

MUSIC OF THE FUTURE

Andrew Blake

Robert W. Witkin, *Adorno on Music*, Routledge, London and New York 1998, 213pp; £35 cloth, £14.99 paperback. Simon Jarvis, *Theodor Adorno*, Polity, Cambridge 1998, 283pp; £13.99 paperback.

If Adorno's project were to defamiliarise, his spirit will be smiling (uneasily) now, as he surveys the fractured legacy of a fragmented life's work, in which aesthetics and politics jostle for subtextual space inside the most thorough twentieth-century attempt to persuade philosophy to recognise their combined force. Whatever else his negative dialectics have done, they have impacted on and through literary theory, sociology and cultural studies, his thought helping to defamiliarise those aspects of the academy which took his work seriously. It is almost unsurprising, then, that in these two introductory texts a lecturer in English writes readable but densely Germanicised prose, while a sociologist, writing of someone usually identified as a Marxist, makes hardly a mention of class. The academic boundaries created so carefully in the late nineteenth century, and rigorously defended thereafter, could not contain Adorno's project. It is for the twenty-first century to assess his contribution to Western thought during one of its darkest hours.

Simon Jarvis provides an admirable starting-point for such an assessment, moving crisply through Adorno's key works on politics and aesthetics from the only available unifying viewpoint: their relation to the 'classical' German metaphysical tradition represented by Kant and Hegel, the sociology of Weber and Durkheim, and the work of contemporaries such as Heidegger; and the legacy of all the above in the work of post-Adornian thinkers such as Habermas (with lateral attention paid to Derridean deconstruction). Explicating these worthies' views in passing, and commenting on Adorno's major works of philosophy and cultural theory, Jarvis produces an Adorno whose thought is less Marxist in any orthodox sense than in parallel with, and alternative to, Marxism. The establishment, crucial to the whole project of negative dialectics, of the mutually binding duality of myth and enlightenment which undercut the possibility of a pure instrumental rationality is the key theme to which Jarvis returns as he takes the reader through Adorno's social and cultural critique, before turning to the more abstruse aspects of the philosophical writings.

The focus of the middle third of Jarvis' book, the critique of mass culture and the proposed alternatives, is the most immediate, nay controversial, aspect of Adorno's legacy. Deeply hostile to any form of totalitarianism, and seeing it in the communist as well as fascist regimes of the 1930s, Adorno was convinced that the instrumental rationality of 'late capitalism' was also

complicit with the tendency towards totalitarianism, denying the spirit any authentic freedom of expression. The cultural products of this rationalised capitalism precluded the expression either of the alienation produced by the contemporary world, or the utopian thought which might form the basis of an escape from it, in any popular-cultural form. Such forms as film and popular music were always-already mass products of the enlightenment industry, offering pseudo-individualisation, and concealing the real relations of production behind which capitalism moved inexorably towards monopolistic and totalitarian supremacy.

Insofar as he found them at all (and Adorno's response to almost anything apart from late-period Beethoven was at best ambivalent), he found forms able to express both alienation from this situation and utopian hope for escape from it, in Austro-German classical music, a historically mature genre in which he himself participated - as composer, studying under the early twentieth-century Viennese Modernist Alban Berg, as well as critic. And there's the rub, for many who want a critical account of popular culture, but actually like it, and/or find in it resistance to relations of power/knowledge which still include subsidised performances of Austro-German classical music. The symphonies of Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms, or the avant-garde music made in Vienna when Adorno was a teenager, are less vital to most of his readers than the perceived disruptiveness of genres such as thrash metal or gabber, made when *they* were teenagers. Adorno's formal hierarchies are, therefore, often written off as reactionary élitism, produced by someone who was so deeply involved with the Austro-German tradition that he simply could not discriminate among other musical genres. Both Simon Jarvis and Robert Witkin, in his welcome and clear account of Adorno's responses to music, defend him against this knee-jerk dismissal - which is made, usually, by unwitting Adorno-ites, who happily reproduce hierarchies of authenticity, praising what they happen to like as a true, painful, alienated and/or utopian document of the contemporary world - while dismissing whatever popular musics they do not like as mass commodified product.

Having made that important point, it is easy to sympathise with the attack. Much of the thirties' dance music of which Adorno wrote so scathingly (under the pen-name Hektor Rottweiller) was standardised and controlled by a music industry which required formulaic and disposable product. This just isn't the same as the widely differentiated pop musics which have emerged since rock'n'roll, whose forms of expression have scandalised, inspired and engaged in a way which the Tin Pan Alley formula song would not and could not do, and whose associated technologies of sampling and Internet diffusion even now threaten the complete deconstruction of the music business which has dominated the airwaves through the century.

However, the defence can also mount a robust case. As I write this, the pop charts are dominated by computer-sequenced tracks, in predictable rhythms and tempos, which pastiche those of the past (for instance, an Abba 'tribute'), and in which the standardised pseudo-individualism of the named,

gender-and-ethnically-balanced, young performers hides the work of, in the main, white men in their thirties and forties. The mid-1990s moment of Britpop, which was seen by some to have moved the charts away from this formulaism, was itself wholly dependent on the music of the past. Dance music, meanwhile, which many of its adherents would point to as beyond the mass-culture model denounced by Adorno, is produced and consumed under the same market conditions as all other pop; the dance culture as a whole has moved from the comparatively socially disruptive activity of raving to the comparatively contained hedonism of clubbing. Indeed, the mechanical and standardised form of mass culture supported by music characterised by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats, to which people make hedonistic but apolitical bodily gestures while under the influence of capitalism's pleasure-inducing chemicals, is deeply susceptible to Adorno's analysis and rejection. His is not the only response to or critique of this phenomenon; but it is one which every proponent of dance music as potentially liberating must face.

What, then, does Adorno put against overwhelming experiences, such as that of raving/clubbing, offered by the culture industry? An insistence on the possibilities of an art beyond commodity status, and representing both the pain and alienation of everyday life and a utopian possibility of escaping it. Projecting a sociology of music which would have to develop through dialogue with Adorno's work, Robert Witkin duplicates the care with which Adorno confronts music in order to develop this comparatively optimistic thesis. Devoting chapters to his critiques of Beethoven, Wagner, Mahler and Berg, Schoenberg, and jazz, Witkin perhaps unwittingly reproduces Adorno's hierarchy, though his sympathetic exegesis does not preclude criticism. Aware of the Germanocentricity of his subject's work, in the end Witkin takes us beyond Adorno's somewhat Einsteinian insistence on a modernist music of free atonality, fully able to express the pain of contemporary existence. Witkin refuses Adorno's dismissal of Stravinsky's and Hindemith's use of the musics of the past, which, he argues, empower the listener in a way which the auratic-romantic, individualised compositions praised by Adorno do not.

Yet, while he ends by endorsing tendencies in Modernism with which Adorno couldn't agree, Witkin's exegesis allows us to compare Adorno's Hegelian dream of 'a wholly spiritualised music' (p112) with the commodified sounds and inane musicology which surrounds us, and to find them wanting. Simon Jarvis, likewise, emphasising Adorno's insistence on the imbrication of the political with the aesthetic, notes the combination of hope with cognitive content as the very condition of negative-dialectical thought: 'a thought which was utterly empty of desire, which did not wish for anything, would not be like anything, would not be a thought at all' (p231). However we respond to popular culture, let us agree.

FRANKFURT AND YALE

Martin McQuillan

Beatrice Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History: Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1998, 207pp; £30 hardback.

The phrase 'the legacy of the Frankfurt School' contains at least two problematic terms. The unity of method and identity implied by the word 'school' is surely as difficult in this context as it is when applied to something like the 'Yale School' to suggest a common goal, theory, practice or programme of reading. Instead, we might speak of Frankfurt, as Derrida does of Yale, as a series of 'family' resemblances. However, it is the notion of a 'legacy' which is perhaps more germane to the concerns of this issue and to Beatrice Hanssen's important book.

A legacy is different from an inheritance. An inheritance, as Derrida notes of 'the state of the debt' in *Specters of Marx* 'is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. Its presumed unity, if there is one, can consist only in the *injunction to reaffirm by choosing*'.¹ The injunction of inheritance asks us to choose (and the injunction cannot be more than this), to decide and distinguish from among what we inherit. This choice, and the undecidability of interpretation which goes with it, divides what we inherit into multiple and differing voices, just as the act of choosing reaffirms the inheritance. However, the idea of a legacy attempts to short-circuit this moment of choice by laying down the terms of a bequest by a legal act of will: this is what you will inherit and these are the circumstances under which it will be inherited. Failure to adhere to these conditions may result in the legacy being withheld. As such this litigious definition of the term has given rise to numerous comic plots (*Great Expectations* and *The Merchant of Venice* among them) but it fails to engage the act of inheritance because the legatee is affected by the legator's will as by a cause, the choice here is between the entire legacy or nothing at all. In rejecting this understanding of 'legacy' Beatrice Hanssen provides us with a valuable rapprochement between 'Frankfurt School' Critical Theory and deconstruction.

The sectarian divisions which structure the Anglo-American academy require us to choose all or nothing with respect to the work of Derrida or the Frankfurt School. You are either for them or against them, and being for them involves accepting everything and obeying the conditions of the legacy. Hanssen's book offers a mature response to the substantial investment contemporary 'critical theory' has in Critical Theory by refusing to accept the readability of both Frankfurt and Yale as univocal and given. No doubt

1. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, translated by Peggy Kamuff, Routledge, London and New York 1994, p16.

there is much in this book that Frankfurt fetishists and Derrida anoraks will dismiss but in so doing they would be failing to take up the task of inheritance (reaffirmation through choice) which Hanssen's book requires us to think through. This is not to suggest that the book attempts to draw Critical Theory and deconstruction within a dialectical logic, rather it is a rigorous and polished (one is tempted to say 'professional' in the sense that it is so often used, in admiration rather than disdain, about the North American academy) reading of Walter Benjamin through a quasi-juxtaposition of 'deconstructive' approaches and well-founded archive research. Hanssen's 'deconstruction' is implied rather than stated: this is by no stretch of the imagination a Derrida-fest. Benjamin and his 'deconstructive inheritance' is the proper subject of Hanssen's patient and revealing scholarship.

If you pardon the phrase, this is a book of two halves. The first section, 'Toward a New Theory of Natural History', provides a detailed account of Benjamin's seldom read and seemingly opaque study, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1925). In this sense, Hanssen provides us with one of the many ways in which her book examines the *other* side of Benjamin's work suggested in her title. For this reason alone, the book deserves to be an immediate point of reference for anyone interested in the ways in which the Frankfurt injunction of inheritance is inhabited by contradictory possibilities. Hanssen finds in this text an extended consideration of an 'ethico-theological call for another kind of history' (p1). This 'other history', 'one no longer purely anthropocentric in nature or anchored only the concerns of human subjects' (p1), emerges from Benjamin's examination of the difference between the history of artworks and human history, coupled with a critique of the philosophy of the subject. In elaborating this cross-over Hanssen examines his philosophical relations with Adorno and Heidegger. Her reading of Benjamin-Adorno concentrates on Adorno's appreciation of Benjamin's formulation of 'natural history', while her reading of the Benjamin-Heidegger constellation is intended to demonstrate the singularity of Benjamin's thought in contrast to Heidegger. This has the effect, not of presenting the Frankfurt School as an alternative to post-Heideggerian philosophy, but of more clearly defining the differences and similarities between Benjamin and Heidegger than has previously been attempted.

Hanssen's thesis in the first half certainly owes something to Derrida, but more so Levinas. She suggests that Benjamin's use of the term 'natural history' contests Heidegger's understanding of historicity by challenging a historical hermeneutics grounded in an appreciation of the human subject. Hanssen argues that by questioning the idealistic foundations of historical hermeneutics Benjamin's discussion of the concept of 'origin' in his prologue 'sought to merge the premises of transcendental philosophy with what traditionally is said to fall outside its boundaries: the contingency, singularity, transience, or alterity of history' (p3). Benjamin's search for

another origin that was not of the order of the Greek *arche*, the foundation of Western epistemology and ontology, lead him to consider the dialectic between sacred and natural history as an ethico-theological event prior to the political realm of historical materialism. Hanssen argues that the separate strands of this philosophical quest come together in Benjamin's treatment of allegory, in which 'allegory counts as a radically new antisystematic figure signifying the disruptive force of history' while at the same time dismantling the 'figures of self and interiority, symptomatic of the philosophy of consciousness' (p4).

This philosophical choreography is preparation for the second half of the book, from which it takes its sub-title. Here Hanssen moves the perspective of her argument away from history as such and onto Benjamin's critique of the subject. Taking a term from Derrida, she examines Benjamin's 'de-limitation' of the human subject through a reading of the figures of stones, animals, and angels which appear in his work. In this way, the book suggests that the 'other history' outlined in the first half is related to Benjamin's reappraisal of the subject of idealism. Hanssen's reading of this other Benjamin (the ethico-theological one of stones and animals) leads us back through the familiar essays on Krauss, Kafka, and Leskov but with our ears tuned to a different frequency. With a sensitivity of touch she shows that 'Benjamin's interrogation of vitalism was motivated by a pronounced Judaic conception of justice founded in a cabalistic philosophy of language' (p106). In so doing she folds recent commentaries by Derrida and Levinas back onto the text of Benjamin in a gesture suggestive of the originary lateness of inheritance.

While this book represents an important meeting between the 'legacy' of Frankfurt and the deconstructive 'tradition' (a meeting which is ongoing in the work of, say, Simon Critchley but yet to happen in Derrida and all but over in Habermas) one is still left with the sense of having been present at the reading of a will. There is a sobriety and propriety which not so much runs as walks through the prose. There is none of the engaging energy which we might find in Arendt, de Man, or Derrida's readings of the same texts (however none of the imbalances either) or in the work of Benjamin himself; and none of the lyrical intensity of Gaston Bachelard's poetics of stone and animals. Perhaps it is just as well, if the reading of this new legacy, in which the inheritance of Benjamin is to be divided differently, is to be respected by those previous beneficiaries. Because Hanssen and her readers come after Benjamin they cannot help to inherit. In this sense we cannot choose not to inherit just as we must choose from what we inherit. It is this injunction of one-which-is-more-than-one, which makes Hanssen's account of Walter Benjamin's *other* history such a compelling response to a legacy which at once calls for and resists interpretation.

BOOKNOTES

Thomas Osborne, *Aspects of Enlightenment: Social Theory and the Ethics of Truth*, UCL Press, London 1998, 216pp; £13.95 paperback.

'Not reading this book,' says the author, 'is unlikely to do anyone any harm': an unusually modest claim in view of the deluge of self-important grand theories currently pouring from the presses. Describing it as an 'excursion' on some issues raised by Michel Foucault's essay, 'What is Enlightenment?', Thomas Osborne has produced a rigorously argued but deflationary contribution to social theory. Treating enlightenment (lower case) as an attitude or ethos, *Aspects* side-steps the overheated - and unproductive - debates between those for and against the historical Enlightenment (upper case) understood as a philosophical doctrine.

Osborne considers enlightenment at work in three fields of endeavour - scientific, therapeutic and aesthetic - an admittedly arbitrary division which makes no claim to be exhaustive. He argues that these activities are characterised by an ethical commitment to (different kinds of) truth, demanding a certain asceticism, a willingness to submit to self-criticism. His view of science, for example, differs from rationalist foundationalists (for whom it is grounded in epistemology) and from relativist postmodernists (for whom it is merely in the service of a political or moral ideology). These global critiques miss the extent to which science is already critical of itself - less dogmatic or more principled than is usually imagined.

He elaborates similar types of argument in relation to the 'psy' disciplines and to the work (and lives) of artists. *Aspects* ends with a fascinating discussion of the nature of intellectual vocation (particularly in the 'English' tradition) and of the university, as a place designed to produce not well-rounded individuals but rather to cultivate somewhat specialised human capacities, such as the art of judgement. This is an original, not to say daring, book which has much to offer anyone uneasy about current trends in social theory.

Alasdair Pettinger

Tim Youngs (ed), *Writing and Race*, Longman, London and New York 1997, 321pp; £40 cloth, £15.99 paperback.

Writing and Race is one of the early volumes in Longman's attractive new Crosscurrents series which aims, in the General Editors' words, to explore the new terrain revealed by recently developed methodologies at the same time as offering fresh insights into more familiar areas. These collections of essays will, they suggest, be indicative and provocative, rather than conclusive; and the stress will be on challenging previously compartmentalised modes of thinking. *Writing and Race* would suggest that this is a promising venture, allowing scholars from different disciplines but

with common interests, to explore areas of mutual concern.

Of the many possible ways of approaching its subject, *Writing and Race* chooses to treat 'race' as generally as possible, including a number of essays which have little or nothing to say about the concept of 'race' in its modern meaning, but which provide a sense of the broader European writing about otherness out of which more specifically racialised discourses emerged. So, for example, there is a wide-ranging discussion of the early modern discourses of monstrosity and a useful reminder of the essential triangular nature of racial identities in the Americas.

Some of the writing given close attention belongs to Maryse Condé, Richard Burton, Lorimer Fison, Hannah Arendt, William Kennedy, Jack London, and Toni Morrison: a pleasingly original range, especially since Morrison is there for *Jazz*. There is only one weak essay out of the twelve, but at least four or five of exceptional quality. Given the presence of a strong Introduction, a useful bibliography, and a handy set of extracts from some of the writing discussed, *Writing and Race* makes a useful teaching companion at undergraduate or postgraduate level, as well as a thoughtful contribution to its subject.

Peter Hulme

Chris Weedon, *Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference*, Blackwell, Oxford 1999, 220pp; £45 cloth, £13.99 paperback.

Weedon's latest book is about contemporary feminist theory and its political implications. It maps the growing concern within feminist thought and activism with the politics of difference, which is depicted as a response to various struggles for inclusion by groups of women who were marginalised in early second-wave feminism. The recent burgeoning literature on the politics of difference is surveyed, offering a useful and accessible introduction to the large number of texts concerned with difference published during the 1990s.

It offers a much more up-to-date survey of current feminist theorising than do many other introductory texts. However unlike much of the difference literature this book is framed by an analysis of the structural power relations produced by patriarchy, class, racism and heterosexism. In other words, Weedon's focus is the modish concern with cultural diversity and post-structuralist theory, but she frames these debates critically in the context of the less fashionable debates about radical and revolutionary feminism, liberal humanism and Marxism. The book includes chapters on gender difference, lesbian feminism and queer theory, psychoanalytic and poststructuralist accounts of difference. It also includes chapters more directly focused on difference as a response to oppressive power relations (class and race) and concludes with reflections on Western feminism in a global context.

This is a book I would recommend to anyone wanting to understand recent developments in feminist theory. It offers excellent lucid accounts of theoretical debates, locates these effectively within a political context and offers a constructively critical, rather than hostile or celebratory, engagement with a politics of difference. I would have liked a final chapter in which Weedon was more direct about her own politics and theoretical commitments. Her readings of the difference debates indicate a commitment to goals like equality and liberation that many people feel uneasy about defending theoretically but continue to invoke and act upon in practice. Her silence regarding precisely how this tension might be resolved is, sadly, significant.

Judith Squires

Tom Steele, *The Emergence of Cultural Studies, 1945-1965*, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1997, 217pp; £14.99 paperback.

For those brought up on the standard interpretation of the rise of cultural studies, Tom Steele's book will prove a challenge. Steele recasts the history over a far longer period, commencing in the early 1930s and moving forward to the end of the 1950s, while transferring the scene from the university lecture hall to the less exotic adult education class.

The introduction and chapter one outline the book's themes. Chapter three is concerned with the issue of Englishness, while chapter four turns to the question of class, chapter two having addressed the relationship between them. Next, Steele reviews the part played by European Jewish migrants, and in particular Karl Mannheim. The remaining chapters deal respectively with Richard Hoggart, E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams, before discussing the future directions of adult education, and what may be learned from its past.

The interwar chapters outline the evolution of cultural studies partly in terms of tensions between three alternative tendencies in adult education. On the one hand, a desire to keep learning 'socially effective', that is, useful to the organised working class. On the other, the Leavisite defence of the text and values which were believed to reside there. In between lay the 'modernising' cosmopolitanism of W. E. Williams. The scenario contributed to the background from which Raymond Williams developed his theoretically rich ideas of culture after the war. That the history Steele tells has taken so long to emerge is certainly a reflection of the power relationships between different parts of the education world.

Stephen Woodhams