

The Wound of Blackness: Thinking Adorno and the Limits of Critical Theory

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The Adorno and Identity Seminars

“To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word.”

W.E.B. Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” (1903)

“The question of criteria by which to judge new music calls for reflection not directly on the criteria themselves, but on the methods needed to discover them, if we are to avoid the standard strategies of resistance. But we can scarcely begin by talking of methods as a matter of principle. For the methods cannot be separated from the subject and treated as something ready-made and external, but must be produced in the course of a process of interaction with their subject.”

Theodor Adorno, “Criteria of New Music” (1957)

“When the writer first heard Parker he simply did not understand *why* Bird should play the way he did, nor could it have been very important to him. But now, of course, it becomes almost a form of reverse snobbery to say that one did not think Parker’s music was worth much at first hearing, etc. etc. The point is, it seems to me, that if the music is worth something now, it must have been worth something then. Critics are supposed to be people in a position to tell what is of value and what is not, and, hopefully, at the time it first appears. If they are consistently mistaken, what is their value?”

LeRoi Jones, “Jazz and the White Critic” (1963)

“Blackness is a political/culture concept that is innovative. It . . . re-thinks forms, systems, and methodologies – placing Black minds, Black energies and Black resources to a common goal: the creation of a New Man, and a re-directed, re-shaped Society supportive of him.”

Mari Evans, “Blackness: A Definition” (1969)

“We are about the task of defining, defending, and illustrating blackness. This means that we are about the truth of this world. For we see blackness in America merging with the blackness and the brownness of the Third World and becoming *the* world. Which is another way of saying that blackness is a truth which stands at the center of the human experience, and that all who reflect the rays of that dazzling darkness reflect a truth which is close to the truth of man. . . .What is the true meaning of blackness? It is too soon to say. . . . [W]e believe blackness is a total challenge, and because of the fact that at a certain level, basic conflicts of interests express themselves as conflicts of rationalities. We see the *rationality* of blackness as a total challenge to the world.”

Lerone Bennett, “The Challenge of Blackness” (1969)