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## Introduction to the inaugural issue of Adorno Studies

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## Editorial Introduction

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WE founded the Association for Adorno Studies in December of 2011 with the aim of providing a forum for scholarly research treating Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno as a thinker of deep contemporary relevance, indeed, importance. Our contention was, and continues to be, that the theoretical rigor and interdisciplinary scope that characterizes Adorno's output makes his work an essential resource for formulating a critical understanding of and plausible response to late capitalism and the broadly neo-liberal framework that currently dominates the globe.

The first issue of *Adorno Studies* comes at the close of a year that contains the kinds of historical events that seem engineered to prove this point: growing anti-immigrant sentiment and the concomitant rise of (neo-)fascisms across Europe and North America; increasing isolationism and religious and cultural fundamentalism in Europe, India, and America; the 're-branding' of white supremacy and nationalism across the globe, but especially in the United States of America and Europe; a deeply perplexing and violent situation unfolding in Turkey and the Middle East; the instability and potential collapse of the European Union as it has been known; the election of Donald Trump as the President of the United States after a campaign centering on xenophobia, misogyny, and white supremacy; the deaths of pop luminaries such as Prince and David Bowie; the (re-)emergence of Russia as a global threat, capable of tampering with elections across the globe; growing global and local economic disparity; increasingly alarming climate change that threatens our very survival as a species; and, perhaps most tragically and recently, the inability of the global left to take a unified position on the genocide unfolding in Aleppo. All of these are contemporary, genealogically rich, and highly mediated phenomena that Adorno's thought might help us to address, whether practically or theoretically, or both.

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Adorno's oeuvre exhibits an intimidatingly strong yet unique grasp of aesthetics and modern music and literature; social, political, and critical theory; popular culture; and the gamut of Western philosophical and theoretical traditions, ranging across streams from German Idealism to romanticism, existentialism to phenomenology, Aristotle to Heidegger, and much in between. His multivalent inquiry and analysis holds much promise for contemporary efforts to think through existent relations between humans, animals, objects, structures, and ideas, and provides a negative image of a potentially transformed world in which these relations would be improved. Because Adorno was a uniquely multi- and interdisciplinary thinker, his philosophy has been taken up within a variety of discourses including but not limited to—as it would be impossible to form an exhaustive list—musicology, literary studies, political thought, Jewish studies, aesthetics, anthropology, epistemology, social criticism, cultural criticism, education, psychoanalysis, and ethics.

We formed the Association for Adorno Studies in order to create a venue that would allow scholars from all of these subject areas to come together to discuss their common interest in the philosophy of Theodor W. Adorno. In this regard (and many others besides) we are pleased to be able to say that the association has proved to be a great success. The annual meetings of the Association for Adorno Studies have given participants the opportunity to discuss Adorno's work across a wide array of disciplines and have served for many as an opportunity to broaden and deepen their own engagement with Adorno's philosophy. It is in this spirit of fostering a "utopia of thought" drawing upon the strength of diversity that we offer this journal to a wider public. It is our hope and belief that *Adorno Studies* will serve as a virtual hub linking Adorno scholars who are geographically dispersed and/or artificially separated by disciplinary bounds.

In the coming months and years, we intend for this journal to disseminate Adorno scholarship covering a wide variety of concerns; we welcome submissions that consider Adorno's own intellectual engagements, but also those that combine a consideration of Adorno's thought with the works of other thinkers, contemporary or otherwise. The journal will remain not-for-profit, open-access, and will be published digitally, thereby allowing for the widest possible dispersion of the items published herein. In addition to these traditional, well-worn paths of Adorno scholarship, we hope to encourage the production of articles—or possibly even novel forms of scholarship or thought—that employ or are inspired by Adorno's insights towards analyses of contemporary events, indeed perhaps even as they occur. *Towards both of these ends, we invite readers to propose guest edited issues or potential other forms of collaboration;* indeed, we welcome the opportunity to push the boundaries of Adorno scholarship and its possibilities, and thereby—we believe—possibilities of human knowledge and being together.

On that note, let us say that as essentially a two-person operation with limited support, have had to develop new skills and widen our technical knowledge base in order to bring this journal into existence; this endeavor was not easy and took a great deal longer than either of us expected it to. For this reason, we would like to take this opportunity to express deep gratitude to the contributors to this first issue for their patience and support. We would also like to thank our spouses and families for the essential support they have provided throughout this project. We would also like to take this opportunity to express our thanks for all of the support we have received from our friends and colleagues in the Association for Adorno Studies; to those who have presented at the association's meetings, and to those esteemed colleagues who have agreed to sit on our editorial board. Thank you also to Felicia Holcomb and Amy Milakovic and Avila University for copyediting.

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Finally, thanks to Petra Hardt and Suhrkamp Verlag for permission to publish a translation of “Thesen über Bedürfnis.”

As noted, five years ago, we invited a group of Adorno scholars to meet at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore with the intention of forming an international association for Adorno Studies. That first meeting set the tone for what has become both an intellectually challenging and collegial annual meeting at which members present ground-breaking works in progress on the thought of Theodor W. Adorno, and a supportive network of scholarly colleagues. For this first issue of *Adorno Studies*, we present a selection of some of the papers presented at the annual meetings of the Association over the course of the last five years, alongside new contributions from Deborah Cook and Max Pensky, as well as Martin Shuster’s and Iain Macdonald’s translation of Adorno’s 1942 text, “Thesen über Bedürfnis” (Theses on Need).

Adorno’s “Theses on Need” constitute a sort of micrological exploration of many of the themes explored in the essays included in the issue: aesthetics, life and death, politics and the social, and, of course, the nature of reason. Alastair Morgan’s contribution to this issue considers the contemporary turn towards the object as evidenced in the work of Graham Harman and Bruno Latour, both of whom attempt to dethrone the subject and its representational / conceptual powers. Morgan concludes, despite Harman and Latour’s claims to the contrary, that any turn to the object must include a consideration of the conceptualizing activities of the subject. What is necessary now, Morgan argues, is a materialist critique of the constitutive subject that, following Adorno’s own dictum, proceeds through a “preponderance of the object”. In a slightly different vein, Pierre-François Noppen subjects Adorno’s claim that reason operates by way of mimesis to critical scrutiny. Adorno has often been misinterpreted as implying that “instrumental reason” needs to

be supplemented with the mimetic impulse that has been exorcised from it. But in the essay published here, Noppen argues convincingly that Adorno’s point is that we must remain highly aware of the element of mimesis in all reason — and this is perhaps most especially important in the case of instrumental reason – where it is at its most heavily disguised. Tying Noppen’s argument back to Morgan’s, one might make the case that Adorno would find precisely this very fault with both Harman’s and Latour’s attempts to debunk human domination as myth without addressing the conditions that continue to make human domination the norm.

The remaining papers included in this volume are quite diverse in terms of their content and argumentation, but they share a single concern: the outlining of what might be termed Adorno’s “utopian moment.” Surti Singh’s essay describes the utopian internal organization of the modern work of art. Employing Adorno’s own terminology, Singh argues that it is the work’s “radical spiritualization” that allows for “a non-dominating stance towards otherness”. Deborah Cook’s paper asserts the importance of determinate negation for Adorno’s social critique – and thereby demonstrates a Marxian utopian element within Adorno’s “inverse theology” as the attempt to provide a glimpse of the earthy conditions that promise the possibility of happiness in the here and now. The faint glimmer of this utopian moment arises again in Max Pensky’s paper, wherein Adorno’s assertion that it is impossible to have a meaningful death today, given the “wrong life” offered up by the contemporary world, is opened up to reveal the possibility of a good death under transformed conditions. Iain Macdonald describes Adorno’s “modal utopianism” as a critique and, at least in part, a rejection of Hegel’s theory of actuality. By expanding the field of possibility beyond Hegel’s conception of it, Macdonald argues that Adorno “sketches a revised dialectical theory of modality.”

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It strikes us as incredibly appropriate to launch *Adorno Studies*—especially with this batch of strong research—in the first days of 2017, a year full of possibility, yet already shadowed by the brutality of 2016. We look forward to publishing future research and work relating to Adorno—broadly, generously, and promiscuously conceived.

January 2, 2017

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