das Urteil zur Vorbereitung darauf, die Annahmen vorkritischen Bewusstseins wissenschaftlich zu vindizieren, in geheimer Sympathie mit dem konventionellen Menschen-verstand.' For the translation see O'Connor (2000: 120).
- 57 *ibid.*
- 58 *GS V*, p. 23: 'der Reflex auf reale Ohnmacht und Unsicherheit, die sich selbst durch Positivität überhebende Klage dessen, der weder zur realen Reproduktion des Lebens beiträgt noch an dessen realer Beherrschung recht partizipieren darf, sondern einzig als dritte Person den Herrschenden ihr Herrschaftsmittel, den zur Methode versachlichten Geist, verkauft und anpreist.' For the translation see O'Connor (2000: 123).
- 59 Cf. *GS V*, pp. 35-6. Adorno borrows in his criticism of systems, as elsewhere, from Nietzsche's criticism of metaphysics in *Gotzendämmerung*.
- 60 Cf. *GS V* pp. 28 and 30.
- 61 Cf. *GSV*, p. 38.
- 62 Cf. *GS V*, p. 30.
- 63 *GS V*, p. 34: 'Der reale Lebensprozeß der Gesellschaft ist kein in die Philosophie soziologisch, durch Zuordnung Eingeschmuggeltes, sondern der Kern des logischen Gehalts selber.' For the translation see O'Connor (2000: 132). This perspective on society is clearly inspired by Nietzsche's idea of the relation between life and logic: 'Auch hinter aller Logik und ihrer anscheinenden Selbstherrlichkeit der Bewegung stehen Werthschätzungen, deutlicher gesprochen, physiologische Forderungen zur Erhaltung einer bestimmten Art

von Leben.' Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Bose. Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft* (1999: 1,3, 17). [Behind all logic, too, and its apparent tyranny of movement there are value judgements, or to speak more clearly, physiological demands for the preservation of a particular kind of life (Faber's translation, 1998).]

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