

# 4

## Court of Appeal, or, Adorno

With Adorno we arrive at a historicized account of phenomenality and dissatisfaction unavailable earlier, developed as it is from Marx. For Adorno, the critique of fact perception as social artifact is research in the phenomenology of ideology. As such, it suggests a cultural explanation of the motives for phenomenophilia, one echoed in criticism by Fredric Jameson, Mary Poovey, and Jonathan Crary, among others. Adducing Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Jameson remarks in *The Political Unconscious* that

the very activity of sense perception has nowhere to go in a world in which science deals with ideal quantities, and comes to have little enough exchange value in a money economy dominated by considerations of calculation, measurement, profit, and the like. This unused surplus capacity of sense perception can only reorganize itself into a new and semi-autonomous activity, one which produces its own specific objects, new objects that are themselves the result of a process of

abstraction and reification, such that older concrete unities are now sundered into measurable dimensions on one side, say, and pure color (or the experience of purely abstract color) on the other. . . . a style like Impressionism, which discards even the operative fiction of some interest in the constituted objects of the natural world . . . offers the exercise of perception and the perceptual recombination of sense data as an end in itself.<sup>1</sup>

Complementarily, Poovey suggests that one reaction to the consolidation of the modern fact is a romantic resistance to “the need to yoke knowledge systems to observed particulars.”<sup>2</sup> These readings of romanticism and modernism argue that the social and economic dominance of fact perception in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provokes a counter-reaction in which invisible (Poovey) or autonomously sensory (Jameson) realms take on the character of “compensation for everything reification brings with it” (Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 236).

Adorno’s work is a part of the reaction Jameson sketches, and he is himself an analyst of its formation. Adorno connects the developments Jameson observes to the ideological legacy of Hegel’s philosophy of history, attending especially to Hegel’s reformulation of what counts as given. To the extent that Hegel’s philosophy is a defense against Kant, Adorno can be seen to enter the discourse of phenomenality and dissatisfaction to fulfill Kantian promises overlooked or dismissed in the nineteenth century.

From the perspective of the phenomenality/dissatisfaction association, the most striking feature of Adorno’s writing is its pointed use of “Schein” to refer, for the first time, to *fact* perception.<sup>3</sup> In the twentieth century,

1. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981), 229–230.

2. *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998), 327.

3. The English translation of *Aesthetic Theory* renders “Schein” as “semblance,” underlining the sense of false likeness or fiction; it’s illuminating to preserve the German word, however, because it encompasses not only semblance, but the generalized sense of illusion that is usually linked to mere phenomenality and the radiance that is its acknowledged attraction.

“the facts that have been advanced as a counterweight to mere illusion have themselves become a sort of cloak and so reinforce the impression of mere illusion [blossen Schein].”<sup>4</sup> The uncanny luster of facts absorbed without attention to the conditions that make them appear as they do—fact perception that goes directly to the bloodstream—is the height of Schein.<sup>5</sup> Hence Adorno’s special dislike of positivism, which would like to identify data exempt from the need for historical analysis.<sup>6</sup> All kinds of perception are historically bounded, but what we have been calling fact perception is most likely to dispense with a qualifying metalanguage and the kinds of mental reservation that it brings. Here we might recall Richard Moran’s idea that the proposition “P” induces belief and commitment more strongly than the proposition “I believe that P.”<sup>7</sup> For Moran, this qualifying effect is a reason not to muffle in representations of reflection

4. HF 29; *Nachgelassene Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), IV 13:45, hereafter NaS.

5. Adorno adds in the same breath that dialectics should not simply consist in “the demonstration that what appears to be a brute fact [ein factum brutum entgegentritt] is in reality something that has become what it is, something conditioned and not an absolute. . . . It would . . . be just as foolish to demand of history that it should concentrate solely on the so-called context, the larger conditioning factor, as it would be for historiography to confine itself to the depiction of mere facts” (HF 20–21, translation modified; NaS 13:32).

6. T. W. Adorno et al., *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London: Heinemann, 1976). See also, e.g., HF 164 and *Introduction to Sociology* [1993], ed. Christophe Gödde, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), 37.

7. *Authority and Estrangement: An Essay on Self-Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001), 85. Moran’s mentor for this point is the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness*. Adorno complementarily views Sartre’s brand of “commitment” as a celebration of unfreedom in disguise: “the prescribed form of the alternatives through which Sartre wants to prove that freedom cannot be lost [die Unverlierbarkeit von Freiheit] negates freedom” (“Commitment,” *Notes to Literature* [1974], Vol. 2, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen [New York: Columbia UP, 1974], 79–81, translation modified); *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 11:413, hereafter GS. Similar remarks in *Negative Dialectics* stress existentialism’s blurred sense of facticity and “existence”: “existentialism raises the inevitable, the sheer existence of men, to the status of a mentality which the individual is to choose, without his choice [Wahl] being determined by any reason [Bestimmungsgrund der Wahl], and without there really being another choice” (*Negative Dialectics* [1966], trans. E. B. Ashton [New York: Continuum, 1992], 49–52, hereafter ND); GS 6:60.

facts to which one wants to commit oneself. For Adorno, the fact/value conflation's coercion of assent to the given is a good reason to *maintain* awareness of reflection, lest we endorse without noticing it historically conditioned facts that don't deserve affirmation. In this context, Schein names the "façade of facticity [der sich durchsetzenden Faktizität]" (HF 30; NaS 13:46)—an illusory rhetorical aspect of fact perceptions—that is "bound up" with "the affirmative power [Druck] of society."<sup>8</sup> Adorno's ideology critique releases conscientious objectors to the world "as is"—the "thinking men and artists [who] have not infrequently described a sense of being not quite there, of not playing along, a feeling as if they were not themselves at all, but a kind of spectator" (ND 363; GS 6:356). Like realism, ideology critique assumes that the person who tarries in appearance is tacitly critical of fact perception; unlike realism, it validates that criticism, and dismisses any need to apologize for reservations about whether "this could be all" (ND 363; GS 6:356). Any embarrassment should be on the side of facts that have the nerve to present themselves as necessities.<sup>9</sup>

Protesting a given, then, including protest that takes the form of seeing a fact with mental reservation as Schein, not only is distinguished by Adorno from "denying" fact, but is the opposite of denial. Adorno illustrates this point to his Frankfurt students by recalling "the experience of having his house searched early in the National Socialist regime" (HF 19; NaS 13:30). The house search exceeds the distinction between fact perception and perception of Schein:

8. *Aesthetic Theory* [1970], trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997), 110, hereafter AT; GS 7:168.

9. Social facts potent enough to be possibly natural are the ones most at issue, which is to say that the question of the natural cannot help being at issue. Kantian critique renders time and space, but not qualitative experiences of time and space, leaving room for the social/natural ambiguity. What should count as a concept and as an intuition are historical, as J. M. Bernstein points out in his analysis of *Aesthetic Theory* (*The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno* (University Park: Penn State UP, 1992), 198–200; see also page 166 below); similarly, Adorno insists that "natural beauty" "is at its core historical" (AT 65; GS 7, 102). When Adorno cites approvingly Hegel's idea that "the consciousness of a people" is "like a necessity; the individual is raised in this atmosphere and knows of nothing else" (ND 327; GS 6:321), his emphasis is on the suitability of necessity as a figure. Later, Adorno will stress that Hegelian necessities are still *only* quasi necessities.

the very concept of “fact” ensures that it cannot be insulated from its surrounding environment—just as I could probably not have really *experienced* that house search if I had not connected it in my mind with the political events of the winter and spring of 1933. If all that happened was that two relatively harmless officials belonging to the old police force had turned up on my doorstep . . . my experience would have been quite different from what it was. . . . A further factor should not be overlooked, if the dialectic is not simply to degenerate into something like a superstition or a trivial pursuit [leeres Spiel]. By referring something back to the conditions that prove immediacy to have been conditioned, you do indeed strike a blow against immediacy, but that immediacy survives nonetheless. For we can speak of mediation only if immediate reality, only if primary experience, survives. (HF 20–21; NaS 13:31–32; see also ND 301)

The dissociation between the incident’s malignancy and its “relatively harmless” strictly empirical features, as well as its utter lack of a legitimate rationale, give it illusionistic qualities that are part of its “primary experience.” The illusory core of the incident is one of the main facts about it: not experiencing it as Schein would not make it any more factive, and abstracting its full facticity would not make one’s understanding of the events of 1933 clearer or more complete. To the contrary: a fact like the house search “is both an actuality *and* at the same time a socially necessary illusion [gesellschaftlich notwendiger Schein]”—as Adorno remarks in a later lecture of “the organic nature” of an ideological society as a whole (HF 118; NaS 13:170; see also ND 327).

I agree with Jameson, then, that “virtually the central issue raised by the relationship between the universal and the particular . . . is what Adorno will call positivism (along with its accompanying value, ‘nominalism’),” if one means positivism “in as generalized a cultural and intellectual fashion as possible.”<sup>10</sup> Adorno does use the term broadly, and seldom attempts to present positivist philosophers’ views. Rather, “positivism” stands for one pole of fact/value conflation, in which value emanates unidirectionally

10. Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic* (New York: Verso, 1990), 89.

from a parsimoniously empirical construction of fact. While Jameson emphasizes Adorno's polemic against positivism, I'll emphasize equally his polemic against the counterforce that appears parenthetically in Jameson's comment as "nominalism" and also informs idealism. Adorno knows that everything depends on what counts as a fact, and takes exception to convenient uses of the fact/value conflation in either direction. Positivism locks too much out of the category of fact, yet self-servingly inclusive ontologies can elicit from Adorno statements of which any positivist would be proud. To live up to Adorno's meticulous analysis of experience, everyone, *including the positivist*, has to pay more, not less, attention to facts and values alike.<sup>11</sup>

#### I. CRITIQUE OF FACTICITY

Nineteenth-century social thought from Hegel and Marx to Durkheim returns again and again to the peculiar reality of the social fact. Marx's pages on commodity fetishism remain the most vivid example of this line of thought for contemporary readers.<sup>12</sup> Adorno is haunted by Durkheim's characterization of the *fait social* that feels like an impenetrable "thing,"<sup>13</sup> and reminds his students that anyone who has had the impression of "run[ning] into a brick wall [auf Granit beisst]" has experienced the violence of the social fact (*Introduction to Sociology*, 36; see also 50–51, 77; NaS 15:66). As Adorno's lectures on sociology show, nineteenth-century thought draws his attention to the urgency of this enigma. What is uniquely Adorno's is his realization that the artwork is the other of the social fact (and hence of the commodity)<sup>14</sup> to such a degree that a philosophy

11. It follows that "the strongest argument against a positivist view of society is that, in placing the concept of experience so far in the foreground in the name of 'empiricism' or 'logical empiricism,' it actually fetters experience" (*Introduction to Sociology*, 51; NaS 15, 90).

12. Karl Marx, *Capital* [1867], trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977), 1:163ff.

13. Émile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* [1912], ed. Steven Lukes, trans. W. D. Halls (London: Macmillan, 1982). Durkheim's account is all the more haunting because it is uncomplaining, written from within the enigma.

14. See AT 236; GS 7:350–351.

that aims to explain social fact has to be rewritten from the perspective of aesthetics and vice versa. This philosophy and aesthetics—or to be more exact, the hybrid enterprises that replace them—are the complementary projects of Adorno’s late books, *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*. They constitute between them the dialecticization of the discourses of phenomenality and dissatisfaction.

Adorno’s attitude toward fact perception in his late work resembles Hegel’s toward public opinion, that it “is to be *respected* as well as *despised* [ebenso geachtet als verachtet].”<sup>15</sup> Now, “respect [Achtung]” is the sentiment Kant matches to “objective liking” (CJ 210)—the minimal consent one gives to facts simply by absorbing their existence. As Ferenczi observes, fact recognition is marked by admission to the realm of calculation; however grudgingly, we “reckon with” facts. Public opinion, for example, may hold little insight, and yet the fact that people think something has to be reckoned with. Respecting facticity, objective liking respects precisely the kind of existence that Kantian aesthetics sets aside. We may also count as facts, however, ontologies even more ambiguous than that of public opinion; and there are of course divergent approaches to what ought to count and why. Adorno’s rereading of Hegel belabors a significant difference between Hegel and himself in this regard: Hegel conflates value with fact far more readily, and is generous and inconsistent about what counts as fact—a treacherous combination. This may seem to be a counterintuitive conclusion. Adorno’s contempt for positivism suggests that he himself would like a more capacious approach to fact; since “dialectics is necessarily and permanently concerned with the critique of mere facticity” (HF 19; NaS 13:30), as Adorno points out, and Hegel is none other than the philosopher most responsible for the historicization of facts, one might think that Hegel’s critique of facticity would suit Adorno. And it does, up to a point. Nonetheless, Adorno’s early-sixties thought concludes that Hegel’s critique, unlike his own, enlarges the do-

15. G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 355; *Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 7:485. Adorno is fond of this catchphrase and echoes it in “Skoteinos, or How to Read Hegel,” in *Hegel: Three Studies* [1963], trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: MIT P, 1993), 113, hereafter HTS; HF 93; and *Introduction to Sociology*, 7.

main and strengthens the value of social fact, and with it the affirmative power of society. This conclusion instigates Adorno's long reply to Hegel and Marx in *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*.

It is easier to understand how Hegel can come to be seen as the champion of fact when we recall that a "fact" is not mere existence but existence recognized conceptually, already raised to consciousness. The notion of facticity registers the way in which value in Hegel is attached to history. (As Timothy Bahti argues of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*—in perceptual language—unimportant events "rot away" from historical consciousness; they "vanish like a deceptive appearance.")<sup>16</sup>

Between 1957 and 1969 Adorno alludes repeatedly to Hegel's phrase "the course of the world [der Weltlauf]." <sup>17</sup> In *History and Freedom* Adorno introduces "the course of the world," among "various turns of phrase" such as "the logic of things," as a reasonable synonym for world spirit (HF 27, translation modified; NaS 13:42). I'll return momentarily to this correlation. First, however, let's note that Adorno identifies the course of the world with world spirit at just this time. In "Aspects of Hegel's Philosophy" (1957) Adorno defends Hegel against the complaint that he displays "a complicity [Einverständnis] with the course of the world" (HTS 45; GS 5:290); by *History and Freedom*, he describes precisely that complicity as a necessary effect of Hegel's philosophy in acid, psychological, and nearly *ad hominem* terms (which are then moderated again in the more public utterance of *Negative Dialectics*; for this reason, I'll emphasize *History and Freedom* throughout). In "Aspects" he asserts that Hegel's philosophy is "essentially negative" and that Hegel "denounced the world, whose theodicy constitutes his program, in its totality as well" (HTS 30; GS 5:275–276); in "Skoteinos, or How to Read Hegel" (1963), the midpoint of Adorno's reinterpretation, he still opines that "with incomparable tact, even the later chapters of the *Phenomenology* refrain from brutally compacting the science of the experience of consciousness and that of human history into one an-

16. *Allegories of History: Literary Historiography after Hegel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992), 97.

17. *Phenomenology of Spirit* [1807], trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 401–412. See "Aspects of Hegel's Philosophy" (1957), in HTS 45; HF 27, 43, 47, 51, 59–68, 72; ND 318; AT 49.

other,” rather allowing them to “hover, touching, alongside one another” (HTS 142; GS 5:371). At the outset of *History and Freedom*, however, Adorno announces that “in *Hegel* history is regarded immediately as progress in the consciousness of freedom, such that consciousness for Hegel amounts to a *realized* freedom” (HF 3; NaS 13:9); and the lectures in their entirety argue that, deploying an “affirmative construction of history” (HF 49; NaS 13:73), Hegel “interprets this primacy of the universal, this actual primacy of the concept, as if it meant the world itself were concept, spirit, and therefore ‘good’” (HF 43; NaS 13:65). What emerges through the arc of Adorno’s Hegel-centric works is the thesis that Hegel’s creation of a new kind of facticity—the facticity of those particulars that *have a course*, that is, of history as the ongoing activity of spirit—expands compulsory affirmation.

Adorno locates Hegel in the tradition of fact/value conflation in a remarkable passage of *History and Freedom*, in his lecture of November 24, 1964. Having just suggested that Hegel’s “hypostatization of reason” can be interpreted as “the hypostatization of mankind as a species . . . that maintains itself as a whole” over individual claims (HF 44; NaS 13:67), Adorno continues:

the human race in fact [tatsächlich] can only survive in and through the totality. The only reason why the optimism [Geschichtsoptimismus] of the philosophy of absolute spirit is not a mere mockery is because the essence of all the self-preserving acts that culminate in this supreme concept of reason as absolute self-preservation is after all the means by which humanity has managed to survive and still continues to do so. And it has succeeded in doing so despite all the suffering, the terrible grinding of the machinery and the sacrifices of what Marx would have called the forces and means of production. The infinite weak point of every critical position (and I would like to tell you that I include my own here) is that, when confronted with such criticism, Hegel simply has the more powerful argument. This is because there is no other world than the one in which we live, or at least we have no reliable knowledge of any alternative despite all our radar screens and giant radio telescopes. So that we shall always be told: everything you

are, everything you have, you owe, we owe to this odious totality, even though we cannot deny that it is an odious and abhorrent totality.<sup>18</sup> (HF 47; NaS 13:71–72)

By calling the philosophy of spirit a kind of “optimism,” Adorno appends it to the debate set off by the Berlin Academy’s 1755 essay contest “All is right” (discussed in Chapter 2), in which Leibniz and Kant participated. Moreover, he echoes Kant’s outline of the dilemma faced by reason in the First Critique, namely whether and how to go about confirming that one must reconcile oneself to the given world after all “because there is no other world than the one in which we live, or at least we have no reliable knowledge of any.” Adorno doesn’t much like this moment of the First Critique; like most readers, he interprets it in isolation from the passages on transcendental illusion and hears Kant’s acceptance as robust rather than minimal—he finds in it at best the “self-satisfied, manly resignation of a philosophy settling down in the external *mundus sensibilis*” (ND 73; GS 6:80). Hegel’s rebellion against this passage of the First Critique could be said to drive his entire project, and Adorno agrees strongly that Kant’s conclusions should not be used in the positivist way to persuade humanity to “affix itself to the finite” (ND 383; GS 6:376). Nonetheless, Adorno’s placing Hegel next in line in the chronicle of optimists indicates that he does no better (and since I don’t share Adorno’s reading of the First Critique, to me Hegel’s contribution looks even worse than it does to Adorno—it looks positively regressive). Hegel historicizes Kant’s cognitive understanding of human limitation in order to inject history with exigency, making it seem circumscribing. Since by definition the human species has no other history than the one that has occurred, “it always looks as if human beings and the course of the world that is imposed on them are truly similar in nature, are genuinely identical. . . . as if we had no right to complain about the course of the world that has made people what they are” (HF 72; NaS 13:107). As Kant demonstrates how to identify exigency through critique, Hegel invents a method—Hegelian dialectic—for revealing social facts as *effective* exigencies, given-substitutes. In the end,

18. See also HF 43, on Hegel’s “realism,” and ND 300–360, especially 303–304, 319–320.

these effective exigencies press for affirmation even more strongly than natural givens, since history ratifies them in human terms. There's more to be said about Hegel's shift from hard-core necessity to "de facto" necessity and his mechanisms for justifying it. For now, let's observe that when Adorno criticizes Hegel's "unquestioned *parti pris* for the prevailing universal" (HF 51; NaS 13:76), the more familiar part of his criticism—that Hegel favors the universal over the particular—occludes his equally important point that the Hegelian universal arranges for itself to be valued *because* it is prevailing, i.e., as fact.

Marx notes that "capital . . . on the basis of its own reality, positions the condition for its realization" in a retrospective operation that converts history into the history of capital. Dipesh Chakrabarty writes that Marx also notices alternative "antecedents" of capital that are "not . . . antecedents established by itself," antecedents neither naturally nor necessarily connected to capital.<sup>19</sup> This second set of antecedents, which Chakrabarty terms Marx's "History 2," is, he argues, Marx's way of showing "that the total universe of pasts that capital encounters is larger than the sum of those elements in which are worked out the logical presuppositions of capital," and that these pasts "interrupt and punctuate" the history of capital ("Two Histories of Capital," 64). With a similarly enlarged set of elements in view, Adorno complains that Hegel "give[s] precedence over possibility" to certain facts that are reinforced in a circular way (HF 51; NaS 13:76). Adorno's texts instate a "court of appeal" for particulars and possibilities on the losing side of history, as I'll explain in the last part of this section. Adorno's concern in *History and Freedom* is to register this complaint in philosophical terms. His phrasing of it involves a complex assertion of methodological bias: Hegel, who sets aside the operative facticity of alternative possibilities—possibilities as things to be reckoned with—*extends* that facticity to presuppositions that are equally mental entities, to the extent that they are attached to the course of the world.

Adorno's methodological point is argued best in "Skoteinos," his long

19. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicholas (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 459, quoted in Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Two Histories of Capital," in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000), 63.

and brilliant essay on Hegel's obscurity ("Skoteinos" = dark, opaque). Published in 1963, it precedes the lectures collected in *History and Freedom*, delivered in the academic year 1964–65. Much of "Skoteinos" attacks the legitimacy of the reconstructed presupposition in dialectics. In Hegel the concept "is turned this way and that" and "breaks up when it insists on itself [geht in die Brüche, sobald er auf sich beharrt]," revealing a nonidentity "inherent" in its meaning ("Skoteinos," HTS 133, translation modified; GS 5:363). Hegel's treatment of what is thus exposes dynamism within the copula: "what is, is more than it is [Was ist, ist mehr, als es ist]" (ND 161; GS 6:164; see also "Copula," ND 100–104).<sup>20</sup> "But," Adorno goes on,

the usual conception of the dynamic of Hegel's thought—that the movement of the concept is nothing but the advance from one to the other by virtue of the inner mediatedness of the former—is one-sided if nothing else. . . . Often, accordingly, the presentation makes a backward leap. What would be new according to the simple schema of triplicity reveals itself to be the concept that formed the starting point for the particular dialectical movement under discussion, modified and under different illumination. ("Skoteinos," HTS 134–135; GS 5:364–365)

Hegel's texts proceed by culling "starting point[s]" from the shadows of what they are said to have produced—or else introducing new points in the guise of reconstructed starting points. Either way, Adorno argues, Hegel exploits the value of what is: either really or rhetorically. Hegel's method embodies his rhetorical reliance on fact/value conflation in that the texts move the reader along without exactly arguing. He "can be understood only when the individual analyses are read not as arguments but as descriptions of 'implied meanings'"; his unwillingness to acknowledge prescription leads him to "[make] fun of theses, calling them 'dicta'

20. See Derrida's analysis of the Hegelian "is" in *Glas* [1974], trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., and Richard Rand (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1986), especially the relation of the copula to Christian revelation (56–58) and to the ambiguously descriptive or prescriptive status of Hegel's texts (197–198).

['Spruch' or sayings—RT]" (ibid., HTS 140, 141; GS 5:370). Although any moment of being in the Hegelian text is transitive, Adorno claims that Hegel does not dynamize the "is" to "add anything to the grammatical concept that forms the subject, as . . . with Kant" (ibid., HTS 133; GS 5:363), but only in the name of a "retroactive force," modeled on Christian *figura*, that radiates from what has come to pass to what appears in hindsight to be its antecedents. What *is* for Hegel is not so much *qualified* by its transience as it is *expanded* to encompass existence in a hypothetical past and future. Thus Adorno concludes that there is a "latent positivistic moment contained, for all Hegel's invectives against narrow-minded reflective thought, in his philosophy's stubborn insistence on what is" (ibid., HTS 145; GS 5:373).<sup>21</sup> The "latent positivistic moment" mirrors the latency of Hegelian fact—a kind of right of the unborn fact to be welcomed, by virtue of consciousness of it, among the living.

Hegel's criteria for what is lead to the question of the status, for Hegel, of thoughts in logical space. The paradigmatic instance for studying this question, in turn, is the ontological argument for God from Anselm and Descartes to Kant. The ontological argument has already appeared in Chapter 1 as a symptom of the compulsory reality of spectres, ideas that seem like things. Remember Hartley Coleridge's urgent wish: "'It is not yet, but it will be—for it *is*—& it cannot stay always, *in here*' (*pressing one hand on his forehead and the other on his occiput*)—'and then *it will be*—because it is not nothing'" (N 3547). Adorno cites Hegel's version in *Aesthetic Theory* and *Negative Dialectics*, underlining the power of Hegel's claim that "the moment a limit is posited, it is overstepped" in thought (AT 6, GS 7:16; see also HTS 6). Adorno adduces Hegel's ontological argument—for Hegel does, in this case, offer an argument—in *Aesthetic Theory* to introduce the idea that art can manage only "intermittent" closure, not "the fixed circumference of a sphere" (AT 6; GS 7:17). Hegel's riposte to Kant is productive, Adorno suggests, insofar as it supports "the deepest promise

21. Carl Schmitt notes that in Hegel "what is right will make itself effective, and what should merely be, without actually existing, is not true but only a subjective mastery of life" (*The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* [1926], trans. Ellen Kennedy [Cambridge: MIT P, 1985], 57). On Schmitt's criticism of Hegel's identification of world history and "the world court [Weltgericht]" (56), see Stathis Gourgouris, *Does Literature Think? Literature as Theory for an Antimythical Era* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003), 97ff.

interpretation makes to the mind,” namely “the assurance it gives that what exists is not the ultimate reality [dass das was ist nicht das letzte ist]—or perhaps we should say: what exists is not just what it claims to be” (HF 138, NaS 13:194).<sup>22</sup> But Hegel’s extension of facticity to mental entities is no longer productive when it begins to imply that ideas back-projected by history are any more factive than alternative past or future possibilities. Adorno grants possible facticity to thought insofar as Kantian forms themselves must be historical phenomena, “not that ultimate which Kant described” (ND 386; GS 6:379). J. M. Bernstein comments that “the issue, then, is . . . dissolving the understanding’s claim to hegemony over what belongs within the domain of possible experience.”<sup>23</sup> Adorno’s suggestion that even the forms of space and time are historical and may produce new versions of experience is, however, careful not to assert the presence of this new experience. Adorno contrasts his own caution to the “too positive” valence Hegel gives to “his theory of the way in which immediacy constantly reasserts itself,” producing the impression of “natural existence” in “the realm of pure reason, pure logic” (HF 136, translation modified; NaS 13:191). I disagree, then, with the upshot of Bernstein’s conclusion that the promise of Adornian art “arises from the belief that if something can materially appear, even in the mode of semblance, it must be possible to imbue it with figures of being,” as is “almost definitive of the ontological proof of God’s existence” (“Why Rescue Semblance?,” 198). Semblances can be “imbue[d] . . . with *figures* of being,” but figures of being are only figuratively closer to being. The quasi entities between the empirical and the merely intelligible can comment negatively on what is, but cannot suggest that the specific things thought of or appearing are possible.<sup>24</sup>

22. Adorno takes the same attitude toward Kant’s own reply, so to speak, to the First Critique, namely, the addition of “the construction of immortality” as a necessary postulate of practical reason; Adorno admires its admission of “the intolerability of extant things [Unerträglichkeit der Verzweiflung]” (ND 385; GS 6:378).

23. “Why Rescue Semblance? Metaphysical Experience and the Possibility of Ethics,” in *The Semblance of Subjectivity: Essays in Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaart (Cambridge: MIT P, 1997), 194.

24. “By itself, the logically abstract form of ‘something,’ something that is meant or judged, does not claim to posit a being; and yet, surviving in it—indelible for a thinking that would delete it—is that which is not identical with thinking, which is not thinking at all” (ND 34; GS 6:44).

Hegel can attribute presence to thought because he has already transferred thought to fact, the connector through which being and value travel back and forth, without a proportional adjustment in fact. Hegel's dynamic "is" and the blur of his moving objects—the Hegelian object is "not firmly delineated as an object [nicht gegenständlich fest umgrenzt ist] but frayed, as it were, at the edges" ("Skoteinos," HTS 133; GS 5:364)—reflect his infusion of the demand for affirmation into the reconstructed presuppositions and mental entities covered within the vague bounds of the Hegelian fact. With borders as cloudy as Kant's are crisp, Hegel thus replaces Kant's minimalist exigency and minimalist obligation with a stream of effective necessities and metalepses that his writing treats as verging on inevitability. The result—and goal—is the creation of asymptotic, virtual fact that, because it has historical process behind it, demands assent even though it doesn't even exist yet, so evident is the course of things.

Etienne Balibar investigates the status of the "effective" through Machiavelli's enigmatic phrase "la verità effettuale della cosa [the effective truth of the thing],"<sup>25</sup> observing that in using the phrase, Machiavelli links his own action in writing *The Prince* to the power of princes to make things be.<sup>26</sup> Balibar explores how in the "rather strange word, 'effettuale,' . . . we hear directly the notion 'in effect,' but without knowing exactly how to interpret it": as claiming the performative power to make the truth or, as Claude Lefort interprets Machiavelli, as claiming to gain authority from *following* the truth of things.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, Balibar goes on, "the term 'effective' . . . involves a kind of play of words, indeed amphibology." The debate between Balibar and Lefort recalls the often-noted ambiguity of prescription and description in Hegel's prose. Adorno frequently calls attention to the way that Hegel's creation of virtual or effective facts is also an artifact of his writing. Like Machiavelli, Hegel disdains argument as though it were too distant from the source of power. He brings writing closer to action by stressing its capacity to describe and, crucially, to ig-

25. "La verità effettuale della cosa: Praeter Mathesis," lecture delivered at UCLA, February 10, 2003.

26. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* [1532], trans. Peter Bondanella and Mark Musa (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979), 52.

27. Claude Lefort, "Machiavelli and the *Verità Effettuale*," in *Writing: The Political Test* [1992], trans. David Ames Curtis (Durham: Duke UP, 2000), 109–141.

nore. Rounding off a description into a law in the making—or to put it a different way, evidence for the possibility of a law into a law—is Hegel’s signature rhetorical move, Adorno points out:

Without . . . the *reality* of a class society that stands as the very principle of bourgeois society, there would have been neither the huge population increase that we have seen, nor the growth in transport, nor would there ever have been anything like enough by way of food supplies for the population. It will not have escaped your attention that the starting-point of a critique of this entire way of seeing is the idea (one that Hegel pursued with especial rigor right on into the heart of his *Logic*) that from the outset *reality* is given precedence over possibility. And of course it is here that we see that unquestioned *parti pris* for the *prevailing* [durchsetzende] universal of which I have already spoken at some length [in Lecture 5 of *History and Freedom*—R.T.]. To recapitulate, then, *the fact is* that mankind has survived not just in spite of but because of conflict, which has such weighty consequences for the theory of history because Hegel has inferred from it with a very great semblance of justice [Schein von Recht], a semblance of justice that cannot be dismissed out of hand, that categorically, in terms of the idea, when looked at from above, life can be reproduced *only* by virtue of conflict. And this has resulted in what might be termed the theodicy of conflict.<sup>28</sup> (HF 51–52, translation modified, my italics; NaS 13:76–77)

28. Hegel’s optimism “is not a mere mockery” as long as the species proceeds by virtue of its conflicts as it has done so far (HF 51). What would it take to refute it? Evidence for the non-inevitability of the course of the world might be furnished, on the one hand, by a transformation of the world and “establishment of humanity” (HF 146; NaS 13, 206); a discontinuous messianic model of transformation might provide such an alternative to Hegelian history. Or, on the other hand, Hegel would be refuted as soon as it becomes clear that history isn’t survivable; when that happens, no one will feel up to enjoying the demise of Hegel’s reputation.

At times, Adorno considers that the genocide of European Jews and other twentieth-century disasters do constitute this evidence: “The catastrophe there was not just a disaster predicted by Spengler, but an actual reality, one that makes all talk of progress toward freedom seem ludicrous. The concept of the autonomous human subject is refuted

Hegel's performative message is that the nonidentity of world and spirit is perfectly noticeable but doesn't matter: the difference is simultaneously observed and dismissed. This difference, isomorphic with alternative possibility, lacks the authoritative value that, after Hegel, the course of the world—"the *whole* of the movement, seen as a state of repose [als Ruhe aufgefasst]" (Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 28)<sup>29</sup>—alone confers. Adorno observes that Hegel's commentators have the same tendency to round off the corners when reading Hegel: "the intention is taken for the deed [Tat], and orientation to the general direction of the ideas is taken for their correctness: to follow them through would then be superfluous. Hegel himself is by no means innocent of this inadequate way of proceeding" ("Skoteinos," HTS 93; GS 5:329). Such writing acts as though one doesn't have to concern oneself with the distinction between the probable and the inexorable; everybody knows what's important and what's going to happen. To Hegel, the course of the world furnishes an authentic "court [Gericht]" (*Phenomenology*, 27; *Werke* II:3, 46) because history is such a frictive and critical medium. But Adorno argues that Hegel creates facts of unheard-of vigor by crediting the energy of the process cumulatively to the outcome and "tend[ing] simply to accept that something that has evolved then disappears into what has evolved" (HF 136, translation modified; NaS 13:192). When Adorno writes that Hegel "believes that non-identity . . . should somehow be incorporated into the concept of identity in the course of its elaboration" (HF 65; NaS 13:96), he means that Hegel is not *content* to leave uncooperative particulars "lying who knows where outside it"

---

by reality [Realität]. By the same token, if freedom and autonomy still had any substance, Auschwitz could not have happened. And by Auschwitz I mean of course the entire system" (HF 7; NaS 13, 14).

29. Hegel's point in this passage is that "negative and evanescent [verschwindend]" moments are preserved in the movement of appearance taken as a whole, not "left lying who knows where outside it" (*Phenomenology*, 28, 27; *Werke*, II:3, 46). For Adorno's response, see HF 64–65, discussed below. Benjamin inverts Hegel's figure of history as a static image of a moving stream in his idea of the dialectical image ("Theses on the Philosophy of History" [1940], in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn [New York: Schocken, 1969], 255). Max Horkheimer and Adorno, writing of symbols as cultural sediment, claim that "the dread objectified as a fixed image becomes a sign of the established domination of the privileged" (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* [1944], trans. John Cumming [New York: Continuum, 1993], 16).

(*Phenomenology*, 27), but insists on their participation in the process that crushes them.

Terry Pinkard, whose history of German philosophy focuses throughout on its handling of normative authority, comments that Kantian exigency modulates in Hegel into “practical” necessity. Facts that compose the course of the world hold authority “by virtue,” in Pinkard’s words, “of the way they have shown themselves to be unavoidable *for us*.”<sup>30</sup> Hegelian necessities are “that which we, as part of a developmental story we must tell about ourselves, come to find that we practically cannot do without” (*German Philosophy*, 359). But who are “we”? The qualification “practically” indexes the constitutive ambiguity of social fact—the quality that renders it “probably equally valid” to state, as Adorno and Horkheimer do in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that society either “is” or “seems to be” under a spell (HF 172–173; NaS 13:241). Ambiguity at the source about whether a social fact *must be* or *seems to be*—the undecidability of the possible naturalism of social facts—ought, to Adorno’s mind, to throw the emphasis on what one prefers. He suspects thinkers who love to dwell on inevitability of cheering on the status quo with redundant declarations of its supposedly obvious necessity. This “us” that seems so ready to embrace the going assumption about what is unavoidable has been the target of queer theory’s criticism of social dependence on norms.<sup>31</sup> A norm presumed by an event

30. *German Philosophy 1760–1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 359, my italics.

31. Adorno’s impatience with the notion of the natural person, reminiscent of Nietzsche’s, his realization that “the spell cast by the identity principle . . . perverts whatever is different [der verkehrt noch das, was anders ist]” (HF 97; NaS 13, 143), and his conclusion that of all tactics, “reflection on difference would help towards reconciliation” (HF 98; NaS 13, 144) offer serious resources for queer theory. Michael Warner recalls that Adorno “embraced [the] cause” of the nascent gay rights movement in his 1962 essay “Sexual Taboos and Law Today” (*The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* [Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000], 22). There Adorno considers the “abominable” “Paragraph 175” that legally proscribed homosexuality far into the postwar period (Adorno, “Sexual Taboos,” in *Critical Models*, trans. Henry Pickford [New York: Columbia UP, 1998], 71–88, especially 79–80 [GS 10.2:533–564]). Adorno dedicates “Sexual Taboos” to the memory of Fritz Bauer, a progressive jurist and coeditor of *Sexualität und Verbrechen: Beiträge zur Strafrechtsreform* (Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag, 1963). On the abysmal state of gay rights in postwar Germany, see Robert G. Moeller, “The Homosexual Man Is a ‘Man,’ the Homosexual Woman Is a ‘Woman’: Sex, Society,

or claim can instead be taken, however, not as a precondition of a state of affairs but as its epiphenomenon—the kind of phenomenon that can be described as “not nothing.” The principle that “even *in extremis* [im Äussersten] a negated negative is not a positive” (ND 393; GS 6:385) is the spine of *Negative Dialectics*. Nietzsche would say—in *A Genealogy of Morals*, for example—that a norm often has force because we read history backward and take metaleptic projections for causes. This element of Nietzsche’s thought contributes to Foucault’s and queer theory’s excavation of norms so as to refuse the way they limit what counts as proceeding.<sup>32</sup> As with Pinkard’s equanimity about what is “unavoidable for us,” there is something troubling in the systematization of effective necessities and virtual acceptance in Habermas’s presuppositions of “*ideal content*” which participants may not *aver*, but which “all participants *must de facto* [faktisch] *accept*.”<sup>33</sup> People *may* accept on another level what they do not avow, but that doesn’t mean that they *must* accept the idealizations projected by their language. “De facto” acceptance of projected discursive norms follows from taking mental entities as facts that obligate more than Kant’s minimal respect. In Habermas’s statement, loosening what counts as necessity drifts, with the best of intentions, into prescribing to all members of a community tacit affirmations that they neither perceive nor endorse, or even explicitly disclaim. From the perspective of phenomenality and dissatisfaction, the first rule of a discourse community should be that

---

and the Law in Postwar West Germany,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4 (1994): 395–429.

32. Adorno notes that “one cannot move from the logical movement of concepts to existence” (“Skoteinos,” HTS 147; GS 5, 375). He makes this remark while noting that Hegel behaves as though having the concept of the nonidentical gave him a way to imagine the dialectic “to have gone beyond nonidentity” itself (“Skoteinos,” HTS 147; GS 5:375). My point is not that the ontological status of thought entities is easy to resolve, but the opposite: they occupy a gray area of fact and value, and no one can jump over arguments about their status. One of the main uses in contemporary theory of counting norms as encrypted givens is to enforce, with an imperative “must,” tacit assent to a “necessity” that someone *explicitly does not endorse*; for example, to argue that Derrida really must subscribe to all the concepts that he places “under erasure,” or that queer theory reinscribes the norms it repudiates because it represents them.

33. Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* [1992], trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT P, 1998), 16, my italics; *Faktizität und Geltung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), 31.

the desirability of communication itself will not be assumed. As long as social reality is suffused with an imperative to communicative reason, there will be great appeal in withdrawing to “always particular, episodic, and only privately accessible, hence consciousness-immanent representations” (*Between Facts and Norms*, 12).

Having learned from Kant that affirmation can be almost fully automated—in Kant, by cognition—Hegel affirms the totality Nietzsche envisions in *The Will to Power* without going through nearly as much anguish.<sup>34</sup> Spirit affirms as well as cognizes, and does so robustly to the extent that the course of the world is progressive. So, Hegel’s optimistic account of necessity has been more popular than Kant’s minimalist one, for reasons anticipated by Kant.<sup>35</sup> If Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Adorno all think through the relationship, within affirmation and negation, between automation and intention, between collective and individual psychology, Adorno’s Hegel stands at the apex of the collective automation of affirmation—an affirmation that orchestrates individual participation and legitimates itself by it. Finally, Adorno writes, law formalizes the bias inherent to norms: “the legal norms cut short what is not covered, every specific experience that has not been shaped in advance [präformierte],” and forbids “the admission. . . . of anything *quod non est in actis*” (ND 309; GS 6:304). Although the value of givenness is supposed to be weaker in Hegel than in the First Critique (since givens in Hegel are historical and in Kant naturalistic and invariant), the reverse is true. Hegel spreads necessity broadly over effective social facticity, and with it the assent it carries; his world offers both less rigorous exigency and an epidemic of dubious authority.

34. A neo-Adornian reading of Nietzsche’s *Will to Power* might suggest that Nietzsche goes part of the way toward automating the affirmation of the course of the world by deintentionalizing will, but, to his credit, continues to register individual suffering within that process and hence the impossibility of harmonious affirmation. On Nietzsche’s pragmatic desire to follow “the interests of sheer survival” in comparison to Adorno, see Peter Dews, *The Limits of Disenchantment: Essays on Contemporary European Philosophy* (New York: Verso, 1995), 24.

35. Kant reflects on the “popularity” of “transcendentally idealizing reason” in CPR A473/B501–A474/B502.

## 2. ILLUSION IN TOTAL ILLUSION

Launched from within his critique of fact perception, Adorno's disquisitions on art depict twentieth-century civilization as a field of illusion. A "negative feel for reality [negativen Realitätsgefühls]" reigns, as Adorno reflects of Kafka (AT 19; GS 7:36); normatively neutral fact perception appears in a lurid shade. The reference to Kafka recalls the romantic reading of Kant, in which having fact perceptions without feeling able to endorse them arouses the suspicion that this facticity does not merit the name, that a world of this kind of facticity is absurd and unjustified ("ungereimte" [CPR Bxxvi]). Adorno's prose renders the tilt of just such a world. As though it were the voice of dissatisfaction with the world "as is," the Adornian artwork is "unconsciously polemical" toward the "spell" of social fact (AT 5; GS 7:14–15).

The artwork is *unconsciously* polemical because it protests the world "as is" mainly by being in it:

What is social in art is its immanent movement against society, not its manifest opinions. Its historical gesture repels empirical reality, of which artworks are nevertheless part in that they are things. Insofar as a social function can be predicated for artworks, it is their functionlessness. Through their difference from a bewitched reality, they embody negatively a position in which what is would find its rightful place, its own. (AT 227; GS 7:336–337)

In its combination of difference and existence, otherwise known as its "form," the artwork causes its perceiver to find it remarkable that something like the artwork ever came into the world. Being a "thing that negates the world of things" (AT 119; GS 7:182), the artwork can leverage the fact/value conflation against social fact. If it were not a thing, so the argument goes, it would not make the strongest case for the fact of possibility it introduces. For this reason, perhaps, Adorno remarks that "real denunciation is probably only a capacity of form [Gestaltung]" (AT 230; GS 7:341). Of course, the artwork also does too much, and gives the impression that the possibility it represents has already been actualized. Because

“artworks detach themselves from the empirical world and bring forth another world, one opposed to the empirical world. . . . however tragic they appear, artworks tend a priori toward affirmation” (AT 1; GS 7:10). So art generates again the kind of problem at issue in the ontological arguments for God: it ought to demonstrate what is thinkable, not that what is thinkable is present through the thought. The impression of actual formal unity that is art’s limit and even goal composes a second-order Schein, a new species of illusory fact perception.

The energy of the implosive moment—obsessively repeated in spiral patterns—when Adorno proposes that artworks harbor a self-contradiction the awareness of which is also what they have to contribute, dominates *Aesthetic Theory* and its commentary.<sup>36</sup> The burgeoning secondary literature evaluates the complexity of Adorno’s theory in learned detail; I don’t revise its main conclusions here, but rather sketch Adorno’s affinity with and ultimate difference from phenomenophilia. As you might guess, the difference is already given away by his focus on form. By defining the artwork by its deployment of a notion of form that outperforms fact perception in the game of Schein, Adorno leaves phenomenophilia even further behind than the Third Critique does. In this way he clarifies what is otherwise implicit, that looking away is aesthetic without being artistic. Although artists are always pulling phenomenophilic tricks, as Nietzsche confides, looking away rests content with evanescent perception that cannot be shared, and lets the chance at art go. Someone who channels the

36. Since about 1990, after an initially quite hostile reception, Adorno’s aesthetic theory has found an appreciative academic audience. See Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*; Jameson, *Late Marxism*; Shierry Weber Nichol森, *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno’s Aesthetics* (Cambridge: MIT P, 1997); Huhn and Zuidervaart, eds., *The Semblance of Subjectivity*; Albrecht Wellmer, “Adorno’s Aesthetic Redemption of Modernity,” *Telos* 62 (1984–85): 89–116; and Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (Cambridge: MIT P, 1991). For a sense of the bitterness of earlier Adorno scholarship, see J. F. Lyotard, “Adorno as the Devil,” trans. Robert Hurley, *Telos* 19 (1974): 128–137; and Michael Sullivan and John T. Lysaker, “Between Impotence and Illusion: Adorno’s Art of Theory and Practice,” *New German Critique* 57 (1992): 87–122, an article that surveys and replies to earlier attacks (as does Wellmer). Lyotard complains, among other things, that Adorno is not affirmative: “what can an affirmative politics be, which does not look for support in a representative (a party) of the negative, etc.? That is the question left, abandoned by Adorno” (“Adorno as the Devil,” 137; see also 130).

memory of merely phenomenal experience into works that may inspire similar experiences in others is already doing something else—such a person, the artist, fulfills a communal function, negotiates a compromise in which the possibility of phenomenophilia becomes a sublimated element. *Aesthetic Theory* furnishes a nonlinear narrative of this sublimation. At the same time, Adorno's aesthetics, like Nietzsche's, glances backward wistfully at mere phenomenality even as it absorbs it into the artistic so that it is no longer mere.

Adorno's identification of Schein with "form in the broadest sense"<sup>37</sup> (AT 110; GS 7: 169) recalls the development of essence (Wesen) in Hegel's *Science of Logic*:

At first, essence *shines* or *shows within itself*, or is reflection; secondly, it *appears*; thirdly, it *manifests* itself. In its movement, essence posits itself in the following determinations:

- I. As *simple* essence, essence in itself, which in its determinations remains within itself
- II. As emerging into determinate being, or in accordance with its Existence and *Appearance*
- III. As essence that is one with its Appearance, as *actuality*.<sup>38</sup>

Traditionally, appearance is compared with confirmed existence and so seems pale (and therefore, in the discourse of phenomenality and dissatisfaction, appealingly light). Like Kant, Hegel associates Erscheinung instead with "determinate being" and existence. "If it is said that something is *only* Appearance," though, "in the sense that contrasted with it *immediate* Existence is the truth, then the fact is that Appearance is the higher truth"; for it is "when Existence passes over into Appearance that it ceases to be

37. Adorno's translator, Hullot-Kentor, underlines the connection: "in that artworks as such remain semblance, conflict between semblance—form in the broadest sense—and expression remains unresolved." Adorno leaves it implicit, though clear enough: "Weil sie aber doch als Kunstwerke Schein bleiben, ist der Konflikt zwischen diesem, der Form in weitesten Verstande, und dem Ausdruck unausgetragen" (GS 7:169).

38. *The Science of Logic* [1812], trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Humanity, 1969), 391; *Werke* 6:16.

essenceless" (*Logic*, 499; *Werke*, 6:148). When appearance is "only appearance" it is at least higher than *mere* existence. But *Erscheinung* is not, as in Kant, *replete* with form from its very onset, because evanescence can emerge into being in accordance with its existence without being unified with its appearance. Formal repleteness is reserved for "actuality." So, Hegel's progressive version of history renders degrees of form, along the lines of the "degrees of reality" that outrage Nietzsche.<sup>39</sup> In that hierarchy, appearance figures determination toward actuality, and actuality, in turn, becomes a way of thinking about formal unity: "actuality as itself the *immediate* form-unity of inner and outer is . . . an *actuality as against a possibility*" (*Logic*, 542; *Werke*, 6:202).

Hegel's account of form supports Adorno's insistence that the artwork cannot just as well have been anything—that it is more, as well as less, by virtue of not being what it's not. The "Essence and Appearance" section of *Negative Dialectics* interprets essence as "that which lies concealed beneath the façade of immediacy, of the supposed facts, and which makes the facts what they are" (ND 167; GS 6:169). At the same time, Adorno again refuses Hegel's inclination to round off historical tendency into actuality. In Hegel's account of formal actuality, "real possibility and necessity are. . . only *seemingly* different"; their identity "does not have to *become* but is already *presupposed* and lies at their base" (*Logic*, 549; *Werke*, 6:211). (Typically, Hegel acknowledges that possibility and necessity *do seem* different on the way to subordinating that apparent difference to the presupposition of their identity.) In Adorno's version, an artwork's form includes its gesture of negation (AT 49) but also its self-difference (for example, AT 143–144); its spirit is not identical with its form. Because artworks have the form of not-being other empirical objects, however, what ought to be a promise of unity appears in the guise of a fact perception—the Schein of Hegelian "actuality": "what they appear to be appears as if it could not be prevaricated [was sie scheinen, so erscheint, dass es nicht gelogen sein kann]" (AT 132; GS 7:199).

When Schein becomes the name of the false repleteness of "actuality," *Erscheinung* takes the part of the fluid principle that breaks its surface

39. A nonprogressive history would render simply transformation, not degrees of formality.

from beneath. “Appearance,” “appearing,” and “apparition” are all mobile and astringent in *Aesthetic Theory*, while Adorno reserves the term “image [Bild]” for efforts to fix appearance’s fluidity. When we apprehend “nature as appearing beauty” (AT 65; GS 7:103), for example, Adorno lends “appearing” the phenomenophilic sense of nonteleological manifestation: “by rejecting the fleetingness of natural beauty, as well as virtually everything nonconceptual, Hegel obtusely makes himself indifferent to the central motif of art, which probes after truth in the evanescent [Entgleitenden] and fragile” (AT 76; GS 7:119). For Adorno, artworks remember nature’s apparitional quality, and summon appearance in strategies of dissonance that contest Schein. A good deal of *Aesthetic Theory* details these strategies. Following the vacillation between *Erscheinung* and *Schein* produces the spiral form I mentioned earlier—a narrative of successive paragraphs that all begin with “but.” Rather than narrating their relation chronologically, we might try to glimpse it in Adorno’s dramatization of *Erscheinung*’s ability, at its most intense, to burst aesthetic *Schein*. In that moment their distinction is sharpest, even as both remain aspects of the same self-conflicted force.

One such moment occurs in Adorno’s discussion of the “instant of expression [Augenblick des Ausdrucks]” (AT 79; GS 7:123):

Artworks become appearances [*Erscheinungen*], in the pregnant sense of the term—that is, as the appearance of an other—when the accent falls on the unreality of their own reality. Artworks have the immanent character of being an act, even if they are carved in stone, and this endows them with the quality of being something momentary and sudden. This is registered by the feeling of being overwhelmed when faced with an important work. This immanent character of being an act establishes the similarity of all artworks, like that of natural beauty, to music, a similarity once evoked by the term *muse*. Under patient contemplation artworks begin to move. To this extent they are truly afterimages of the primordial shudder in the age of reification. (AT 79; GS 7:123–124)

Awareness that the artwork is artificial interrupts aesthetic *Schein*, as Brecht might hope. The trace of artifice on the work is the secular “after-

image” of the seeming animation humans used to shudder at in the cultic object. “The shudder is past and yet survives” (AT 80; GS 7:124) in the artwork’s capacity to overwhelm, as the scars of action on it evoke the instant when it became a work, and project as active force the energy the work absorbed. What is unreal is the work’s insinuation of life, an effect inseparable from that of “form,” another way of thinking of the artwork’s illusion of being more than the sum of its materials and labor. Freed from “mythical deception,” the shudder gains a new ground in the autonomy of the artwork that presents it “as something unmollified [Ungemildertes] and unprecedented” (AT 80; GS 7:125). The effect is not even all that transient, and as Adorno continues to describe it, its collaboration with the artwork’s facticity comes through:

If the deities of antiquity were said to appear fleetingly [flüchtig erscheinen] at their cult sites, or at least were to have appeared there in the primeval age, this act of appearing became the law of the permanence of artworks, but at the price of the living incarnation of what appears [Leibhaftigkeit des Ererscheinenden]. The artwork as appearance is most closely resembled by the *apparition*, the heavenly vision [Himmelserscheinung]. Artworks stand tacitly in accord with it as it rises above human beings and is carried beyond their intentions and the world of things. Artworks from which the *apparition* has been driven out without a trace are nothing more than husks, worse than what merely exists, because they are not even useful. . . . The pregnant moment of their objectivation is the moment that concentrates them as appearance, which is by no means just the expressive elements that are dispersed over the artworks. Artworks surpass the world of things by what is thing-like in them, their artificial objectivation. They become eloquent by the force of their kindling of thing and appearance. They are things whose power it is to appear. (AT 80; GS 7:125)

No longer “the living incarnation of what appears,” like an idol, the artwork, appearing only as itself, remains “the appearance of an other” among prosaic objects, more like a “heavenly vision” than Kantian *Erscheinung*. Appearance, the trace of artifice, explodes aesthetic *Schein*; put another way, the self-differential momentum of the artwork’s creation

carries it past its form. “This rupture [Durchbruch] is the instant of *apparition*” (AT 88; GS 7:137), figuring with almost unbearable freshness the moment of the artwork’s determination and with it, its full blast of negation. Adorno’s language recalls Nietzsche’s would-be identification with Raphael’s *Transfiguration*: the artwork sides with the vision “as it rises above human beings and is carried beyond their intentions and the world of things.” Reading this, it can be difficult to hang on to the realization that Adorno is writing here not of the peak of Schein but of the peak of *Erscheinung*: all of this takes place when “the sudden unfolding of appearance *disclaims* aesthetic Schein” (AT 85, my italics; GS 7:132). Apparition, in other words, isn’t just another illusion. *Erscheinung*, unlike Schein, is true in a negative mode: the power of showing, showing what is not, when there isn’t anything else yet to show.<sup>40</sup> Things are complicated by the circumstance that appearance needs substance to carry it, as fire needs something to burn. Similarly, a minimal, often irregular materiality or hylē supports even spectra—the inside of the eyelid, the film in Coleridge’s fireplace. Although initial illusion is not the only criterion for aesthetic impact, Adorno prefers the larger impact of negation that goes with a fuller illusion of facticity: the more illusion, the bigger the bang when it vanishes. Thus artworks “surpass the world of things by what is thing-like in them,” and the benefit is that their facticity, Schein included, pressures the perceiver to feel and credit their negation of what is, including that very facticity.<sup>41</sup>

Rupturing Schein, appearance also ruptures itself in a “catastrophic fulfillment [katastrophische Erfüllung]” that takes art with it:

The shocks inflicted by the most recent artworks are the explosion of their appearance. In them appearance, previously a self-evident a priori of art, dissolves in a catastrophe in which the essence of appear-

40. Compare Derrida’s critical approach to pure monstration or theatrical luster in Mallarmé, *Dissemination* [1972], trans. Barbara Johnson [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981], 173–286, especially 179, 206.

41. See Zuidervaat, *Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory*, 184, and Jameson, *Late Marxism*, 180–181. A parallel philosophical stance appears in Adorno’s suggestion that “we have no power over the [Heideggerian] philosophy of Being if we reject it generally, from the outside, instead of taking it on in its own structure—turning its own force against it” (ND 97; GS 6:104).

ance is for the first time fully revealed. . . . Even this volatilization of aesthetic transcendence becomes aesthetic, a measure of the degree to which artworks are mythically bound up with their antithesis. In the incineration of appearance, artworks break away in a glare from the empirical world and become the counterfigure of what lives there; art today is scarcely conceivable except as a form of reaction that anticipates the apocalypse. Closely observed, even tranquil works discharge not so much the pent-up emotions of their makers as the works' own inwardly antagonistic forces. The result of these forces is bound up with the impossibility of bringing these forces to any equilibrium; their antinomies, like those of knowledge, are unsolvable in the unreconciled world. The instant in which these forces become image [Bild], the instant in which what is interior becomes exterior, the outer husk is exploded: their *apparition*, which makes them an image, always at the same time destroys them as image. (AT 84–85; GS 7:131–132)

Spirit drives form to Schein until it manifests itself in appearance; appearance releases essence, flash-burns its “husk,” and sings the empirical world. Now, Adorno notably identifies the denouement of Schein with the self-negation of art altogether—“art,” not merely the “artwork”: “as a result of its determination as appearance, art bears its own negation embedded in itself as its own telos: the sudden unfolding of appearance disclaims aesthetic Schein” (AT 85; GS 7:132). Albrecht Wellmer calls art’s explosion a “‘setting free’ of forces which in their non-aesthetic use can re-establish a continuum between art and the life-praxis” (“Adorno’s Aesthetic,” 110). Yet Adorno implies more than the reestablishment of art and life when he calls art’s teleology the self-negation of art. If the artwork’s self-destruction models the self-destruction of the “unreconciled world,” then the latter destruction would also dissolve art altogether.

Adorno frees objection to the inevitable from guilt, as I noted at the beginning of this chapter. The sphere of art, however, remains a theater of guilt and thrill for Adorno, as the participant in art eddies in the addiction cycle of negation and Schein. *Aesthetic Theory* narrates art’s “entanglement in the guilt context of the living [die Schuld des Lebendigen]” (AT 144; GS 7:217) and the “shame” of the perceiver, who, hypnotized by aesthetic

Schein, implicitly damages “what does not yet exist by taking it for existent” (AT 74; GS 7:115). The secondary literature takes the position that the Adornian artwork’s difficult trajectory is the only way: according to it, art resists turning against itself, and has to turn against itself. Unfolding Adorno’s remark that “irritation with Schein has its locus in the object itself” (AT 101; GS 7:156), Zuidervaart suggests that “the artwork could shed its illusory character if it would rid itself of all likeness to a false reality. For this to happen, society would have to become true” (*Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory*, 181). The rhetoric here is that we would all love things to be different—the course of the art world, along with everything else. But the guilt persists, even in the face of the conviction that the artwork must and should fall into Schein. The persistence of Schuld measures the difference between Kantian exigencies and effective exigencies, their different degrees of reality; effective exigencies are not strong enough to dissolve guilt. The guilt and shame that trail aesthetic Schein insinuate that the all but irresistible course of Schein in art is not literally irresistible, that the space between plausibility and inevitability is not closed. Comparison with Kant’s aesthetic or with phenomenophilia makes the axiomatic conceptuality and facticity of the Adornian artwork look less than necessary. This is so because even if we concede that the artwork must lead to Schein, we would still need an argument that artworks must come into being.

Adorno defines art by his conceptual notion of form—“art has precisely the same chance of survival as does form” (AT 141; GS 7:213)—using the sort of tautological formulations whose motives he suspects in others. Without form, he writes, nothing would distinguish art from the things it resists through its form. So, Adorno complains that Webern withdraws from conceptuality: when “sonata movements shrink to aphorisms,” Webern “executes [vollstreckt] tensions that originate in the genre. . . . Aesthetics is not obliged, as under the spell of its object, to exorcise concepts [die Begriffe zu eskamotieren],” but rather to free them from false objects and “bring them within the work” (AT 180–181; GS 7:269–270). Art therefore cannot be merely or mainly “involuntary” (AT 69; GS 7:109), nor the unbinding of sounds and colors from context (AT 90; GS 7:140), nor “the grouping of color [Farbkomplex] that is simply factual” (AT 144; GS 7:216). Art must invite interpretation, even if it finally repels

it; to claim otherwise “would erase the demarcation line of art” (AT 128, translation modified; GS 7:193). Conditional clauses like the one above signal vulnerable points in Adorno’s theory—places where hope runs out,<sup>42</sup> in the sense that no choice appears:

As soon as the artwork fears for its purity so fanatically that it loses faith in its possibility and begins to display outwardly what cannot become art—canvas and mere tones—it becomes its own enemy, the direct and false continuation of purposeful rationality. This tendency culminates in the *happening*. . . . The difference of artworks from the empirical world, their Schein character, is constituted out of the empirical world and in opposition to it. If for the sake of their own concept artworks wanted absolutely to destroy this reference back to the empirical world, they would wipe out their own premise. (AT 103; GS 7:158)

This passage moves between two criteria that separate the Adornian from the Kantian artwork: conceptuality and the coercive use of fact perception. Adorno’s “if” phrases make it sound as though art would *like* to loosen its ties to both criteria, and that the only reason it doesn’t is that if it did it would no longer be art. The assumption that art must not do anything self-destructive, though, belies its teleology in self-negation, as well as the impetus that its teleology offers for thinking beyond givenness. Granted that art consists in conceptual form and, once it comes into being as such, must be torn by the irreconcilable forces Adorno analyzes—its need to destroy its “husk” and have a husk to destroy—why, finally, must art come into being? Adorno famously declares in the first sentence of *Aesthetic Theory* that art’s “right to exist” is not “self-evident,” yet the assumption seems to be that if art doesn’t come into being, nothing else will step up to the plate; that only form constitutes itself “out of the empirical world and in opposition to it,” while only facticity flexes muscle. Nothing will do the

42. “The mental stages within the human species, and the blind-spots in the individual, are stages where hope petered out [die Hoffnung zum Stillstand kam]” (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 258 [GS 3:296]; the last clause is Horkheimer’s phrase, Adorno notes [HF 314n]).

job as well as the artwork *if* the task is to turn the fact/value conflation against itself.

### 3. CIRCUS COLORS

The conviction that that is so leads Adorno to pass over some possibilities. Adorno disagrees with Benjamin's idea that play (*Spiel*) may represent an alternative to Schein because it, too, posits a false harmony (AT 100; GS 7:154). Similarly, he claims that "the ineffability of illusion [Illusion] prevents the solution to the antinomy of aesthetic semblance [ästhetischen Scheins] by means of a concept of absolute appearance [absoluter Erscheinung]" (AT 103; GS 7:159). Adorno's dismissal of brief and relatively amorphous ventures such as "happenings" suggests that merely demurring from duration is insufficient. Like Kant, who requires the aesthetic object to seem to be eligible for conceptuality even as it deflects it, Adorno prefers that the artwork be able to be mistaken for another fact among social facts.<sup>43</sup> If the subaesthetic lack of pretense to public presence seems to be too little for Adorno, however, we can also wonder whether it isn't, rather, too threatening—an alternative to negation that is no longer art, but might be something better, something that overflows art's "obligation" by "execut[ing]" tensions, as Adorno writes of Webern (AT 180–181; GS 7:269–270), or registers a different kind of resistance to history by looking away from it. It is an *embarrassment* to history that mere phenomenality touches, then falls away from the threshold of what is, as though facticity were no great prize.

Adorno approaches the phenomenophilic element within art whenever he calls artworks "afterimages" (*Nachbilder*)—literally, spectra. Artworks may be afterimages of various things: they are "for the disenchanting world . . . afterimage[s] of enchantment" (AT 58; GS 7:93); they are "afterimages of empirical life insofar as they help the latter to what is denied them outside their own sphere" (AT 4; GS 7:14); of nature's communicative silence (AT 74; GS 7: 115); and "of the primordial shudder in the age of reification"

43. This preference sets off criticism of Adorno's aesthetic narrowness, notably by Peter Bürger in *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* [1974], trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984).

ion” (AT 79–80; GS 7:124), as we’ve seen. In phenomenophilia, the afterimage figures the trace of fact perception’s lifted pressure. Adorno can almost crave that weight, when it is that of enchanted nature or the cultic object, or feel its attenuation in the phenomenophilic manner, as relief from the effective reality of the given. Then, Adornian artworks’ influence on what is achieves the rethinking of fact and illusion that Hegelian dialectic could bring about if it were consistent. The “is” in Georg Trakl’s poetry, for instance, “expresses no existential judgment but rather its pale afterimage qualitatively transformed to the point of negation” (AT 123; GS 7:187). The Trakl copula happily fails to trigger the fact/value conflation at full strength. The judgment of the lyric poem is only an afterimage of a judgment. Similarly, the poem’s negation is only the afterimage of a negation. In balance in the pure example of Trakl, the afterimage-like artwork doesn’t so much negate what is as solicit a question of itself—“What is it?” (AT 121; GS 7:184)—that should be asked of the fact perceptions around it. Trakl accomplishes what Hegel does not, a dialectical revision of what is that expands and dilutes it equally without being tied to a progressive history. Leaving aside Adorno’s previous, more Hegelian formulation that “what exists is not just what it claims to be” (HF 138, NaS 13:194), “the assertion [in Trakl] that something is amounts to both more and less and includes the implication that it is not [dass etwas sei, ist darin weniger und mehr, führt mit sich, dass es nicht sei]” (AT 123, translation modified; GS 7:187).

The Adornian artwork can scarcely hold this balance in the wind of the fact/value conflation.<sup>44</sup> It’s in order to try to do so that *Aesthetic Theory* incorporates nonconceptual qualities of natural beauty and naive “pre-artistic” features into the artwork. These elements are homeopathic, the artwork’s attempts to metabolize extra-artistic forces that could obviate it:

The phenomenon of fireworks is prototypical for artworks, though because of its fleetingness and status as empty entertainment it has scarcely been acknowledged by theoretical consideration; only Valéry

44. De Man’s theory of the inherent overassertion of position offers one way to understand the difficulty.

pursued ideas that are at least related. Fireworks are apparition *κατ' ἐξοχην* [par excellence]: they appear empirically yet are liberated from the burden of the empirical, which is the obligation of duration; they are a sign from heaven yet artifactual, an ominous warning, a script that flashes up, vanishes, and indeed cannot be read for its meaning. The segregation of the aesthetic sphere by means of the complete afunctionality of what is thoroughly ephemeral is no formal definition of aesthetics. It is not through a higher perfection that artworks separate from the fallibly existent but rather by becoming actual, like fireworks, incandescently in an expressive appearance. They are not only the other of the empirical world: everything in them becomes other. It is this to which the preartistic consciousness of artworks responds most intensely. This consciousness submits to the temptation that first led to art and that mediates between art and the empirical. Although the preartistic dimension becomes poisoned by its exploitation, to the point that artworks must eliminate it, it survives sublimated in them. (AT 81)

Prototypisch für die Kunstwerke ist das Phänomen des Feuerwerks, das um seiner Flüchtigkeit willen und als leere Unterhaltung kaum des theoretischen Blicks gewürdigt wurde; einzig Valéry hat Gedankengänge verfolgt, die zumindest in seine Nähe führen. Es ist apparition *κατ' ἐξοχην*: empirisch Erscheinendes, befreit von der Last der Empirie als einer der Dauer, Himmelszeichen und hergestellt in eins, Menetekel, aufblitzende und vergehende Schrift, die doch nicht ihrer Bedeutung nach sich lesen läßt. Die Absonderung des ästhetischen Bereichs in der vollendeten Zweckferne eines durch und durch Ephemeren bleibt nicht dessen formale Bestimmung. Nicht durch höhere Vollkommenheit scheidet sich die Kunstwerke vom fehlbaren Seienden, sondern gleich dem Feuerwerk dadurch, daß sie aufstrahlend zur ausdrückenden Erscheinung sich aktualisieren. Sie sind nicht allein das Andere der Empirie: alles in ihnen wird ein Anderes. Darauf spricht das vorkünstlerische Bewußtsein an den Kunstwerken am stärksten an. Es willfahrt der Lockung, welche zur Kunst überhaupt erst verführt, vermittelnd zwischen ihr und der Empirie. Während

die vorkünstlerliche Schicht durch ihre Verwertung vergiftet wird,  
bis die Kunstwerke sie ausmerzen, überlebt sie sublimiert in ihnen.  
(GS 7:125–126)

“Ephemeral through and through,” the firework’s apparitional moment of “becoming actual” is its only moment. Singularly among Adorno’s examples of art, the firework’s difference from other objects suggests “no formal definition of aesthetics,” only a temporal one; it arrives to vanish, and “cannot be read for . . . meaning.” Like spectra, it reveals the “burden of the empirical” by opting for *minimal* empirical existence. Lighting up the sky, fireworks also bring forward a threatening power to alter the way everything around them looks—magnified, in Adorno’s fantasy of the “writing on the wall [Menetekel],” into a power to lay waste—that remains implicit and private in spectra. Thus the difference between fireworks and spectra, and what makes fireworks an Adornian choice among transient phenomena, is that fireworks are directed to public view. Synthesizing the evanescence celebrated by solitary pleasure in spectra, on the one hand, with communal wishes at once to destroy, to be saved from destruction, and to let be, on the other, fireworks represent the idea of spectra we all can share—a moment of mass rebellion against fact perception. Adorno warns that theatrical luster can return as a “poison”; a mass spectacle like cinema, which lures the “preartistic consciousness” with the wonder of artificial light, is easily exploited for ideological and commercial purposes. But the appeal of fireworks also poisons art in another way; it suggests how much aesthetic desire is fulfilled at art’s margin, in throwaway “preartistic” perceptions.

Complements to aesthetic Schein born in form from spirit, fireworks, or another example Adorno entertains, “water fountains of the seventeenth century” (AT 80; GS 7:124), float on nonconceptual sensuous appeal. Adorno’s shorthand for this feature is “circus colors” (AT 81). His phrase “Buntheit des Zirkus” (GS 7:127) actually refers to motley, that is, to the *variegated* color that Kant excludes from the aesthetic because it is so subconceptual. Adornian artworks assimilate the preartistic as a feature, amid safeguards. So, “Beckett’s plays, as crepuscularly grey as after sunset and the end of the world,” nonetheless “remain true” to circus colors “in that the plays are indeed performed on stage” with costumes and sets, and

don't renounce wholly the naive magic of theatrical monstration: "the curtain lifts expectantly even at the beginning of Beckett's *Endgame*" (AT 81; GS 7:126–127).<sup>45</sup>

The artwork is not afterimage, firework, nor even fountain, but something that would like to have their ephemeral radiance, but not quite as much as it would like to have "form." Looking away makes the opposite tradeoff: it would like to negate fact perception—it stirs with this desire—but does not want to do that as much as it wants to be relieved, if temporarily, of fact perception's demand and the normative concepts that go with it. So phenomenophilia looks away from fact perception or suspends it in a frame of metaperception. The phenomenophile verifies the first sentence of *Aesthetic Theory*, that art's "right to exist" is no given. In order for art to exist in freedom, the phenomenophile has to have a preceding right to linger in the preartistic indefinitely and unconditionally, because only a profound conviction that there is no imperative to art can make artistic reception or creation free social acts. Without looking away, there is no art; and by the same logic, looking away cannot be art. That's why Adorno begins the book with a disclaimer, and why he discusses "natural beauty" before "art beauty"; but, significant as these gestures are, it's hard to be persuaded by reading *Aesthetic Theory* that it really doesn't matter to Adorno whether art exists or not. The paradox of art is that nothing less (or more) than that is called for.<sup>46</sup>

The phenomenophile dwells on object perception not only because of mixed feelings about his possible deviance, then, but because he seeks release from even negative assertion, including that of art production. Art tends inherently to affirm, as Adorno notes on the first page of the book. Art production places the artist closer than the phenomenophile to the theologian, Platonist, or naturalist who points to a world better than the

45. "The bow or baton of the conductor—of the orchestra—waiting, depending, like a lifted quill, can also be illuminated by some such suspension or lustre ' . . . when the curtain is about to rise upon the desert magnificence of autumn The imminent scattering of luminous fingering, which the foliage suspends, mirrors itself; then, in the pit of the readied orchestra'" (Derrida, *Dissemination*, 180, quoting Stéphane Mallarmé, *L'Oeuvre de Mallarmé: Un Coup de dés* [Paris: Librairie des Lettres, 1951], 388).

46. Arguably, within the art world this need to divest art of its imperative is best fulfilled by minimalism, which allows the smallest gesture to satisfy the imperative.

world “as is,” even though art only gestures, like the statues in *Last Year at Marienbad*, to what isn’t there. Art also has a teleology, if only in its own illuminating destruction.<sup>47</sup> In looking away there is neither a perceived right nor an imperative to negation, only an awkward silence suspending negation and affirmation; and no work, only preartistic perception. Below the conceptuality of even the happening (which is fairly rational and intentional in practice), there are experiences and perceptions that never crystallize a form—spectra, or the phenomena Kant excludes from the aesthetic as “charms [Reizen].” These comprise a special variety of natural beauty because, although they figure harmony as Adorno writes images of natural beauty do, they take no public shape and time themselves out. The few moments that one can hold on to the realization that the perception is illusory are, in the case of these phenomena, all that the perceiver needs, since the experience itself is so brief. And because their temporal limits are obvious at first sight, they never really coerce. Their superiority to art is that they cannot be bought and sold. A gallery may pay me for sitting in a room and saying that I’m seeing colors; it would then be paying me for my idea that this could occur and for my self-presentation, but not for my perception itself, which cannot be shared. And this is actually what is happening when galleries exhibit artworks; artworks are not perceptions. The gestures of art and exhibition are our way of compromising with and paying respect to the worthlessness (beyond worth) of perceptions that can never be duplicated or exchanged.

There is pathos in Adorno’s sublimation of mere appearance in the

47. Visual artworks may be especially susceptible to Schein because of the semblance (here is a good place to use this word) of totality more strikingly achieved by visual form. The more obviously temporal arts, music and writing, can negate themselves in successive phrases and can activate the perceiver’s awareness that there is no single moment of realization. Visual apprehension gives a stronger illusion of grasp—a quality Lacan mobilizes when he makes the mirror into the emblem of that illusion, and one that Hegel exploits figuratively in the passage of the *Phenomenology* cited earlier, when he considers history “in a state of repose.” For the same reason, however, visual art furnishes a good counterpoint to the facticity of the world “as is”—that is, to a world that conveys its power less through discourse than through existing. Visual form replies to that world in its own terms. By the same logic, the transient visibility of spectra demurs pointedly from visual aesthetic illusion and social facticity alike.

artwork, as art's mementos of the preartistic seem to commemorate an inadmissible desire to *be* preartistic. Art may recall the early childhood experience of the visual stimulation also encompassed by Kant's "charms," a sensory experience more radically un-factive than that of art. Once upon a time we were happy when luminous object perceptions simply appeared: the large colored beads that hang over a crib resemble Anaxagoras's stars and moon for which alone life is (already) worth living. Memories of some such experience stir in Adorno's treatment of the preartistic. In comparison to art that "bends under the burdensome weight of the empirical [der lastenden Schwere der Empirie] from which, as art, it steps away" (AT 105, translation modified; GS 7:161), Adorno portrays fountains, "circus colors," and the like as merely recreational, even as he notes that sensitivity to their allure is necessary for quality aesthetic work. They recall the era of direct stimulation:

By its mere existence, every artwork, as alien artwork to what is alienated, conjures up the circus and yet is lost as soon as it emulates it. Art becomes an image not directly by becoming an *apparition* but only through the countertendency to it. The preartistic level of art is at the same time the memento of its anti-cultural character, its suspicion of its antithesis to the empirical world that leaves this world untouched [ihres Argwohns gegen ihre Antithese zur empirischen Welt, welche die empirische Welt unbehelligt läßt]. Important artworks nevertheless seek to incorporate this art-alien layer. When, suspected of being infantile, it is absent from art, when the last trace of the vagrant fiddler disappears from the spiritual chamber musician and the illusionless drama has lost the magic of the stage, art has capitulated. (AT 81; GS 7:126)

Although an "infantile" state of openness is the only one in which perception—before fact perception—is spontaneously embraced, such a state is vulnerable to exploitation, as Adorno warns in writing of preartistic "poison," and one might say that the infant's openness is fated to be exploited. Looking for shelter from exploitation, the Adornian artwork gives up the preartistic magnetism of "unmediated" appearance (sheer *Erscheinung*)

and sets out on the long way around to apparition. As it embarks on its travels it carries a little shred of circus color, like a lucky charm.<sup>48</sup>

#### 4. COURT OF APPEAL

Marxism and critical theory enter the discourse of phenomenality and dissatisfaction to answer the question of what it means to object to the world “as is.” Adorno observes that Kant “would say: very well, individual conscience and the course of the world are absolutely incompatible. But then he would add: so much the worse for the course of the world [um so schlimmer für den Weltlauf]” (HF 65; NaS 13:96–97).<sup>49</sup> Adorno is a Hegelian and not a Kantian in that he dwells more fully on individuals’ participation in the course of the world, an imbrication that takes place on levels additional to that of judgment. Therefore, Adorno’s objection to the course of the world does not “deny” something like world spirit. Rather, it is based in two responses to Hegel’s system, one that asks Hegel’s use of fact to be consistent in its own terms (Marx’s History 1, à la Chakrabarty) and another that credits the worth of possibilities and particulars excluded from history’s logic (Chakrabarty’s History 2).

In the first case, Adorno perceives that Hegel’s system “oscillates between thinking in invariants and unrestrained dialectical thinking” (AT 208; GS 7:309) and handles unevenly presuppositions and possibilities that share similar ontological status. Hegel treats presuppositions read out of what (now) is as more actual than possibilities that have not come to be. Adorno’s turn to possibility, correcting Hegel’s leaning, is based in what he

48. While Adorno’s desire to insure against the illusion of the unmediated is well founded, it’s not clear in his own terms that rejecting play is the right decision: the limited duration and ontic thinness of spectra and “charms” protect the perceiver from aesthetic ideology as well as the autonomous form of the artwork does.

49. It’s a mark of Adorno’s darkening interpretation of Hegel that he here ascribes to Kant words that he used to ascribe to Hegel: “If in the last analysis Hegel’s system makes the transition into untruth by following its own logic, this is a judgment not simply on Hegel, as a self-righteous positivist science would like to think, but rather a judgment on reality [Wirklichkeit]. Hegel’s scornful ‘so much the worse for the facts’ [‘Desto schlimmer für die Tatsachen’] is invoked against him so automatically only because it expresses the dead serious truth about the facts” (“Aspects,” HTS 30–31; GS 5: 276).

considers to be a *more capacious* as well as more careful attention to reality than Hegel's. What "allows reason, and indeed compels and obliges reason, to oppose the superior strength of the course of the world is always the fact that in every situation there is a concrete possibility of doing things differently [der ist stets und in jener Situation der Hinweis auf die konkrete Möglichkeit, es anders zu machen]" (HF 68; NaS 13:100). The *fact of possibility*, a "concrete possibility of doing things differently," "present and sufficiently developed" (HF 68; NaS 13:100), is the only thing that constrains Hegel's attempt to convert a series of events and ideas into a law. Although Adorno would, I think, defend the right to take seriously possibilities that one cannot quantify at all, the alternative possibility he has in mind is often enough strongly indicated, for example by the palpable weakness of existent institutions. Such a possibility is factive enough that, once it enters awareness, it "compels and obliges reason" to reckon with it. This is not to say that the fact that things could be otherwise is as powerful as the fact that they are what they are; only that since possibility is a piece of reality, one cannot dismiss it without *proportionally* diminishing one's apprehension of the world "as is." The fact of possibility should get the same respect as other ontologically similar pieces of reality. Adorno does not, in practice, give as much credit as he should to counter-histories—the almost infinite resource of available facts from disparate places and times that touch Hegelian history without being of it. Unfamiliar pasts and spaces seem to alarm him, so that rumors about them lend his aesthetics the "shudder" of the primitive. When Adorno opines that "any casual glance at the wretched existence of primitive peoples who have survived but still live in Stone Age conditions ought to persuade us to abandon every . . . idealization of primitive society once and for all" (HF 53), his glance is "casual," for sure—indeed, he has no idea what he's talking about. Adorno believes, however, in making available both present possibilities and fragments of the past that show historical discontinuity.

The second and more idiosyncratic tactic of Adornian objection to the world "as is"—to which I'll turn in the rest of this section—is Adorno's defense of the inherent right of the particular and the individual to judge the course of the world by their own perspectives instead of by that of the universal. In Kantian vocabulary, this means that in moving from objective liking to free judgment, I reserve the right to despise what I respect, even

when the given at issue is the world “as is.” Nietzsche dismisses the idea of such a right with the question: “*from where does it derive the right to this judgment?* How does the part come to sit as judge over the whole?” (WP §331; KSA 12.316). Adorno takes the position that the right is self-evident and symmetrical to that of universality: it’s necessary in order for there to be anything for universality to work with, but it is also inherent. His unconditional intensity on this point distinguishes him from almost every other philosopher. He elaborates on it in brilliant pages of *History and Freedom*, zeroing in on the phrase “mit Grund” (with reason, “justifiably”) in Hegel’s statement that the universality that constitutes law “is justifiably regarded as the main enemy by that feeling which reserves the right to do as it pleases, by that conscience which identifies right with subjective conviction” (*Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 17; *Werke* 7:20). Adorno captures the false magnanimity of the moment:

this “justifiably” has to be taken much more seriously than even Hegel believes. It is characteristic of Hegel’s thinking that he really wants to have it all ways; that he really wants to include everything, even things that simply cannot be reconciled. By this I mean that he adopts the standpoint of the universal; he tends always to claim, ideologically and in a conformist spirit, that the universal is in the right. But equally, almost as an afterthought, he would also like to be credited with wanting fair play for the individual. And he does this with a throwaway remark [einer Partikel], in this case the single adverb “justifiably,” merely in order that the individual should get his just deserts, *simply so that it does not look as if anyone is being left out*.<sup>50</sup> (HF 64–65, my italics; NaS 13:95–96)

50. Adorno liked the point enough to preserve it in *Negative Dialectics*, but a comparison of the two texts shows why I prefer *History and Freedom*: “this word of Hegel’s looks like a philosophical slip of the pen. He is blurting out what he denies in the same breath. If the individual conscience actually regarded ‘the real world of that which is right and moral’ [*Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 17] as hostile because it does not recognize itself in it, no avowal would serve to gloss this over; for it is the point of Hegelian dialectics that conscience cannot act differently, that it cannot recognize itself in that real moral world. Hegel is thus conceding that the reconciliation whose demonstration comprises his philosophy did not take place” (ND 310; translation modified). The reading in *History and Freedom* is freer, clearer, more direct, and winds up going further.

Adorno's point is not that the universal necessarily does injustice to the individual, but that justice is flawed by dependence on the universal vantage, which cannot represent fully that of each particular at the same time that it represents itself. The universal judges from the perspective of the universal, because it cannot do otherwise. Why should the particular, in turn, not judge from its own perspective? Why should it do the work of the universal, as well as its own work?

An aphorism of *Minima Moralia*, "Golden Gate," contemplates the rights of the particular and universal as they inform the rights and judgments of love:

Someone who has been offended, slighted, has an illumination as vivid as when agonizing pain lights up one's own body. He becomes aware that in the innermost blindness of love, that must remain oblivious, lives a demand not to be blinded. He was wronged; from this he deduces a claim to right and must at the same time reject it, for what he desires can only be given in freedom. In such distress he who is rebuffed becomes human. Just as love uncompromisingly betrays the general [Allgemeine] to the particular in which alone justice is done to the former, so now the general, as the autonomy of others, turns fatally against it. The very rebuttal through which the general has exerted its influence appears to the individual as exclusion from the general; he who has lost love knows himself deserted by all, and this is why he scorns consolation. In the senselessness of his deprivation he is made to feel the untruth of all merely individual fulfillment. But he thereby awakens to the paradoxical consciousness of generality: of the inalienable and unindictable human right to be loved by the beloved. With his plea, founded on no titles or claims, he appeals to an unknown court, which accords to him as grace what is his own and yet not his own. The secret of justice in love is the sublation of right, to which love mutely points. "So forever / cheated and foolish must love be."

---

Hegel may also mean "mit grund" more darkly and brutally, if his intention is to indicate that what the particular fears is about to happen. Thanks to David Lloyd for this idea and other contributions to this chapter.

Dem Gekränkten, Zurückgesetzten geht etwas auf, so grell wie heftige Schmerzen den eigenen Leib beleuchten. Er erkennt, daß im Innersten der verblendeten Liebe, die nichts davon weiß und nichts wissen darf, die Forderung des Unverblendeten lebt. Ihm geschah unrecht; daraus leitet er den Anspruch des Rechts ab und muß ihn zugleich verwerfen, denn was er wünscht, kann nur aus Freiheit kommen. In solcher Not wird der Verstoßene zum Menschen. Wie Liebe unabdingbar das Allgemeine ans Besondere verrät, in dem allein jenem Ehre widerfährt, so wendet tödlich nun das Allgemeine als Autonomie des Nächsten sich gegen sie. Gerade die Versagung, in der das Allgemeine sich durchsetzte, erscheint dem Individuum als Ausschlossensein vom Allgemeinen; der Liebe verlor, weiß von allen sich verlassen, darum verschmäht er den Trost. In der Sinnlosigkeit des Entzuges bekommt er das Unwahre aller bloß individuellen Erfüllung zu spüren. Damit aber erwacht er zum paradoxen Bewußtsein des Allgemeinen: des unveräußerlichen und unklagbaren Menschenrechtes, von der Geliebten geliebt zu werden. Mit seiner auf keinen Titel und Anspruch gegründeten Bitte um Gewährung appelliert er an eine unbekannte Instanz, die aus Gnade ihm zuspricht, was ihm gehört und doch nicht gehört. Das Geheimnis der Gerechtigkeit in der Liebe ist die Aufhebung des Rechts, auf die Liebe mit sprachloser Gebärde deutet. “So muß übervorteilt / Albern doch überall sein die Liebe.”<sup>51</sup>

The Kantian antagonism of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, that freedom is constrained by others' freedom, plays for erotic stakes in this aphorism, written in the language of rights and titles. The slighted lover has suffered an “injustice [unrecht]” in love, but realizes that even from his own particular perspective, he wants the other to be free, since otherwise there would be no possible happiness. It's an instance in which the individual really does grasp the universal and the particular together—for reasons that are as interested as disinterested—and “reject[s]” his own claim. What makes

51. *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* [1951], trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1978), §104; GS 4:185, hereafter MM. The quotation is from Hölderlin, “Tränen,” *Selected Verse*, ed. Michael Hamburger (London: Anvil, 1986).

Adorno Adorno, however, is that the story doesn't end there. He neither writes off the loss nor averages it into the communal pool of lovers' luck (win some, lose some). Rather, losses remain classified as injustices no matter how fair they are. Similarly, physical suffering "tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be" (ND 203; GS 6:203), and death properly remains intolerable because and in spite of its natural inexorability (ND 385; GS 6:378). The original demand to be loved, turned aside by the plaintiff himself, has merit that no rival merits have the power to cancel—that he himself does not have the power to cancel. "The inalienable and unindictable human right to be loved by the beloved" extends beyond titles. A right based on no reason, it appeals to an "unknown court" that does not operate on the scarcity principles of justice, thus a messianic "Golden Gate" where judgment and plenitude are the same. This court would overturn what is just on the basis of a greater right to universal happiness.

"Golden Gate" alludes to the original source of the phrase associated with Hegel, "world history is the world's court." "Right" is what "world history, as the world's court, exercises [Der Weltgeschichte, als dem Weltgerichte, ausübt]," Hegel writes in *Elements of The Philosophy of Right* (§340). The legal metaphor develops, of course, out of the homology between "process" and "trial" in German (making Kafka, again, an apt respondent to Hegel). The figure recurs in Hegel's *Encyclopedia*, in the section entitled "Die Weltgeschichte."<sup>52</sup> In both passages Hegel draws a connection between the spirit of a people (Volksgeist) and the justice of "Weltgerichte"; history's justice is founded in the spirit of a people, the rightful agent of history. The "Instanz" of "Golden Gate," in contrast, names the special appeal stage of a trial. In appealing the verdict of the people, "Golden Gate" returns to the source of Hegel's phrase, Schiller's poem "Resignation: A Fantasy." Schiller's poem functions as a kind of poetic precedent against philosophy, since Hegel's allusion to the poem does misapply it. Far more Adornian than Hegelian, "Resignation" is the plaint of a narrator who has given up a real love for a delusory hope—based on the promise of an afterlife—and whose justifiable complaint of breach of contract is brushed off with the phrase Hegel selects: "Die Lehre

52. G. W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [1830], trans. Gustav Emil Mueller (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), §548; *Werke*, 10, §548.

/ ist ewig wie die Welt. Wer glauben kann, entbehre. / Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht [the doctrine / is eternal as the world. Who can believe it, does without. / World history is the world's court]."<sup>53</sup> Like "Golden Gate," Schiller's poem insists that losses are by definition never recompensed: "was man von der Minute ausgeschlagen / gibt keine Ewigkeit zurück [what's lost to the moment / eternity does not give back]" (*Werke*, 1:169). The Hegelian phrase bears the "resignation" of the title, a resignation recommended to, but not taken up by, the poem's narrator. Instead he retains the sealed envelope containing his "Vollmachtbrief zum Glücke," a power of attorney for accomplishing the happiness never delivered. This unopened letter captures well the Adornian fact of possibility—that "unfinished business [dieses Unerledigte]" (*Introduction to Sociology*, 96; NaS 15:164) that outlives the disregard of history. Far from resigning, the speaker forwards his file to the reader as "phantasie," in other words, in a form that exceeds the norms that legitimate appeal. Adorno casts himself, then, as the reader who is willing to hear "Resignation's" appeal—or to read the poem properly.

Adorno believes that Kant's merely intelligible realm in *Critique of Practical Reason* prefigures such a court of appeal (ND 385; GS 6:378), not in its attitude toward happiness but at least in its introduction of the thought of immortality. In this he follows the reading that the *Critique of Practical Reason* withdraws, if only in thought, some of the exigency of the First Critique. He reuses the same legal metaphor for Hegel's rebellion against Kant's so-called barriers to thought: Hegel argues that Kant "presupposes already that there is a position beyond the realms separated on the Kantian map, that there is a court of last resort [eine dritte Instanz], so to speak" (ND 383; GS 6:375). In both cases the court of appeal surveys the facts and judges independently of their pressure. From it the world "as is" can never coerce endorsement:

Nietzsche in the *Antichrist* voiced the strongest argument not merely against theology but against metaphysics, that hope is mistaken for

53. Friedrich Schiller, "Resignation: Eine Phantasie [1786]," in *Werke* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1943), 1:167–169. De Man would have said something about Hegel's seduction by rhyme: the return of the same in rhyme beats the time of the course of the world. . . .

truth. . . . He refutes the Christian “proof by efficacy [Kraft],” that faith is true because it brings felicity. For “could happiness—or, more technically, pleasure—ever be a proof of truth? So far from this, it almost proves the converse, at any rate it gives the strongest grounds for suspecting ‘truth’ whenever feelings of pleasure have had a say in the matter. The proof of pleasure is proof of: pleasure—nothing more; why in the world should true judgments cause more enjoyment than false ones and, in accordance with a preordained harmony, necessarily bring pleasant feelings in their train?” [Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §50]. But Nietzsche himself taught *amor fati*: “thou shalt love thy fate.” This, he says in the *Epilogue to The Twilight of the Idols*, was his innermost nature. We might well ask whether we have more reason to love what happens to us, to affirm what is, because it is, than to believe true what we hope. Is it not the same false inference that leads from the existence of stubborn facts to their erection as the highest value, as he criticizes in the leap from hope to truth? . . . In the end hope, wrested from reality by negating it, is the only form in which truth appears. Without hope, the idea of truth would be scarcely even thinkable, and it is the cardinal untruth, having recognized existence to be bad, to present it as truth simply because it has been recognized. Here, rather than in the opposite, lies the crime of theology that Nietzsche arraigned without ever reaching the final court [zur letzten Instanz]. (MM §61, “Court of Appeal,” translation modified; GS 4:109–110)

From the stance of factive illusion and illusory facticity, both sides of the fact/value conflation—“the leap from hope to truth” and the inference from “stubborn facts” to “the highest value”—are equally theological. Only inside the awareness of what Adorno reveals to be the inherently ambiguous zone of social fact do we “wrest” hope “from reality”—Adorno continues, “by negating it,” while I have focused throughout on an alternative tradition of suspension and reservation. Nietzsche and Adorno agree that the very fact that one feels put upon, “like a memory of freedom,” asserts “that we ought by rights to be free” (HF 205; NaS 13:284), but Nietzsche demands a title for the assertion, whereas Adorno finds in discomfort itself a perfectly natural right to want to be comfortable, and in pressure a right to want to be free. As a result, he exceeds the imagination

of society, which in its bourgeois phase, he notes, “established formal freedom, but had not envisaged [a society] *free from every coercion* [von jedem Zwang befreien]” (HF 195, translation modified, my italics; NaS 13:270). Who else has defended the desire for a society free from *every* coercion? Adorno’s critique of facticity is a platform to support the right to want universal happiness, a wanting that is more contested—because more pointless—than the right to *be* happy. Visionary as Adorno’s philosophy may be, it is also his attempt to represent more *realistically* than Kant, Hegel, or Nietzsche what is given in the world “as is.”