

“Art Has No Power over *Schein* through Its Abolition”

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Theodor Adorno’s aesthetics takes up the German Idealist and Romantic idea of “*Schein*” – the “beautiful illusion” characteristic of authentic art – and reinterprets it through the lens of his own very particular kind of dialectical Marxism. Unlike his friend, Walter Benjamin, who welcomed the overcoming of so-called auratic art, Adorno believed that *Schein* can thus be vindicated. Whether this is so, the article argues, depends on how far one accepts Adorno’s adoption of a Marxist-Hegelian conception of social meaning.

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I.

Adorno writes in the *Ästhetische Theorie*: “The central part of aesthetics would be the salvation of *Schein*, and the emphatic justification of art, the legitimation of its truth, depends on this salvation” (Adorno 1970a, 164). My purpose in this article is to make what progress I can in opening up understanding of the *Ästhetische Theorie* through looking at this, evidently fundamental, concept.

For Adorno, philosophy is historical and interpretive, not demonstrative or scientific. “Through its evident or latent dependence on texts, philosophy confesses what, under the ideal of ‘method’ it denies: its nature as language,” he writes in the *Negative Dialektik* (Adorno 1966, 65). While Kant, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, says that to be “consequent” is the first duty of the philosopher (Kant 1913, 24), Adorno’s admired friend, Benjamin, chose as his own motto “always radical, never consequent” (Benjamin 1966, vol. 1, 425, Letter to Gershom Scholem, 29 May 1926). And against Hegel, who says that “The true form in which truth exists can only be its scientific system” (Hegel 1977, 11) and that “philosophy is system in development; the history of

philosophy likewise" (Hegel 1971b, 47), Adorno called the *Negative Dialektik* an "anti-system" (Adorno 1966, 10).

Although reference to other thinkers is everywhere in Adorno's work, this never takes the form of close textual commentary or sustained argumentative reconstruction, so it is at least a question worth asking how far it is appropriate to try to subject Adorno's own text to systematic interrogation and to criticize him when it is not possible to find a single, consistent position in it. Perhaps instead we would do better to see the enormous, baggy text of the *Ästhetische Theorie* as a dazzling collection of hit-and-run aphorisms held together by a modernist anti-capitalist aesthetic sensibility rather than the articulation of an underlying, consistent philosophical position.

Admittedly, many of Adorno's aphorisms are brilliant enough (especially in German) to stand on their own: "Reality gives too many real reasons to escape it for indignation against 'escapism' to be in place" (Adorno 1970a, 21); or, "The bourgeois wants art to be luxurious and life ascetic; the other way round would be better" (Adorno 1970a, 27). (I could go on.) Yet I believe that that would be to understate the ambition of Adorno's project – and its interest. In the *Negative Dialektik* he invokes D'Alembert's famous distinction between the "*esprit systématique*" and the "*esprit de système*," endorsing the former while rejecting the latter. So, at the risk of unweaving the rainbow, I am going to do my best to articulate Adorno's position systematically, by reconstructing the relationship it has, implicitly, with the texts against which he pushes off. To follow him the reader must ask not only what Adorno read (the answer, of course, is pretty much everything) but how important it was and in what way he read it. I identify – I think uncontroversially – three main bodies of thought informing his ideas about the philosophy of art. (1) Above all, given the central role that he attributes to the concept of *Schein*, there is the aesthetics of German Idealism. (2) Secondly, there is Marxism. (3) In the background too, there is Adorno's dispute with Benjamin, whose concept of *aura* Adorno interprets through the lens of his own would-be materialist transformation of German Idealism.

II.

I have left the word *Schein* untranslated and I shall continue to do so. The reason is this: the word's meaning points in many different directions, all of which are philosophically important, but which no single word in English can encapsulate.

First, of course, *Schein* means illusion. In German, alliteration invites the contrast between reality and illusion as *Sein* (being) and *Schein*. The phrase "*Mehr sein als scheinen*" ("Be more than you seem," "*esse quam videre*") was a motto of the Prussian generals von Moltke and Schlieffen – and was adopted in turn by their dark successors.

But *Schein* can just be about how things seem, without being deceptive – their appearance. The Swiss polymath, Johann Heinrich Lambert, who worked under the patronage of Frederick the Great in Berlin, was a correspondent of Kant's. Kant wanted to dedicate the *Critique of Pure Reason* to Lambert, although he died before the book was finally published. Lambert was particularly interested in the different ways in which objective reality presents itself (he made important discoveries in the science of perspective and the projection of maps). In 1764, he published a work on logic that he called *Neues Organon* (New Organon) of which the fourth part was entitled "*Phänomenologie oder Lehre von dem Schein*" ("Phenomenology or the doctrine of appearance"), thus providing us with the earliest use in philosophy of another term that would have a very significant career in Continental Philosophy.

The whole business is fiercely complicated. Kant himself introduces the, for him, very important distinction between *Schein* and (a cognate word) *Erscheinung* – a term that can also only be translated as "appearance," and which has thus created a great deal of confusion in philosophers writing about Kant without sufficient knowledge of the original German. For Hegel, the transition from *Schein* to *Erscheinung* (which he calls "*ein Ganzes des Scheins*" (Hegel 1977, 87) – *Schein* "as a whole") is one of the transitions of *Geist* traced out in the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* as it moves through illusion to truth.

Another sense of *Schein* is more easily appreciated by the English-speaker, however, for it has exactly the same root as the English word "shine." Thus the German for a headlamp or a searchlight is *Scheinwerfer* – literally, "shine thrower." But additionally (like the English "sheen") *Schein* suggests something bright and lustrous at a surface. We need to keep this sense in mind when we read Hegel – for instance, when he writes (as he does in the *Lectures on Aesthetics*) that "The beautiful has its life in *Schein*" (Hegel 1971a, 17). The idea that *Schein* makes works of art (and beautiful natural objects) something more than just ordinary material things arises much earlier, however. Herder, for example, in his *Plastik* (1778), makes an etymological connection between *Schein* and beauty: "*Schönheit* [beauty]," he writes there, "takes its name from *Schauen* [looking] and from *Schein*" (Herder 1892, 10). The expression "*schöner Schein*" [beautiful *Schein*], seems to have been used first by Schiller in the 26th

of his extraordinarily influential *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind* (1794), after which it became ubiquitous in the aesthetic writings of the Idealists, Romantics and Goethe (assuming that he belongs in neither camp).

Bearing all of this in mind, I want to put *Schein* into context by drawing attention to two closely connected themes about art that run – taking different forms in different authors – through German Idealism. The first I shall call “art for art’s sake.” Of course, this can mean different things and many of them were by no means new at that time. But, in Kant’s hands, it contains three important elements.

- (1) Authentic art is not instrumental.
- (2) Any feelings associated with art are distinct from pleasure and pain or other non-aesthetic emotions.
- (3) The value of art lies in its form.

The latter doctrine, in particular, has radical implications for the evaluation and criticism of art. As Kant writes in the *Critique of Judgement*:

In painting, sculpture, and in all the formative arts – in architecture and horticulture, so far as they are beautiful arts – the *delineation* is the essential thing; and here it is not what gratifies a sensation but what pleases by means of its form that is fundamental for taste. The colours which light up the sketch belong to the charm; they may indeed enliven the object for sensation, but they cannot make it worthy of contemplation and beautiful (Kant 1914, 75, § 14).

And this, it is relevant to note when we consider Adorno, applies even to music: “The *charm* of colours or of the pleasant tones of an instrument may be added, but the *delineation* in the first case and the composition in the second constitute the proper object of the pure judgement of taste” (Kant 1914, 75 – 76, § 14).

The second theme I want to emphasize – and here the concept of *Schein* comes to the fore – is what I shall call “art for God’s sake.” In his classic work *The Mirror and the Lamp*, M.H. Abrams identifies the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as the epoch of a conception of art that he calls art as “heterocosm.” The idea, to simplify, is that the work of art does not reproduce the external world so much as create its own, independent world. But this is not to abandon the idea of mimesis entirely. On the contrary. If the artist is truly a creator, not just an imitator (think of Plato’s dismissal of art as a “copy

of a copy”) then there is a sense that the artist’s creativity runs parallel to the free creativity of God himself.

This opens the way back to a kind of Platonism, in which art connects us with a higher realm by the very fact that its purpose is to create rather than to imitate. And here the idea of *Schein* returns, for *Schein* is the mark of genuine art, art that “points beyond itself” and is, in the language of the time, “symbolic,” not “allegorical.” Here, for example, is Coleridge (whose aesthetics were taken wholesale – notoriously, without acknowledgement – from Goethe and Schelling) which I quote not least for the wonderful way in which Coleridge conveys the German conception of aesthetic *Schein* in English:

Now an Allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language ... On the other hand a Symbol...is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal (Coleridge 1816, 36 – 37).

III.

From this sketch, we are, I think, in a position to turn to Hegel and his assertion that “The beautiful has its life in *Schein*” (Hegel 1971a, 17). Although *Schein* is not part of what Hegel would call the “natural being” of objects (say, those properties that would figure in a physicist’s account of the world) it is not, for that reason, something purely subjective: a *projection* onto the world by the individual. On the contrary, Hegel’s metaphysics leaves open, as more conventional philosophies do not, a third possibility: that it is an actual (in that sense, vis-à-vis the individual subject, objective) expression of a higher subject, *Geist*.

That Hegel believes that the Idea does realize itself in the form of *Geist* in the beautiful object is made clear when we consider his solution to a problem of German Idealist and Romantic aesthetics that I call “Winckelmann’s Paradox.” The paradox was that Greek art was in a sense both open to the modern age (still capable of being appreciated) and closed (incapable of imitation). For Winckelmann and his successors (Herder, Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin, the Schlegels and Karl Marx, to name only a few of the most prominent thinkers who accepted the paradox’s premises) it appeared deeply puzzling that the art of the Greeks should remain an unsurpassed ideal of beauty, and yet that their own age should be incapable of recapturing whatever it was that had given Greek art its magic.

In Marx's words:

...the difficulty lies not in understanding that the Greek arts and epic are bound up with certain forms of social development. The difficulty is that they still afford us artistic pleasure and that in a certain respect they count as a norm and as an unattainable model (Marx 1976, 31).

The enormous importance of this paradox is that it strikes against both relativism *and* its apparent contrary, (what we can call) universalism. The relativist can explain why it is that the Greeks have Greek art, the medievals Medieval Art and that we moderns have modern art. What she cannot explain is why the art of the past still speaks to us today. The universalist, on the other hand, must explain why it is that the modern world – the best efforts of French classicism notwithstanding – has failed to match and build upon the achievements of the Greeks. As a result, the paradox draws us towards views of history by which the past is both open and closed, of which Hegel's is the supreme example.

Hegel agrees that, even nowadays, Greek art is still, rightly seen as supremely beautiful and offers his own explanation. The reason for the inimitable beauty of Greek art, he maintains, is that Greek art was the objective embodiment of a particular stage of *Geist*, one in which *Geist* had not yet discovered the universality that would bring it into conflict with the world of the senses. In consequence, those who now look back on Greek art from a higher stage can be moved by what it articulates (for it really is a feature of the statues and architecture that they so much admire) without being able to express themselves in the same way.

The *Schein* of Greek art is a property which (like a colour) can be said to be "in" an object yet which cannot be registered except by a subject who has a certain perceptual capacity. The continued "existence" of *Schein* – its openness to perception by later perceivers – depends therefore on the fact that, at a later stage of *Geist*, *Geist* includes aspects of its own earlier self. Although *Geist* has now, Hegel claims, achieved universality, part of that universality lies in its ability to appreciate (even if it can no longer legitimately confine itself to) previous forms of particularity.

Although the perception of *Schein* in Greek art is true in exactly the way that the perception of the colour of a work might be true, nevertheless, one can say that there are still two senses in which falsehood is at work here. First there is a sense in which the individual who perceives a beautiful object but is not aware that that beauty has its source in the Idea is suffering from a kind of

“false consciousness.” Secondly, there is a kind of falsehood in *Geist* itself, which achieves harmony with the world of the immediate senses only at the price of a distortion of its own nature – one which will lead to the breakdown of that harmony and send *Geist* further along the long and painful path to self-knowledge.

To move from Hegel to Marx is, of course, to enter a very different world. It is certainly not unreasonable to think that Marx anticipated a future form of society in which the activity of the artist, as described in Schiller’s *Letters*, would become a characteristic of integrated human labour more generally. Still, his perspective on the present is wholly negative.

He uses the term *Schein* often in *Das Kapital* (even more frequently in the *Grundrisse*) but he does so exclusively in the sense of “illusion.” Still, there are clear links between Marx and Hegelian aesthetics. This is most evident in Marx’s conception of “fetishism.” For de Brosses, whose *Du culte des dieux fétiches* (1760) brought the word into currency, the fetishistic illusion is a matter of projection, as it would be later for Freud: the fetishist misguidedly transfers a subjective quality to an object that does not (indeed, could not in principle) belong to it. But that is not Marx’s position. In the chapter on the Fetishism of Commodities, he refers to fetishism as an “objective illusion” (*gegenständlicher Schein*). It is not a mere projection. In that case, however, where could the “illusion” in fetishism lie?

Structurally, Marx’s two-fold answer is extraordinarily close to Hegel’s picture of Greek art. Just as Greek art really does have *schöner Schein* but those who perceive it fail to recognize its source – the Idea that is manifesting itself through it – so the person suffering from “commodity fetishism” is correct in believing that commodities really do have exchange value, but thinks, falsely, that that value is intrinsic to them, and does not see its source in social labour. And just as Greek society in which the highest form of *Geist* is its expression in art must be superseded, so too – but with much less of a sense of loss! – the capitalist mode of production must be replaced by another, superior one.

IV.

With this in mind, we can turn to Adorno with a relatively clear-cut interpretive alternative before us. Does Adorno side with Hegel and the German Idealists in seeing *Schein* as a valuable quality – the emblem of authentic art – or does he see it, like Marx, as an illusion to be abolished? If we look at the quotation with which we started this article – that “The central part of aesthetics would be the salvation of *Schein*, and the emphatic justification of

art, the legitimation of its truth, depends on this salvation.” – it seems that everything points strongly in the direction of the first alternative.

But how is that possible? After all, it makes sense for Hegel to claim that *Schein* is an objective property of objects that shows only to properly attuned subjects who share the perspective of *Geist* because that fits with Hegel’s overall metaphysics, according to which *Geist* is the self-realizing subject, the true source of order, system and development in reality:

Everything that happens in heaven or on earth – happens eternally – the life of God and everything that occurs temporally, only strives towards this: that *Geist* knows itself, makes itself objective, finds itself, becomes *für sich*, merges with itself. *Geist* is bifurcation and alienation, but only in order to be able to come to itself (Hegel 1971b, 41 – 42).

There are two possible positions that a materialist critic of Hegel might take. One is that Hegel’s dynamic and developmental conception of reality is indissoluble from the Idealist framework within which it is presented by Hegel, and so to reject that framework implies adopting a quite different conception of the nature of reality and of the forms of explanation that are appropriate to that reality. This, in effect, is the position taken by the analytical Marxists. On the other hand, it is also possible to think (as the young Hegelians did) that Hegel’s philosophy contains a truth in mystified or inverted form of which it is itself unaware and that the first step towards recovering that truth is to invert Hegel’s own inversion.

Adorno holds the latter view. As he puts it at the beginning of the *Negative Dialektik*, it is only if Hegel’s philosophy contains some “experiences which are – against Hegel’s own emphases – independent of the Idealistic apparatus” that philosophy can be something more than an *ex post facto* theory of science (Adorno 1966, 19). The starting-point for the reinterpretation of *Geist* is to “read back” the concept so that it becomes apparent that *Geist* is actually an enciphered representation of *society*: “Beyond the philosophy of identity’s magic circle, the transcendental subject can be deciphered as society, unconscious of its own self” (Adorno 1966, 179). In other words, Hegel is right in his characterization of the powers and attributes of *Geist*, but wrong in the way that he identifies it. Putting the point in its most succinct form, Adorno writes: “The World-Spirit is, but it is no such thing” (Adorno 1966, 298).

This reinterpretation is not just a direct translation, however. The “enciphering” of society in the concept of *Geist* conceals and idealizes what is, in fact, an oppressive feature of capitalist society, namely, the domination of

the universal over the particular. It represents as if it were the embodiment of harmony and reconciliation a process that is repressive and antagonistic – an “order of compulsion”:

The compulsive order of reality, which Idealism projected into the realm of the subject and of *Geist*, is to be translated back out of it....The prior universality of the process of production is both true and false: true because it forms the “ether” which Hegel calls *Geist*; untrue because its “reason” is, as yet, no such thing, and its universality the product of particular interest (Adorno 1966, 22).

Adorno does not just reverse the affirmative way in which Hegel presents the processes of *Geist*. He also thinks that the return to materialism involves the rejection of Hegel’s monistic claim that *Geist* is the source of all reality. *Geist*, Adorno counters, is not an ontological first cause, the “ground of grounds.” It is only one pole in a process cleft between mental and manual labour, a fact which the Idealist illusion of *Geist* as something spontaneous and creative conceals: “*Geist* is no isolated principle but one *moment* in social labour – that which is separated from the corporeal” (Adorno 1970b, 270). *Geist*’s apparent independence and creativity is not an original truth about its nature, but a deceptive appearance produced by a social process of abstraction, corresponding to the regimentation of commodity production itself.

Idealism which distilled the abstract law-governedness of exchange into its Absolute Spirit, at the same time enciphers the truth that the phenomena encounter this mediation in the form of a mechanism of compulsion. *That* is what is concealed behind the so-called problem of constitution (Adorno 1966, 57).

The collective subject for Adorno is thus not absolute: only the illusions induced by the division of labour lead to the supposition that the polarity of subject and object could ever be entirely transcended. It is the fact that labour has taken on a certain form in a society of generalized commodity exchange (that is, capitalism) that makes for the correspondence between the Idealist concept of *Geist* and the structure of society.

...in the transcendental principle, the universal and necessary activity of the mind, social labour indispensably hides itself....Beyond the magic circle of

the philosophy of identity, the transcendental subject can be deciphered as society unconscious of itself (Adorno 1966, 178 – 179).¹

This supports a conception of philosophy that Adorno calls “physiognomic.” In his discussion of Husserl, Adorno transforms Husserl’s claim that phenomenology gives access to a region of essential truths which could be directly known by what he calls the “intuition of essence,” in the light of his own doctrine of the constitutive role of society *qua* transcendental subject:

“Intuition of essence” is the name for the physiognomic way of regarding intellectual [*geistige*] matters. It is legitimated by the fact that the intellectual realm is not constituted by the consciousness which is directed towards it cognitively. It is constituted, rather, well beyond the individual who originates it, in the collective life of *Geist*, and is objectively grounded according to its immanent laws (Adorno 1966, 89).

Interpretation has to aim to recover the “immanent universality” of apparently isolated phenomena, like the “monadic” work of art. “Such immanent universality of the individual,” Adorno claims, “is objective as sedimented history” (Adorno 1966, 165).

V.

Adorno’s reinterpretation of Hegel’s concept of *Geist* leads to an account of the nature of capitalist society that operates on two levels. On the one hand, the collective subject does indeed dominate the individuals who live their lives within it: social labour is alienated and takes the form of a social subject – capital – that dominates the individuals who are, in the end, the means by which it reproduces itself. But the idea of *Geist* also incorporates the deceptiveness of the social process – the fact that the priority of the universal over the particular *appears* to be the result of the innate creativity of that collective subject (when, in fact, it is only the *result* of the form taken by social labour under capitalism).

¹ See Adorno (1966, 197): “If, however, *Geist* needs as part of what it is that which it isn’t, then the reference back to *labour* is not (as the apologists for the philosophy industry like to think is the final word on the matter) a *metabasis eis allo genos*. The insight of idealism is retained that the action of *Geist*, *qua* labour, is achieved through individuals as much as through their resources, and, in carrying that out, reduces individuals to their function. The idealistic concept of *Geist* exploits the transition to social labour: it easily tends to transfigure that universal activity, which absorbs the individual agents, into an ‘in itself,’ without regard to the latter.”

Adorno's account of the nature of works of art is the complement to the Marxist-Hegelian reading of the theory of commodity fetishism. Economic life and culture are not an edifice (as the "base" and "superstructure" metaphor would suggest) but rather two poles of a self-reproducing social totality whose motion is determined, ultimately, by the articulation of social labour. He makes the point explicitly in a letter to Benjamin:

...I consider it methodologically unfortunate to treat individual striking features from the realm of the superstructure "materialistically," by putting them into relation with corresponding features of the base, immediately and even causally [*unvermittelt und gar kausal*]. The materialistic determination of cultural characteristics is only possible as mediated by the *totality* [*Gesamtprozess*] (Adorno 1970c, 138 – 139 (Letter to Benjamin, 10 November 1938)).

While material production is carried on under the auspices of alienated social labour (capital) its aim is the maximisation of exchange-value at the expense of use-value. Thus the labour process is robbed of its potential as part of the self-realization of the individuals who participate in it.

Artistic production, on the other hand, can retain a non-instrumental relationship between producer and product and *Schein* is its emblem. Thus the elimination of *Schein* would be a sign that cultural production, too, had been reduced to a part of "ordinary" economic life – that art had been abandoned in favour of the "culture industry," which reproduces the existing social system by satisfying its members' emotional needs as cold-heartedly and instrumentally as, traditionally, capitalism dealt with material needs. Yet even authentic art (art that manages to retain its *Schein*) is not unideological. It remains limited to a demarcated sphere of life, and this makes it, like religion in Marx's "Towards a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. Introduction," at best an "imaginary flower" on the "chains" of society: a model of emancipation that distracts from the real bondage of social production. By setting art in its social context, however, aesthetic theory has a dual role: to criticize the ideology of art for art's sake, while, at the same time, using the *Schein* of autonomous art to provide a critique of heteronomous economic life.

The work of art, like the commodity whose use-value lies in consumption, is a product of social labour. It is social labour, ultimately, that has the power of conferring meaning on material reality (although that "meaning" does not have an explicit, linguistic character). Yet, under the regime of alienated social labour, the production of commodities for use has come to take on the purely

instrumental character of a *Stoffwechsel*. Production in the sphere of art is part of the same social process and carries many of the deceptions and deformities characteristic of commodity production within it. Nevertheless, it also retains the trace of freedom that has been eliminated from production elsewhere and this is the source of its *Schein*.

Like the Idealists, Adorno believes that authentic art does indeed have the quality of "pointing beyond itself," and he agrees, too, that this is a form of manifestation of *Geist* (understood in the sense of society): "That by which works of art, as they become appearance, are more than what they are: that is their *Geist*" (Adorno 1970a, 134).

What is more, Adorno shares Hegel's criticism of the limitation which its sensible form imposes on art; it requires a higher, theoretical form to elucidate its truth-content: "The truth-content of works of art...can only be attained by philosophical reflection" (Adorno 1970a, 193).

The work of art's character as *Schein*, according to Adorno, is, at once, both true and false; it creates the illusion that the aesthetic quality of the work of art is a property that is intrinsic to it, without relation to non-aesthetic reality, but, in fact, it is what connects the work of art to a broader sphere of social meaning: "But *Geist* is not simply *Schein*. It is also truth. It is not only the fraudulent image of an independent entity but also the negation of all false independence" (Adorno 1970a, 165 – 166).

Art is thus both detached from and expressive of society:

The relation of works of art to society is comparable to Leibniz's monad. Windowless – that is to say, without being conscious of society, and in any event without being constantly and necessarily accompanied by this consciousness – the works of art...represent society (Adorno 1976, 211).

Whatever its associations with the cultic functions of the work of art, *Schein* retains a progressive element, Adorno claims: "Magic itself, when emancipated from its claim to be real, is an element of enlightenment; its *Schein* desacralizes the desacralized world. That is the dialectical ether in which art today takes place." (Adorno 1970a, 93) And this returns us to the point with which we started. *Schein* is not to be eliminated. The purpose of philosophical aesthetics, in Adorno's view, is, by its reflective activity, to "save" the *Schein* of works of art through the theoretical reconstruction of the sedimented layers of *Geist*'s activity. Hence the assertion from which I started: "Art has no power over *Schein* by its abolition" (Adorno 1970a, 166).

VI.

Adorno's reinterpretation of Hegel's concept of *Geist* has the attraction typical of neo-Hegelian theories: it appears to offer a powerful and comprehensive way of understanding social processes. Yet, in my view, its underpinning conception of social labour cannot be sustained consistently without the surrounding framework of a full-blown, Idealist metaphysics.

As a materialist (in some sense) and someone who, as we have seen, explicitly rejects the metaphysical monism of Hegel's conception of *Geist*, Adorno must deny that physical processes are intrinsically meaning-bearing (*Geist* is not a world-soul coming to expression in nature). So what sense can we make of his claim that history is "sedimented" in phenomena? How can a materialist say that an object "bears in itself" anything other than its causal natural history? Social labour, on the materialist understanding, transforms an object physically. It also represents the realization of a purpose on the part of the person who performs that transformation -- and this purpose or intention can be recognized by an observer who sees the product. But how is the collective life of *Geist* supposed to "sediment" itself into that physical product?

At this point Adorno fails to give a clear answer. Instead of answering the question of how meaning processes can have this quasi-natural "objectivity" in relation to individuals, he retreats into Idealist terminology that obscures the dilemma rather than addresses it. Negative dialectic, he says, has the task of freeing the "mediations" which whatever is given immediately conceals within itself (Adorno 1966, 48). But what, precisely, is the ontological status of a "mediation"? Is it a *causal*, a *logical*, or a *semantic* relation? For Hegel, of course, the concept of mediation embraces all three: mediations are "moments," as he puts it, in the fundamental rational structure of reality. But Adorno, who rejects Hegel's assumption of an Absolute Subject, has no right to assimilate the three dimensions in a way that depends on that assumption. And yet, if he does not, Adorno has no way of explaining the crucial feature of his own notion of *Geist*: its ascription to processes of meaning the objectivity usually reserved for material causal processes.

Thus I conclude – with a little regret – that the analytical Marxists were quite right.

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