

**Protocol, Graduate Seminar – Adorno and Heidegger****Class Session: 5, September 23, 2010****Minute taker: Christian Lotz****Topic: Reading Adorno and Heidegger through Kant's concept of schematism**

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**Abbreviations**

ND = Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*; AP = Adorno, *The Actuality of Philosophy*; TH = Heidegger, *The Thing*; NPT = Adorno, *Notes on Philosophical Thinking*; EF = Adorno, *The Essay as Form*; IM = Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*; LH = Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism*; SO = Adorno, *Subject and Object*; MTP = Adorno, *Marginalia to Theory and Praxis*; WCT = Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*; WSP = Adorno, *Why still Philosophy?*; KCPR = Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*; KPM = Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*; WT = Heidegger, *What is a Thing?*; QCT = *Question Concerning Technology*; TT = Heidegger, *The Thing*; BDT = Heidegger, *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*

**Asylum for the Homeless**

We have now come to a point where we see the center of Adorno's and Heidegger's questioning: according to Heidegger, the turn of things into objects is the result of a thinking centered on representation whereby Heidegger does not simply, as we learned from his Kant interpretation, understand representation as mental images; rather representation has to do with how thinghood is identified with a specific form of constancy and relatedness to subjectivity. Logos became a form of *Vorstellung*.<sup>1</sup> As we will soon see, Heidegger's reflection on technology add a more precise component to this mix, namely, the reduction of things to mere material and availability (in contrast to thinghood as the event of world-gathering). Thinking, as we now know, is not a subjective act for Heidegger; rather, it is the name for the "non-relation" and participation in Being. In our times thinking turned itself into a form of technology. Similarly, thinghood in Adorno is the result of "fixed" and non-dialectical object-relations; the main target of his critique is the ongoing attempt of intellectual endeavors to either establish a fixed self, subject, and ego; or to establish a fixed object, reality, data, nature, etc.<sup>2</sup> As we now know, these fixations and exclusions of the other and real experience are not only intellectual failures; rather, these philosophies are taken to *be* material (social) configurations. Transcendental philosophy, for example, is not simply the efflux and echo of the material social relations; rather, it is the *form* of these relations. Consequently, the materialism that Adorno presents in ND is an *immanent* materialism, namely, a materialism that cannot be interpreted as one that is opposed to idealism. Adorno's and Heidegger's philosophies are, as Adorno puts it in *Minima Moralia* (not commenting on Heidegger though, and echoing a phrase from Lukacs and Kracauer), "asylums for the homeless" (GS13, 42). Both Adorno and Heidegger assume that we are not *at home*, as we live in a reified and technological world. Both, and this point is important, claim that reification and technology are forms of metaphysics and ontology. Consequently, both Adorno and Heidegger ultimately are concerned with a form of thinking *beyond* metaphysics, though in very different ways.

**The overall thesis of this seminar**

[1] According to Adorno, the analysis of the relation between intuition (receptivity) and understanding (spontaneity) in Kant leads to the insight that the subjectivization of knowledge found in Kant equals the reification of subject and thinghood. Furthermore, the problem of the schematism returns in the

<sup>1</sup> The German terms are important, as Heidegger's term for enframing is "Gestell." "Stellen" means "to put."

<sup>2</sup> According to Heidegger's BT, the epistemological treatment of the world as natural things and material/form combinations have led to misconstructions of *Dasein* about itself and what it means to be in a world. For the relation between this point and Lukacs see Honneth, Axel, *Verdinglichung*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 31.

*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, namely, in the analysis of the culture industry. Adorno's and Horkheimer's thesis is that the culture industry has "taken over" and determines our experience. Accordingly, the real problem is how our faculty of imagination becomes "schematized" through the reified experience and no longer allows us to imagine the "other place" or the real alternative to the administered world. Experience and conceptual understanding is pre-determined and *framed* by our reified culture. [2] Similarly, according to Heidegger, the analysis of the relation between intuition and understanding leads to the insight that Kant presupposes a concept of thinghood that is based on *representation*. In combination with a modern form of instrumentality entities are no longer understood as "worldly" entities and, though Heidegger does not use the word, become *reified*. Though it seems as if Heidegger and Adorno address Kant as one of their enemies, we should underline that the full picture is more complex and ambivalent. Adorno implicitly returns to a Kantian mode of thinking, as he rejects the total conceptualization that Hegel had in mind. Similarly, Heidegger returns to Kant, as he sees in Kant the first and only serious non-Ancient attempt to think the *logos as finite*.

### **Adorno's ideal of philosophy: thinking in models**

In his commentary on the problem of schematism in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* Adorno mentions the following:

"The question we are concerned with here and that forced itself on Kant's attention in the Schematism chapter is the question of a discrepancy between a category and its object. He tried to resolve it by arguing that there was a kind of intermediate stage between intuition and concept, a kind of model or image. These models were models of what we are perceiving and enable us to recognize what we perceive" (KSPR 131)

Though Adorno does not extensively deal in his commentary with the *transcendental* function of the schematism, he does see that the mediation of intuition and concept leads to a concept of knowledge and cognition, in which *neither* the individual *nor* the universal alone are possible (and desirable); rather, the point is to bring both in a form of finite knowledge together. The problem of the schematism, hence, is for Adorno not simply a conceptual problem in Kant; rather, *all knowledge*, including philosophy itself, is the establishment of knowledge as a synthesis between intuition and concepts. We can translate this into Adorno's idea of the relation between concept and experience: thinking in, as he puts it in his early lecture, "constellations" means to produce *thought-images* as the ideal combination of something individual with something universal, which is the only way to a *concrete* philosophy. What we produce intellectually are ways in which we come up – in ideal – with the best combination of what is rooted in experience and what is rooted in the conceptual.<sup>3</sup> *Models* are those schemas of the world, and successful models will give us a "miniature" version of the world (or possible worlds). Furthermore, Adorno says in his *Negative Dialectics* the following:

"In the praxis of cognition, the resolution of the irresolvable, the moment of such transcendence of thought comes to light in that solely as a micrology does it employ macrological means. The demand for committalness [*Verbindlichkeit*] without system is that for thought-models. These are not of a merely monadological sort. The model strikes the specific and more than the specific, without dissolving it into its more general masterconcept. To think philosophically is so much as to think in models; negative dialectics is an ensemble of model-analyses" (ND 29)

As we can see, what Adorno called "constellation" and "image" in his 1931 inaugural lecture *The Actuality of Philosophy* (AP 32), reappears in the *Negative Dialectics*. He now calls it "being specific."

<sup>3</sup> We might consider whether theories that Adorno reject also produce those configurations: if it is true, for example, as Adorno claims, that our experience in our modern world becomes impoverished, then it must follow that either the conceptual level becomes impoverished, too, and thereby produces impoverished images (as, for example, in positivism), or the conceptual and the experiential fall apart and distort our knowledge of the world.

Something *becomes* specific if we transform it through conceptual activity into something that separates itself from other phenomena and in this way “flashes up” within the whole of theory and experience. He underlines the following about the structure of his *Negative Dialectics*:

“The third section then carries out models of negative dialectics. They are not examples; they do not simply illuminate general considerations. By leading towards what is relevant to the matter, they would like to simultaneously do justice to the substantive intention of what is at first dealt with generally, out of necessity, in contrast to the usage of examples as something indifferent in themselves, which Plato introduced and which philosophy has ever since merely repeated. While the models are supposed to clarify what negative dialectics would be, and to drive this latter, according to its own concept, into the realm of reality, they elucidate, not dissimilar to the so-called exemplary models, key concepts of philosophical disciplines, in order to centrally intervene in these” (ND XX)

Models, then, are the attempt to schematize experience and concepts in a way that allows us to *recognize the concept as the particular*. As Adorno outlines in his 1958 lecture course on dialectics, Husserl was already on the way towards such a thinking, as Husserl’s concept of essence is defined as that which makes something *that specific* something that it is, its *quidditas*. Adorno argues, though, that Husserl still defined the essence as a general concept of something. Against this he claims that the concept of “model” leads to the attempt to think something as something *specific* rather than as something *universal*. Dialectics means to shift knowledge away from the alternative of individual or universal.<sup>4</sup> Since schematism depends upon the faculty of imagination, we should do well to further investigate this topic. The hypothesis in this seminar is that the central function of the imagination is suppressed by philosophies that Adorno attacks and which, according to Adorno, partner up with the contemporary culture industry. The culture industry stands for any structure that schematizes our experience in a way that no longer allows us to see the “outside” of the administered world.

### What is a thing? Adorno’s Kant Interpretation

#### [1] First step: ontology

As I mentioned above, the overall framework within which Adorno and Heidegger interpret the *First Critique* is very similar. Both philosophers reject the Neo-Kantian claim (or what they conceive as such a claim) that Kant’s main work is either a theory of nature or an epistemology; rather, both claim that the real core of the whole work is metaphysical:

“The thrust of Kant’s philosophy as a whole – and that includes the really critical work, namely the *Critique of Reason* – is aimed at *salvaging*, and the salvaging of *ontology* in a quite specific sense. [...] I have in mind here the statement from the Preface of the Second Edition that ‘criticism is the necessary preparation for a thoroughly grounded metaphysics ... as science.’” (KCPR 85)

This metaphysical core of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is especially visible, according to Adorno, through its implicit reference to the Ancient difference between *to on* and *ta onta*, which Adorno calls the “ontological meaning” of Kant’s analysis. The categorical framework of beings for Adorno points, in Heidegger’s terms, to the difference between beings and Being:

“You can see here very clearly that, as the precondition of the possibility of knowledge in general, the Kantian concept of the *a priori* is not just to be understood in functional terms, that is, not just with reference to the constitution of knowledge, the grounding of experience. Over and above that, Kant ascribes a kind of ontological meaning, that is, a kind of ideal existence, to these root concepts, to the categories and forms of intuition, and it is this ideal existence that he is attempting to salvage.” (KCPR 86)

<sup>4</sup> For this, see the just published lecture course: Adorno, Theodor W., *Einführung in die Dialektik*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 2010, 239.

The possibility of knowledge, according to this take, depends upon an ontological framework that constitutes knowledge *as* knowledge. Knowledge can only *be* knowledge because it is held in place by what Adorno calls an “ideal existence,” namely, thinghood (as that which entities *are*) makes knowledge possible.

“This means, then, that the ontological difference has the meaning that *ta onta* are indeed constituted through the *on*, through pure existence, but that conversely, pure existence only acquires truth in so far as it relates to *ta onta*.” (KCPR 87)

[2] *Second step: things*

The “on” as the underlying “ideal existence” is interpreted by Adorno as the concept of the thing, which makes all references to something in the world possible:

“But it is quite obvious that the epitome of nature or of the world is a concept of the thing, that is, the supreme synthesis, the all-inclusive ensemble of all existing things in general.” (KCPM 94)

Since the pure concepts are called by Kant “categories” and since categories are the rules under which object reference can be thought, thinghood turns into the *lawfulness of experience*: “Kant’s answer to the problem of the thing can be summarized in the proposition that a thing is the law of its possible appearances” (KCPR 94). This insight is very important, as we should not confuse the thing or what a thing is with the synthesis of appearances or the synthesis of intuition and concepts in general; rather, the thing is identical with the *lawfulness* of the appearances as the latter’s condition of possibility. If experiences would not be “normative” and ruled, no unity and no object reference could be established. We can see that Kant returns to an Ancient theme: the fleeting character of the world would not allow us to refer to anything “objective,” stable, and fixed in it, if the fleetingness would not itself be identical or be based on the *ruled* forms of the world.

“In other words, he says that, looked at ontologically – that is, in terms of their absolute nature – there is no vast difference between the concept of laws and the concept of givens even though they lie at the opposite poles of knowledge. For just as I may not speak of a given without postulating a subject – in the absence of a subject all talk of a givens is meaningless – so too, at the other pole of the understanding, I may not speak of laws without presupposing an act of thinking that could be said to think those laws. For conformity with law is nothing other than thinking as such, that is, it is a logic (you might say) that necessarily refers back to thinking, and thus to a subject. According to Kant, then, it is in this sense that it is no paradox to ascribe the objectivity of things to the subject, because the guarantee of that objectivity is nothing but the fact of laws, and we can speak of laws only as the laws of our thoughts.” (KCPR 99)

Since the categories and pure determinations of the thing are determinations of thought, Adorno points out that Kant is unable to avoid falling back into an absolute idealism:

“this unity of consciousness is conceived as the correlative of the unity of the thing, the unity of the object. That is to say, the mechanisms that Kant represents as the truly transcendental mechanisms, those which provide the foundations for subjective unity, are indistinguishable in reality from those which enable us to perceive things, objective existent beings, as identical objects.” (KCPR 94)

Since the unity of consciousness hangs on the transcendental apperception as a *logical* unity, the lawfulness of the thing is ultimately identical with the unity of consciousness itself. The condition of the possibility for experiencing *something* in the (fleeting) world is the unity of consciousness as the lawfulness of things. Thinghood, according to Adorno’s interpretation, is, consequently, identical with reification; for the fixed and stable character of the thing turns out to be identical with the fixed and stable character of the subject: “reification,” as Adorno puts it, “is a function of subjectivization. In other words, the more subjectivization you have, the more reification there is” (KCPM 114).

*[3] Third step: subject and object, subjectivity as objectivity, subjectivization as reification*

The most important step within Adorno's interpretation of Kant, which separates him finally from Heidegger's approach to Kant, is his claim that the dialectical relation between subject and object in Kant depends upon the *activity of the subject*. The materialist interpretation of the *First Critique* would not be understandable if we would not assume that the subject is active, for only the definition of subjectivity as – ultimately – *labor*, allows Adorno to see it as a dialectic between subject and nature: "the world, reality as a whole, is turned into a product, in fact, the product of *labor*, of effort" (KCPM 115). This relation between subject and object is, for sure, paradoxical, for, on the one hand, the subject seems to *construct* the identity of the thing (as lawfulness), on the other hand, the subject thereby turns into a fixed form itself. In addition, as Adorno claims in the footsteps of Lukacs, "the livelier the subject becomes, the deader the world becomes. We might talk here of the 'commodity character' of the world, whose rigidity and inflexibility keeps increasing thanks to this process." (KCPM 115). What *seems* to be the "spontaneity" of the subject is *in reality* the absolute inflexibility of the subject (and, consequently, things, too). This paradox is then further interpreted by Adorno as the "essential antinomy of bourgeois society in general" (KCPM 115). On the one hand, the world becomes increasingly dependent upon activities of the subject and has been transformed into a world that is made by subjects; on the other hand, the world that we create increasingly dominates ourselves, as with every activity the independent object-character of the world increases. Every domination of the object, according to Adorno, leads, hence, to a domination of the subject. The subject determines itself through the fixation of the object (by which we now mean both subject and object). Consequently, the poles of knowledge and object of knowledge move further away from each other. Let us next week see how Heidegger approaches the same topic.

**Questions**

Jeez... No.