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Foreword

Abstract

Adorno was a prolific and interdisciplinary thinker whose research lies at the intersection of philosophy, musicology, literary critique and art critique in a broad sense. A significant aspect of his intellectual journey was his confrontation with other key figures from the past and his contemporaries, which, explored through the exercise of immanent critique and dialectical method, contributed to the complex and layered elaboration of his thought.

Keywords

Adorno, Philosophical dialogue, Immanent critique

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This special issue of “Studi di estetica / *aesthetic studies*” is the first publication of a project entitled “Adorno &”. Aim of the project is to create a working group on Theodor W. Adorno that brings together scholars who have dedicated their research, or part of it, to this author, considered not only as one of the major philosophers of the 20th century, but also as an important musicologist and literary critic.

To this end, the theme that has guided the work carried out so far has been that of the dialogue between Adorno and other authors – whether philosophers, thinkers, writers, intellectuals, poets, novelists, musicians, or hybrid figures who operated at the intersection of different disciplines – with whom he engaged during his life and who were fundamental in the formation of his thought. Hence the title “Adorno &”.

A first meeting of the group took place on 1 March 2024 at the University of Bologna. On this occasion, six Italian researchers presented their work, giving and discussing papers on the relationship between Adorno and Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Baudelaire, Husserl, Kracauer. As the study day proved to be very fruitful, it was decided to continue the collaboration, both by developing the presented papers into a collective volume and by carrying on the work on this topic involving other international researchers.

In this way, scholars from different countries and contexts, with different and interdisciplinary backgrounds, and at different stages of their research, joined the project. Some of them decided to contribute with an essay, others with the presentation and discussion of a paper at the first international conference – and second meeting – of the group, which took place at the University of Bologna on 28 March 2025. Bringing together the various contributions, the research on the theme “Adorno &” was enriched by many new insights, offering comparisons between Adorno and Kafka, Freud, Marx, Lukács, Valéry, Benjamin, Beethoven.

All these comparisons provided the opportunity to explore various aspects of Adorno’s complex and highly multifaceted thinking. It became clear how profoundly his dialogue with other significant figures – both of the past and of his own time – contributed to his intellectual journey, sometimes shaping his key concepts and sometimes even influencing his philosophy more than Adorno himself would have been willing to admit.

In light of the research and discussions conducted, what perhaps stands out the most, tying together all the essays which are here collected, is Adorno’s ability to relate to others through the practice of immanent critique, so that the result of the exchange is never reduced to a mere absorption of the strengths of his interlocutors, nor to a pretentious

questioning or total rejection of their weaknesses. Rather, by dialectically combining admiration and critical thinking, Adorno developed each of these – more or less direct – dialogues in the most fruitful way, that is, always emerging from them enriched and at the same time ready to pursue new insights, so as to take the other author beyond himself, keeping his productive energies and/or ideas alive, but also expanding their hidden possibilities.

The arrangement of the essays reflects this very dynamic. The sequence of contributions follows a trajectory that moves from Adorno's confrontation with German idealism to his engagements with materialism, phenomenology and psychoanalysis, and finally to the figures of literary and musical modernity that proved decisive for the elaboration of his aesthetic thought. Yet this succession does not aim at re-establishing disciplinary hierarchies or at separating philosophy from literature, music or social theory. On the contrary, what emerges from the convergence of these studies is the extent to which, for Adorno, thought is inseparable from the material in which it takes shape. Whether the interlocutor is a philosopher, a composer, a poet or a social theorist, reflection is always wrested from the resistance of its object, in a movement that binds together historical reconstruction and theoretical inquiry.

Recognising how enlightening and constructive this kind of philosophical practice can be, the idea behind the reflections presented in this special issue is precisely to expand, in turn, our dialogue with Adorno and the possibilities hidden in his extensive writings and lessons. The significance of the project documented by this publication lies in the convergence of diverse and rigorously updated lines of research around a shared set of questions, where historical inquiry and theoretical investigation prove inseparable. Each contributor was given the freedom to choose how to structure and develop their essay, the only guideline being to compare Adorno with another author. The editors would like to thank all the contributors for their dedicated and thought-provoking work, as well as everyone who collaborated on the project in different ways, including organising meetings, participating in discussion sessions, and contributing to the various stages of revising and preparing this special issue.