

THE MOVEMENT AND THE UNIVERSITY: CRITIQUE OF MODERN IRRATIONALITY

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The institution (the university, the prison, the hospital, the state) is regulatory; and regulation tends towards elimination. The university regulates certain kinds of theoretical and empirical, intellectual and sensual, study; the prison regulates mobility; the hospital regulates health; the state, of which these other institutions are apparatuses, regulates sociality, in general, by imposing the individuation it implies. These institutions do what they do unto the elimination of what they regulate.¹

In an essay that takes its point of departure in the thinking of Palestinian poet and literary scholar, Refaat Alareer, literary critic and professor at University of California Anahid Nersessian discusses the role of parody in contemporary education, knowledge production, and critical thinking at American universities.² Refaat Alareer's research and poetry are well-known in occupied Palestine, but received international fame after the English translation of his poem, "If I Must Die," on the occasion of his death, on December 6, 2023. Like many Palestinian thinkers, Alareer was killed by Israeli bombing. His passing is part of the scholasticide and cultural cleansing that, at the time of writing of this article, is ongoing in Gaza and on the West Bank. In her essay, Nersessian draws on Alareer's research and teaching, especially his dissertation on the English poet John Donne.

In a recorded version of a lecture by Alareer that Nersessian listened to retrospectively, the Palestinian poet and scholar speaks about literary parody as something that opens for new possibilities. Amid the global movement of student encampment that started in the USA, where Nersessian is based, she states that the same kind of parody is currently present at Western universities. The parody that Nersessian speaks of is the encampments at the universities, which reveal otherwise ignored or suppressed characteristics of such institutions. These characteristics can be understood as the role of critical thinking, the philosophy of history, and the philosophy of law. In other words, all that which Nersessian sees the protesting students undertaking in the camps. She writes:

The encampments are also a parody, in Alareer's sense: emerging from within the university, they offer another possibility for what the university might be. (...) The protests have revealed that the American university, which operates more and more as a high-cost degree factory where humanities departments squirm on the chopping block, is still a place where people can learn what is true, and act on their knowledge. You cannot, in other words, expect young people to memorise and regurgitate history, economics, political science, moral philosophy and so on for their exams while prohibiting them from taking their education on the road.³

What Nersessian says in the foregoing statement is that the critical thinking and knowledge production presupposed by the university are now taking place in the student encampments. They do so in the form of protest directed to the university's complicity in crimes against international law. These crimes have escalated since the 1948 Nakba, and especially since the Six-Day War of 1967, in the form of illegal settlement, apartheid, and ethnic cleansing. Part of the parody that Nersessian notes is that the university refuses to allow its students to undertake the critical thinking and democratic activities that they are taught in class, when studying this history in everything from international relations to law and cultural studies. This essay takes as its starting point an attempt to avoid such parody, as a piece of critical thinking produced on paid time for research undertaken at the university, and published in an academic journal. I want to shed light on the history of critical thinking and social movements that historically, just like today, have been inherently intertwined.

As a way of historicizing the critical practice of the global student movement, I want to shed light on a famous debate between two German critical theorists, Theodor W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, who had an argument related to the German student movement that emerged in 1968. In correspondence between the two professors in 1969, they disagreed on the level in which they should engage in the discussions at students' open assemblies. The exchange between the two professors was one of the last for Adorno, and the correspondence ended with his passing in August 1969. The arguments that came out of this discussion, and from one of their students, show a conflict immanent to critical thinking, with which the discipline did not have a way to deal with, then.

By shedding light on the practice that emerges in the milieu that Adorno and Marcuse were part of, but also by pointing at a way out of it, I will discuss how critical thinking in practice necessarily not only reproduces its institution, but also questions the role and necessity of such an institution. By means of this historical-critical path, I will explain how this questioning is central to the reproduction of the institution, whether or not its leadership wants to accept it. The method employed in my way of undertaking this analysis includes the inclusion of references to material otherwise excluded from an academic canon or context. By introducing these into this critical discussion, I wish to show in practice how the form that this essay takes is inherently dependent on surrounding historical models and practices. The model manifested by this method is a montage of historical materialist constellations of the ways in which theory is practiced, which both reflects and questions the theoretical groundwork on which this essay relies. Hence, the form of this essay reflects the parody that it attempts to explicate.

Central to the disagreement between Adorno and Marcuse was the possibility of collective critical practice, including, as for many in the late 1960s, the dialectics between theory and practice between the mediated and the immediate, the sensed and the reflected, critique and action. The main difference between Adorno and Marcuse is the extent to which such dialectics may be transformed into a universalized transcendence of the collective, as a way of collectivizing the individual critical subject. Adorno relies on a Kantian individual self-reflection, and, following on the thinking of early Walter Benjamin, only sees transcendence as immanent to the historical experience embedded in a fragmented essay or artwork. This is, as Adorno would say, the only way to avoid totalitarianism. Marcuse stands closer to orthodox Marxism, according to which collective transcendence emerges as the abolition of individual alienation, and therefore, too, of already existing totalitarianism.⁴

The experience of racialization is not central to Adorno's or Marcuse's thinking, and this lack will be a key to a historically specific understanding of their arguments. By reading their correspondence and critical thinking from 1930 onwards, I will shed light on both of their stances with the help of the contemporary critical theorist Fumi Okiji. Okiji's understanding of critical thinking as both communal and individual puts Adorno's and Marcuse's stances to the test, based on the question of what is communal and how critique is practiced. This reading will bring us back to Nersessian's

analysis of the current student encampment movement as epitomized by an image that she comments on in her essay, and which went viral during the initial phase of the American student encampment movement, a photograph of a student holding a banner with the text: “Columbia, why require me to read Prof. Edward Said if you don’t want me to use it?”⁵

WITH AND AGAINST ADORNO

In her book, *Jazz as Critique* (2018), Okiji reads Adorno’s aversion to immediate practice in relation to the critical models that he introduced after the Second World War. In a sense, Okiji’s theoretical method identifies the same paradox that Nersessian highlights in the currently ongoing student encampments. That is, that the capacity of critical theory is practiced fully only if we also use it against itself, for example, criticizing Adorno with the help of his own thinking. As he would say himself, it is only by immanently negating the universality of a theoretical model that we can practice it. Adorno famously described such a theoretical practice of *negative dialectics* in 1967.⁶ Drawing on this negative dialectics, Okiji elaborates an understanding of critique as practice on the premise that the individual subject in jazz constantly acts on the critical threshold of being part of the self-image of modern liberal subjectivity, and also stands outside of it because of social and racial stigmatization. She employs American sociologist W.E.B Du Bois’s concept of *double consciousness* to explain how this plays out. In his 1907 book, *Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois describes the experience of reflecting on social relations from behind a social veil, with a “second sight.”⁷ He defines this second sight as both a “gift and a curse” of the black American, who embodies two contradictory identities: the *racially stigmatized* and the integrated *citizen*. This is a matter of not only being a body, an object, but also a mind, a subject. In his own words, the person with a double consciousness strives “to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius. These powers of body and mind have in the past been strangely wasted, dispersed, or forgotten.”⁸

If the objectifying veil that Du Bois describes in the statement above is the “death and isolation” that the racial oppression of the color line causes, the second sight is the reflection *from behind* this objectification. It is therefore a reflection on the means to individuate, to be a subject. It is this process that Du Bois writes about, as a way “to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius”: in other

words, to be a subject *despite* the social repression that hinders the racialized person from practicing free subjectivity in a modern liberal democracy. Second sight is therefore not a possibility but a *must* for survival. It is a divided subject position caused by what Cedric Robinson would later describe as “racial capitalism.”⁹ In Okiji’s reading of Du Bois, this divide becomes a critical capacity for orientation in modern society’s overarching racial and social divides, which could be seen as constitutive of what Adorno, with and against Max Weber, characterized as a barbaric inversion of the modern process of rationalization.¹⁰ The orientation that Okiji proposes as being enabled by second sight through the model of double consciousness in late-modern racist society can be understood as a negative dialectics that continuously questions its own form. It is therefore an orientation that also is essential to social struggle.

In the light of Okiji’s reading of Adorno via Du Bois, it is interesting to see how a similar contradictory logic—a negative dialectics—is at work in the writing of one of Adorno’s earlier students, namely Hans Jürgen Krahl. Besides being a student of critical theory at the Institute for Social Research, Krahl was a member of the Socialist German Students’ League.¹¹ Historical specificity is obviously crucial when reading Krahl at a time when such student struggles are globalized once again, in yet another specific conjuncture of social, economic, and political crisis.¹² What needs to be emphasized here, however, is Krahl’s negative dialectical critique of his professor as unpacked in the text, “The Political Contradiction in Adorno’s Critical Theory,” of 1971. Here, Krahl describes how Adorno’s critical thinking, writing, and teaching had enlightened him and other students with “concepts which demystified the ruling system and defined the need for emancipation.” Yet, Krahl underscores that Adorno was unable to accept this fact. Krahl describes this paradox as an objective, that is a *critical*, contradiction:

This objective contradiction in Adorno’s theory broke into open conflict and made the socialist students into political adversaries of their philosophical teacher. As much as Adorno saw through the bourgeois ideology of the disinterested search for truth as a fetish of commodity exchange, he equally distrusted the traces of political struggle in scientific dialogue.¹³

The critical paradox that Krahl points out in Adorno’s thinking can also be seen in the professor’s correspondence with Marcuse. It

consists of seven letters sent between Germany, to which Adorno had returned after the Second World War, and California, where Marcuse had remained in exile as a professor at University of California, San Diego. While the German student movement of the late 1960s focused on institutional and capitalist forms of governance in the Post-War state, the student movement in the USA was deeply involved in the question of the racism that was experienced at the university and beyond. At the University of California, in Berkeley and San Diego, the students had been fighting the internalized racism at departments since 1964. The movement emerged as the Free Speech movement, which developed in relation to, amongst many others, the Third World Liberation Front and the Black Panther Party.¹⁴ Marcuse and his student at the time, Angela Davis, supported the students' occupation of the universities.¹⁵ On October 24, 1969, they held a collective speech for the student protestors at the University of California, Berkeley. In the introductory words to the speech, Marcuse distinguished the ruling powers of liberal democracy from society itself:

The fight against these powers must go on, because it is a fight for you. They want to block your mind, they want to protect you against controversial ideas which according to their judgment endanger and destroy American society. In all modesty I suggest there is a slight confusion here, a slight Orwellian language. Because what these controversial ideas may indeed endanger or destroy is the rule of the powers that be over the society, but not the society itself.

With these words, Marcuse defended the students' struggle against university management and the state itself, with the argument that society is not threatened by activism; it is the other way around: the struggle is part of society, although the university acts as though it is not.

His former colleague, Adorno, took an entirely different stance. In January 1969, that same year, Adorno called the police when a group of his students hosted an activist meeting at the Institute for Social Research. It is the attempted "occupation," as Adorno calls it in writing, that is the hot subject of the written correspondence between the two professors. The reason is that Marcuse insists on starting his planned visit to the Institute by meeting the students in an open student assembly. He insists on that because he wants to show his solidarity with the students at a time when their professor, Adorno,

did not. Marcuse writes the following to Adorno: “I believe that if I accept the Institute’s invitation without also speaking to the students, I will identify myself with (or I will be identified with) a position that I do not share politically.”¹⁶ Adorno refuses to meet Marcuse’s demand, and Marcuse finally cancels his visit to the Institute.

DEBUNKING THE DEMOCRATIC NARRATIVE

I will now go on to further unpack Okij’s critical treatment of Adorno’s writings on jazz. My aim is to extrapolate central motifs in my own negative dialectical reading of Adorno’s critique of the student movement of the 1960s, and the implications such a reading may have in our current historical conjunction. Okiji’s book engages with an older dismissal of Adorno’s in the 1930s. This was a time when jazz was a subversive musical practice mainly undertaken by racialized people in the USA, a practice that many white Americans understood to be “dangerous.”¹⁷ In his infamous 1932 essay, “On Jazz,” Adorno warns of unmediated practice as uncritical, and hence as reactionary. In the practice of jazz, this is most specifically manifested in the improvisational aspect that distinguishes the genre. These elements, Adorno writes, “characterize a subjectivity which revolts against a collective power which it itself is, for this reason its revolt seems ridiculous and is beaten down by the drum just as syn-copation beats.”¹⁸

Adorno’s dismissal of the “out of synch” jazz ensemble in the statement above needs to be contextualized in the time and context of its writing, namely during the depression-worn initial years of what soon came to be Hitler’s Nazi governance, and one year before Adorno, Marcuse, and their fellow Frankfurters were forced into exile. Simultaneously, Adorno’s description of the jazz ensemble echoes his later critique of “discussion” at the student actionists’ open assemblies in the late 1960s. This is where Okiji’s thinking comes into the picture for our discussion. Her reading of jazz through Adorno’s post-war works, and especially the posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory*, from 1970, shows how Adorno’s critical model of negative dialectics and immanent self-reflection does not conflict with jazz. Okiji instead shows how it is possible to use Adorno’s theory of the modern artwork, as outlined in *Aesthetic Theory*, to show how the performance of jazz is as critical as the performance of atonal music that Adorno refers to in his book.

What Okiji does is take as her starting point Adorno’s general position that collective practice is impossible, if it is not mediated by

individual reflection. By stating that the liberal democratic understanding of the subject as primarily individual, and only secondarily communal, Okiji outlines how the “jazz subject” manifests the paradox of modern subjectivity. Her argument is that critique, in the form of jazz, cannot solely be an individual practice:

I suggest here that jazz cannot be adequately understood through a reading that sees the individual soloist fully liberated within the confines of predetermined rules and expectations nor through one that portrays a group of “isolated” individuals who merely inhabit the same space and miraculously turn out “coherent” work. The democracy narrative recognizes a collective in jazz but misconstrues the complex, contradictory, irresolvable relationships as a harmonious resolution to do what one wants, so long as one is tolerant.¹⁹

Okiji uses Adorno’s model of the double character of the work of art as both autonomous and heterogenous: free, and unfree, at the same time.²⁰ Although this dialectic plays out in the form of the artwork, she transposes it to the experience of double consciousness on the one hand, and secondly, to the artistic and social practice of jazz. Hence, she outlines how the jazz practitioner is not only both collective and individual at the same time; she is also both accepted and excluded from modern democracy. This is how Okiji short-circuits Adorno’s critique of jazz by pointing out how the experience of racialization is critical to begin with. She does so by applying Adorno’s model against the way he himself used it; that is, by cross-reading it with Du Bois’s work. Consequently, Okiji argues that “black life, whatever the intention of a particular actor, cannot but help be lived as critical reflection.”²¹

The resulting discussion that Okiji undertakes leads to her model, “jazz as critique,” which is also the title of her book. Her model is as relevant to the intellectual history of which Marcuse’s, Adorno’s, and Du Bois’s writing is part, as to our own time. It is so especially in a discussion surrounding what Nersessian calls the parody that the contemporary, often racialized, student movement in solidarity with Palestine reveals.²² To understand this we need to examine the way in which Adorno’s dismissal of jazz practice in 1932 is similar to his dismissal of the student movement’s open assemblies in Frankfurt in 1969. The critique that he directs at both jazz practitioners and young people attending student assemblies is their immediate, collective identification with a collective practice or group. In

other words, Adorno's problem is *spontaneous* movement, be it musical or socialist. In his view, such movements risk producing a collective identity for everyone involved. It is the presumed universalism of such a collective identity that Adorno warns of. The reason is that from his point of view, the necessary self-reflection that needs to be undertaken by an individual when joining such a group is overlooked.²³ The question that Okiji allows us to ask, by means of the analysis in her book, is whether they actually do so. Do the jazz practitioners and the students overlook individual reflection when this reflection becomes a collective practice? Let's take a closer look at Okiji's argument.

In her book, Okiji uses Adorno's aesthetic theory to explain how the self-reflection that he stresses in his text on jazz is immanent to jazz practice undertaken by racialized people. She does so by describing jazz practice as operating according to the dialectics between a collective and an individual voice. That is, "[t]he productive tension between the nurturing of personal distinction and the commitment to communal work is a creative catalyst and, in itself, a story to be told."²⁴ The difference between this dialectics and Adorno's subject-object dialectics, established in *Negative Dialectics* and in *Aesthetic Theory*, is that although Adorno speaks about art as part of a global Western trauma after Auschwitz, Okiji speaks of black subjectivity in jazz as the bearer of a collective trauma from ongoing colonization and state-funded racism. As she argues, it is through practice that this subject becomes communal.²⁵ This is the second aspect of the black subject of the jazz practitioner that Okiji underscores: on the one hand, she has a double consciousness as both subject and object of her self-reflection, and on the other, she is communal, due to the shared experience of having such consciousness. This form of communality is much more refined than the discourse of the irrational and unmediated communality of the jazz ensemble that absorbs listeners with collective unreason, as Adorno warns about in his essay. The "irrationality" of the unstructured music, he argues, goes before the listener's "rational" reflection on the social form of the concert:

Just as the reality within which the hit song is heard is not ordered systematically; just as space and time are capable of exerting more control over the fate of the product form than does its own merit, so the consciousness of those who receive it is unsystematic, and *its irrationality is a priori that of the listener*. But this is not a creative irrationality; rather, it is destructive. It is not a

generative force, but a recourse to false origins under the control of destruction.²⁶

Adorno describes this as though the listener becomes captive in the communality described by Okiji. Therefore, the listener is absorbed without reflecting on this. Further on in the essay, he states that the jazz musician herself, too, is such a victim: “this subject is not a “free,” lyrical subject which is then elevated into the collective, but rather one which is not originally free—a victim of the collective”²⁷ What Okiji makes clear in her book is that the jazz listener is no victim of the jazz collective, but of the imagined collective of liberal democracy. It is this context that jazz critically reflects in practice. The jazz practitioner therefore undertakes this aesthetic and social critique of a society in which all subjects in different ways are victims of the form that Western liberal democracy assumes within and between nation states. If we are to understand this in keeping with Adorno’s original argument, which Okiji uses against itself, the jazz practitioner therefore acts in the way that Adorno describes the “new” as characteristic of modern art: as a way of introducing difference to its universal, aesthetic form. In the recent words of Peter Osborne on Adorno’s model, “[t]his is a functioning form through which the artwork ‘speaks’ its historical content as material fragment of a collective subjectivity that has otherwise yet to exist”;²⁸ that is, as a collective experience that remains to be expressed. The fact that this experience is being perceived as a threat to the context in which it is present is not dissimilar to the parody that Nersessian describes in the context of the 2024 student encampments.

AN IRRATIONAL BACKLASH

As we get this far in our reading of Okiji’s debunking of Adorno’s critique of jazz, it becomes clear how the critique of liberal democracy and the function of modern art in jazz resembles the student movement then and now; from the movements against racial repression, like the ones at The University of California, where Marcuse was employed during the time of Adorno’s and his conversation, to the student movements currently taking place at universities where Okiji and I are working.

The critique of liberal democracy in the current student encampments takes the form of protesting against the complicity of their institutions with regard to 76 years of settler colonialism, apartheid, and ethnic cleansing in Palestine. These institutions are as much bodies of the liberal democratic nation state as are art institutions,

museums, prisons, and courtrooms. What I will speak of in the following section is how the student movement emerges both with and against these pillars of Western democracy, and how, perhaps counterintuitively, it poses no threat to that democracy. On the contrary, it in fact keeps it alive. To understand how, we will return to Adorno's dismissal of the student assemblies in late 1960s Germany. He clearly had a similar view of the post-war students' presupposed uncritical absorption of the assemblies, as in the case of the "jazz subject" or listener.

The absorption that Adorno warns of, in both jazz and in political assemblies, must be understood as what he describes in another essay as "spontaneity."²⁹ Interestingly, spontaneity is central to both direct action and musical jamming.³⁰ In his correspondence with Marcuse, Adorno mentions that he is working on the essay that was published posthumously under the title, "Marginalia to Theory and Practice." In this essay, Adorno describes the absence of reflection in practice. Knowing about the context in which Adorno was writing the essay—a director of the Institute for Social Research, where his students were starting to undertake creative revolts against his leadership—we need to interpret his abstract formula in terms of the actual social relations that he was part of.³¹ In "Marginalia," Adorno describes the neglect of theory as "false praxis."³² The overarching argument in the essay is that direct action risks developing into what it, in the first place, emerged against: *fascism*. The consequence of such an activity, he states, would result in "pseudo-activity" and "pseudo-revolution."³³ Instead of the actual need to counter authoritarianism, on which Adorno himself had been spending years working,³⁴ he thought that direct action risked turning protestors into authoritarian personalities.³⁵

In the correspondence between Adorno and Marcuse, the latter tries to convince the first to understand that he cannot only support his students in their struggle against an authoritarian state *theoretically*. In their writing on art and liberation, both Marcuse and Adorno draw on Karl Marx's early concept of practice.³⁶ However, for Adorno, practice needs to be immanent to critical reflection, as explained in both *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*. Marcuse instead describes practice as the transcendent capacity that emerges from theory and enters practical liberation. This is made clear in most of his work, ranging from *Eros and Civilization*, from 1955, to *An Essay on Liberation*, from 1970. Marcuse's theoretical focus on the practice of liberation made him a central reference for artists and

gay liberationists, as much as for the New Left and for the autonomous student movement in the USA, in Germany, and in Italy, to mention only a few.³⁷ That Marcuse was conscious of his role is made clear in one of his letters to Adorno in which he writes: “The student movement today is desperately seeking a theory and a practice. It is searching for forms of organization that can correspond to and contradict late capitalist society.”³⁸ What we see in the currently ongoing encampments at Western universities, and as Nersessian states in her essay, students of the 21st century have already found this contradiction in theory itself. By reading Said for a seminar at the university, and then seeing war crimes being sponsored by the same institutions, the contradiction is in fact presented to the students by the university. In other words, it is not the students who are transgressing the formal limits of theory, but the institution. What the students do is, simply, critically study and discuss this paradox, just as they would do in class. If this is not critical thinking, it is not certain that we are still capable of using the concept of critique without falling into the irrationality that Adorno warned about, half a century ago.

Against Adorno’s argument that collective irrationality was developing amongst student activists and sub-culture practitioners, we see that those who are absorbed by collective, irrational practices are not the students, but the leaders of Western universities. This also includes all university staff that refuses to study, for example, the legacy of Edward Said’s thinking in light of the present conjuncture.³⁹ As Nersessian indicates, thinking has left the building. What teachers and staff at the university should do is to follow this march, and study the way in which history unfolds, together with the students. Such a collective practice does not make them irrational. On the contrary, it would save critique from its irrational institutionalization, keep it alive, and make it a practice. It would not only save critical thinking, but possibly also actual human lives.

“AN ABOLITION(IST) UNIVERSITY”

Back in Germany in the 1960s, Krahl’s activities identified a similar crisis in institutionalized critical thinking as the one we see today. His approach to the university as an institution that must be abolished with its own means were soon further developed by fellow student activist, Rudi Dutschke. Dutschke famously took Mao Zedong’s notion of a long march by making it a long march through the institutions.⁴⁰ If we transpose this to Krahl’s model of critical theory, we may think of how such theory becomes practical in a

“march” all the way through the institution, and out. The question then is, what happens on the other side? Is there still a university, or has critical thinking been transformed into something else?⁴¹ At a teach-in lecture at the University of California, and in solidarity with the ongoing student strikes in the summer of 2020, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney described the abolition of the university by means of undertaking critical thinking in its structures, in the same vein:

An abolition(ist) university would be kinda like an abolition(ist) prison or an abolitionist plantation. It would be where the generation of knowledge in the university—at the level of its form, content and practices—tends towards the knowing degeneration, disorganization and disequilibrium of the university.⁴²

Moten’s and Harney’s argument would not have been foreign to Krahl in his attempt to immanently abolish the university by using its resources differently. According to art historian Mikkel Bolt’s understanding of Krahl, “[t]he point was thus not to reform the institutions, but to use them in the revolutionary struggle and somehow make them obsolete from within.”⁴³ Neither would this approach be foreign to Marcuse. In *An Essay on Liberation*, from 1970, he summarizes a number of his previous works in light of the last years of the social movements that had surrounded his work and thinking. As he outlines in this essay, the exodus from modern liberal thinking, from Kant onwards, is indeed a collective act. This is what Krahl and Dutschke took on in their student activism. Owing to the absence of historical continuity on the outskirts of critical thinking like that undertaken by Krahl and Dutschke who both are poorly translated beyond the context of the movement itself, we need to reflect on these contexts by employing a materialist lens to properly understand the relations between the proposals. At the time of writing, peaceful protests were met with unlawful police harassment in the yards of Western universities, from Berkeley to Lund. And in Palestine, all universities are in ruins. Amid the crisis of Western democracy, the subjective experience of the students’ collective practice, across geopolitical contexts and periods, emerges as a form of “political critique.”⁴⁴ Essentially, it emerges from within, and yet against the idea of a critical and political subject.

- 1 Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, "university. last words." Manuscript circulated on the occasion of the teach-in on July 7, 2020. May be accessed at https://www.academia.edu/43580248/The_university_last_words_by_stefano_harney_and_fred_moten.
- 2 This article was developed from a paper presented at *The Nordic Society of Aesthetics'* conference, "Resistance," June 8–10, 2022. I am very thankful for the feedback I received from fellow panelists and the audience. I am also incredibly grateful for the responses from Fredrik Svensk, Peter Osborne, Mikkel Ibsen Sørensen, and Tobias Dias during the process of editing this text.
- 3 Anahid Nersessian, "Under the Jumbotron," *London Review of Books*, May 6, 2024, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2024/may/under-the-jumbotron>.
- 4 This is what Marx, in his *Economic Philosophical Manuscripts*, describes as "positive transcendence." Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*. Volume 3. March 1843–August 1844 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 296.
- 5 Nersessian, "Under the Jumbotron."
- 6 T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London and New York: Routledge 1973).
- 7 W.E.B du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7.
- 8 Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, xiv.
- 9 Cedric Robinson coined the notion of "racial capitalism." See Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed Press, 1983).
- 10 The racial divide immanent to modern critical thinking and democratic nationalism is discussed in detail by David Lloyd. See David Lloyd, *Under Representation. The Racial Regime of Aesthetics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).
- 11 For further reading on Krahl, see *Für Hans-Jürgen Krahl Beiträge zu seinem antiautoritären Marxismus*, ed. Meike Gerber, Emanuel Kapfinger, Julian Volz. (Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2022).
- 12 In this essay, I rely on Italian economic historian Giovanni Arrighi, who proposes a theoretical model of cycles of crises that took place both in the 1930s and in the late 1960s, as a focus for this essay. In continuation of this proposal, we may assume that another of these cycles is taking place today. See Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times* (London and New York: Verso, 2010 [1996]).
- 13 Hans-Jürgen Krahl, "The Political Contradictions in Adorno's Theory," *The Sociological Review* 23, no. 4, (November 1975 [1971]): 832. Originally published in Hans-Jürgen Krahl's *Konstitution und Klassenkampf* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1971), 285–288.
- 14 Harvey Dong, "Third World Liberation Comes to San Francisco State and UC Berkeley," *Chinese America: History & Perspectives* (January 1, 2009): 95–106.
- 15 Herbert Marcuse and Angela Davis, "Herbert Marcuse and Angela Davis at Berkeley," *Pacific Radio*. October 24, 1969, <https://www.pacificradioarchives.org/recording/az1025>. Find the full speech here, accessed on May 21, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HuyWj8BtjKc>.
- 16 Herbert Marcuse, "Letter to Theodor W. Adorno, 5 April 1969," in Theodor W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, "Correspondence on the German Student Movement," trans. Esther Leslie. *New Left Review* 1, no. 233 (January–February 1999) [1969]: 125.
- 17 Russell L. Johnson, "'Disease Is Unrhythmic': Jazz, Health, and Disability in 1920s America," *Health and History* 13, no. 2 (2011): 32.
- 18 Theodor W. Adorno, "On Jazz," *Discourse* 12, no. 1 (Fall–Winter 1989–90), 68.
- 19 Okiji, *Jazz as Critique*, 19.
- 20 Although Adorno introduces this model in *Aesthetic Theory*, he develops it further in a posthumously-published essay, "On Subject and Object." In this essay, he describes the dialectics of critical thinking as similar to the historical practice of the modern artwork. That is, as a "second reflection." He describes the object of this reflection as the social reality that shapes the conditions for its practice. Theodor W. Adorno, "On Subject and Object," in *Critical Models. Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 257.
- 21 Okiji, *Jazz as Critique*, 26.
- 22 In the introduction to a questionnaire sent out to student and non-student activists at American universities, the *Endnotes* collective and *Megaphone* provide us with a contextual background of recent social movements, primarily in the USA, to underscore how the social justice movement against racial oppression, on the one hand, and the movement in solidarity with Palestine on the other, increasingly have intersected in a global movement for which Palestine is seen as the nexus for most, if not all, struggles. *Endnotes* and *Megaphone*, "The encampments for Gaza. Interviews with Participants," *Endnotes*, June 7, 2024, <https://endnotes.org.uk/posts/the-encampments-for-gaza>.
- 23 In "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis," Adorno describes this as "the error of the primacy of praxis": "The error of the primacy of praxis as it is exercised today appears clearly in the privilege accorded to tactics over everything else. The means have become autonomous to the extreme. Serving the ends without reflection, they have alienated themselves from them." Theodor W. Adorno, "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis," in *Critical models. Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 268.
- 24 Okiji, *Jazz as Critique*, 73.
- 25 Okiji, *Jazz as Critique*, 76.
- 26 Adorno, "On Jazz," 52. Italics mine.
- 27 Adorno, "On Jazz," 64.
- 28 Peter Osborne, *Crisis as Form* (London and New York: Verso, 2022), ix.
- 29 Adorno, "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis," 266.
- 30 Adorno is also famous for disregarding "happenings" in art. See *Aesthetic Theory*, 258.
- 31 Esther Leslie, "Introduction to Adorno/Marcuse Correspondence," *New Left Review* 233, no. 1 (January/February 1999): 118.
- 32 Adorno, "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis," 265.
- 33 Adorno, "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis," 269–271.

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- 34 Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality* (London and New York: Verso, 2019 [1950]).
- 35 Adorno, "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis," 269–271.
- 36 In "Theses on Feuerbach," Marx describes the self-reflection of the proletariat as a "practical-critical" activity. Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, *Marx and Engels. Collected Works*. Volume 5. Marx and Engels 1845–47 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 3.
- 37 Regarding Krahl's role across Europe and the Atlantic, see Fabio Belloni, *Militanza artistica in Italia 1968–1972*. (Rom: L'erma 2015); and Marcello Tari, "Lenin in Inghilterra, Krahl in Italia," *Sinistrainrete Archivio di documenti e articoli per la discussione politica nella sinistra*, January 23, 2022, <http://www.sinistrainrete.info/sinistra-radiale/22112-marcello-tari-lenin-in-inghilter-ra-krahl-in-italia1.html>.
- 38 Marcuse, Letter to Adorno, 21 July 1969. In Adorno's and Marcuse's "Correspondence on the German Student Movement," 133.
- 39 Such an analysis of theory is what results in higher grades nowadays, and students are doing this, while refusing to accept grades or diplomas from their universities. Obviously, they don't need them at a time when academic institutions undertake armed self-defense against such critical analysis.
- 40 For a further discussion of the coming into being of Dutschke's notion of the Long March, see, for example, Mikkel Bolt, *After the Great Refusal—Essays on Contemporary Art, Its Contradictions and Difficulties* (Winchester: John Hunt Publishing, 2018), 64–76.
- 41 I discuss this aspect of Dutschke's model in Frida Sandström, "Böcker och kanoner. En grundkurs på universitetets gräsmatta," *Arbetaren* no. 6 (June 2024, forthcoming).
- 42 Moten and Harney, "university. last words."
- 43 Bolt, *After the Great Refusal*, 66.
- 44 Thanks to Peter Osborne for posing the question around the role of "political critique" in relation to a draft of this text in October 2022.