

Adorno's Aesthetics of Illusion

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Culture history, to be sure, increases the weight of the treasure which accumulates on the back of humanity. Yet cultural history does not provide the strength to shake off this burden in order to be able to take control of it.

Walter Benjamin¹

“The dialectic of modern art to a large extent is such that it seeks to shake off its illusory character, as an animal sometimes seems to want to shake off its antlers.”

T. W. Adorno²

In order to read Adorno's Aesthetic Theory as a weighty defense of modern art,³ we must understand modernism according to what he describes as its "crisis of illusion." But prior to formulating an explanation of illusion's crisis we require an exposition of illusion itself.

Aesthetic illusion is not an appendage of an artwork, as if an artwork presented itself as something *and* also evoked or provided an illusion to accompany itself, but is rather its very mode of existence. Illusion is the defining characteristic of artworks. An artwork is an artwork just so far as it pretends to be something which it is not. But what is it that artworks pretend to be? In answering this question, all discussions of art as representational, or artworks as symbolizing or referring, fall by the wayside; what artworks pretend to be are coherent, meaningful, unified wholes—in a word, they pretend to being-in-itself. The illusion of art is that it is non-artifactual. The illusory quality of art conceals the artwork's material, historical production. (And yet I hope to show later that illusion is not simply an evanescent act of concealment.)

Adorno's characterization of the source of illusion is the product of a subtle yet profound shift away from the traditional philosophical characterization of illusion's sensuous source. "This view of illusion goes back to the ancient theory of Plato and Aristotle that ranged illusion and the empirical world on one side and essence or pure spirit as true being on the other."⁴ Adorno finds this same arrangement in Hegel's notion of beauty as the sensuous appearance of the Idea. The shift which Adorno proceeds to effect locates illusion not in the phenomenal appearance of art but at its spiritual essence. Although the illusory moment of art has its source in the artwork's spiritual aspect, we cannot blame spirit *per se* for illusion. "If spirit is conceived as a separate, independent, and fundamentally intangible entity, it has an illusory quality; in other words, if one views it in isolation from bodily being one elevates a non-existent abstraction to the status of an existent."⁵ I shall forestall a discussion of the correct conception of spirit and its relation to art until we have considered meaning and its relation to illusion.

Meaning is what appears through illusion as the content of an artwork. Meaning is the "vehicle of illusion" because, although artworks "possess coherent meaning," their claim that meaning is present in them is false and therefore illusory. Meaning, in other words, is the illusory content of art. Meaning, as the vehicle of illusion, generates the coherence of a work of art; it is the agent of integration and unification. As an agent, however, meaning does not manifest itself within the artwork except as the vehicle of its integration and thus of its coming-to-be. The falsification or illusion occurs when the artwork proclaims that

meaning—its agent of unification—is not an agent or catalyst but is instead its content. The artwork proclaims meaning to be its static existent possession, which exaggerates the artwork so as to elevate it to an in-itself. "Still, the essence of meaning is not synonymous with illusion; it is more. Above all, the meaning of a work of art is also the summoning to appearance of an essence that is otherwise hidden in empirical reality."⁶ The positive aspect of meaning, in other words, needs to be disentangled from the negative sway of illusion.

Adorno states that a "certain sadness" or grief accompanies all works of art because of the pervasive entanglement of meaning and illusion. Artworks provoke a certain sadness and indeed they themselves seem to grieve because whenever meaning manifests itself as present in them it is not without the concomitant knowledge that illusion is near at hand. "Without using words, art works flash a message to the effect that 'it is', against background that says 'it is not'..."⁷ When meaning seeks to redeem the essence hidden in empirical reality by making that essence appear, this act is not a positive function of meaning but is rather an attempt by illusion to present the unrepresentable. Although this attempted redemption of essence gives birth to illusion, it is nonetheless, in the dialectical schema of the artwork, a positive development. As Adorno puts it: "Even as art complains that the concealed essence which it summons into appearance is really non-essence, an absent essence or possibility is being posited by it negatively."⁸ We shall return to this positive development through illusion below.

There is one other aspect of the artwork whose seemingly negative role is transformable into a potentially positive development for knowledge. Here I am alluding to the manner in which the artwork qua artifact works against itself, (Adorno has it that, "Every artifact works against itself."⁹) What is peculiar to artistic artifacts is that their manner of coming to be negates the very claim to existence that they propagate. That is, there is a fundamental schism between the artworks genesis and its identity-claim. That artworks genesis is best explained as the strategic methods of integration and unification carried out by meaning. The artwork identifies itself, however, as a being-in-itself. Still, coherence of meaning and unity are not separate existents—they are artificial products of meaning and as such, "they negate the being-in-itself which was to have been accomplished through this strategy of making."¹⁰ Art's illusory presentation of itself as immediacy or being-in-itself is negated by the fact that the means of this presentation are themselves merely constructs.

The crisis of illusion that typifies modern art can be construed as the crisis of art in general to the extent to which illusion has been embedded in art. Adorno believes illusion has been embedded in Western art throughout its entire history. In modernism what makes illusion a crisis-provoking phenomenon, and further, what causes illusion itself to undergo a crisis, is precisely the self-conscious manner in which art attempts to outwit illusion. Two examples will suffice to show Adorno's meaning here; Adorno criticizes the "so-called artistic happening" by considering it not to be the product of genuine art-making but rather the result of purposive rationality. Artistic happenings maybe the result of an artistic concern with the function and place of illusion in art, but what

displaces these happenings from the realm of art is, according to Adorno, the way in which their search for artistic purity leads them to ignore completely the necessity of illusion. So although certain artistic happenings (and here we may include the more recent term; performance art) may be politically correct, they are nonetheless through and through bad art. The aesthetic literalness which pervades these contemporary attempts to disgorge illusion from art are, for Adorno, a renewed attempt at naturalism and are therefore subject to the same criticisms which eventually overthrew nineteenth century Naturalism.

A second example, indeed symptom, of the crisis of illusion in modern art is the phenomenon known as "accidental art." Accidental art attempts to outwit illusion by reducing the activity of art making to blind chaos. The intention here is to integrate contingent particulars into the artwork without recourse to a previously formulated harmony. Accidental art fails to overcome illusion because it has failed to satisfactorily confront illusion. What it has done instead is simply substitute a more or less uncontrolled illusion-generating mechanism for a more or less controlled one without impinging at all on the dynamic of illusion production.

The failure of the above two attempts to dislodge illusion from art points to the need for a broader conception of the historical predominance of illusion in art. If the crisis of illusion is but the most recent manifestation of the crisis of art we ought then to characterize the latter crisis according to what Adorno describes as the paradox of aesthetics, "namely, how the act of making can cause the apparition of a thing that is not made; how something can be true which is not true in terms of its own concept."¹¹

Now one of the concepts which artworks have tried continuously to live up to and have just as continuously failed to achieve is harmony. Harmony is an illusory concept of the artwork. "Harmony presents something as actually reconciled which is not."¹² We might say that harmony fails to live up to its own concept. Harmony, in other words, contains dissonance within itself. Thus what we see when we look at the history of art is the dialectic of harmony and dissonance manifested in the guise of artworks. However, since this dialectical unfolding takes place within the confines of the false and coercively imposed concept of harmony, it is harmony along with dissonance which requires overcoming. So it is that Adorno writes, "The emancipation from the concept of harmony turns out to be a revolt against illusion."¹³ Authentic works of modern art attempt this emancipation as a negation of illusion. Thus illusion *and* art are in crisis because art attempts to overcome its heretofore defining characteristic.

Earlier I characterized the crisis of illusion as a result of a particular misconception of spirit. The misconception which is responsible for illusion's crisis is one which hypostatizes spirit. This is in fact Adorno's criticism of Hegelian aesthetics. Adorno takes Hegel to be correct in identifying spirituality as the vital element in art. Adorno also agrees with Hegel that spirit manifests itself in art as opposition. Adorno and Hegel differ, however, when they come to distinguish what it is that spirit opposes, and further, whether the opposition of spirit and its other is reconcilable.

Hegel has it that spirit initially opposes materiality. This opposition, however, is but a superficial one, for spirit and materiality are reconciled within the artwork as objectified spirit. A criticism here is that the artwork exists as nothing more than a reification of spirit and as such ceases to have any negative character. Adorno agrees that what animates the artwork is spirit, but Adorno argues that as a spiritual entity the artwork necessarily exists as a negation, not of the Hegelian materiality, but instead, of socially constructed empirical reality ("Art is the social antithesis of society"¹⁴). If therefore the artwork's oppositional or negative power comes to be reconciled with reified empirical reality, the artwork is no longer spiritual and thus no longer art but instead becomes merely another reified commodity. And we have observed that it is precisely this misconception of spirit which has given rise to illusion.

The question of spirituality in art now revolves around what is to be regarded as the correct conception of spirit. If spirit is not to be construed as a reified existent (which would simultaneously signal the dispelling of illusion in art) we must then ask after the source and genesis of spirit. For Adorno, spirit is not the cause of art nor is it the locale wherein art making (or appreciating, consuming, et al.) takes place, but is rather a product of the artwork itself. That spirit animates art means that spirit comes to be through the artwork and spirit comes to be as an artwork. This latter characterization betrays Adorno's contention: to say that spirit comes to be as an artwork is already to reify spirit, which is precisely the conception of spirit he wishes to overcome. The difficulty here is that if we recognize spirit as the integral aspect or moment of the artwork and yet wish to avoid the reification of spirit. We must also then, to some extent, avoid the reification of the artwork precisely because of spirit's intimate association with it.

The horns of this dilemma are as follows: on the one side is the problem of identifying the artwork with spirit which would mean to fall prey to the illusory intent of the artwork, which seeks to conceal its materiality (history) and true meaning. The other horn of this dilemma is the unmistakable objective character of artworks. We cannot ignore that artworks manifest themselves as objects in the world. It becomes apparent through this dilemma that it is not only a misconception of spirit that fuels the crisis of art but also that a correct conception of spirit requires a recognition of the objective character of art. We become aware, in other words, of the dialectic of art.

Access to Adorno's version of the dialectic of art is easiest through a consideration of the dialectical schema he imposes consisting of the dichotomy between objectification and appearance. Adorno ranges objectification and reification on the one side against phenomenality and appearance on the other. Adorno's conception of phenomenality or appearance is Hegelian: a phenomenon is the appearance of the noumenal; appearance is the shining forth or laying bare of essence. Adorno's conception of objectification or reification is taken from Lukács: it is the process of heterogeneous structuration and composition. The role of spirit in this schema is as follows: "Spirit shares in objectification no less than in phenomenality, the contrary of objectification."¹⁵ This statement is

applicable only to artworks, for artworks are the only things that are both phenomenal and objective.

But we have yet to say what the correct conception of spirit is, or in other words, what the true place of spirit is in art. Adorno has it that, "the place of spirit in art is the configuration of appearing qualities."¹⁶ We know too that spirit in art negates empirical social reality. If spirit is manifested as a negation through a configuration of an artwork's appearing qualities, we can conclude that spirit gives form to appearance. It is in this light that we ought to consider the following passages: "The instant of appearance in works of art (this instant is the work of art) is the paradoxical union or balance between a vanishing and a preserving tendency, for art works are static and dynamic at the same time."¹⁷ And, "The work of art is both a process and an instant. Its objectification, while a necessary condition of aesthetic autonomy, is also a petrifying tendency."¹⁸ The crux of the paradox here is that art "appears" as an objectification while simultaneously it opposes the act of objectification. This is the intent behind Adorno's statements to the effect that art is something which cannot be true in terms of its own concept and the paradox as to how something made can appear as an in-itself.

Art, seen in this light, is an indictment of the "fetishization" apparent in objectification. Adorno's complaint here is against the fetishistic character of objectification which ossifies what ought to be seen as a process between moments. Adorno finds the cause of this "fetishization" within domination. Here we find an important link between the social dialectic and the aesthetic one. The latter is both art capitulation and a negation of the former. The social dialectic takes place as the relationship between nature and its domination. The instrument of domination is objectification. Nature is conquered through the human petrification of it. Nature does not "appear" to society except as a "fetishized" product.

The dialectic of art, as recapitulation of the social dialectic, is somewhat more complicated. The simple dichotomy between appearance and objectification is confounded by the dual character of the artwork. That is, the objectification of the artwork is the artwork's appearance, and conversely, its appearance, by definition, takes place as objectification. If we continue to understand appearance as the unmediated phenomenal appearance of the noumenal, then the artwork's objective character is indeed a part of its immanent unfolding. So too the objectification of an artwork is part and parcel of its essence. (Spirit, we recall, springs into existence when these various aspects assume a particular configuration.)

This intricate, and perhaps precarious, dialectic of art is thrown off balance when the social dialectic overwhelms it. An example of this is harmony. Adorno presents harmony as the attempt to dominate an artwork's coming-to-be through the imposition of form. If harmony succeeds in penetrating the genesis of an art work it displaces the artwork's immanent form achieved by spirit with a falsely imposed one. And Adorno thinks that artworks, throughout their entire history, have struggled against domination in the form

of harmony. If harmony succeeds in its attempt to dominate the artwork through its imposition of form, the resulting artwork is reduced to a reified object.

We need to distinguish here two distinct species of objectification. On the one hand there is the reification of the artwork which the social dialectic carries out as domination through the imposition of harmony. This sort of reification, if successful, reduces artworks to the same status as every other socially produced object. Adorno refers to the contemporary institutionalization of this process as the "culture industry," which leads him further to make the pronouncement that, "the more the social labour embodied in an art work becomes objectified and organized, the more it sounds empty and alien to the work."¹⁹

The second sort of objectification is that which we have already discussed as being immanent to the artwork's unfolding. This latter sort of objectification is an echo of the former. What prohibits this echo from achieving a complete objectification of the artwork is the existence and negative thrust of spirit within the artwork.

We ought now to confront the schizophrenic core of spirit's life. The schizophrenia comes to the fore when we consider Adorno's remark that spiritualization is itself a kind of domination. This characterization flies in the face of the exposition of spirit we have just presented. We have until now understood spirit as the vital force which comes to be through a particular configuration of appearing qualities in the artwork. Now we must attempt to see spirit as not just a product of these qualities but also as a force which congeals particular moments of an artwork into a whole. That is, we must come to see active spirit as the instrument of objectification in the artwork. Further, spirit achieves this objectification through a domination of the artwork's aspects that is modeled on the social domination of nature. Spirit, we might say, is the master of what we referred to above as the second sort of objectification. Spirit is the agent which effects the transition, indeed transfiguration, of appearance into objectification.

Spirit re-dominates individual particulars of an already objectified world and in so doing liberates them. We can speak of this liberation or emancipation as redemption. Spirit redeems petrified sedimented moments of the objective world. Here it seems we should change our above conclusion regarding spirit to read not that spirit transfigures appearance into objectification but rather that spirit transfigures objectification into appearance.

It is difficult to characterize spirit's activity correctly because of the obscure nature of the material upon which spirit works. Insofar as spirit re-dominates we conclude that the appearing qualities of an artwork, which are the stuff of spirit's coming-to-be, are already dominated and thus objectified existents. On the other hand we characterized spirit as marking the transition from appearance to objectification. "Appearance" here clearly denotes a predominated, non-objectified quality. Thus spirit works upon, and is a product of, the non-objectified.

The correct analysis of spirit's schizophrenic activity revolves around spirit's schizophrenic pre-history. Spirit's pre-history occurs in objectification. The potential for emancipation of the objectified world resides within the very same objectified world. This is due to the necessarily incomplete nature of the process of objectification. Nothing is fully objectified, or put differently, anything that is fully objectified retains within it an unfulfilled or unexpressed appearance. It is these uncompleted appearing qualities which spirit emancipates as negation of their objectifying enslavers. The spiritual activity of redeeming these concealed qualities of objects takes place as art. "The phenomenon of fireworks can be viewed as a prototype of art...Fireworks are apparitions par excellence. They are an empirical appearance free of the burden of empirical being in general, which is that it has duration; they are a sign of heaven and yet artefactual; they are both a writing on the wall, rising and fading away in short order, and yet not a writing that has any meaning we can make sense of."²⁰

But here we must ask after the content of this redemption which, in this context, is the same as asking after the content of the artwork. This brings us full circle to face squarely the crisis of illusion, because when we ask after the content of an artwork we find that only the content which illusion prescribes. Thus the full redemption of the non-objective translates into what Adorno terms the "redemption of illusion," which would signal the resolution of illusion's crisis.

"Aesthetic illusion seeks to redeem what the active spirit, which brought about the artefacts or vehicles of illusion, has reduced to materials dominated by itself. In so doing, however, illusion turns the object of redemption into a dominated object, if not an object of its ownmaking."²¹ Adorno completes this passage by concluding that the redemption of illusion cannot take place as redemption through illusion. That is, illusion per se is powerless to affect its own redemption. The agent of redemption must therefore be spirit since spirit goes beyond the production of illusion. As he writes, "Yet spirit is not only illusion but also truth. It is not only the delusion of being-in-itself, but also the negation of all false claims to being-in-itself."²² This is the place at which spirit plays its all-important role. Spirit negates the artwork's (and its own) illusory claim. Still, we cannot construe spirit's success here beyond a negative dialectical framework; we cannot conclude that spirit's machinations issue in a positive content. But we can conclude that spirit achieves a positive development. This is the meaning of Adorno's conclusion that, "Therefore the illusory character of art is simultaneously its *methexis* [participation] in truth."²³

Spirit negatively posits a potentiality or absent essence. We have seen this dynamic performed by meaning. We recall that meaning can be truly present only in a negative manner. This analysis of spirit corroborates my statement that illusion is not merely an evanescent act of concealment but that it provides the illusory ground against which spirit may potentially negate all false claims.

We have still to consider illusion's antithesis. Adorno ranges expression and dissonance on one side against consonance, harmony, and illusion on the other. Expression existed

prior to illusion. In fact we might say that illusion came about as the attempt to dominate and transform expression. Aesthetic illusion consists of the objectification of expression. Adorno likes to say that this objectification creates a "second non-objective substance." This means that, as we put it earlier, objectification is never entirely successful, that a redeemable residue remains. This non-objective objectification speaks, according to Adorno, out of the artifact rather than out of the subject. So although the objectification was carried out under subjective impulses something non-subjective remains. Still, there is no content to express.

Expression in art does not "express something," and thus expression opposes conceptualization. This lack of content and conceptualization, coupled with the notion of something which nonetheless "speaks," gives rise to the questions of what it is that speaks and what is its language. Adorno distinguishes two kinds of language here: the one communicative and the other mimetic. His notion of mimetic language is derived from the mimetic aspect of art and the mimetic faculty of the artist. (Adorno considers Joyce an artist who attempted the transition from communicative to mimetic language.) True mimesis takes place as the release of an expressed substance (these expressive substances exist today only as sedimentation).

Mimesis is best understood not as an aping or imitation but as assimilation. Dialectic of Enlightenment offers Mauss and Hubert's conception of mimesis: "L'un est le tout, tout est dans l'un, la nature triomphe de la nature."²⁴ But the assimilation which the artwork attempts through the instrument of mimesis stops short of complete identity. Indeed, one of Adorno's fundamental characterizations of art is that the identity it affects is an identity which assists the non-identical (here, too, complete domination is thwarted).

"The language of expression is older than its significative counterpart; it is also unredeemed. It is as if artworks were re-enacting the process through which the subject comes painfully into being ... Art possesses expression not when it conveys subjectivity, but when it reverberates with the primal history of subjectivity and ensoulment."²⁵ Although Adorno has it that expression has no content, he nonetheless states that expression is always expression of suffering—which coincides with his statement above regarding artworks as there capitulation of the painful birthing of subjectivity. Artworks, as the embodiments of the mimetic impulse, don't "say" anything and yet they have a linguistic character. This linguistic character is particularly difficult to characterize since it stands as an antithesis to significative communicative language. Perhaps it is helpful here to consider what Adorno takes to be expression's intent when it is manifested in art. Expression's intent is dualistic and mildly contradictory. On the one hand it seeks a trans-subjectivity by producing a kind of knowledge that recalls a state of existence prior to the dichotomy of subject and object. This act of recollection would in turn serve to negate the sway of the subject/object polarity. "On the other hand, expression is secular in that it tries to attain this kind of knowledge in the unredeemed state of polarity through a cognitive act of spirit qua spirit for itself."²⁶ Adorno refers to this contradictory intent as the Herculean task of trying to force mute Nature to speak.

There is a complication that arises in the consideration of the dynamic that we have thus far characterized in terms of expression, mimesis, objectification, and illusion. This complication occurs as a result of complications that take place in the history of subjectivity, and we must recognize these complications if we are to construe artworks, with Adorno, as reenactments of the subject's coming-to-be. What we need to recognize is how the mimetic faculty, which provides the means by which the subject occasions the expression of a substance as the artwork, is transformed historically. Mimesis is the vehicle of expression and yet this vehicle changes shape due to the various manifestations of the enduring tension between expression and illusion. Illusion comes historically to "infiltrate" the mimetic mode of behavior, and further, this infiltration is so extensive that mimesis develops into a virtual tool of illusion, Adorno even speaks of an "archaic taboo" on mimesis, and he means by that the stifling of expression and non-dominating assimilation by the subject. What makes the historically growing pervasiveness of the mimetic taboo ironic is that its strength increases alongside the purported "development" of subjectivity, and thus we are left with the rather paradoxical emasculation of the subject in the midst of what appears to be the increasing subjectification and concomitant objectification of the world.

"Aesthetic externalization into the work of art presupposes not a weak, adaptable ego, but a strong and autonomous one, which alone can see itself in its true light, breaking through its limitations in illusion. This is impossible to conceive as long as the mimetic moment is being repressed from outside by a conformist aesthetic superego, whereas it should be sublated in the objectified tension between itself and its opposite."²⁷ What we are witnessing, in other words, is the extinction of that species of subjectivity which could provide the only locus for redemption. As this strain of subjectivity dies off so too does the possibility for art as the last refuge for spirit's coming-to-be. This would simultaneously signal the end of any negative response to socially constructed reality and socially deformed subjectivity. The subject is to reach the stage in which it has no means to articulate itself.

In order for the crisis of illusion to achieve its resolution as a redemption carried out by spirit, adequate subjects are required to serve as the "hands" of spirit in art. But the possibility for this sort of subjectivity is thwarted by the taboo on mimetic behavior, which, in turn, gives rise to increasingly inadequate subjects.

In order to combat this development, the mimetic taboo (behind which lies a sexual one) requires stronger subjects to oppose it. "Tagging along behind its reification, the subject limits that reification through the mimetic vestige, the plenipotentiary of an integral life amid a damaged life where the subject is being reduced to an ideology."²⁸ The notion of "stronger" subjects translates here into a vision of subjects who lead a more coherent and richer internal life, indeed who have any internal life at all, compared to the "weaker" ones. Adorno is not unaware of the negative connotations which "inwardness" carries today. He does not intend to promote this debased type of inwardness which is, "a blatant ideology, a mock image of an inner realm in which the silent majority tries to get compensation for what it misses out on in society."²⁹ What he means instead by

inferiority or inwardness is the location in which the aesthetically necessary negation of the in-itself (claimed here by the artwork) takes place. He illustrates this by contrasting Beethoven and jazz music. Beethoven's music allows an internal return of an experience of external life whereas jazz cannot achieve this internal return but exists solely as a "somatic stimulus."

There are two questions which arise here: the first is in regard to the status of the artwork. That is, should we attribute jazz's failure at achieving an internal return to jazz music or to the subjects who listen to it? Secondly, we must ask after the appropriateness of Adorno's model of internal return here. To answer the latter question first: the journey of an experience of external life from external life through an inner return is better known as sublimation. Adorno is well aware that sublimation is through and through a repressive act. But his use of the notion of sublimation has a clear affinity to his description of spirit's act of re-dominating a previously objectified thing. What remains questionable is Adorno's reliance on the psychological model of sublimation. However, this is not the appropriate place for an evaluation of this.³⁰

To return to the question regarding the attribution of failure—it seems that an adequate response must include an assessment of what I alluded to above as the positive development that spirit achieves through artwork. I described that achievement as the redemption of sedimented aspects of life, which serves in turn as the articulation of genuine subjectivity. Since it is artworks alone, in the modern world, that function as the vehicles of the ongoing articulation and eventual emancipation of subjectivity, we ought then to construe artworks according to their potential or actual truth content. However, a consideration of the artwork along this line enmeshes us in a web of contradictory assertions. To begin, there is the difficulty, already discussed, of the necessarily illusory result of any ascription of content to the artwork. To assert that the artwork has a content would be to succumb to the artwork's own illusory stratagem, which is of course, initially, a falsification. Similarly, to assert the possession of a truth content by the artwork would reduce the status of an artwork to that of a mere means for subjectivity, which nullifies the negative thrust of an artwork against the identity-mongering sway of objectification and socialization.

But Adorno wants it both ways: he has it that the artwork both contains and does not contain a truth content, by which he perhaps means that truth content is a potentiality unlocked by philosophical reflection. But the existence of this potentiality cannot be construed according to a Hegelian conception that understands potentiality as an immanent possession. On the other hand, it is not an accidental potentiality since this potentiality is allowed for structurally by the incomplete nature of the processes of objectification and domination.

If we turn to consider what sort of philosophical reflection unlocks an artwork's truth content, we shall find that we cannot understand the result of this philosophical reflection as a positive content but instead merely as a positive development, because the work of art (and the philosophical reflection which completes it) cannot issue in a discursive

product but instead can only produce a positive move as a negation of, or break with, itself. "Truth cancels the artwork along with its illusion. The definition of art in terms of illusion is only half correct: art is true to the degree to which it is an illusion of the non-illusory (Schein des Scheinlosen). In the last analysis, to experience art is to recognize that its truth content is not null and void."³¹ In order for this last analysis to take place—an analysis which experiences art as a final recognition of its genuine truth content—philosophy is necessary. Art, in order to be completed, must be moved beyond itself by philosophy because art's truth content is not just its own possession but also participates in history. This final movement takes place as thought. "Truth content is the crystallization, in art works, of history,"³² Artworks, in and of themselves, cannot provide the final unpacking of this crystallization. However, the philosophy that does complete the artwork is not an unpacking but a negation of a negation.

NOTES

1. "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian," *New German Critique* 5 (Spring 1975): 36. Habermas quotes this statement and uses it as his point of departure in his essay, "Consciousness—Raising or Redemptive Criticism—The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin," *New German Critique* 17 (Spring 1979): 32.
2. T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gertel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. C. Lenhardt (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 151. Adorno's book was originally published in German in 1970.
3. This is Richard Wolin's characterization in his essay, "The De-Aestheticization of Art: On Adorno's *Aesthetische Theorie*," *Telos* 41 (Fall 1979): 105-27. Wolin seems off the mark, however, when he describes the crisis of the avant-garde as a crisis of identity, rather than, as I have it, a crisis of illusion.
4. Adorno, p. 158.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 119-20.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 15. Published in German in 1944. Citation corrected.
25. Adorno, p. 165.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 171.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

30. See Jessica Benjamin's article, "The End of Internalization: Adorno's Social Psychology," *Telos* 32 (Summer 1977): 42-64. Benjamin provides a discussion of Adorno's notion of internalization in the context of his theory of employment of mass psychology in fascism and mass culture. See also Horkheimer's chapter "Rise and Decline of the Individual," in *Eclipse of Reason* (Continuum, 1974), pp. 128-61.

31. Adorno, pp. 191-92.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

I would like to thank my colleague Gregg Horowitz for our numerous discussions of Adorno. I would also like to extend thanks to Professors Robert Zimmerman and Rudiger Bubner for their fruitful comments.