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Introduction to *Adorno and Performance*

Will Daddario and Karoline Gritzner

I.1 Intermittence: Adorno and performance

In his essay "Notes on Philosophical Thinking" (1965), Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969) provokes us with the following statement: "To think philosophically means as much as to think intermittences, to be interrupted by that which is not the thought itself" (131–132). The intermittence pursued throughout this volume has been concealed through the word "and" that conjoins the title's two keywords: Adorno *and* performance. That there exists any solid ground upon which to build such a pairing is an assumption to which anyone familiar with the work of Adorno might reasonably object. Despite his devotion to the practice of musical composition, his numerous interpretations of theatrical texts and the philosophical writings of notable playwrights, his documented attendance at theatre events, and his micrological interpretation of such everyday acts as listening, writing, and thinking, the concreteness of the pairing Adorno *and* performance cannot congeal without considerable philosophical effort, in the sense offered by Adorno in the quotation above. In addition to offering a thorough orientation to the key concerns and the contents of this volume, then, this introduction will unconceal the intermittence between both Adorno and performance (as concept and artistic practice) and also the thought of "Adorno and performance" as a critical, interpretive phrase capable of orientating the praxis of performance philosophers, and schematizing the work required to legitimize and mobilize such a phrase in the first place.

To do this, and to act in fidelity to Adorno's negative dialectical procedure, let us begin not with Adorno's own thoughts but, rather, with a playwright whose works so frequently motivated those thoughts.

Turning to Samuel Beckett's performance score for *Act Without Words I*, we enter into the following scene:

> Desert. Dazzling light.
> The man is flung backwards on stage from right wing. He falls, gets up immediately, dusts himself, turns aside, reflects. Whistle from right wing. He reflects, goes out right. Immediately flung back on stage he falls, gets up immediately, dusts himself, turns aside, reflects. Whistle from left wing. He reflect, goes out left. Immediately flung back on stage he falls, gets up immediately, dusts himself, turns aside, reflects. Whistle from left wing. He reflects, goes toward left wing, hesitates, thinks better of it, halts, turns aside, reflects. (203)

The mime's rehearsal in this segment of the score, his ensuing labor and pursuit of the carafe (ever out of reach), and his repetitive failures present a multifaceted allegory, which, once engaged through philosophical interpretation, opens numerous perspectives onto the pairing of Adorno and performance.

Note the order of events, "The man is flung backwards." Then, only after dusting himself off, the man "reflects." Of the many reasons Adorno returned to Beckett again and again throughout his life, perhaps the order of events enacted in *Act Without Words I* tells us the most. Object always precedes subject. That which flings the man onstage commences the action of this piece. Man himself, once flung, slowly comes around to thinking, here phrased as reflection. Negative dialectical thinking takes its cue from this order of events.

Adorno returns to this choreography repeatedly: "Where thinking is truly productive, where it creates, it is also always a reacting" ("Philosophical Thinking" 129). And yet, if one may be so bold as to call it choreography, this aggressive *pas des deux* between subject and object gives no sense of a starting point. Intended for repetition as a work for the stage, one should neither say that *Act Without Words I* commences, nor that it ends. Rather, as with so many of Beckett's works, the piece loops around. Man and objects vie continuously for reasons unknown and, ultimately, irrelevant. What matters here is the doing. Similarly, the stakes of the practice of thinking arise not from an understanding of which comes first, subject or object, but from the willingness to return again and again to the position from which one will be flung onstage. Thus, even when one sentence in Adorno seems to offer a linear order – "Despite the Copernican turn, and thanks to it, Kant inadvertently confirms the primacy of the object" (129) – another will reveal negative dialectical entanglement – "The primacy of the object means rather that subject for its part is object in a qualitatively different, more radical sense than object, because object cannot be known except through consciousness, hence is also subject" ("On Subject and Object" (1969) 249). Eventually, then, a question: who is flinging whom?

Thinking better of it, though, let us leave the answer to that question aside and return to the engagement of thinking itself, what Beckett calls "reflection" and Adorno rephrases as "expansive concentration" ("Philosophical Thinking" 129). In *Act Without Words I*, the subject matter at hand seems not to be the success or failure of the mime but the interruptions ensuing from the mime's approach to the wings of the stage, the carafe dangling from the tree, the scissors, the cubes, the tree itself, etc. When the mime "reflects" he engages in expansive concentration by attending to the intermittence that lies between and yet also undergirds the thinking subject and vibrant object of/for/beyond thought.

With this in mind, let us rephrase the question: To what extent may one deploy words such as "performance," "choreography," "enactment," and "stage" when writing of Adorno's philosophical practice? Are these words figurative, metaphorical? Are we imposing an unwanted heuristic by crafting an analysis of Adorno through a vocabulary germane to the fields of theatre, music, and Performance Studies, or does there exist within Adorno's negative dialectical praxis a reliance on performance and embodiment that necessitates such a vocabulary? We argue that "performance" (and associated concepts such as presentation, expression, and embodiment) is indeed a central category in Adorno's project of critical and aesthetic theory. This is already evident in the first major monograph with which Adorno began his academic career, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* (1933). In this important study Adorno engages with Søren Kierkegaard's concerted, but for Adorno ultimately failed, attempts to overcome Hegelian idealist constructions of the self. Adorno's critique focuses on Kierkegaard's proto-existentialist notion of "pure inwardness" which suggests a disregard for the individual's historical situatedness, a dimension that becomes central in Adorno's later explorations. Furthermore, Adorno was responsive to the aesthetic dimension of Kierkegaard's thought, to the performative dimension of truth; in other words, to the ways in which ideas are *performed*, and not merely described. Encountering Kierkegaard, Adorno identifies the importance of thought-images in aesthetic and philosophical work, figures of presentation which make the truth content of the work inseparable from its aesthetic form. Adorno argues that truth, in philosophy as well as art, “presents itself in semblance”:

> In fact, Kierkegaard nowhere better described the reconciling figure in which his own philosophy joins nature and history, than in a passage directed against Hegel that meant to destroy this figure as semblance, while yet its semblance, recognized and maintained, serves truth as its truest counterimage: “Some bend eternity into time for the imagination. Conceived in this way, eternity produces an enchanting effect. One does not know whether it is dream or actuality. As the beams of the moon glimmer in an illuminated forest or a hall, so the eternal peeps wistfully, dreamily, and roguishly into the moment.” (Adorno, *Kierkegaard* 137)

And as Adorno would later write in *Negative Dialectics* (1966): “the presentation of philosophy is not an external matter of indifference to it but immanent to its idea” (18), implying that the philosophical concept is a performative because it is dependent on a doing, an expression, a presentation, a semblance. Unsurprisingly, Adorno’s preferred mode of philosophical expression (performance) was the essay, a form of writing in which language becomes emphatic and no longer over-reliant on the concept. For Adorno, in the essay form the concept approaches the non-conceptual and enables language to say what cannot be said.

In short, then, yes. Performance – as concept, practice, engagement – fills Adorno’s thought and writing, both in terms of content and form. His essayistic endeavors reveal the extent to which Adorno performs and even stages his thought in writing. So too does his continual return to artists, musicians, writers, and theatre makers demonstrate a desire to think philosophically-in-tune with various forms of artistic, performance-based expressions. Thus we return to Beckett’s mime in *Act Without Words I* and his relationship to the carafe, which, interestingly, tethers us once again to the thinking of intermittences when one considers the less familiar, more abstruse definition of “intermittence” as “alternately containing and empty of water” (Free Dictionary). Engaged by a field of objects, the Mime seems to bring most of them under his control through failed experiments and thoughtful reflection, but the carafe – perhaps full, perhaps not – stands out as particularly elusive:

> He looks up, sees carafe, reflects, gets up, goes and stands under it, tries in vain to reach it, renounces, turns aside, reflects. […] With length of rope in his possession he makes a lasso with which he tries

> to lasso the carafe. The carafe is pulled up quickly and disappears in flies. He turns aside, reflects. [...] The carafe descends from flies and comes to rest a few feet from his body. He does not move. Whistle from above. He does not move. The carafe descends further, dangles and plays about his face. He does not move. The carafe is pulled up and disappears in flies. (Beckett, *Act Without Words* 204, 205, 206)

With every movement toward the carafe, the object itself recedes until, after coming to some kind of understanding, the mime allows for the out-of-reach-ness of the carafe. A similar series of events transpires within Adorno's oeuvre between the philosopher and the phenomenon of performance, which, like the carafe, plays a dominant role in the relationship yet always remains slightly out of reach.

Take, as an allegorical representative, the following passage in *Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction* (collected notes and drafts of unfinished book projects dating from 1927–1959) where Adorno reflects on the labor of the stage actor:

> Gretel asked me how it can be that actors, who are mostly of questionable intelligence and always uneducated, can represent people and deliver lines that convey the most difficult of ideas, as with Hamlet and Prospero, Faust, Mephistopheles. I ventured the reply: every poetic work contains not only the meaningful-significative element, but also the melodic-mimic aspect, tone, speech melody, and manner; and it is a substantial criterion for success how deeply the former is immersed in the latter, i.e. whether the mimetic, 'magical' aspect is able to invoke, to *force* the meaningful one, to such a degree that a tone of voice or gesture itself becomes the allegorical representation of an idea. The actor's ability is mimic in the true sense: he actually imitates the melodic-gestural aspect of language. And the more perfectly he achieves this, the more perfectly the idea enters the representation, not least because – and especially when – he does *not* understand it. The opposite approach would be the explanatory one: but to explain the intention means to kill it rather than invoking it. One could almost say that it is the *prerequisite* for an actor not to "understand," but rather to imitate blindly. (159, emphasis in original)

Like Beckett's mime approaching the carafe in *Act Without Words I*, Adorno approaches the embodied practice of performance. After a general dismissal of actors as ignorants, Adorno draws our attention to the intertwining of content (meaningful-significative) and form (melodic-mimic), the very same intertwining with which Adorno concerned himself in his unfinished and posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* (1970). For a performance, here understood as a presentation of a work, to be successful (i.e., to adequately present and convey its truth-content), the melodic-mimic aspect must contain within it and then express the full force of the content. When this occurs, Adorno suggests, the actor's gesture (vocal or otherwise) will become the allegorical representation of the truth content.

"The actor's ability is mimic in the true sense: he actually imitates the melodic-gestural aspect of language." It is hard to say what Adorno means here. Is he suggesting that the actor's role is to perfect the melodic-gestural aspect of language, or that the actor imitates that aspect and, therefore, that the actor is removed from the reality of that aspect? The next sentence eliminates some of the ambiguity of the previous one. There, Adorno seems to suggest that the better the actor can express the form of the work, the more he will be able to convey the truth content of the work. From this sentence, one might derive a definition of performance through the parsing of *per-form*, that is, performance denotes the act of inhabiting and moving through (expressing) the form of the work. Importantly, Adorno suggests that in order for the actor to properly relay the gestural-mimic dimension of the work, and, by extension, faithfully represent the content of the work, he must not "understand" what he is doing: "The opposite approach would be the explanatory one." Namely, the actor must not take a stance toward his labor that presupposes an understanding of the work's truth content or the artist's intention, thereby making the goal of his interpretive role the teaching of a lesson or the explanation of that intention. This is what Adorno means when he says that, "to explain the intention means to kill it rather than invoking it." The actor instead must imitate blindly, which, in turn, means to expertly move through the form (per-form) of the work. This is the main role of the actor/performer.

Now, have we touched the phenomenon of performance through Adorno's notes, or has the mere thought of performance thrown us back toward a position of critical distance from which, once again, to reflect more deeply on the object at hand? Are we sipping from the carafe or reflecting on it? One suspects the latter, and yet through such a densely woven critical reflection on the problem posed by his wife, we may simultaneously feel as though we have reached a new understanding of performance thanks to Adorno's reflection. One step forward, one step back. The closer we get to performance, the farther away we seem to be.

Something similar happens when dwelling on the translation from Adorno's German to English. Are we dealing with "performance" at all, or merely an English-language equivalent to a specific German word and concept? Wieland Hoban's translation of *Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction* suggests the latter. In the notes that make up that work, we learn Adorno is not concerned with "performance" as such; instead, he takes up *Darstellung*. As Hoban explains,

> This word means "presentation" and "representation"; in Adorno's usage, it often implies both at once. He uses it to refer to the act and general practice of performance, where a piece is presented to the public in a certain way; but he also brings out the implicit *representation* of musical meaning in the act of presentation. (xix, emphasis in original)

Thus, the problems begin to compound. Before we approach the passage on actors above, we halt before a terminological distinction that presents another hurdle. To speak of Adorno and performance is never quite to speak directly of Adorno and performance but, rather, of Adorno and (re) presentation. Additionally, other than the occasional aside, Adorno most frequently analyzes musical performance and therefore tasks the imagination charged with transferring Adorno's thoughts on performance (*Darstellung*) to the realm of theatre, much less to performance writ large.

Scholars of Adorno's work, however, do not hesitate to place Adorno and performance in proximity to one another. Taking Max Pensky's introduction to his edited collection, *The Actuality of Adorno: Critical Essays on Adorno and the Postmodern* as one example, one finds the following phrases. Regarding Adorno and poststructural theory:

> Both are efforts to work out the philosophical import of the collapse of philosophical idealism. Both seek to interpret this collapse not in terms of a simple liquidation of philosophy but rather attempt to *perform* a self-liquidation of the contents and intents of idealist philosophy toward some radically new conception of philosophical practice. (5, emphasis added)

A few pages later, while pondering Habermas's uptake (or deviation) of (or from) his teacher's work:

> For Habermas, the hypercomplex, claustrophobic, fretful atmosphere of Adorno's late work was the unavoidable consequence of a total rejection of the rational and normative grounds of criticism, and led

> to a form of *performative* self-contradiction just as pronounced as the exhilarated gestures of French theory. (7, emphasis added)

And then, making a distinction between Adorno and Walter Benjamin, Pensky embraces the metaphor of stage fright:

> Adorno did not always follow up on the promise to transform the impulse of idealism into a historiography of things: whatever we make of the familiar accusations of his "*Berührungsangst*" [fear of contact], it is true that, unlike Benjamin, *he was always more comfortable as an observer before the stage of the concept* than he was wading into the thicket of the historical material. (10, emphasis added)

For the empirical analyst, these occurrences may mean very little. For an inductive interpreter, however, Pensky's language presents a constellation of terms that shines down onto the, what shall we call it now, routine between Adorno and performance. Never through a clean embrace, always padded by ample critical distance, and yet somehow also profoundly deep in its engagement with the phenomenon, Adorno's treatment of performance remains simultaneously profound and perplexing, purposeful and purposeless, accidental and co-incidental. Adorno is to performance as Beckett's mime is to the carafe.

One final consideration adds some more weight to this claim and brings us back again to the thinking intermittences, this time via the related word "intermission." "(1931–1933)": This indexical mark appended to the essay, "The Natural History of the Theatre" offers a glimpse into the life of Adorno the audience member who, so it would seem, explored theatre spaces during that three-year period making observations not only about the onstage performance but also the theatre of the world expressed through social and theatrical architecture. Regarding the former, Adorno first reflects upon applause, which he describes as, "the last vestige of objective communication between music and listener" (65). Opposed to its mythic origins where music served a ritual purpose, music in Adorno's present was separated from the audience by the platform, "that is to say, they [the audience] are separated from a commodity which can be bought" (65). Clapping, however, as an embodied connection between performer and audience members, evokes the memory of mythic music and leads Adorno to consider light applause, hissing and booing, the muffled static of applause heard through radio broadcasts, and theatricalized applause produced onstage by the actors themselves who, through so doing, seem to reflect the intersubjective experience of performance back to the audience and who appear to Adorno as "ghosts from mythical times" (66).

Both as a seated audience member during music and theatrical performances, as well as a wandering *flâneur* between acts, Adorno sends his attention from social architecture in the section titled, "Applause," to structural architecture in sections titled, "The Gallery," "The Stalls," "Boxes," "Upper Circle, First Row, Middle," "The Foyer," and the "Dome as Finale." Some of his anthropological/ethnographic readings of these spaces and the activities contained therein reveal Adorno's own scruples and, in their unashamed self-revelation, seem to prefigure the startling notes from his dreams that would later be published as *Dream Notes* (2009). Appraising the boxes, for example, he declares, "If you are a man, never take a box with another man. Two men in a box are either boring or no men at all: they cut no sort of a figure" ("Natural History" 71). Presumably this is so because, for Adorno, the appropriate performance of masculinity in the theatre space requires the presence of a woman. But even the heteronormative façade of this statement points beyond semblance to a withering internal drama: "She now shows herself with you so as to conceal herself. For this evening she is your mistress, even if you have never possessed her except in this dark, constricted frame which unites you as in a picture" (72). But then, as quickly as it landed on this imagined picture of the boxes, his gaze is off again, turned to the upper circle where the combination of volume, fullness and resonance is most concentrated for the listener (73). And then he's off again, sending his attention further back still to the Foyer where an altogether different performance unfolds in which "the spectators are the players, presented to an imaginary public" (74). Caught up in this voyeuristic game of seeing and being seen, Adorno's eye wanders back into the theatre space, now empty at intermission, and glimpses the dome rising above the auditorium to reveal a position resembling the vantage point of judgment day: "For one day, so it would appear, the vault of the dome will draw the entire theatre into itself. The theatre will then become a sphere which has ceased to know the direction of historical time, something which our theatre has yearned to master" (77).

We might ask, to conjure the title of Mattias Martinson's contribution to this volume, what is Adorno doing? In this natural history of the theatre, which reads simultaneously as a fantastical dream narrative, Adorno exposes himself not only as a critic but also as a transgressive audience member who recognizes a wider performance transpiring beyond the limits of the stage itself. This type of audience member enacts a tactical failure of the role assigned to him by the script that tacitly prompts the theatergoer to sit quietly, hands folded in the dark, awaiting a readymade transmission from stage to auditorium. Matthew Goulish describes this failure in his essay "Audience Failure Index," where he writes: "Awakened to its unruliness, the trespassive audience emancipates the force of the mess. It takes the stage from all directions. Wherever it leads, a performance must follow" (25). Such is Adorno's figure in this natural history of the theatre and throughout his entire oeuvre, a trespassive audience member interpreting, from positions interior/immanent to them, various performances, some more philosophical, some more artistic, but all expressive of an intermittence between a doing and a thing done, between an action and a thought of/within that action.

I.2 Historical situation and artistic affinities

Beckett's résumé as a playwright and theatre maker helps to reveal the connection between Adorno and performance, but Beckett was by no means the only artist to attract Adorno's attention. Additionally, the work of Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust, Paul Klee, Arnold Schönberg, Richard Wagner, and, negatively, Bertolt Brecht all goad Adorno's thinking. For Adorno, the works of these artists reveal the extent to which art and thought express, through form and content, the sedimentation of their historical situation.

Let us turn our attention toward Adorno's treatment of Kafka in order to develop this idea in more detail. As a paradoxical "expressionist epic," Kafka's work, particularly *The Castle* and "The Hunter Gracchus," "tells of something about which nothing can be told, of the totally self-contained subject, which is unfree and which, in fact, can hardly be said to exist" ("Notes on Kafka" (1955) 264). For Adorno, this act of saying that which cannot be told must occur through written expression, as text. As he explains in a footnote, "Drama is possible only in so far as freedom – even in its painful birth-pangs – is visible; all other action is futile. Kafka's figures are struck by a fly-swatter even before they can make a move; to drag them on to the tragic stage as heroes is to make a mockery of them" (261–262, note 1). However, it would not be possible to categorize Kafka's works neatly outside the realm of performance. If, beyond its application in the fields of the fine arts, performance denotes a concerted life practice, an act of living life rightly as Adorno might say, then Kafka's writings constitute precisely this mode of performance. Consider the uncanny similarity, for example, between

Adorno's aphorism "Memento" from *Minima Moralia* (1951) and the following idea penned by Kafka in his journal in 1921:

> Anyone who cannot come to terms with this life while he is still alive needs one hand to ward off a little his despair over his fate – he has little success in this – but with his other hand he can note down what he sees among the ruins, for he sees different (and more) things than do others; after all, dead as he is in his own lifetime, he is the real survivor. (cit. Foster, "Adorno on Kafka" 175)

In both cases writing and living collaborate in the task of living among the ruins of modern life, though, in the end, "the writer is not even allowed to live in his writing" because the writing circulates without him and, as in Kafka's case, in spite of him (*Minima Moralia* 87).

As Adorno's immanent criticism of Kafka's works builds throughout "Notes on Kafka" (which, one must point out, begin to resemble much more than haphazard thoughts dictated to his wife when time permitted, as the dedication to these notes also would suggest), the reader becomes aware that statements seemingly developed out of close readings of Kafka's tales also refer to the historical situation of Kafka and of Adorno himself. Roger Foster makes this same point by claiming that Adorno saw in several of Kafka's writings a direct citation to the terrors of National Socialism under which both Kafka and Adorno suffered (Foster, "Adorno on Kafka" 176). Again, the co-presence of both men within the same historical situation reveals itself in Adorno's writing: "Whereas the interiors, where men live, are the homes of the catastrophe, the hide-outs of childhood, forsaken spots like the bottom of the stairs, are the places of hope" (270). But these places of hope, hiding spots seemingly marginalized and claustrophobic when compared to the expanse of the exterior, become the kernel of all that is true. In his translator's introduction to Adorno's book on Kierkegaard, Robert Hullot-Kentor reminds us that, "The idea of 'truth-content' for example, which has remained so obscure, is a work's content of hope" (*Kierkegaard* xxi). Thus, one might suspect that Kafka's writings, which resembled at times the scribblings or diary entries left by a child hiding beneath the stairs, compelled Adorno's investigations into the dialectic of truth content and semblance that show up repeatedly throughout his life's work.

Adorno chooses to frame these notes on Kafka with an epigraph taken from Proust: *Si Dieu le Père a créé les choses en les nommant, c'est en leur ôtant leur nom, ou en leur donnant un autre que l'artiste les recréé* (If God the

Father created things by naming them, it is in removing their name, or giving them another that the entertainer has recreated them). Proust's words draw the reader's attention to the play of textual signifiers and their ability to trouble the supposedly pure and invariable concepts named by words, something which is perhaps most visible in Kafka where the word of the law reveals the extent to which it is always asserting itself, even when there is no subject or case of justice to pursue. Though it is not the relationship between the name and the thing, but, rather, the relation between the whole and the detail that forms the target of Adorno's essay "Short Commentaries on Proust" (1958), the focus of the latter reveals another connection between art, philosophy, and historical thinking. That is, whereas Kafka's portrayal of the law forces the reader to rethink the very nature of law – its absurdities showcased as certainties – Proust's casting of the relationship between the part and the whole reveals an "allergic reaction to read-made thought," and thus conjures the philosophy of Henri Bergson, whom Adorno refers to as Proust's "kinsman" (175).

From where does Proust's experimentation in the *durée* of memory and writing emerge? Does Proust influence Bergson, or is it the other way around? The answer seems to be, rather, that the shortcomings, from Adorno's point of view, found in Bergson's philosophy are addressed and overcome in Proust, and vice versa. To reap the benefits of philosophical exegesis on the relation between the concept and the thing, the general and the particular, one must turn to literature; and to immerse oneself productively in the details of Proust's search for lost time, which enacts the interplay between part and whole, one must turn to philosophy. The two systems are locked together and emerge from the same historical situation in which philosophers tried various methods of escaping the inheritance of German Idealism.

Again, much more than an insight developed through a close reading of specific Proustian passages, the whole endeavor of this particular essay carries with it the sense that Adorno seeks not only to enlighten our understanding of philosophical concepts and literary tactics but also to emulate Proust's musical qualities in his own writing. "The productive force," he writes, "that aims at unity is identical to the passive capacity to lose oneself in details without restraint or reservation" (174). Proust resists such force through his narrative structure, but, here again, one finds a passage that, in addition to functioning as an introduction to the work at hand, reminds one of Adorno's own practice as a philosopher engaged in immanent criticism, a task that runs the risk of losing track of the concept as it delves into the material world. Foster even goes as far as to suggest that Adorno came to his negative dialectical practice by, among other methods, working through Bergson's attempt at recovering spiritual existence (Foster, *Recovery of Experience* 113–114).

One can find many other instances (particularly in this volume) where Adorno not only develops mutually constitutive relationships between literature, visual art, music, and philosophy but also receives instructions, as it were, in his own philosophical practices from specific artists. Far from developing an aesthetic theory and mode of criticism divorced from the exigencies of one's historical situation, Adorno dedicated himself to answering the very question that he placed near the end of his posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory*: "But then what would art be, as the writing of history, if it shook off the memory of accumulated suffering?" (261). The act of developing answers to this question artfully, or, better, of revealing through the art of dialectic the extent to which such a question can illuminate the complexity of an artist's and art object's philosophical-historical situation, drives the work of Adorno's dialectical materialism.

Adorno's practice of thinking historically owes much to the work of Walter Benjamin, which sought in no uncertain terms to "brush history against the grain," that is, to deny the truth of history written by the victors and to reveal the extent to which "every document of history is at the same time a document of barbarism" (*Theses*, cit. Leppert, *Essays on Music* 40). Adorno addresses the philosophical underpinnings of Benjamin's dialectical materialist historiography, as well as his own fidelity to Benjamin's work, in a 1964 lecture titled (in the English translation), "'Negative' Universal History" (in *History and Freedom*). There, Adorno reveals Benjamin's inversion of Hegel's concept-driven philosophy of history. Whereas for Hegel, the concept is the thing, that which contains both the identity and nonidentity of the particular, for Benjamin the concept is non-identical to itself and "includes what gives history its unity, what enables it to accommodate itself to the concept as well as what doesn't" (Adorno, *Freedom and History* 92). Formulating this belief into a practice, what Adorno refers to as "the task of a dialectical philosophy of history," Adorno works toward a notion of history as the permanence of catastrophe, a condition in which, "the very things that subjugate and submit, these very acts of subjugation and submission in which identity is torn apart, forge the identity of history of which we speak and which we must describe as negative identity" (92). If art, then, constitutes the writing of history, it does so by expressing the suffering – mutely (in the case of visual art), sonically and structurally (in the case of music), and through the interplay of Idea and enactment (in the case of theatre) – written out of history by the victors and the extent to which all objects do the same once their relationship to their historical situation is revealed.

If one turns from Adorno's project of encountering the truth congealed in artworks toward Adorno himself as a historically conditioned individual, one would find traces of a similar suffering encoded in various signs. Take for example the "W." in Adorno's name, which sometimes appears in publication and sometimes does not. This "W." carries with it a remnant of Adorno's expulsion by the Nazis from his position as *Privatdozent*. Prior to this moment, as is evident in the Benjamin-Adorno correspondences (1928–1940), Adorno utilized his Jewish father's surname, Wiesengrund. Not until afterward did the philosopher adopt the name for which he is now known (Zuidevaart, "Theodor W. Adorno").

Though not addressed explicitly in this volume, the lasting effect of Nationalist Socialist ideology on German identity and thought, not to mention the extent to which the Holocaust informed European and U.S. cultural production, inheres in many of Adorno's philosophical formulations. The most famous of these, undoubtedly, is the claim that "to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric," which appeared in Adorno's 1949 work, "An Essay on Cultural Criticism and Society." The same statement appears again, intact, in "Commitment" (1962), and then again, with a caveat, in the section "Meditation on Metaphysics" in *Negative Dialectics*: "Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems" (362–363). Less well-known, perhaps, is a section from one of Adorno's lectures on 17 November 1964 in which he almost casually references the state of panic into which he was thrown when Nazi officers searched his home. "A fact like a house search," he said, "in which you do not know whether you will be taken off somewhere or whether you will escape with your life has a greater immediacy for the knowing subject than any amount of political information [...] and, ultimately theory can give us access" (*History and Freedom* 20). In these lectures, Adorno openly reveals the great extent to which his historical situation as a Jew under Nazi occupation shaped his daily consciousness. Finally, the seemingly innumerable references to the work of his friend and colleague Walter Benjamin act as acknowledgments of the Nazi terror which led to Benjamin's suicide in the Spanish town of Port Bou on 27 September 1940. In all three examples mentioned here, as well as in Adorno's continual drive to recognize the suffering contained within artworks, the legacy of National Socialism haunts his words and, as Karoline Gritzner's essay in this volume demonstrates, his dreams.

I.3 Taking seriously: Adorno and performance

Urged to consideration by Beckett's *Act Without Words I*, the numerous references to performance throughout Adorno's life's work, and the ever-growing field of scholarship that recognizes in his thinking something of an object lesson in the performance of philosophy, this collection of essays takes seriously the proximity of Adorno and performance. Not restricted to any one single understanding of either the philosopher or the capacious, multidisciplinary umbrella term "performance," the book unites this particular thinker and this particular object of study/ artistic practice. And yet, like Beckett's mime flung onstage by an unseen, offstage force, the attempt to unite these two will result in the creation of a conceptual force field (*Kraftfeld*). Adorno and performance repel each other, but at the last possible moment the gravitational force of each locks its partner into place as one pole of a world.

Since its inception as an academic discourse, Performance Studies has articulated a multiplicity of views regarding the ontology, socio-historical constitution and phenomenological effects of "performance" understood as aesthetic object, artistic practice and socio-political phenomenon. For example, performance has been defined as ritual (Richard Schechner, Victor Turner), as speech act and stylized repetition (J.L. Austin, Judith Butler), through disappearance (Peggy Phelan), as trace and iteration (Jacques Derrida), in tension between technological mediation and liveness (Philip Auslander), and in dialogue with practices of documentation and archiving (Diana Taylor, Rebecca Schneider). Underlying these multiple perspectives on the complex category of performance is a dialectic tension between performance's material basis and its objectless ontology. This tension is productive because it allows us to view performance as both aesthetic object and process, as material product and temporal experience.

The relation between art's constitution as material object and ephemeral process was also crucial to Adorno's understanding of art and aesthetic experience. Art, for Adorno, is object-based and material as well as time-based (historical) and enigmatic. Through our encounter with art we experience a subjective reconfiguration of reality and are invited to re-orientate ourselves in the world. Importantly, Adorno's aesthetic theory and mode of criticism are never divorced from historical experience, especially the experience of perennial human suffering which for Adorno is encapsulated by the Holocaust and its after-effects on Western culture. He witnessed the rise of Nazism, as the passages above indicate, and lived in exile from 1934 (first in Oxford, then in New York and southern California) until his return to Germany (in 1949) where he became a leading figure of the Frankfurt School (Institute of Social Research). During his American exile, he worked on his influential critiques of modernity and the culture industry, such as *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944, with Max Horkheimer), *Philosophy of New Music* (1948), and *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*. Upon his return to Germany, he became a leading German intellectual and, until his death in 1969, dedicated himself to answering the very question – cited above, but well worth repeating – posthumously published in *Aesthetic Theory*: "But then what would art be, as the writing of history, if it shook off the memory of accumulated suffering?" (261). Responding, in particular, to the idealist tradition of Kantian and Hegelian metaphysics, Adorno's materialist aesthetic and critical theory proposes a "primacy of the object," which on the one hand manifests itself in the somatic, physical effects of art on the individual (the notion of art as affect and shudder); on the other hand, the priority of the object in Adorno's post-metaphysical thought is to be understood as a critical negation of the historically dominating and instrumentalizing effects of Enlightenment reason in today's culture industry.

Adorno's thinking about art, and our attempt at bringing his thought in productive dialogue with the discourse of performance studies, aims at the creative construction of new forms of non-coercive knowledge and the discovery of new forms of non-discursive truths. We propose that we might find the actuality, relevance, and indeed political urgency of Adorno's aesthetic philosophy today in his unique conception of art as a critical-creative and historical practice, which, in turn, can offer us a recovery of individual experience. Such critical recovery of experience neither seeks to resurrect the ideological concept of the bourgeois humanist subject, nor does it join in hasty celebrations of the erosion of the human. Rather, Adorno's attention to the material basis of our social and historical existence and his valorization of the somatic dimension of our experience of art suggests that what is needed today, more than ever, is a radical critique of the limits of rationality or "identity thinking" in our globalized world of late capitalism. Significantly, he considers the aesthetic to be a principal form of non-identical thinking. In her keynote presentation at the recent Performance Studies international conference at Stanford University (July 2013) Peggy Phelan (in the spirit of Benjamin but also of Adorno without, however, mentioning his name) articulated such a desire for a reconception of the human in response to the aesthetic. She argued that performance's particular ability was to engage us with the material density of the now, and suggested that performance's labor was post-conceptual in the sense that it reveals the limits of the conceptual while at the same time inviting us to conceive of "a concept that is not conceptual."

Performance is process and objectivation, temporal experience and material sensation; or to paraphrase Hölderlin: performance is a disappearance in the process of appearance and vice versa. This dialectical movement is at the heart of performance and central to Adorno's aesthetic theory which offers us a dynamic constellation of ideas about art and its relation to society, history and time: the past, the present, and the future. Indeed, it is the principle of hope which guides Adorno's understanding of art as the utopian promise of reconciliation, freedom and happiness. But art cannot positively affirm utopian visions of a healed world without relinquishing its critical negativity. Art can do no more than *risk* the promise of happiness – a promise which, in the manner of Beckett, is always broken. To take Adorno and performance seriously means to turn a critical eye toward the enactment of this broken promise, to tune the ear toward the mute language of art's expression, and to engage in a dialectical mode of thinking wherever Adorno grapples with performance, whatever form that performance may take.

I.4 Contributions and disciplinary boundaries

The editors of this volume have neither divided the contributions into subgroups, nor arranged the essays into anything resembling "the most logical" order. Instead, we have carefully scrutinized the singularity of each piece and assembled each chapter into a verbal mosaic, a constellation as it were, one fragment teaming up with the next to form a rebus of Adorno and performance. A casual reader, and one not familiar with Adorno's work, will find assistance parsing the philosopher's dense vocabulary. Someone more conversant with Adorno's oeuvre will find this vocabulary mobilized in numerous directions, serving at times as critical lenses to the contemporary neoliberalization of higher education and specific performance works (from Pocha Nostra to Richard Maxwell); at other times, serving as goads to philosophical reflection on matters as diverse as academic publishing and the act of dreaming. Whether familiar with Adorno's work or not, each chapter continues the thinking of intermittences that has begun in this introduction and goes on to reveal the stakes of thinking through Adorno in the present day. For anyone seeking a guide to the expansive secondary literature on Adorno, the editors encourage a careful perusing of the works cited in this volume and, beyond that, we recommend visiting the bibliography in Lambert Zuidervaart's entry on Adorno for the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

But then a question: do you read straight through or do you hop around? While keywords in the chapter titles might provoke you to hop around, the description of contributions here will guide you through the book from start to finish and could entice you to follow the path we have laid out. After beginning with Beckett in this introduction, the first chapter will begin with Beckett again. This time, Michal Kobialka will present Adorno's Beckett through the philosopher's essay, "Trying to Understand *Endgame*" (1961). Confronting the reified residue of culture in Beckett's famous play, Adorno encounters a force of resistance against the coercive nature of the culture industry. Kobialka engages with what he refers to as the materiality of this encounter and, in so doing, provides an Adornian understanding of performance that moves away from the path of performativity charted by performance studies scholars over the last several decades.

Adorno frequently turned the perspicacity of his philosophical thinking from artistic and political events to his own life. Nowhere is this self-reflexivity more acute than in his *Dream Notes* where he recorded many of his own dreams over a long span of years. Karoline Gritzner grapples with these dreams, which manifest thoughts that do not understand themselves. Her line of inquiry commences with the seemingly un-Adornian fact that the philosopher's reflections show little to no sign of interpretation; that is, despite the assiduous practice of philosophical interpretation crafted through a lifetime of negative dialectical praxis, Adorno's dream notes leave interpretation aside and expose, instead, the dream work. Triangulating this work between the dream theories of Benjamin and Sigmund Freud, on the one hand, and the internal movement of images within Adorno's dreamscapes, on the other, Gritzner composes an argument for understanding these dream notes as a specific kind of performance in its own right, one that aligns with the philosophical concept of redemption oscillating throughout Adorno's writing.

Andrea Sakoparnig's chapter, "Performativization and the Rescue of Aesthetic Semblance," offers readers the first opportunity to wrestle with the complexities of the vocabulary that Adorno develops in *Aesthetic Theory*. Of particular interest in this chapter is the notion of aesthetic semblance, which, according to Sakoparnig, can help to unpack Adorno's critique of performance art. Against the usual habit of accepting this critique at face value, however, this chapter rethinks the broader concept of performance at work in *Aesthetic Theory* and thus helps to discern the dialectical underside of Adorno's critique. Once laid bare in all its complexity, Adorno's critique of performance art in fact opens the possibility of reactivating the dormant potential of Adorno's concept of performance, a move that Sakoparnig rehearses and for which she advocates.

Whereas that chapter dwells on the operation of rescuing of aesthetic semblance in and with *Aesthetic Theory*, the next assembles a collection of performance events in an attempt to understand Adorno's distinction "between preaching an ideal and giving artistic form to the historical tension inherent in it." A piece of performative writing in its own right, Twitchin's chapter jumps between multiple instantiations of the classical Greek figure of Iphigenia. From Euripides to Werner Fassbinder, from Goethe to Adorno's lecture on Goethe amidst the student protests of 1967 and Joseph Beuys's performance at the Frankfurt Experimenta Festival in 1969, the figure of Iphigenia appears again and again. In this figure, and the assemblage of its various incarnations, Twitchin discovers how these artists and philosophers have given form to the historical tensions inhering within not only artistic representation but also the social edifice of academic institutions, from the 1960s to the present day.

Adorno's life-long preoccupation with music is duly noted by Anthony Gritten whose chapter focuses on a recurrent metaphor in *Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction*, namely what Adorno terms "culinary music-making." His critique of this phenomenon is unpacked with an ear for the metaphor's potential to act as the basis of a critical theory of performing. Aspects of Adorno's theory of "performing" are contrasted dialectically with Jon McKenzie's theory of "performance," in which the term "performance" is a paradigm against which all singular actions – including those of musical performing – are measured and to which they must contribute.

Our attention then shifts from music to theatre in the next chapter by Ioana Jucan. Her essay stages an encounter between Adorno's critique of the capitalist form of life and Richard Maxwell's *Neutral Hero* (US premiere at the Kitchen, NYC, 2012) in an attempt to think through what performance's political potential might be in neoliberal times. Jucan's contribution explores the ways in which a theatrical performance enacts and makes possible a mode of thinking that counters abstraction and the instrumentalization of reason induced by the capitalist form of life. The essay shows how *Neutral Hero* extends Adorno's thought for the times we live in.

Theatrical performance is also the focus of the next chapter in which Stephen Robins examines Adorno's claims for beauty via the work of La

Pocha Nostra, an international performance company noted for creating hybrid, "border art" performances. The essay considers La Pocha Nostra's 2007 performance, *The Barbarian Collection*: a performance apposite to a discussion of beauty because of its staging of the fashion catwalk. Robins shows how La Pocha Nostra's fantastical and grotesque personae amaze and productively confound their audiences while echoing Adorno's critique of idealist aesthetics.

The following two chapters continue a focused exploration of the notion of the theatrical in Adorno's aesthetic theory. Marcus Quent argues that theatrical and performative practices enable a mutual dependency between art and philosophy and he shows how in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* the theatrical space is conceived as a possibility for conflict-prone negotiations of the "memory trace of the mimetic impulse." At the ground of this mimetic process of interpretation, Quent suggests, lies the concept of *pre-imitation* – an affirmative moment in the negative truth of art. Anja Nowak's discussion of the "theatricality of art" draws our attention to the fact that Adorno doesn't really treat theatre as an independent art form, and that he has a tendency to limit his observations to the textual dimension. Still, Nowak shows how theatre does appear as a reoccurring metaphor in *Aesthetic Theory* as an example to explicate general assumptions about art. As a figure of thought, theatre works as a potent theoretical agent and can be traced back to some of the most essential features of Adorno's aesthetics.

In "Adorno and Performance: Thinking with the Movement of Language," Birgit Hofstaetter tunes herself to the practice of *Selbstbesinnung* in Adorno's work. This phrase, crucial to the practice of philosophy as it appears in *Negative Dialectics*, reveals the labor of cultivating a dynamic self-reflexivity, which, in turn, helps individuals to comport themselves to the singularity of works of art. The word "language" in the chapter's title marks the meeting point between music and philosophical writing, a place that, for Hofstaetter, houses a notion of performance specific to Adorno's thought. This notion develops as a critical practice of reading which opens itself up to a quasi-somatic resonance crucial to musical play, but also to thinking more generally.

In "What Is Adorno Doing? Immanent Critique as Philosophical Performance" Mattias Martinson questions the cliché that Adorno's thought is immensely difficult yet possible to fully comprehend in tune with traditional philosophy. By focusing on the last aphorism of Adorno's work *Minima Moralia* – where philosophy becomes an impossible task that still has to be carried through – Adorno's writings are viewed as radical performances, manifesting the basic obscurity of our linguistic relations to reality. Adorno's aesthetically informed notion of philosophical language in "The Essay as Form" is discussed in connection to his understanding of nondiscursive forms of truth expressed by artworks. It is argued that Adorno's strict division between philosophical language and art is paradoxically based in a utopian (ultimately impossible) philosophical strive toward nonphilosophical art-language, and that this leads to a creative philosophical betrayal of philosophy.

Julie Kuhlken, in the chapter "The Vanity of Happiness: Adorno and Self-Performance," develops an understanding of self-performance, according to which performance is an ethical task that resists the temptation to adopt a readymade, social identity. She first sketches how self-performance is Adorno's critical response to the classical understanding of moral action as a reflection of conscious will. Then, using Adorno's examples drawn largely from theatre, she looks at his characterization of the gap between the individual's conscience and the aims of contemporary society. The essay shows how the instrumentalism of modern society turns even happiness into an organized pursuit. The "vanity of happiness" so conditioned is the ultimate travesty to which self-performance responds. Kuhlken concludes by looking at the consequences, both ethical and artistic, of modern self-performance.

The final chapter in this book resonates in a frequency similar to the reflections collected in Adorno's work, *Minima Moralia*. Conventional wisdom such as that typed on bumper stickers paired with a reference to the Bill Murray movie *Groundhog Day*, Oscar Wilde and Ernst Bloch paving the way to the *Book of Wisdom*: this imbrication of so-called high and low culture prepares the scene for a dialectical treatment of life performed. For Dixon, "the categories of practicing, rehearsing, and performing that are derivable from artistic-productive experience can be extended to lived experience," and lived experience finds its texture in the practice of writing. Placing the dialectic of form and content front and center, Dixon argues that "Writing as Life Performed" acquires texture and consistency only once we stop talking about the form-content relation and start practicing it. But to do so would mean to finally confront the machinery of academic writing that vouchsafes legitimacy only to those books and articles that conform to certain standards.

If these chapters collaborate in creating a shared disciplinary home, then that home would likely be neither Performance Studies nor Philosophy but Performance Philosophy. Of course, as Adorno famously wrote in "Refuge for the Homeless," "dwelling, in the proper sense, is now impossible" (*Minima Moralia* 38). Transposed to this particular conversation, Adorno's reflections on emigration and the ethical necessity of never being at home in one's home warn us against affiliating ourselves with any organization simply for the purpose of finding legitimacy. In this sense, Performance Philosophy becomes the ideal no-place for this particular book, one that offers no lodging but, rather, motivates a particular practice of thought. At this stage of its existence, this practice, to cite Laura Cull, derives from an

> enactment of an immanent thought that does not represent performance in ways that construe it as somehow incapable of thinking for itself [...] A thought alongside performance rather than an ontological claim about it. ("Performance Philosophy")

If philosophers enact thought through the discipline of philosophy, and performers think through embodied activity, then perhaps what performance philosophers do is pursue a dual research agenda that participates in both of those actions while also mapping the terrain of a hybrid practice. And thus we return to Adorno *and* performance: a specific philosophical practice that tarries with performance as concept, artistic practice, and life praxis. The book *Adorno and Performance* is not confined to the disciplinary home of Performance Philosophy, but it does aspire to the thought currently undertaken by its membership.

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