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CHAPTER 14

Adorno refracted

German critical theory in the neoliberal world order

Stefan Baumgarten

Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno's oeuvre has been widely translated into English, and despite an uneven reception history in the Anglophone world, he can be regarded as a "fashionable", perhaps even a "celebrity" philosopher in English translation. Whilst it remains an open question to what extent a high intellectual pedigree can be distilled into cultural capital when refracted through the lens of translation, it appears reasonable to assume that key works of German critical theory in English are refracted through a positivist order of discourse, which is at odds with the ideological, or more precisely utopian, convictions of mainstream critical theorists. This article discusses the translational recontextualisation of Adorno's concept of the "non-identical" and some of its associated conceptual frames.

Keywords: translation and philosophy, critical theory, capitalism, power asymmetries, ideology, domination, hegemony, non-identitarian thinking, instrumental reason, translation and the market

1. Hope and suffering in the age of identity thinking

Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno (1903–1969) was one of the most important social philosophers of the 20th century. His oeuvre elucidates the human condition in late capitalist modernity, articulated through a style of writing that consciously rejects conceptual expression. It is a philosophical discourse that meanders along multi-layered discursive constellations without succumbing to the dictates of conventional scholarship that require the fixing of meaning within clearly defined conceptual boundaries. A recent essay collection fittingly summarises Adorno's aphoristic style as a "language without soil" (Richter 2010a), a language that evokes an almost mystical dream-like reading experience. Adorno's style is underpinned by the idea of *non-identity thinking*, a mode of thought which recognises that no concept can ever fully grasp the world in its entirety, and which stands in contrast with *identity thinking*, a cognitive mode that embodies the human tendency to

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appropriate the world through attitudinal evaluations and conceptual classifications. The concept of identity itself constitutes for Adorno the *ur*-form of all ideology, whereas non-identity thinking strives to recognise the violent disruptions that human reason inflicts on the shifting permutations of historical becoming. In other words, in our attempts to shape and understand the world, we perpetuate the domination of nature and ourselves, whilst a sustained attention to the non-identical, an approach described by Adorno as a "negative dialectics", might reconcile us with those "negative" elements of our existence that "positive" human reason sought to suppress. As this article endeavours to show, it is this tension between hegemonic identitarian predispositions and a gradual move towards enlightened self-reflexivity that characterises the representation of (elements of) German critical theory in English translation.

Adorno's extremely self-conscious social philosophy enabled him to deconstruct discourse to such an extent that any attempt at summarising his thought alongside a couple of thematic principles feels like nailing jelly to the floor. A conceptual regimentation of discourse, after all, amounts to nothing less than perpetual domination, since for Adorno (1973: 11) "all concepts, even the philosophical ones, refer to nonconceptualities, because concepts on their part are moments of the reality that requires their formation, primarily for the control of nature". Such meta-reflexive observations go hand in hand with a sustained attention to the *particular*, to the micro-politics of everyday experience, since the formation and imposition of any cognitive concept that seeks to fully understand reality entails a violent incursion into the natural order of things, the realm of which can never be identical to any primary origin or likeness (cf. Cronin's 2012 idea of a "politics of microspection"). Robert Hullot-Kentor (2006: 4) grasped this perhaps better than many others, arguing that "the concept of origin" denotes nothing less than nature "dominated in its own name". Given that it is impossible to impose stable origins or meanings on the world, the concept of identity dissolves into a vast network of *quasi-universal* relations, a process of dissolution that simultaneously engages with the infinitude of *particular* human experience (Hullot-Kentor 2006: 161). The dialectical tension between identity and non-identity, between universality and particularity, lies in the existential gap between human suffering and hope, and as I will argue, this tension is played out in different English translations of Adorno's critical theory.

Despite German critical theory's complexity and its insistence on the omnipresence of human suffering, reading Adorno inspires hope, be it only in the sense of a utopian yearning that one day an emancipated human consciousness might eliminate unnecessary violence, oppression and exploitation. Unlike traditional social theory, critical theory perceives social domination to be located especially in the historical dynamics of capitalism. For Adorno, rigorous *immanent critique*

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offers a faint hope of unmasking the existing oppressive forces and relations of production and consumption. Adorno's radical social theory, his unflinching and persistent criticism of the status quo, constitutes a form of philosophical rebellion that obstinately, indeed cunningly, provokes a utopian craving for a "reversal of domination" (Hullot-Kentor 2006: 39). Hope and despair, however, can be no more than paradoxical twins, since we may allow ourselves, in Adorno's view, "to hope only on the condition that all hope has disappeared" (Böckelmann 1969: 22, quoted in Bonefeld 2009: 143). Broadly in line with other critical commentators on capitalist history (e.g. Baudrillard 2010a and 2010b), Adorno envisages a hegemonic drive towards a totally administered society governed by the all-embracing principles of capital accumulation and commodity exchange. His immanent capitalist critique was enthusiastically picked up by sections of the 1960s student protest movement in Germany, a liberatory force that rebelled against increasingly anti-liberal tendencies of Western capitalist governments. Today, Adorno's social philosophy has found its place in the canon of the Anglophone social sciences, within a discourse world still dominated by the conceptual rigidities of scientific positivism. It is not unreasonable to suggest that a sensitive "microspective" engagement with one of the most significant cornerstones of German critical theory only occurred from the 1990s onwards (e.g. Hohendahl 1992; Huhn 2004), an engagement that can be extended to the publication of Robert Hullot-Kentor's retranslation of *Aesthetic Theory* (1997), whilst also rekindling hope in the non-identitarian habitats dormant in Anglophone social science.

If critical theory engenders an illusory hope in a world free from social domination, the emphatic target of Adorno's social philosophy is the mitigation of human suffering under the banner of modern capitalism. His critique of identity thinking is closely interwoven with the need to articulate suffering in the face of total social control and recurring evil in modern capitalist societies. Such an articulation fundamentally "defies discursive treatment" whilst simultaneously requiring "conceptual comprehension" (Zuidervaart 2007: 61). It is within this paradox that his work has an ongoing resonance for the problem of social domination and capitalist hegemony, because it highlights society's notoriously invisible and mostly unequal relations of power. But how, in the end, is one to re-articulate in another language an intensely self-reflexive discourse that, on the one hand, defies conceptual composition and understanding, but on the other hand engages deeply with the suffering of a world alienated from nature and from itself, a utopian discourse that yearns for absolution from instrumental reason and commodity fetishism? As I would like to suggest, the answer to an "appropriate" recontextualisation lies in the translator's willingness to sacrifice an instinct that aims to grasp the irreducible complexity of reality; at stake is a willingness "to lend a voice to suffering" as "a condition of all truth," a voice that defies the totalising pretensions of identitarian

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thought (Zuidervaart 1991: 304). Adorno's highly idiosyncratic discourse knows no conceptual bounds, it is a discourse that should only be moulded in the hands of those who would never think of language and translation in terms of ownership and territory. Seen from this vantage point, some of the first English translations appeared to have "suffered" under the reified regime of free market liberalism – in contradistinction to the philosopher's emancipatory ambitions.

2. Translation's suffering: Critical theory under the spell of advanced capitalism

The timeless quality of Adorno's thought cannot be assessed in relation to its position in the canon of philosophical discourse. The most fruitful line of enquiry, it seems to me, is to appreciate his written output as an inspiration to meditate on all *unnecessary* forms of suffering within advanced global capitalism. This view allows us to consider his critical theory as an ethical project that diagnoses economic exploitation and social oppression as systemic yet avoidable failures in our current predicament. A critique of *particular* social relations, however, that simultaneously strives to ground itself in the conceptual liquidation of *universal* truth claims is forced to find alternative ways to communicate its *raison d'être*. While any realistic promise of universal salvation would become superseded the very moment it is pronounced, since it is forced to obey the axiom that "[t]he only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they *would* present themselves from the standpoint of redemption" (Adorno 2005a: 247, emphasis added), it is, on the other hand, only possible to express in words the infinitude of particular human experience by adopting a style that does not commit itself to conventional conceptual expression. Hence, translators of Adorno's critical theory into English need to possess an accurate understanding of the non-identity principle and its ethical prerogatives, an advanced sociocultural self-reflexivity, and a very close familiarity with the historical traditions and conceptual landscapes of continental and Anglophone philosophy, rather than attempt to strive for easily identifiable conceptual arrangements and linear composition.

A first wave of English Adorno translations tended to violate the non-identity principle by relapsing into an identitarian habitus that sought to make him palatable to an Anglophone readership (e.g. Adorno and Horkheimer 1972; Adorno 1973 and 1984). It is essential to realise that reception patterns cannot simply be ascribed to censorship or manipulative mistranslation, rather, they are grounded within subliminal cultural and ideological dispositions that generate normative behaviour (cf. Toury 1995: 54). More significantly, however, reception patterns can be regarded as stemming from a dominant linguistic habitus (Bourdieu 1992: 77) that directs itself

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towards the more powerful partner within a cross-cultural configuration. Within this context it is most notable that Adorno, who lived as a Jewish émigré in the UK and the United States between 1935 and 1949, prematurely returned to his homeland precisely because he was, proverbially, lost in the power plays of translation! In one of many reflections on his working experiences as a scholar in the United States, upon having received the proofs of an article he had written in English, the editors, he discovered, "had not been content simply to correct the stylistic flaws of an emigrant writer. The entire text had been disfigured beyond recognition, the fundamental intentions could not be recovered" (Adorno 2005b: 211). Whilst inattentive editors and translators were prone to misjudge cultural dimensions and philosophical subtleties, Adorno's initial misapprehension in the Anglophone world also rested on lingering ideological suspicions towards German intellectual life during and after World War II (Jay 1984: 158).

Adorno's travails in translation demarcate an ideological chasm between two philosophical traditions that evolved along dissimilar intellectual paradigms. In his own estimation, he appeard to have "collided with the positivistic habits of thought that reign virtually unchallenged in American science" (2005b: 220) whereas in his home country the commercial spirit "had not flourished as widely as in the advanced capitalist countries" (2005b: 207). An intimate daily involvement with American life and culture made Adorno painfully aware of the totalitarian character of advanced consumer capitalism and the dominant positivistic spirit that reigned in the social sciences. In addition to this general feeling of alienation came nagging sensations of having been misunderstood as a strictly conservative European bourgeois with anti-American leanings (cf. Wagle 2011: 359). Ironically, his traumatic experiences in Nazi Germany became transmuted into a sentiment of intense alienation, which Adorno (2005a) himself famously recounts in his aphoristic "reflections on a damaged life", which indicate his general attitude towards authorial identity and instrumental translation into English:

> There is a song by Brahms, to a poem by Heyse, with the lines: *O Herzeleid, du Ewigkeit!/Selbander nur ist Seligkeit*. In the most widely used American edition this is rendered as: 'O misery, eternity!/But two in one were ecstasy.' The archaic, passionate nouns of the original have been turned into catchwords for a hit song, designed to boost it. Illuminated in the neon-light switched on by these words, culture displays its character as advertising. (Adorno 2005a: 47)

Leaving aside the questionable terminology of a mishandled "original", an identitarian concept that contrasts starkly with an otherwise rigorously constellatory approach to writing, Adorno's perceptions of such English-language refractions – to evoke Lefevere's (1992) influential notion of the rewriting of literature through translation – are rooted in the conviction of an almost whole-sale commodification

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of US-American culture. The thesis that under advanced capitalism the products of the culture industry are increasingly exchanged as mere consumer commodities according to market demands was, of course, famously put forward in the best-selling study *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, co-authored by Adorno and his colleague Max Horkheimer (2002); and it is not unreasonable to suggest that translation practices themselves are bound to the steadily advancing reification of culture, since they may be seen as echoing the historical shift from mass producer to mass consumer capitalism within our rapidly globalising world. Sociocultural norms and the linguistic habitus that underpin translational behaviour, as evident in the application of domesticating, "fluent", strategies in translations into English (Venuti 1995: 5), become ossified into unquestioned hegemonic patterns of behaviour that are subject to the vicissitudes of geopolitical power relations. The pendulum of power, after all, overwhelmingly swings in the direction of those who control access to commodities and knowledge, with English functioning not only as a lingua franca but also as an imperialist tool that serves the economic interests of the mega-selling English-language book industry (Schiffrin 2001). While the rigid demand to present translated discourse in flawless and transparent conceptual jargon only constitutes the epistemological side of this hegemonic process (cf. Bennett 2007), it is instructive to see how the first complete translation of *Ästhetische Theorie* was caught within the dynamics of economic power play and sociotextual practices that transformed a strictly non-identitarian ontology into an easily digestible market commodity.

The first English translation of *Ästhetische Theorie*, a work that primarily deals with the position of modern art in the capitalist market place, was published in 1984. If Adorno's German text "deliberately resists easy consumption" because "the need for powerful expression weighs heavier than the desire for direct communication" (Zuidervaart 1991: 46), this translation by Christian Lenhardt destabilises the book's fragmentary and speculative character through the imposition of a linear narrative and an easily digestible conceptual framework conforming to dominant norms of English-language writing that insist on unmediated access to cultural otherness. In accordance with his non-identitarian habitus, Adorno's non-linear discourse unfolds through an excessive application of paratactical syntax and the virtual absence of cross-referencing, two rhetorical-stylistic devices which Lenhardt's translation frequently ignores by introducing subordinating conjunctions such as "while" or "if" and cohesive markers like "as mentioned above". Paradoxically, however, the additional tendency to clarify conceptual propositions, for instance when a conventional Marxist phrase such as "relations of production" is rendered as "capitalist society", allows the reader to appreciate with more clarity the philosophical dictum that human suffering should have been considerably diminished in the wake of unprecedented technoscientific advances. Nevertheless,

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the first English-language version constitutes an interesting case of instrumental reason in translation, because it is possible that the German text's non-identitarian habitus became erased by means of an economic and linguistic prefiguration towards its Anglophone market. Of course, my observations should not be mistaken for a conservative critique that laments the misrepresentation of an 'original' author on teleological grounds; rather I want to highlight that it is problematic that such a translation promotes an implicit belief in universal intelligibility. A refusal to engage with Adorno's principle of non-identity in translation surrenders to an epistemological vantage point that remains under the spell of the reified principles of advanced consumer capitalism.

Adorno did not live to see his *Ästhetische Theorie* in print, and an editorial afterword was appended to the German edition by Adorno's widow Gretel Adorno and his German editor Rolf Tiedemann. The afterword provides insight into the stringent structural and stylistic prescriptions to which Adorno subjected himself while working on his last book-length study. In order to embody a philosophical discourse that defied conventional canons of writing, he insisted that the book be composed "in equally weighted, paratactical parts that are arranged around a midpoint that they express through their constellation" (Adorno 1997: 364). The German editors had a partly fragmented manuscript and faced the daunting task of assembling a free-floating patchwork of aphoristic thought around its narrative nucleus, which involved some structural rearrangements; but they never lost sight of the necessity, as they put it, "to accentuate the book's paratactical principle of presentation" because it was inconceivable "to sacrifice the book to a deductive hierarchical structure of presentation" (Adorno 1997: 365). Interestingly, the translation of the editorial afterword in Lenhardt's version provides a further glimpse into the ideological capture of philosophical otherness. Here, an appropriative interpretation of Adorno's thought is echoed in a kind of misdirected reported speech, when Lenhardt overtranslates Adorno's editors as claiming that the book's non-linear requirements "will no doubt stand in the way of its appropriation [*Rezeption*]" (1984: 496), and that the irredeemable paradox of any committed philosophy that strives for universal salvation still "might be a good model for the appropriation of this work [*rezeptive Anstrengung*, i.e. efforts that need to be expended for the reception of Adorno's work; we could also speak here of an undertranslation given that the concept of 'effort' conveyed through the noun *Anstrengung* has been ignored]" (Adorno 1984: 497). Even though we should not assign too much strategic significance to such translational over- and under-determinations, it is tempting to evaluate them as forcible appropriations, not least owing to the linear and hypotactical straitjacket that this translation project imposes upon a strictly asymmetrical and paratactical discourse.

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Against this background of a predominantly domesticating translation strategy, let us try to advance a tentative psychogeography of hegemonic translation by briefly dwelling on Adorno's (2005a: 49) meditations on the *particular* in American life, where "even the smallest of its segments is inscribed, as its expression, with the immensity of the whole country." For Adorno, the country's psychology was so obviously intertwined with its architectural infrastructure, everything appeared so visibly suffused with political meaning, that even the roads acquired a semblance of monstrosity, having been "inserted directly in the landscape, and the more impressively smooth and broad they are, the more unrelated and violent their gleaming track appears against its wild, overgrown surroundings" (Adorno 2005a: 48). If these meditations partly evoke the damage brought about by a nation born out of colonialism and ethnic violence, they also resemble Baudrillard's (2010a: 29) narrations of American space, where "any old street in a Midwestern town" may conjure up "the whole of the US". The Frenchman, however, writing around fourty years after Adorno, was concerned with the dissolution of intellectual thought and political values in postmodernity, so in true Nietzschean spirit, he cheerfully diagnosed "a crisis of historical ideals facing up to the impossibility of their realization" in Europe, while across the pond we merely observe "the crisis of an achieved Utopia" (Baudrillard 2010a: 83). For Baudrillard, in the final analysis, Americans remain unencumbered by the historical weight of both idealist metaphysics and grand ideological narratives, whereas European conceptions of freedom "will never be able to rival their spatial, mobile conception, which derives from the fact that at a certain point they freed themselves from that historical centrality" (Baudrillard 2010a: 88). If we can glimpse a residual Marxism in Baudrillard's account, Adorno's earlier aphoristic imagery remains rooted in a conviction that the reigning market and exchange principle, having edged its way into every fibre of the social fabric, had found its most unadulterated expression in US-American society:

> Every child of the European upper classes blushed at a monetary gift made by relations, and even if the greater force of bourgeois utility overcame and overcompensated such reactions, the doubt nevertheless remained whether man was made merely to exchange. The remnants of the old were, in the European consciousness, ferments of the new. In America, on the other hand, no child of even well-off parents has inhibitions about earning a few cents by newspaper rounds, and this nonchalance has found its way into the demeanour of adults. […] It occurs to nobody that there might be services that are not expressible in terms of exchange value. This is the real pre-condition for the triumph of that subjective reason which is incapable of thinking a truth intrinsically binding, and perceives it solely as existing for others, as exchangeable. (Adorno 2005a: 195–196)

Adorno's thought reflects a melancholic yearning for a life that might never be experienced, given that the hegemonic order of capitalist exchange has penetrated

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deeply into humanity's social consciousness. Where Adorno sees American society and culture as a faceless consumerist Moloch irredeemably disjointed by scientific calculability and instrumental rationality, Baudrillard's experiential account celebrates the absence of historical weight, dwelling instead on the American desert as an allegorical space for radical cultural critique that nonetheless renders superfluous the faintest hope of liberation from the commercial spirit. Where Adorno's melancholy dwells on unfreedom, alienation and difference, Baudrillard joyfully exaggerates the wild anarchic play of uncultivated virility, expressive withdrawal and frivolous indifference. Yet Adorno's (2005a: 15) "melancholy science" owes much less to joyful Nietzschean anarchism than to an unrelenting faith in the remote possibility that the universal spell cast by commodity fetishism could be overcome. I therefore argue that the hegemony, or, more precisely, the psychogeography of instrumental reason constitutes a form of naturalised power that overrides most translational decisions into English. Consequently, the cross-cultural negotiation of power differentials in translation, at least when English is involved, appears to rest on a quasi-universal obligation to trade almost every particularity according to its exchange value, a practically instinctive subjection to the gravitational pull of hegemonic power, a process widely discussed under the label of interpellation in post-colonial translation theory (Robinson 1997: 22), but rarely with explicit reference to the history of capitalism. In particular during the first wave of translations until the 1980s, many American editors and translators of Adorno's work would estimate that an Anglophone readership would struggle with the density of his discourse unless they were helped through this labyrinthian web of metaphysical profundities, semantic ambiguities and structural complexities.

3. Translation's hope: Non-identity rescued?

Adorno had become a truly public intellectual in the German-speaking world of the 1960s. In the English-speaking hemisphere, however, a deeper appreciation of his writing's potentially emancipatory after-effects only slowly began to emerge. A thorough engagement with Adorno's fierce critique of the commodification of human existence, specifically as underway in the Western world, gradually materialised in the publication and translation efforts by some left wing intellectual circles from the 1970s onwards (e.g. the efforts to publish translated articles in the influential journal *Telos*). Moreover, during the 1980s a comprehensive assessment of two "first generation" translations, inspired by the American scholar and critic Robert Hullot-Kentor (1985, 1989, the second essay was republished in his 2006 essay collection), paved the way for a more perceptive awareness of the vicissitudes of translating German critical theory. Whilst Hullot-Kentor himself published a new translation of *Aesthetic*

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Theory in 1997, a problematic rendition of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was superseded by a new translation by Edmund Jephcott in 2002. It is also pertinent to note that attempts to rescue Adorno from one-dimensional readings appear not to have occurred to the same extent with the Anglophone reception of most other theoreticians associated with the Frankfurt School of critical theory. Herbert Marcuse's writings, especially his phenomenally successful *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* from 1964 achieved wide public recognition especially in the United States, and was swiftly translated and published in German in 1967. This commercial success, however, might have been due to the fact that Marcuse, who never relocated to Germany after his forced emigration in 1934, had written his academic bestseller in English. Besides, his scathing critique of the reifying logic of late capitalism was more in tune with the revolutionary *Zeitgeist* than the late Adorno's rather theory-heavy writings. After Adorno's death in 1969, German critical theory gradually moved closer to the epicentre of the Anglophone philosophical polysystem, evidenced by an increase in sympathetic and critical reviews and a growing number of translations in left-intellectual journals such as *Telos* or the *New Left Review*, which helped to establish "the basis for an increasingly sophisticated American reception of his work" (Jay 1984: 170).

Adorno's ever more refined reception in the Anglophone arts and social sciences was accompanied by increased translation activity, a development that eventually inspired an improved historical contextualisation of the diverging strands of European social theory by pinpointing Adorno's ideological position "in the general context of Western Marxism" (Jay 1984: 172; Hohendahl 1992). Yet the continuing circulation of some English translations which, to differing degrees, compromised Adorno's non-identitarian habitus is a fascinating reminder of the hegemonic strength of Anglophone discourse, an invisible power without precedence in the history of intellectual thought (cf. Bennett 2007). It became increasingly clear throughout the 1990s that there was an almost symbiotic proximity between Adorno and postmodernist thought, at a time when Peter Uwe Hohendahl (1995: 3–4; emphasis added) nonetheless stressed that

> the textual basis of American Adorno criticism has been shaky. Some of the existing translations are inadequate and have to be replaced – particularly *Aesthetic Theory*, but even *Dialectic of Enlightenment* has room for improvement. […] The most obvious explanation for the increasing interest in Adorno's work may be the poststructuralist connection: the supposed affinity between his project of negative dialectics and the antiessentialist and antimetaphysical turn in American criticism during the 1980s. […] In fact, one could argue that the somewhat marginal position of the Frankfurt School in this country encouraged interaction between Adorno's theory and other oppositional forces and that the interpretation of Adorno is, implicitly or explicitly, determined by conflicting modes of *appropriation*.

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Hohendahl (1995) aims to clear up misunderstandings surrounding the Anglophone reception. As a US-based scholar of German origin, and thus keenly aware of the pitfalls of some translations, Hohendahl was able to rely on Adorno's works in German. Like many scholars with foreign language skills writing on German critical theory through the medium of English, Hohendahl provided his own modified translations whenever he saw fit. His general dissatisfaction with the existing translations seems to have been particularly pronounced in the case of Lenhardt's version of *Ästhetische Theorie*, any quotes from which he translated anew for his own scholarly narrative (Hohendahl 1995: ix–x). In contrast to Hohendahl's critical awareness, the second edition of David Hawkes' (2003) influential work *Ideology*, which positions Adorno as a post-Marxist thinker, relies on first-generation translations of *Negative Dialectics* and *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which were the object of fierce criticism (Rose 1976; Hullot-Kentor 1989), with *Aesthetic Theory* arguably the most widely noted case of an apparently botched translation (Hullot-Kentor 1985; also Jameson 1990: ix–x).

Any language is subject to the forces of power and ideology. And translation, in whichever constellation of power, threatens the identity and conceptual universe of the originating *and* receiving discourse. The translation of philosophy involving English as a hegemonic language, however, has a heightened tendency to be bent towards discursive and textual norms residing in the hegemonic culture. Venuti (1998: 108) talks in this context of "the virtual invisibility of translation in Anglo-American philosophy." The English translations of the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, for instance, remind us of the phenomenological existence of a "remainder" which proves the principle that "the philosophical project of concept formation is fundamentally determined by its linguistic and cultural conditions" (Venuti 1998: 115). Such sociohistorical contingencies nonetheless allow for innovative intrusions, since in any disciplinary context "a style of philosophical writing may insinuate itself among or violate the philosophies that currently hold sway" (Venuti 1998: 122). By extension, this argument highlights the underlying power struggles and ideological interests in Anglo-German translation, but, further, there is a fundamental 'economic remainder' in hegemonic translational relations that points towards a woefully overlooked aspect of contemporary translation theory. If Lenhardt's translation of *Ästhetische Theorie* neatly insinuated itself into mainstream Anglo-American philosophy, Hullot-Kentor's retranslation surely went against the norms of English-language philosophical discourse. And whilst Lenhardt's streamlined translation conforms, subconsciously or not, to the orthodoxy of academic fluency in English-language writing, in the final analysis it panders to the imperial dominance of a highly standardised idiom in the globalised English-language book industry.

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Recent theories consider ideology as a phenomenological concept that reaches beyond limited definitions of a shared discursive system of thought amongst groups, or a distorted world view that masks purportedly 'real' class interests. Žižek (1994: 8), for instance, maintains that ideology serves not only as an invisible force that underpins capitalist production and consumption, rather, ideological thought enunciates discursive positions which are themselves situated within ever shifting constellations of power. Most crucially, however, ideology cannot simply be located on the level of discourse and epistemology (or knowledge), as it does not simply 'reflect' reality, but rather constitutes an integral part of our own individuality. For Žižek, ideology is primarily located on the level of ontology (or life itself) and practice (or lived reality), since ideological thought does not merely constitute "an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality" (1989: 33). Incidentally, then, Žižek's position is closer to Adorno's than he appears to admit, given that for Adorno the master-concept of identity itself tells the story of all ideology. In view of the misrepresentation of Adorno's discourse in Lenhardt's translation, it is thus important to realise that ideological thought itself does not have the power to 'distort' or 'manipulate' discourse, because power in the age of late capitalism tends to reside in a translation's surrender to identitarian thought which, as so often in the case of translations into English, manifests itself in the imposition of a rigid structural logic and transparent conceptual landscapes. Power in the age of late capitalism resides so strongly in the realm of economics that this cannot but have critical implications for the theory and practice of translation, an observation, however, which seems to have gained little credence in translation studies.

In his fierce critique of Lenhardt's translation, Hullot-Kentor (1985: 145–146) takes particular issue with structural readjustments, for "[t]he translator wants to provide an Adorno that would act as a tour guide to aesthetics; a long trip is planned, with occasional detours, clearly marked", indeed, "[i]f the translation were an introduction to modern art it would want to make sense of abstract painting by connecting the lines." Hullot-Kentor's mocking critique rests on the conviction that identitarian thinking constitutes ideology in almost undiluted form, since for him "subjective reason has installed paragraphs to mark the work as a one-way street" (Hullot-Kentor 1985: 147). Eight years before his retranslation was published in 1997, Hullot-Kentor summarised the poor quality of English-language representations of Frankfurt School thinkers in terms of crosscultural philosophical disparities, the intellectual and political demise of Marxism, and the growing popularity of postmodern deconstructionism, whilst singling out "the damage done to his [Adorno's] writings by their inadequate translation and the blunting of his thought" (1989: 5). In his own retranslation, Hullot-Kentor resisted a quasi-instinctual reflex to 'tidy up' a highly aphoristic narrative into bite-sized chunks. If Lenhardt strove

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to fix deliberate narrative disruptions and their underlying conceptualities into a discursive straitjacket, Hullot-Kentor, in an attempt to echo the text's meandering paratactical flow, took care to virtually layer a second skin on each aphoristic riddle and chiastic wordplay. The two divergent approaches are epitomised in the following extracts. In order to exemplify Adorno's spiral movement of thought and its internal conceptual density, the two sentences I focus on are presented within their surrounding linguistic context:

> hieße ihr irrational. Leiden, auf den Begriff gebracht, bleibt stumm und konsequenzlos: das läßt in Deutschland nach Hitler sich beobachten. Dem Hegelschen Satz, den Brecht als Devise sich erkor: die Wahrheit sei konkret, genügt vielleicht im Zeitalter des unbegreifbaren Grauens nur noch Kunst. Das Hegelsche Motiv … (Adorno 1970: 35)

> reason's own standards. Therefore, even when it is understood, suffering remains mute and inconsequential a truth, incidentally, that everybody can verify for himself by taking a look at Germany after Hitler. [paragraph indentation] What recommends itself, then, is the idea that art may be the only remaining medium of truth in an age of incomprehensible terror and suffering. As the real … (Lenhardt 1984: 27)

> … rebuffs rational knowledge. Suffering conceptualized remains mute and inconsequential, as is obvious in post-Hitler Germany. In an age of incomprehensible horror, Hegel's principle, which Brecht adopted as his motto, that truth is concrete, can perhaps suffice only for art. Hegel's thesis that … (Hullot-Kentor 1997: 18)

Adorno's aphoristic propositions are firmly lodged between the single full stops that communicate the end of a single thought. Each sentence achieves its conceptual density by communicating just a semblance of semantic closure. Its centre of gravity, therefore, lies as much in its concise form as in its expressiveness, whilst remaining in dynamic interaction with the surrounding discourse. Hullot-Kentor's observance of this compositional principle is evident in a correspondingly terse and self-contained yet wholly interdependent and outreaching discourse that aims to incite readers to dwell on their own *particular* experience in relation to the more *universal* tendencies integral to the social world. This incitement to think for oneself is severely compromised through any strategy of semantic recasting, which in Lenhardt's translation is evident in changes in paragraph structure, omissions, and addition of cohesive markers. It is ironic that in an early review, one of Adorno's best-known commentators, the otherwise soioculturally perceptive Lambert Zuidervaart (1985: 195), called Lenhardt's translation "excellent", adding that "Adorno's highly wrought, idiosyncratic prose has been turned into idiomatic English that captures the gist without missing nuances". Perhaps the times were not yet ripe for a more nuanced, indeed accurate refletion on a translation that was

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pandering to the axiom of enforced readability, perhaps largely owing to economic and financial deliberations on the part of the publisher?

Be that as it may, Adorno requires his readers to relate to the fundamental human sentiments of suffering and hope, since his social philosophy – and here we may agree with Zuidervaarts (1991: 304) assessment – attempts "to lend a voice to unmet needs and unfulfilled desires". The coordinates of life, however, can never be grasped in their totality, an unspeakable remainder is always present, a shrapnel of non-identity which, as Thyen (2007: 205) puts it, "is concerned with the particular, not as something against but as something mediated by the universal". Hence, whilst the infinite meaning potential of words (or signifiers) can never be fully covered by the cognitive concepts (or signifieds) we impose on them, human experience paradoxically needs to rely on conceptual constructions which are largely socially mediated. But the sociohistorical contingency of concepts conceals the important fact that concepts, in our age of advanced consumer capitalism, are in the first instance economically determined. Bourdieu (1984) points out that the concept of taste positions people in social fields that are governed through the dynamics of economic exchange value. The significance of Bourdieu's scholarship for the investigation of the phenomenon of translation has been widely acknowledged in translation studies (Inghilleri 2005), but it is curious that this fundamental insight into the economic determinations of discourse has not yet gained much currency in the discourse of our discipline, an insight that owes much to Baudrillard's (1981: 163) work *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* in which he asserts that "[a]ll the repressive and reductive strategies of power systems are already present in the internal logic of the sign". Signs themselves are commodities that are predominantly exchanged according to market principles. In the light of this, it is interesting to note that when Adorno and Horkheimer (1944, 1947 and 1969) worked on subsequent German versions of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* while in exile in the 1940s, and in order to pre-empt censorship of the fiercely anti-communist US federal authorities, they themselves transformed German Marxist terminology into more neutral terms. According to Hullot-Kentor (1989: 6), terms such as "proletariat" and "capitalist" were changed into "worker" and "employer" respectively, and, crucially, they changed the term "exploitation" into "suffering"! Such conceptual transformations responded to political and ideological constraints, but in the end they signify a conscious surrender to the 'political economy of the sign'. Identitarian thought constitutes a clearly hegemonic mode of thinking, it fails to recognise its inextricable entanglement with economic imperatives, and its normative force is more strongly ingrained in discourse than many of us dare to admit.

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4. The language of suffering refracted

The story of German critical theory in the English speaking world is worrisome. My worries are based on the premise that a sufficient understanding of the English-language reception needs to engage more thoroughly with the history of capitalism than with the histories of science or ideas. A capitalist critique would still provide only tentative conclusions, but translation studies could gain additional geo-economic and systemic-conceptual insights into the impact which hegemonic power and ideological interests have on the formation of disciplinary subjectivities and in turn geopolitical constellations. As Adorno maintains, the "intended comprehensibility of philosophical language today is to be uncovered in all aspects as a delusion", for it harnesses "the pathos of words that appear to have been extrapolated from the dynamics of history in order to bestow upon these words non-historical validity and at once comprehensibility" (quoted and translated by Richter 2010b: 144 from Adorno 1997: 368). Enforced comprehensibility, as an imprint of identitarian thought, bears considerable traces of economic market relations, and constitutes a quasi-universal aspect of hegemonic translation. English-language recontextualisations, on the other hand, that try to do justice to the particular and emancipatory content of Adorno's philosophy, have a stronger chance to couch their own, inevitably partial, discourse within a negative dialectics that deconstructs identitarian thought and its obsession with fixed conceptualities.

A geo-economic approach to translational phenomena not only renders visible the spatiotemporal and cultural positions of translated literature, but also provides insights into translation activity along a systemic continuum from direct relations of domination (e.g. censorship) to quasi-naturalised relations of hegemony (e.g. the economic foundation of translation strategies). Translation scholars and translators, especially those of a literary-systemic persuasion, tend to overlook the commodification of human experience under advanced capitalism. With the ontological principle of profitable exchange as its underlying dynamics, the epistemological principle of reification exerts a strong normative impulse on hegemonic translation activity. These phenomenological dimensions embody a historical situation that inverts social values into market values whereby people increasingly treat each other as exchangeable commodities in the market place of society. Advanced consumer capitalism constitutes a hegemonic system of power that appears to propel humanity into a future of techno-spiritual domination (Baudrillard 2010b). Capitalism provides an illusion of community yet steadfastly works for the destruction of the communal spirit. Adorno remains deeply entrenched in the capitalist world order, but more than most professional thinkers, he worked at exposing every fragment of thought that remained attached to capitalism's ideological universe and discursive logic. His non-identitarian and concentric style of writing echoes modern

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society's shifting constellations of power whilst simultaneously attempting to escape the cold rationality of market calculability and the conceptual stringencies of identity thinking. It is thus not unreasonable to suggest that under the regime of advanced consumer capitalism in the Anglophone world, poorly self-reflexive English-language representations of German critical theory tend to materialise as images without resemblance, as simulacra whose only trace of origin lies in reified cognition (cf. Baudrillard 1994). Conversely, a non-identitarian engagement with philosophical and cultural otherness would strive to lay bare its own ontological, discursive and ideological constrictions.

A systemic-conceptual approach to the study of translational phenomena recognises that the infinitude of human experience can never be imprisoned within clearly demarcated conceptual boundaries. The general difficulty of re-expressing concepts across languages is exacerbated when dealing with philosophical discourses that strive to deconstruct the very identity of the notion of a concept. It is thus problematic to speak of Adorno in translation in a rigorous and quasi-positivist academic jargon, given that the concepts discussed would dissolve in the hands of any translation scholar who ignores the history of capitalism and capitalism's objectifying force on human subjects caught in its historical trajectory. A convincing critical deconstruction of capitalist presuppositions remains a blind spot in thinking on translation. What might be needed could be a "psychogeography of translation under advanced capitalism" that acknowledges the veil which consumer capitalism casts over normative translation behaviour and by extension over the constitution of literatures in translation. Instrumental reason, most evidently in its positivistic persuasion, has a tendency to appropriate concepts that perceive the world from different ontological and epistemological vantage points. Adorno experienced this phenomenon close up when residing abroad, and his own psychogeography of American life and thought, especially as evident in his work *Minima Moralia* (2005a), forms a crucial component in understanding the conceptual recontextualisation of his critical theory. Identitarian thought assumes an illusory resemblance to otherness that it can never achieve, for it is geared, as Adorno (2005b: 211) himself puts it, towards "the highly rationalized commercial exploitation even of spiritual creations". Perhaps Hullot-Kentor's translation method can be taken as a strongly self-reflexive attempt at recreating a language that, according to Richter (2010b: 144), "registers, in a diction at once poetic and philosophical, the injury but also the hope that resides in the very world in which it unfolds", and that strives for "a certain melancholia of negativity, a careful and caring probing, a provisional yet steadfast searching, a non-anthropocentric yet deeply responsible engagement with what remains non-identical".

At times of global wars and permanent terrorist threats, economic deprivation in large parts of the world, and spiritual poverty in the so-called Western

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hemisphere, Dennis Redmond, a present-day American (re)translator of some of Adorno's works, perhaps most succinctly captivates the spirit of a non-identitarian Adorno translator. Just as my own argument has a clear ideological drift, there is no translator of critical theory who can escape ideological bias, but perhaps translators could not do worse than deny their own partiality *and* disregard the ever more compelling conclusion that, somewhere along the lines of social evolution something has gone terribly wrong, even though redemption might never be too far around the corner:

> Above all, I have tried to do some small amount of justice to the poetry, musicality and beauty of Adorno's language, which is inextricably interwoven with Adorno's theoretical innovations. In the midst of the most cataclysmic war of human history, Adorno's prose radiates the promise of a happiness beyond catastrophe, a happiness which the total system, to this day, denies its constituent members, simply because it *is* this catastrophe. (2005c, emphasis original)

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