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From Aesthetics to Pedagogy and Back: Rethinking the Works of Theodor Adorno

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Lewis, Tyson

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## Introduction

In his book *Late Marxism*, Fredric Jameson (2000) persuasively argues that Theodor Adorno's negative dialectic is a vital and necessary tool to combat the ludic tendencies of postmodernism. Jameson's intervention is timely indeed, rehabilitating Adorno from contemporary historians and theorists who either position him as a cantankerous curmudgeon or relegate his thought to an (depoliticized) aesthetic realm. Opposed to both perspectives, Jameson repositions Adorno as the theorist of late capitalism whose pessimism acts as a sobering agent against the intoxication of market desire and against postmodernity's perpetual present. While I agree with Jameson that Adorno is in fact a central figure in our postmodern times for imagining a politics of transformation, I would also argue that Jameson, in his assessment of Adorno's work, has somewhat missed his mark. Keeping Jameson's basic thesis in mind, we must now turn to Adorno's theory of *education* (here specifically referring to pedagogy and its institutionalized form, schooling) to see how his project remains relevant to the present historical moment. To clarify this argument, I will bridge the gap between Adorno's aesthetic theory and his critical pedagogy, suggesting that his educational writings (though less voluminous) actually solve a central problematic posed by aesthetic theory: the question of fascist resentment as it manifests itself in social violence against the individual, racist projection, and historical amnesia. Ending fascist resentment is a new pedagogical and ethical mandate precisely because fascism is the psychological logic of late capitalism whose most gruesome and barbaric manifestation is genocide. In short, it is through the shared problematic of fascism that we will be able to move from aesthetics to education and back, and in the process map a new notion of schooling that is no longer predicated on violence.

### **A Shared Problematic: The Precarious Position of the Philistine**

To begin, Jameson carefully documents three opposing positions in Adorno's (1997) text *Aesthetic Theory*. First is the position of the laboring masses. Here Jameson connects *Aesthetic Theory* with *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002), which provides us with the most succinct allegorical representation of this position: Odysseus's crew, who cannot hear the call of the sirens because their ears are plugged with wax. In other words, Odysseus' oarsmen know that aesthetic experience exists, but are excluded from entering the aesthetic realm by their location in the social relations of production. Second, *Aesthetic Theory* critiques the consumers of the culture

industry. Barred from directly experiencing the promised happiness of the aesthetic realm, these individuals indulge in the false pleasures of the mass produced commodities of film, television, radio, and so forth. Such pleasures mystify social contradictions and thus perform a convenient function in the reproduction of labor-power: momentary escapism that prepares the consumer for further labor.

Yet for Jameson, there exists another antagonist in *Aesthetic Theory* whose challenge to aesthetics proves the most daunting: the philistine. As opposed to the non-hearing oarsman or the consumer of the culture industry, the philistine understands art, and for this very reason is full of resentment towards its broken promise for happiness. The key connection between Adorno's aesthetics and his more overtly political critique of enlightenment now becomes clear, for as Jameson argues, the central figure of the philistine is in fact the anti-Semitic Nazi (2000). The fascist, in other words, is envious of the broken promise of art, which in the end amounts to a utopian hope for social transformation. This envy leads to an increasing resentment and to the process of revolt against the concept of happiness, resulting in a distortion of happiness with power (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, p. 141). In this sense, the philistine embodies what Ernst Bloch would refer to as "filled affects or emotions" (1996, p. 74). Such emotions contort hope and its utopian drive for social transformation into greed, envy, and jealousy, all of which are then directed against an other conveniently constructed as a scapegoat for this resentment: the Jew. As such, class antagonisms (and thus class interests) are displaced and hope becomes a malicious form of racial hatred.

For our present purposes, what is most important in Jameson's insights is that we can now precisely locate the bridge uniting Adorno's aesthetics with his pedagogy: the shared problematic of the philistine. Although Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* posits the philistine as an antagonist, the text offers no solution to addressing this politically dangerous figure. Rather, the book merely negates the position. Adorno's pedagogy, on the other hand, makes a critical intervention. If his aesthetics remain austere (strategically addressed to those who have cultivated a set of shared experiences and as such are already educationally conditioned to enter the text), Adorno's pedagogical program is geared at combating the spread of philistinism throughout the cultural and political spheres from the ground up. Stated differently, if as Adorno (2002) argues, "[A]rt becomes social by its opposition to society, and occupies this position only as autonomous art" (2002, p. 225), then perhaps we could argue the inverse: that pedagogy is oppositional to society because it engages directly in the everyday life-world of social relations. As such, Adorno's aesthetic theory cannot be read without also including the gesture towards his pedagogy. In other words, Adorno's aesthetics set up a problem that can only be solved in relation to pedagogy and school reform. The two programs are, in the end, not only complementary but intimately interwoven,

forming the arc of a much larger political project often ignored in Adorno scholarship, an arc uniting anti-genocide education with the utopian dimension of aesthetics.

Here I am not simply championing a series of articles, lectures, and radio interviews that—even when collected into a coherent set—remain marginal and insignificant in relation to Adorno’s larger output of writings. The theme of education, or more specifically, school reform, plays a reoccurring role in two of Adorno’s major texts: *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Minima Moralia* (which I discuss later in this article). In fact, Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) posit educational degradation as a key source for the rise and maintenance of fascism in pre- and post-World War II Germany. In their penultimate chapter on anti-Semitism, the authors attribute (in part) the proliferation of one-dimensional stereotypic thinking, clinical paranoia, and the demise of self-reflection in German youth to a waning of educational institutions within the German state. While Frankfurt School scholars such as Stephen Eric Bronner (2004) have pinpointed the theme of education in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, his reading of Horkheimer and Adorno’s pessimism needs to be framed in relation to Adorno’s later comments on pedagogy in order to be adequately complemented by a reconstructive vision. Thus, questions of education arise in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that are not fully solved until Adorno’s later, much more focused and politically oriented comments on educational activism.

Overall, education in relation to Adorno cannot be dismissed as a marginal concern. Furthermore, when framed by Adorno’s larger critique of praxis, education (as an activist oriented intervention) becomes a unique moment in which Adorno directly confronts many concrete political issues that elude his other writings. It is well known that Adorno heavily criticized praxis as an attempt to synthesize thinking and practice (hence the oft-cited and unwarranted charges of elitism and smugness). His critique of praxis is perhaps most directly summarized in the essay entitled “Marginalia to Theory and Praxis,” in which Adorno (1998) argues that praxis, in its historically materialized forms, inevitably degrades thought to the level of mere pragmatism. The hasty movement towards activism is, for Adorno, a retreat from the labor of thinking (itself a praxis) into a collective narcissism that does not so much disrupt the status quo as it substitutes a sense of futility with the equally problematic retreat into self-congratulatory moral superiority. In the moment of praxis where practice calls for thought to service immediate needs with equally immediate solutions, the dialectic is “perverted into sophistry” closing off the power of thought to contemplate the totality of social relations that lie on the horizon beyond what is given (p. 268). As such, praxis reduces thought to a form of “gadgeteering” (p. 270) through which self-reflection (the negative movement of thought through its opposite and back again) is replaced with pragmatics, which ultimately spiral into a form of

identity thinking. The contradiction between theory and praxis that Adorno describes is, in the end, not inevitable but rather is the result of the fractured life-world of late capitalism itself, which creates boundaries and borders between subject and object.

Considering his reflections on praxis, it might be rather shocking to hear Adorno (1998) argue “school today, its moral import, is that in the midst of the status quo it alone has the ability, if it is conscious of it, to work directly toward the debarbarization of humanity” and thus strive for a democratic praxis (1998, p. 190). Here, Adorno’s insistence on the very practical intervention of education to halt (or at least stave off) the arrival of a universal philistinism begins to stand out as an unusual intervention that is unparalleled in Adorno’s other works. As we will explore below, pedagogy becomes a moment not of the synthesis of theory and practice, but rather a praxis that lives within the contradictions of the moment in order to articulate them in its very form. The “solution” that pedagogy offers against barbarism is thus not an immediate fix but rather an opening up to thinking negatively, and thus in the end, a movement away from fascism towards the possibility of aesthetic experience as a field wherein social suffering is thrown into relief and the broken promise of happiness is animated beyond fascist resentment. Stated differently, the contradiction between practice and theory is the precise place of the pedagogical imagination, which acts as a symptom of the fractured life world and a possible moment of productive intervention.

In this sense, pedagogy is exalted in Adorno’s writings as a peculiar mode of praxis on par with (and perhaps subsuming) aesthetics. Commenting on authentic works of art in opposition to the vulgar realm of the culture industry and the resentment of the philistine, Adorno (2002) argues that aesthetics are “less than praxis and more” (p. 241). The work of a piece of art is less than praxis because it positions itself in opposition to immediate political intervention. Yet by this obdurate abstention, art categorically denounces all facets of the practical world. The resulting praxis is a “scarcely apprehensible transformation of consciousness” (p. 243) that is not directly political but which has political implications. The shock and the shutter induced by an aesthetic experience are the subjective results of the objective social contradictions embedded in the very form of the artwork, thus revealing the internal limits and aporias of bourgeois subjectivity as constitutively unfinished. If art, therefore, has the potential to jolt the subject into an experience of the possibility of the *novum*, then as I will demonstrate below, a truly democratic pedagogy generates the possibility for the possibility of experiencing such newness in the first place, and as such incorporates Adorno’s aesthetics into a comprehensive educational movement towards democracy.

## Adorno's Pedagogy

As is well known, the major aim of education for Adorno is to prevent the recurrence of genocide. As he wrote, "Every debate about the ideals of education is trivial and inconsequential compared to the single ideal: never again Auschwitz. It was the barbarism all education strives against" (1998, p. 191). Whereas Adorno resigned himself to the position that poetry was impossible to write after Auschwitz, it would seem that the inverse is true for education. Precisely after the Jewish holocaust, the mandate of education becomes crystal clear. In this sense, education becomes possible at the moment it fully realizes its necessary, urgent, and vital mission to combat the mass slaughter of human lives. Yet before we outline how Adorno envisions education as a central tool in the prevention of genocide, we must make two points absolutely clear. Rather than locate Auschwitz in the past (and thus position it as a singular moment unique to history itself), Adorno's comments on the Holocaust must be placed in relation to his larger critique of the ongoing violence of capitalism itself, which culminates in the fascist state. As such, preventing Auschwitz from ever happening again is, as we shall see, ultimately a critique of capitalism's ongoing fragmentation of the life-world of which Auschwitz is the most devastatingly succinct example. Second, we have to broaden the references to fascism and thus Adorno's relevance to U.S. education. Here I would suggest that fascism is not simply a historical relic but rather lives within the contemporary moment as a tendency within capitalism itself that results in a particular mode of hyper-fascism. My term hyper-fascism is similar to what Henry Giroux (2004a) has termed proto-fascism in the sense that both recognize the cult of traditionalism, the attack on democracy, patriotic nationalism, the control of the media by the government and/or corporations, the connections between government and overtly religious fundamentalism, and the militarization of public life as constitutive elements of fascism. The use of the prefix *hyper* is an attempt to more clearly position such fascist tendencies within a postmodern logic of media saturation, space-time accelerations, and various forms of implosions between real and fantasy (Jameson, 1995) and to give further specification to the resentment of the philistine in late capitalism.

Bearing these distinctions in mind, we can now pose our main question: How does education prevent genocide? The key to Adorno's analysis is that genocide-prevention education does not simply concern content but rather concerns the *form* of education as a subjectivizing procedure. As such, educators must avoid four major pedagogical errors that reduce genocide to an historical event teachable through mere curricular amendments. First, one cannot make an appeal to ideals, or as the case might be, to empty utopian dreams of a perfect society (Adorno, 1998). Thus, teachers cannot lament that "the world should not

be this way” and posit some sort of vacuous daydream in order to criticize the present. These utopian mirages are a form of escapism whose positivity must be resisted by the negativity of dialectics. Nor can teachers invoke identification with victims and/or victims’ pain. According to Adorno (1998), such identity politics erase the *other* with the imaginary projection of the self, and as such replicate a form of epistemological violence. Intimations of a social contract (and thus the formalization of ethics into a universal governing body not unlike the United Nations) also fail in the face of genocide. Arguing against the call to social bonds solidified via contractual agreements, Adorno warns: “the so-called bonds easily become either a ready badge of shared convictions—one enters into them to prove oneself a good citizen—or they produce spiteful resentment, psychologically the opposite of the purpose for which they were drummed up” (p. 195). The compulsion to obey that is co-terminus with social contract theory ultimately collapses into the very resentment that characterizes the philistine. Finally, recourse to facts concerning the Holocaust is problematic at best. Taking a very pragmatic approach to the problem of genocide education, Adorno (1998) rightfully argues, “As far as wanting to combat anti-Semitism in individual subjects is concerned, one should not expect too much from the recourse to facts, which anti-Semites most often will either not admit or will neutralize by treating them as exceptions” (p. 102).

Adorno’s observations do not mean that these four pedagogical techniques are completely useless. I am sure Adorno would agree that they each have their regional validity. In my reading, what Adorno is arguing against is the over-reliance on any one tactic to “solve” the problem of genocide prevention. Viewed from this perspective, these various strategies appear to treat a symptom rather than the illness. At best, they might serve a limited goal, but at their worst, they might actually reinforce certain psychological trends towards a hyper-fascist perspective that they are consciously attempting to subvert.

Thus, Adorno is forced to search for an alternative education that will not in its essence exclude the others, but rather provide a theoretical basis for reconstructing a education that cuts to the very heart of genocide: the unconscious life of the philistine and his or her social resentment. As such, genocide prevention must battle against the rise of hyper-fascism, and in particular its three dominant manifestations: violence (both psychological and physical), racist projection, and historical amnesia. In order to accomplish this goal, education for Adorno must offer practitioners and students the opportunity to reflect upon institutional forms reproducing anti-democratic proclivities.

Yet we must ask: What are the critical tools necessary to address the pedagogical problematic of such resentment? Answering this question, Adorno (1998) advocates a powerful reconciliation between Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxism. With these tools, pedagogy becomes equipped to “work through” the

psychical compartments that form the foundations for hyper-fascism (p. 193). These foundations include both hardness and coldness. Hardness as an educational virtue makes the subject resistant to pain and likewise resistant to the guilt of inflicting pain on others. Self and other become essentially objects to be manipulated, resulting in a “reified consciousness” (p. 199) wherein human relationships become relationships between things. In this sense, hardness is derived from the techno-rational and instrumental logic of the enlightenment itself—so brutally prefigured in Odysseus who tied himself to the mast in order to hear the call of the sirens without the pleasures of sensual fulfillment (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). Likewise, coldness speaks to an indifference to others and a sense of isolation through an insatiable appetite for competition, and ultimately, domination. Here Adorno (1998) makes the curious observation that in a technocratic and administered educational system, the only social unit remaining is the “lonely crowd” tied together precisely because they lack love for one another (p. 201). Thus Adorno offers a unique critique of Freud’s (1989) theory of group psychology, which argues that groups form through libidinal identifications. Furthering Marcuse’s (1991) analysis of a one-dimensional society, Adorno offers a new theory of the group where collectivities are consolidated by instrumental logics, through coldness, and through a loss of libidinal investments. More precisely, the loss of libidinal investment in the group *is* a libidinal investment denuded of love itself and replaced by a prefabricated and instrumental identification with the factory assembly line. In the reduction of relationships to cold and indifferent seriality between objects, coldness results in a form of technological fetishism that further prevents individuals from engaging in love relations (Adorno, 1998). Perhaps it would not be improper to further Adorno’s comments and argue that this loss of libidinal investment has transformed into the postmodern waning of affect (Jameson, 1995), suggesting increasing levels of hyper-fascism where the subject becomes alienated from the very sense of alienation.

The result is the manipulative consciousness of the hyper-fascist that is characterized by “a rage for organization, by the inability to have any immediate human experiences at all, by a certain lack of emotion, by an overvalued realism” (Adorno, 1998, p. 198). As such, the subjectivity of the philistine is anti-dialectical, fully one-dimensional, devoid of emotional resonance, and incapable of recognizing the non-identical in the identical, or the penetration of subject and object. In sum, educational hardness and coldness are values that equate happiness with manipulation, power, and resentment, generating the preconditions for hyper-fascist political ideology—in all its militarized and patriotic forms—to take root in the deepest levels of our unconscious psyche.

But how exactly does education foster coldness and hardness inherent in a reified consciousness? For Adorno there are essentially three mechanisms:



institutional violence, enforced amnesia, and racism. First, violence. Schooling fosters the psychological preconditions of fascism through a series of educational hierarchies that reduce students to mere objects. Two such hierarchies exist: the manifest level of grades and examinations and the latent level of brute competition and physical punishment (Adorno, 1998). This social conditioning is not simply a historical accident but rather finds its own genealogical roots in the ritual of execution. In a careful examination of the educational archive, Adorno argues that the primal scene through which the notion of the teacher emerges is that of the “flogger.” According to Adorno’s reading, Kafka’s novel *The Trial* “presents the teacher as the physically stronger who beats the weaker” (Ibid, p. 182). Thus in literature, Adorno finds traces of an institutional unconscious linking schooling with physical punishment. Here Adorno sounds remarkably similar to Michel Foucault (1979) whose genealogical work on the rise of the prison system also draws clear parallels between mass education, military training, and Bentham’s ideal prison architecture: the panopticon. Yet there are two significant differences between Adorno and Foucault. First, while Foucault avoids questions of the subjective unconscious, Adorno argues that these genealogical links provide a powerful collective *imagerie* passed down from generation to generation. Second, for Foucault, education is part of a larger disciplinary regime and thus is separate from the tyranny of the sovereign. Yet in Adorno’s genealogy, the pervasive taboos against the teacher have ancient roots in the sovereign’s right over death. Thus as Adorno (1998) ominously warns, “The image of the teacher repeats, no matter how dimly, the extremely affect-laden image of the executioner” (p. 183). In the classroom, the “flogger” lives through the hierarchies constructed between students and teachers, transforming learning into punishment rather than autonomy, self-responsibility, and critical consciousness. Because of this disavowed kernel connecting teaching to pre-modern execution, the classroom itself can all too easily transform from a disciplinary or normalizing space (*a la* Foucault) into a space of physical brutality and overt punishment that brutalizes and traumatizes the subject.

Such comments are not simply novel genealogical readings, but have pressing importance in understanding violence in schools today. Connecting education with the history of political execution is especially insightful when we consider that, as of 2000, twenty two states in the U.S. still permitted corporal punishment in schools, most of which was inflicted on youth of color (National Coalition to Abolish Corporal Punishment in Schools). Furthermore, police interventions in schools are on the rise in urban areas, creating a sustained state of emergency legitimated by a discourse of civil war against students (Lewis, in press). Such police raids, viewed through Adorno’s theory, are not antithetical and thus external to education in the United States. Rather, the preconditions for such military and police actions adhere to the very heart of schooling in its

disavowed relation to the ancient figure of the executioner. As such, education must come to terms with the latent hierarchy through which fascism—in all its historical varieties—reappears, and move beyond the unconscious complicity with the structures of social violence.

The coldness and hardness of hyper-fascism are also directly experienced in the violence of the schoolyard and in hyper-masculine bullying. The aphorism entitled “The bad comrade” in Adorno’s (1999) *Minima Moralia* reveals why he centers schooling as *the* primary social institution to combat fascist subjectivity. In this aphorism, Adorno recalls his first meeting with fascism on the playground of his childhood school. Referring to a group of bullies he writes: “The five patriots who set upon a single schoolfellow, thrashed him, and when he complained to the teacher, defamed him a traitor to the class—are they not the same as those who tortured prisoners to refute claims by foreigners that prisoners were tortured?” (p. 193). The aphorism ends with chilling claim that “in fascism the nightmare of childhood has come true” (p. 193). Thus for Adorno, childhood is the critical moment to intercede in the development of fascist tendencies, and the schoolyard is the primary locus for the eruption of society’s disavowed cruelty. In this sense, it is the school rather than the home where social antagonism is first experienced. It is worth quoting Adorno (1998) at length here:

It seems to me to be the case that in the development of children, their first experience of alienation generally is when they enter school. For the first time the child is torn away from the protection of the family, from the extended womb, so to say, and comes to feel the coldness of a world with which he or she is not identical. And it seems to me to be the case that genetically the first expressions of anti-Semitism or of racial hatred at all, as for instance the persecution of black children or red-haired children or whatever it may be, takes place precisely at this stage... Thus, the child who in school experiences coldness, anxiety, the pressure of the collective, psychologically saves himself by displacing it onto others, and groups form in order, as it were, to pass this burden of alienation onto others. (p. 296)

These concerns are far from being limited to the specific situation of post-World War II Germany. Since the 1999 Columbine High School shootings, bullying has gained national attention in the U.S. media. Correctly, Ben Frymer (2005) has argued that the cruelty of bullying and the attending backlash of the school-shooter phenomenon speak to a pervasive form of postmodern nihilism and resignation in U.S. youth. Yet I would add to Frymer’s assessment that the proper political horizon in which to locate these trends is the cultural resentment of the philistine as it is intimately linked with the increasingly commodified life-world of teenagers. While the psychological motives of such shootings remain a mystery (Egan, 1998), the historical meaning of these actions is to be properly

located in relation to the psychology of late capitalism: as a return of the repressed in the form of a sadistic system of vengeance and retribution that speaks to the hardness and coldness of hyper-fascism. Take for instance the testimony of Barry Loukaitis. In 1996 Barry walked into a classroom and shot and killed a popular boy who had bullied him. Then he proceeded to shoot two other students and his teacher. When asked why he continued to kill after his intended target had been hit, Barry replied, “I don’t know, I guess reflex took over.” The indiscriminant killing coupled with the remorselessness and callousness of Barry’s actions all speak to an unprecedented level of psychological detachment further exacerbated by the glorification of violence in the media, postmodern fragmentation of meaning, and the philosophical death of the metanarrative as a framework for making sense of our existential condition. Here fascism retains its racist, sexist, and homophobic proclivities (Klien & Chancer, 2000), yet is not articulated with collective nationalism. It is rather an isolated and nihilistic embrace of resentment, of closure to life itself, and a retreat into the only radical solution: death.<sup>4</sup> Thus Barry was able to stand before one of his dying victims, and without a sense of cynicism quip: “This sure beats algebra, doesn’t it?” As Adorno argued, the problematic of school bullying, whose violence returns four-fold in the reactionary force of school shootings, must be addressed in relation to the psychic economy of the philistine if it is to be adequately treated.

In addition to combating the personality of the postmodern philistine, education—as a sphere for working through the past—must confront racism itself and its psychic causes. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) argue that Nazi racism against Jews was caused by a certain psychic projection. For Freud, projection is the externalization of internal contradictions onto the other. For the Nazi, desire and the anger resulting from civilization’s demand to renounce primary pleasure have been projected onto the Jew. In the ideological fantasy of the Nazi, the Jew has not yet renounced such pleasure and thus represents a sensual reality that is desired but also hated (if not feared). Through the figure of the Jew, the Nazi indirectly lives out his or her own fantasies of primary wholeness. As Adorno and Horkheimer argue, the stereotype of the Jew as a “sniffer” (whose stereotypical big nose derogatorily signaled an immediacy with the sense of smell) offered the fascist the opportunity to replicate such sniffing through pejorative mimicry (p. 151). Below the superficial hatred that such mimicry indicated was a deeper level of dirty pleasure or *jouissance* through which the Nazi indirectly enjoyed certain primal fantasies that had been disavowed. In this case, the contradiction between conscious hatred and unconscious enjoyment led to an overall resentment of pleasure itself, and as I have argued in the preceding pages, to the relationship between happiness and power. In sum, the result of such projections onto the proverbial other is a sustained high level of cultural paranoia, which is merely exacerbated by a lack of

education. Therefore, education against fascism must address the process of projection and its racist tendencies, and thus prevent the major psychic mechanism promoting fascism from becoming a cultural norm.

Finally, there is the question of memory in education. Freud has often reminded us that forgetting is an active position, a form of repression wherein traumatic experiences are blocked. The same holds true for fascism, which in Adorno's post-war Germany, ignited a fond nostalgia for the war years through an active forgetting of the trauma of battle. In fact, the reified consciousness produced by the educational system was described by Adorno (1998) as "blinded to all historical past, all insight into one's own conditionedness" (p. 200). Adorno thus argued that many Germans legitimated an induced amnesia on the account that "dwelling on the past" might have hurt Germany's recovery both at home (psychologically) and abroad (economically). The danger with such willed forgetting was, of course, that those who actively repressed memories of the contradictions of fascism would eventually forget that they had forgotten in the first place. The ironic twist was that in forgetting to remember to have forgotten, the fires of fascism were once again rekindled. A "weakened memory" mis-recognized the internally split nature of fascism, reducing atrocities of war to a fond reminiscence for the good old days. As Adorno writes, the weakened memory "tenaciously persists in glorifying the National Socialist era, which fulfilled the collective fantasies of power harbored by those people who, individually, had no power and who indeed could feel any self-worth at all only by virtue of such collective power" (p. 95). Remembering cannot be reduced to simply tallying up the raw facts of the Holocaust, nor can it be predicated on social bonds or empathy. Rather, to remember is to work through the trauma of the war in order to cut the ties that bind the subject to the psychic life of fascism.

These lessons from Adorno's Germany cannot be lost, especially in today's atmosphere of the "war on terror" where the U.S. has given up its critical capacities to realize historical ties binding current terrorism with American foreign policies and imperialism (Kellner, 2003; Giroux, 2004b). Furthermore, a nationalistic rhetoric of evil versus good merely results in the projection of the negative onto the proverbial other in order to sustain military globalization. Here, dichotomous thinking prevails, preventing citizens from addressing the historically interwoven patterns of violence that constitute the current "crisis in the middle east." As such, the inability to mourn the loss of 9/11 transforms into militaristic nationalism, which all too easily falls into patterns of racism and xenophobia. Thus the one-dimensional amnesia and racist stereotyping described by Adorno in post-World War II Germany are rearticulated as a form of postmodern flatness—which lacks all intimations of historical depth (Jameson, 1995)—in the face of national trauma or, as the case might be, the inability to feel trauma in the first place. If coldness and hardness replace both depth memory and

depth psychology, then memory returns as a critical educational issue for enabling us not only to position ourselves in history but also for enabling us to feel the affective component of our historical situation.

Here the dialectic of education becomes apparent. On the one hand, schooling forms the social cradle for ingratiating youth into a system of coldness and hardness, estrangement, and amnesia necessary for a newly mutated form of hyper-fascism to become pervasive. On the other hand, precisely because it plays such a crucial role in forming this character structure, education can invert the process and work against barbarism and, in the process, combat the psychological preconditions that facilitate genocide. This task means that education must confront its ignoble and somewhat questionable genealogical past and thus break its unconsciously sustained relation to violence. A democratic pedagogy must take into account its own complicity with genocide and thus transform itself on the level of form rather than ameliorative content. In the classroom, teachers cannot endorse the coldness and hardness of hyper-fascism and must instead explore the social anxieties arising from contemporary social relations in late capitalism. As Adorno (1998) writes, “education must take seriously an idea in no ways unfamiliar to philosophy: that anxiety must not be repressed” (p. 198). In this case, emotional distress will not return in a series of symptoms (for example, resentment, amnesia, and projection)—which are negative reactions to the warning provided by anxiety—but rather as a productive index of social contradiction. As opposed to resentment or projection, anxiety is not a clinical symptom in psychoanalysis. It is rather a signal that the symptom is no longer functioning properly, and that the subject is approaching the unbearable truth that symptomatic formations mask. As such, anxiety is a powerful—if not the most powerful—educational affect for examining the psychological repository frozen over by coldness and its social determinants.

In this sense, education and aesthetics begin to meet once again. If education is able to pierce the crusted psyche of hardness and coldness inherent in our commodified world of late capitalism, then it adequately produces the preconditions for aesthetic experience. According to Adorno, aesthetics enable us to reflect on social suffering that is prohibited from expression by fascist resentment. Thus Adorno (2002) writes, “Hegel’s thesis that art is consciousness of plight has been confirmed beyond anything he could have envisioned” (p. 18). For it is in art that personal anxiety becomes politicized and individual emotions enter into a larger narrative of collective suffering that cannot be falsely massaged into the pre-packaged pleasures of the culture industry or the indifference of coldness and hardness. Here aesthetics emerges as a moment within an overall pedagogical problematic centered against hyper-fascism. The arc from pedagogy to aesthetics resists reification of consciousness into a thing, opening up the subject to its own constitutive incompleteness. Art moves this individual process

to a higher level of collective articulation, even if this collectivity remains forever differed in the aesthetic realm.

But we must make it clear that for Adorno, fascism is not simply psychological, and as such, genocide is not the result of an aberrant perversion. The psychology of fascism is conditioned by the material relations of capitalism, and is thus the subjectivity necessitated by the mode of production. Adorno (1998) argues, "That fascism lives on, that the oft-invoked working through of the past has to this day been unsuccessful and has degenerated into its own caricature, an empty and cold forgetting, is due to the fact that the objective conditions of society that engendered fascism continue to exist. Fascism essentially cannot be derived from subjective dispositions" (p. 98). Hyper-fascist subjectivity is not an individual psychological problem, nor is it a cultural ethos. It is rather the *psychological dominant of late capitalism* whose multiple contradictions produce sustained economic inequalities and social antagonisms that are ideologically distorted in terms of a fascist fantasy. Thus the stumbling block for realizing the democracy promised by progressive pedagogy (including its aesthetic component) becomes material relations themselves. Here Adorno would agree with Freud's (*SE XXIII*) seemingly pessimistic assessment that teaching is one of the "impossible professions" (p. 248), but for radically different reasons. For Freud, there are three impossible professions: governing, educating, and analyzing. In each case, it is impossible to touch the truth, which is located in psychoanalysis on the edge between what can be said (the domain of knowledge) and what cannot be said (the domain of the absent or lost object cause of our desire). For Adorno, this absent cause that refuses to be articulated in the pedagogical moment is itself the historical totality of social relations (the ungraspable density of class struggle as it toils ceaselessly through the historical strata of human time), which the student must ultimately confront in terms of its resultant contradictions within the field of knowledge, or as the case might be, in the un-teachability of our postmodern, global world. If education becomes overly self-confident and self-congratulatory (thus prematurely proclaiming the reconciliation of practice and theory) then it offers solutions rather than posing problems (including itself as a problem) and as such creates the illusion that social ills lack an objective basis. Likewise, the key difference between products of the culture industry and Art is that the former reconciles these contradictions through the instantaneous gratifications of pleasure whereas the latter presents contradictions as determinate bars against the realization of the promise of happiness. Dialectically speaking, it is through self-recognition of its necessary limitations within the historical moment that education succeeds, sustaining a space of radical openness towards the figure of social totality and historical movement even if such a totality remains in shadow. Thus in the negative moment, Adorno's unusual utopianism shines through.

## Conclusion

In response to increasing Holocaust denial in Europe and a series of genocides in the 1990s (including massacres in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Bosnia), Adorno's comments must be taken seriously. In particular, his reflections on the importance of education to move society towards a viable democracy are useful in two ways. First, Adorno grounds pedagogy in a psychoanalytic understanding of the unconscious and in terms of Marxian analysis of the mode of production. Only when subjectivity is related to material relations (and thus the objectivity of thought comprehended) can education hope to foster the preconditions for a world without genocide. Key here is the cautious endorsement of democratic education as a "precondition" rather than a solution. To take capitalism into account, education must incorporate material contradictions into its very form (e.g., the very fracture between practice and theory that pedagogy attempts to reconcile). Thus education cannot be a viable praxis precisely because the distinction it attempts to overcome is the very source of the pedagogical imagination in the first place. Education here is not a solution but rather a space for exploring these contradictions in knowledge and in the emotional anxieties that they inevitably produce. The failure of education is thus not an excuse to blame the teacher or the student, or to lose hope. This failure is rather the motor that pushes pedagogy towards an analysis of its location in the relations of production and its complicity and its resistance to the violence on capitalism.

Second, Adorno's pedagogical imagination foregrounds Marxist pedagogy in the problematic of mass murder and the violence of education that serves as its groundwork. As the most dramatic moment of capitalist injustice, genocide (whether the Jewish Holocaust or the Trail of Tears) becomes the condensed representation of all the horrors of racism, classism, and sexism within the movement of the modern world and a nodal point of reference for examining the seemingly disconnected matrix of school violence and social amnesia.

In conclusion, pedagogy is charged with the vital role of preventing the rise of barbarism by cracking open the crust of fascist subjectivity. As such, it must replace hardness and coldness with an openness of the subject towards the other. With this openness, pedagogy moves from a model of projection (wherein the other is rapaciously consumed by the resentful subject) towards that of democracy. Here democracy is concerned with self-reflection, agency, and dialogue as opposed to self-annihilation in libidinally empty group narcissism, amnesia, and racist fantasies of the other. Yet in the end, education also moves us back to the very beginning of this article, back towards aesthetics. In the educative moment "subjective reason senses subjective contingency, the primacy

of the object shimmers through: that in the object which is not a subjective addition” (Adorno, 1998, p. 254). It is here in the recognition of disjuncture between the subjective knowledge learned and the object experienced and between practice and theory that education prepares us not only for democratic life but also for the experience of an openness to openness, which for Adorno remains the point where the promise of future happiness is reclaimed against the resentment of the philistine.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Without being overly simplistic, negative dialectics is for Adorno the constant reminder of the non-identity between concept and reality, particular and universal through a back and forth oscillation that refuses closure (see Adorno, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> When viewing this typography of individuals in relation to aesthetic experience, it is important to remember that they are types. As such, they are hermeneutic tools that are not so much direct reflections of actual positions (which always contain objective ambiguity) but rather convenient abstractions against which history can be measured precisely by its deviation from such models. Furthermore, as Jameson (2000) points out, the pejorative depiction of the culture industry by Adorno has been historically misunderstood for it is not so much a theory of culture but rather a theory of industry and as such the “commodification of life” (p. 144). In both senses, much of the criticism of Adorno (see, for instance, Kellner, 1992) is at least lessened, if not avoided altogether.

<sup>3</sup> As Adorno (1999) argues, “wrong life cannot be lived rightly” (p. 39).

<sup>4</sup> Here we must historicize the classical Frankfurt School analysis of the authoritarian personality. As Slavoj Žižek (2000) has argued, whereas the Freudian-Marxist interpretation of fascism emphasized repression, insecurity, and irresponsibility, the properly postmodern fascist is cursed with a totalitarian Other demanding not so much renunciation as compulsive and obligatory enjoyment—of which the *jouissance* of death reigns supreme (p. 391).

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### **Author**

Tyson Lewis is a doctoral candidate in educational philosophy at UCLA. His dissertation explores the relationship between education, biopower, biopolitics, and utopia. His broader research interests include critical theory, postmodernism, psychoanalysis, and educational philosophy.