

TRANSLATING AUTHORITY: ADORNO'S CULTURAL POETICS
IN THE AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY

A new categorical imperative has been imposed by [whom] upon unfree mankind: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz [Nanking; Dresden; Hiroshima; Vietnam; Cambodia; Rwanda; Bosnia; Iraq] will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen.

—Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, 365 [Bernstein, 385]

The literary work or cultural object, as though for the first time, brings into being that very situation to which it is also, at one and the same time a reaction. It articulates its own situation and textualizes it, thereby encouraging and perpetuating the illusion that the situation itself did not exist before it.

—Frederic Jameson, Ideologies of Theory 2:82 [Hartley, 141]

The situation of language invoked by Adorno in his “new categorical imperative”—a discipline of thought such that the fundamental event of dehumanization now taking place be countered as it imposes itself as an inevitability by the terms of language itself—is to say the least difficult to realize in practice. At what moment should one comprehend that the inexorable logic of events is becoming distorted to the degree that it compels conceptualization on other terms—at a singular moment of rupture (9/11) or in the continuous redeployment of that trauma as unspeakable substrate of a distorted rationalization for war? Staring at the October sky in Detroit, fantasizing anthrax-laden balloons dropping their apocalyptic cargo, I could only be subject to the thoughts I was then having; my only possible response was to write them down, exactly as they came to me, as a poetic act.

ANTHRAX

Blowing across the mid October sky of Detroit:
about three dozen black, red, and blue balloons
circling around what appears to be a clump of
balloons forming an irregularly shaped, multi-
colored mass, something like an aerial whale
surrounded by numerous smaller fish or birds.
I think, what an ingenious way to distribute
anthrax, as the wind blows into my face and I
consider which authority I should contact first.
Someone should know about this! Then I reflect
that the dispersal has already happened, it has
already taken place, there is nothing I can do
to stop it. If I die within a week, this account
will be the only evidence of what had happened.
Why was I the only one to notice these things? [BW]

A projective identification of distorted social rationality if there ever was one, the poem asks what kind of consciousness is possible in the face of total social violence (of a symbolic as well as instrumental kind) and tries to pose that question at a specific historical moment. Later (November 2004), when the inexorable logic of war had reached a sustained pitch of irrationality and denial, I felt forced to ask myself the question not only of complicity but of immediate and present danger: Are we on the road to fascism; what should I do? Adorno's language-centered imperative to return consciousness to distorted rationality gets one only so far as asking this question; the next moment is a practical one. If my assessment is correct, what action should I take? What if I were the only one having such thoughts? Such an effect of isolation, as we know, is corollary to the force of distorted rationality on its way to destruction—a logic not confined to a single example.

The appearance of "fascism" in my train of thoughts, in their logic of fantasy, is not an accident, even as I am clear about the difference between one historical situation

and the next. It is well to reconsider the not-insignificant American history of the term. The state of Michigan produced its own garden-variety fascists, represented by the would-be tin-pot dictator Father Coughlin, whose Shrine of the Holy Madonna—an ordinary televangelist church from the 1930s—stands as an ironic monument to a forgotten history; everybody knows something strange happened there, no one is quite sure what. Something similar may be said of the fascism in the poetry and radio speeches of Ezra Pound—for many readers still subject to bracketing and denial in order to preserve the unity of modernist authorship; for a few, the site of a revisionary critique of modern authorship itself. Bringing Coughlin and Pound together foregrounds the social logics of distorted rationality on their way to authoritarianism not simply as part of an historical event but as a condition of modern authorship. The question then might be asked, In what way does the modern author—from Pound and Eliot to Stein and Zukofsky in the American context, or Thomas Mann and Ernst Jünger in the German—depend in its construction on the logics of distorted rationality that invest figures of modern authority—the examples of Henry Ford and Franklin Delano Roosevelt in my own work—with their transformative, totalizing potential? It is precisely this relation between authority and irrational force, of course, that Adorno himself developed or, better, synthesized from his experience of exile from Nazi Germany in Los Angeles, of all places. As is well known, Adorno and Horkheimer projected the logic of depraved rationalization onto the very mechanisms of social reproduction in consumer society; at the same time, Adorno and others in the exiled Institut für Sozialforschung undertook linked investigations into the figure of the would-be tin-pot dictator himself in his study of the Father Coughlin (or Ezra Pound)-like radio orator Martin Luther Thomas and later the language of popular media (Los Angeles Times horoscope columns) as sites of wishful fantasies that would prepare the masses for dictatorship. Adorno's project, it has not been enough said, was itself an event of the history it described: a projec-

tion of the totalitarian authority of Nazi Germany onto the empty social rationality of Los Angeles media and consumer society in "The Culture Industry," and onto the specific class and ethnic alliances that constituted American democracy during the war, as consequences of both the Popular Front and the New Deal, in the quantitative work. On his return to Germany, Adorno moved away from these early exercises in content analysis and statistical correlation and toward the more abstract but always socially grounded reflexivity of the later achievements of his Kant lectures, Negative Dialectics, and Aesthetic Theory—the basis of the prevailing accounts of his work in the US today, if not wholly in Germany.

Between the first empirical studies (as reflecting the Institut's experience of exile in America) and the reflexive articulation of Critical Theory (as extending the insights of exile into the social logic of the Bundesrepublik and its development of rationalized consumer society) stands the oft-neglected analysis of social authority in the multi-authored treatise The Authoritarian Personality (based on research conducted in 1944–46 and published in 1950). The reception of this massive work, as I will develop in more detail later, is at this juncture both historically and culturally discontinuous. In America, the work was enormously important both for social theory in the 1950s (a large literature of response appeared, including a volume of essays questioning its methods in 1954) as well as for the anti-authoritarian cultural movements of the 1960s (my claim that The Authoritarian Personality was taken up in the culture more generally depends on evidence from popular jazz and poetry from the 1960s and later). In American intellectual history itself, there are gaps between the work's early sociological impact and its position as a milestone in the development of Critical Theory that anticipate its current state of neglect even in the ongoing return to Adorno we are now witnessing. Apart from discussions of the work as a crucial historical episode in Martin Jay's The Dialectical Imagination and Susan Buck-Morss's The Origin of Negative Dialectics, Adorno's participation in the project is generally

overlooked or downplayed in subsequent Anglo-American overviews of his work (Fredric Jameson, Martin Jay, J. M. Bernstein) and current critical debates structured around it (Jeffrey Nealon and Caren Irr on the Frankfurt School and Cultural Studies, Robert Kaufman on Adorno and lyric poetry). According to Jay, however, at the time of its publication it was widely read (“an enormous flood of research resulted from the stimulus [it in particular] provided”; 250), and it achieved with Kinsey’s report on human sexuality and early contrarian sociologies such as Paul Goodman’s Growing Up Absurd, C. Wright Mills’s White Collar and The Power Elite, and Herbert Marcuse’s One-Dimensional Man, an even broader public notoriety. I want to make a further claim, which needs to be supported by an as-yet unwritten cultural history of the postwar period, that the popular strand of anti-fascist discourse that emerged in the Civil Rights and antiwar movements (and which is immediately visible in the anti-authoritarian struggle of the Free Speech Movement at UC Berkeley) owes much to the general notion, advanced by Adorno and his co-workers, of an underlying pathology surrounding questions of authority common to both fascism and liberal democracy. In my personal experience of that time, it was common to call parents, teachers, adversaries, and political figures “fascists”—and this was extended to disputed authority in general. The documentary film Berkeley in the Sixties provides a context for this usage at a variety of moments, from the conflict between university president Clark Kerr and Free Speech Movement leader Mario Savio to the irrational eruption of an anti-fascist chant during a demonstration against the draft at the Oakland Induction Center.

The German reception of Adorno’s work, however, is one I must bracket pending further investigation. While The Authoritarian Personality in the two-volume or abridged editions is out of print in America, and somewhat hard to find, in Germany it is readily available in the abridged version (which reprints Adorno’s critical reflections but not the statistical analyses). At the same time, the empirical methods of the work are given sig-

nificant treatment in Rolf Wiggershaus's history, suggesting a split in the American and German receptions as to their value. Martin Jay remarks, perhaps a bit cattily, that they came in handy for negotiations over institutional support for the Institut's return to Frankfurt, while Fredric Jameson reports a certain sense from Germany circa the late 1980s that Adorno is passé, due he thinks to increasing nervousness over his anti-positivism. On the other hand, I was charmed to see a red and black, "socialist realist" portrait of Adorno (whom I mistook for Salvador Allende) at a student political cabaret in Tübingen, indicating perhaps a renewed circulation of Adorno as an (ironic) countercultural figure. These gaps in the reception history, however, might be better elucidated if Adorno and company's project is removed from the domain of a strictly intellectual history (as with Jay and Wiggershaus), with its specific methodology, and were read through a revisionist cultural history of the 1940s and Cold War. Two results would follow: Adorno's empirical work would be seen not as teleologically positioned (thus to be overcome) along the way to the development of Critical Theory, and its cultural resonances would be better understood in terms of a regional politics of cultural dialogue. The German background of the analysis of mass culture located in Southern California is all to the point, as would also be the importation of specific Americanisms in Critical Theory on its return to Germany in the 1950s. A culturalist and dialogic reading of The Authoritarian Personality might achieve even more tantalizing goals: it could show once and for all how the Great Divide between "mandarin" modernism and the Culture Industry came about and was reproduced by Cultural Studies; it could unlink specific cultural histories from totalizing horizons and thus encourage a critical regionalism and further work on the cultural history of the Cold War.

The question of social reproduction is key to The Authoritarian Personality; this is the point of Adorno's unapologetic avowal of the circularity of its theory and evidence. In constructing the "type" of the authoritarian personality, the authors themselves reproduce

the logic of types, arriving at what I will term a “cultural logic.” Under historical pressure, the intellectual in exile projects the authoritarian personality onto both evidence and theory and hence becomes an exemplar of its logic. I want to explore this circularity, which is everywhere in the details of The Authoritarian Personality, as a part of its construction, its poetics. In a moment of social reflexivity, I would extend as well such a poetics of authority to the poetry of the postwar period—as originating in the Popular Front and World War and produced under conditions of authoritarian repression in the Cold War. In developing The Authoritarian Personality as a cultural logic, I want to show how its account of the social reproduction of personality types is reinforced through other cultural means. I read the oppositional and countercultural poetry of the New American poets, as well as that of later figures in the Language School, as centrally concerned with poetic responses to distorted, irrational authority as precisely the grounds for authorship. It is no accident that two of Adorno’s social types of personality (the rebel; the protestor) were prescient models for the countercultures of the Cold War (the Beat Generation) and Vietnam Period (from Berkeley in the Sixties to poets emerging soon after). As a cultural logic that unites postmodern American culture and the poetry produced in it, the question of social authority crucially brings together logics of subject formation and specific social forms (from homosocial communities to strategies of containment to “presidents lying in public” to the emergence of minority identity politics). In reading the poetry of the 1950s and 1960s in these terms, I hope to show how literary authorship, in its turn to language as the ground of a critical social reflexivity, reconstitutes authority in Adorno’s sense. Showing how The Authoritarian Personality is a moment of discontinuous cultural translation, I also hope, will further the development of a historically specific “cultural poetics.”

The Poetics of Authority

The Authoritarian Personality is an analytically prescient work that should be read as a touchstone of modern intellectual history, particularly for its anticipation of the cultural logic of the Cold War period as a direct result of the social psychology of World War II. It is also an ungainly, incomplete, and often unreadable monument—stretching to 1000 pages, with an inclusiveness of the least minutia of research protocol (questionnaires, interview topics, Thematic Apperception Test images, scoring methods, statistical analyses, correlations of data, and so forth)—which has been widely criticized for the bias or circularity of its assumptions, its use of “human subjects,” and its quantitative methods. More carefully rationalized procedures would soon be developed in the sociology of the American School over the next decades (a discontinuous parallel to the literature that concerns us here), while Adorno’s later work would eschew quantitative methods and privilege a reflexive methodology of immanent critique. At the intersection between history, social psychology, and Critical Theory, however, it offers a virtual gold mine of material otherwise neglected, sublated, or denied in more separate genres and domains. At the same time it resulted in a fundamental account of the “authoritarian personality” that should provide a historically and culturally specific bridge between Freud’s derivation of the superego in World War I and the decentering of authority in postmodern theory. Where Slavoj Žižek called for a postmodern ideology critique of social fantasy in general terms, Adorno and his co-workers demonstrate how particular ideologemes (revealed in responses to prompts such as “It is wrong for Jews and Gentiles to intermarry” or “Whether one likes them or not, one has to admire men like Henry Ford or J.P. Morgan”) depend on specific underlying types of personality. Going well beyond empirical analysis, The Authoritarian Personality—when read critically rather than in terms of positivist methodol-

ogy—discloses, from the preconceptions of its investigators through their painstaking research methods, a systematic relation of fantasy states among members of society, determined by individual internalizations or rejections of social authority. While much of its social psychology is undertheorized and dated (the bibliography combines practical approaches to data analysis with Critical Theory, Freud, and American sociology, but without reference either to the Object Relations or Ego schools of psychoanalysis), the work discloses a direct relationship between a constructivist account of personality and the reproduction of social ideology. It therefore stands on the road to the revival of ideology critique after Louis Althusser, as with the work of Slavoj Žižek, with the advantage of locating psychological dynamics and social content in a specific historical period.

The central claim of The Authoritarian Personality is that acceptance of fascism as a political doctrine depends on how its “ideology” as exterior, positive content can be accepted by specific types of “personality” in ways that are irreducible to positive content. It is not, then, a question of whether a subject agrees or disagrees with a particular statement or strand of ideology, or whether it expresses his or her interests. Anticipating the work of British Cultural Studies, the authors show that ideology, while it may be presented as positive content, does not necessarily reflect a corresponding positivity. One may vote in a manner directly opposed to one’s interests, as occurred when many of the British working-class supported Thatcher, who then immediately disempowered them. On the other hand, political advocacy should not be confused with mere “ticket mentality,” the reduction of political agency to the minimal programs of the various parties (as visible recently in the highly quantitative results of the recent German elections). What the acceptance or rejection of ideology points to are underlying patterns of personality that integrate inexpressible if not unconscious needs with highly projective interpretations of what the positive content of ideology really means. Ideology will turn out to be a

“shifter” or placeholder for the subject’s projection of needs, much as the pronouns “I” and “you” are shifters in structuralist and psychoanalytic theory. The “turn to language” begins right here, with the unlinking of ideology from its positive content, which must be understood at the more basic level of projection—even as we recall that, in ideology critique after Althusser, it is the “subject” itself, apart from any content, that is ideological. In his lectures on Kant, Adorno sees a productive conflict between a transcendental “subject” and individual “personality” that is certainly rejected in French theory: “Kant failed to see the possibility of objective realities in the psyche and thus overlooked the element of [truth] that there really is such a thing as personal identity, an empirical identity of the individual which takes the form of a thing-like relation between psychological phenomena, between individual modes of reaction” (205). If we follow his thinking back from the Kant lectures to the empirical work, we can position this “thing-like” entity squarely between objectified exterior content and inexpressible interior needs. If we project this formulation forward to his later works, we find that what Adorno will call “identity thinking” entails a transparent (and utterly horrifying) reduction of exterior content to internalized schema. Personality thus stands squarely on the side of “nonidentity”: as a material, opaque, “thinglike” substrate that stands in the way of the absolute authority of identity thinking, personality becomes crucial as the site for mediation of rational categories and empirical experience—without which, everything is transparent terror. It is finally in the aesthetic that Adorno, as we know, locates the kind of experience that keeps categories from becoming rigidly identitarian through their inculcation of new meaning.

If “personality” is thus a central mediating term in Adorno’s later account of experience, it is fascinating to see how it is identified and produced through the empirical methods of The Authoritarian Personality. To begin with, the authors posit personality as a psychological reality that integrates disparate components (not always successfully):

What the individual consistently says in public, what he says when he feels safe from criticism, what he thinks but will not say at all, what he thinks but will not admit to himself, what he is disposed to think or to do when various kinds of appeal are made to him—all these may be conceived of as constituting a single structure. . . . The structure may not be integrated . . . but it is organized in the sense that constituent parts are related in psychologically meaningful ways. (5)

Thus, “the forces of personality are not responses but readinesses for response”; they are primarily based in “needs” (the need of the ego to negotiate with that which threatens it in order to maintain its unity above all), as a result of which personality may be seen as a “a determinant of ideological preferences” (5). How Adorno and his co-authors identified actual personality structures, and finally the “authoritarian personality,” however, begins not from first assumptions but through elaborate methods of data collection and analysis. First, the researchers selected two subjects, Mack and Larry, whose backgrounds were relatively similar but who, it turned out, divided into “antidemocratic” and “liberal” types. Mack is a typical “prejudiced” individual, the kind of person who has “My Country Right or Wrong” on his pickup truck and is a member of the NRA; he is what is called a “high scorer.” Larry, on the other hand, tries his best to respond in a PC manner in every instance—he provides a model of “tolerance” as rigidity reflected in the “low scorers.” In the course of the interviews, attitudes toward Jews and minority groups turned out to correlate highly with other personality trends; from this evidence, and obviously due to the preexisting account of fascism, the researchers created a scale (the A-S Scale) to measure anti-Semitic prejudice by using a questionnaire that asked for responses to anti-Semitic statements. They concluded that anti-Semitism was a much larger structure than simply specific attitudes towards Jews; rather, it was the key to a “broad ideological spectrum”:

The spontaneous discussions of anti-Semites . . . suggest that for each individual there are certain “nuclear ideas”—imagery of Jews as conniving, or sexual, or radical, and the like, and corresponding primary attitudes—which have primary emotional significance Once the central or nuclear ideas are formed, they tend to “pull in” numerous other opinions and attitudes and thus form a broad ideological spectrum. (92–93)

Anticipating Žižek’s notion of the Jew as “antagonistic kernel” of ideological fantasy, the researchers posited both an abstract generality of this fantasy along with its specific content. Certain types reveal both a “receptivity” to hostile images of Jews and a “resistance” to less stereotypical thinking; what is necessary, then, is to show how both anti-Semitic and anti-anti-Semitic ideology (i.e., a rejection of tolerance) are to be brought together. Similarly, responses to the Jews as a separate group tended to be precisely contradictory: “There is no logical basis for urging on the one hand that Jews become like everyone else, and on the other hand, that Jews be limited and excluded in the most important areas of social life” (9). The oxymoronic figure of a Jewish “communist banker’s conspiracy” appears right here. Finally, Jews were seen as themselves responsible for the attributes that made them intolerable, leading to a psychological mechanism in which they are simultaneously split off from a stereotypical “we” and projectively identified as an antagonistic “they.” The eruption of Melanie Klein’s key mechanisms of “splitting” and “projective identification” should be noted here; not only are Adorno and his co-authors identifying Kleinian fantasy structures as crucial to group psychology quite early in the reception of her work in postwar psychoanalytic theory. They are identifying, before the war’s end, the psychological mechanisms that will organize the Cold War in its “cold” and “hot” phases: the splitting off and denial of antagonistic others in a politics of “containment,” and the projective identification of antagonistic others in antiwar and Civil Rights movements.

In the structure of a specific prejudice, Adorno and co-authors discovered a systematic mechanism that placed personality at the site of ideological reproduction and, just over the horizon, that would be central to the cultural logics of the Cold War and Vietnam Era. Its emergence is discernable in their next protocol, the construction of an “E Scale” to measure ethnocentrism as intolerance of “the Other” in general (Zoot Suiters, Japanese, blacks, homosexuals) rather than a specifically targeted group. Here again mechanisms of splitting, between ingroups and outgroups, and projective identification (“most essentially, outgroups are seen as threatening and power-seeking,” even as “they are objectively weaker than the groups they supposedly threaten”; 148) occur. While the E Scale is constructed from specific responses to claims about ethnic groups (“Filipinos are all right in their place, but they carry it too far when they dress lavishly and go around with white girls”; 142), what is revealed is an abstract, underlying fantasy. That structure is then tested against the third constructed scale, the “Political-Economic Conservatism Scale” (PEC), with disappointing results: explicit political attitudes along a left-right spectrum do not exactly correlate with greater or lesser intolerance. Thus the researchers formulated a final scale of measurement, the “F Scale” (for fascism), based on abstract topics such as “the self, family, sex, interpersonal relations, moral and personal values” in order to “formulate scale items which . . . would actually serve as ‘giveaways’ of underlying antidemocratic trends in the personality” (222–23), identified not with specific groups but with attitudes towards authoritarianism, as it is subdivided into nine thematic areas. These are (along with an example of the kinds of prompts that were constructed to measure them: 1) conventionalism (“What a man does is not so important so long as he does it well”); 2) submission to authority (“Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn”); 3) aggression (“No insult to our honor should ever go unpunished”); 4) anti-intracception (i.e., suspicion of feelings, fantasies, speculations;

“There is too much emphasis in colleges and universities on intellectual and theoretical topics, and not enough emphasis on practical matters and on the homely virtues of living”); 5) superstition (“It is more than a remarkable coincidence that Japan had an earthquake on Pearl Harbor Day, December 7, 1944); 6) power (“What this country needs is fewer laws and agencies, and more courageous, tireless, devoted leaders whom the people can put their trust in”); 7) cynicism (“Reports of atrocities in Europe have been great exaggerated for propaganda purposes”); 8) projectivity (“To a greater extent than most people realize, our lives are governed by plots hatched in secret by politicians”); and finally 9) sex (“No matter how they act on the surface, men are interested in women for only one reason”). I suggest we all sit down and take this little test right now; according to the authors, test results should correlate pretty well with hostility toward others on the E Scale, but will not be decisive for the A-S and PEC Scales, due to the greater specificity of their values. Test results are then separated into “high scorers” and “low scorers”; excluding the uninteresting majority of “middle scorers,” researchers will continue to quantify the fantasy structures of the targeted high and low scorers, using interviews and the Thematic Apperception Test, to build up an inventory of personality types predisposed to accept or reject fascist ideology, should it become available to them on a mass basis in the USA.

“It has frequently been remarked that should fascism become a powerful force in this country, it would parade under the banners of traditional American democracy,” the authors write (50). Their derivation of personality types allows them to study ideology at the “‘readiness level’ in order to gauge the potential for fascism in this country” (4). At a later date, George Lakoff’s account of the frame structures underpinning conservative and liberal discourses suggests that, in contemporary America, stable structures of authority and unambiguous messages trump unclear lines of authority and mixed messages; what we lack is an operative metaphor system like that which recently emerged in the German

election, where the “unsozial” politics of the Right raised alarms in a populace that holds a positive valuation for “sozial” concerns. Indeed, this American dilemma align with the general value schemes of “high scorers” versus “low scorers” in The Authoritarian Personality; high scorers have a low tolerance for ambiguity and abstraction, while low scorers have a high regard for difference and community but are not always able to state clearly why. What differs from these dichotomous schemes, however, is precisely their “funding” in unconscious wishes, fantasies, drives. At the conclusion of their massive assessment of dichotomous groups, Adorno and his co-authors present a system of personality types that are organized around the basic opposition, but that lead to very different behaviors. As Alice Kaplan shows in Reproductions of Banality, fascism did not have a stable doctrinal center; Hannah Arendt’s notion of the “banality of evil,” likewise, deprivileges the intentional agency of historical actors due to their underlying weakness and dependency. On the other hand, Adorno claims that his personality types are best defined around the most “negative” example, the authoritarian personality, while anti-authoritarian options (as Lakoff has also claimed) lack the same clear-cut structures of valuation and fantasy. “It is one of the outstanding features of this study that [F Scale] ‘highness’ is essentially one syndrome, distinguishable from a variety of ‘low’ syndromes. There exists something like ‘the’ potentially fascist character, which is by itself a ‘structural unit.’ In other words, traits such as conventionality, authoritarian submissiveness and aggressiveness, projectivity, manipulativeness, etc., regularly go together” (751). A weakness in explicit ideology, then, is overcompensated for by the strength of underlying drives. This, as much as sheer terror, explains the charismatic, stultifying force of fascist movements, their openness to projection; it explains, as well, why it is so hard to discern their real content as ideology.

With some irony, Adorno, in his overview of personality types generated by the research, sees a parallel between the study itself and the results obtained: “The rigidity of

constructing types is itself indicative of that 'stereopathic' mentality which belongs to the basic constituents of the potentially fascist character" (746). Here, empirical psychology meets immanent critique; it would not be hard to show how basic mechanisms of "splitting" and "projective identification" organize the data into dichotomous groups to produce the "one" most negative type. For Adorno, the typology of personality is organized around the authoritarian in a manner that predicts his later concern with "identity thinking" and its diffuse alternative, "nonidentity." Among high scorers, those demonstrating prejudiced and antidemocratic traits, at the center of a concentric ring of syndromes generated by these traits (the "resentful" and "conventional" types; the "rebel," "crank," and "manipulator") stands the "authoritarian" prototype, described in the following narrative:

In order to achieve "internalization" of social control which never gives as much to the individual as it takes, the latter's attitude toward authority and its psychological agency, the superego, assumes an irrational aspect. The subject achieves his own social adjustment [by] taking pleasure in obedience and subordination. . . . The transformation of hatred into love . . . never succeeds completely. . . . The Jew frequently becomes a substitute for the hated father, often assuming, on a fantasy level, the very same qualities against which the subject revolted in his father, such as being practical, cold, domineering, and even a sexual rival. . . . Stereopathy [typologizing], in this syndrome, is not only a means of social identification, but has a truly 'economic' function in the subject's own psychology: it helps to canalize his libidinous energy according to the demands of an overstrict superego. Thus stereotypy itself tends to become heavily libiditized and plays a large role in the subject's inner household. He develops deep 'compulsive' character traits, partly by retrogression to the anal-sadistic phase of development. (759)

This is precisely the personality inventory Bob Perelman identified in his discussion of the fascism of modernist authors like Pound and Celine; it points out the inefficiency of the authoritarian type, matched only by the rigidity and abstraction of his projection of a punitive superego. The type (situated in a field of types) is also abundantly evident in the recently published interviews between an American psychiatrist and the Nürnberg Trial defendants, with their weak and “stereopathic” rationalizations. Adorno’s later development of “identity thinking” and “nonidentity” in Negative Dialectics (the transparency of rational categories opposed to the experiential content not subsumed by them), clearly owes its origins to an abstract and inaccessible, denying and excluding, form of authority he identifies with this type. What about, then, the possibility of locating an originary model for “nonidentity” in the problematic traits of low scorers? It seems the concept of the “type” itself sets up the later dichotomy, in that the more the low scorers “are ‘typified’ themselves, the more they express unwittingly the fascist potential within themselves” (749). What is really at stake, then, is a dialectic between type and individuation that the research method, in its production of types, must locate as outside typology itself, whose “major dichotomy lies in the question of whether a person is standardized himself and thinks in a standardized way, or whether he is truly ‘individualized’ and opposes standardization in the sphere of human experience” (ibid.). To be at once a low scorer and individuated, it follows that one has remained open to nonidentity; identity thinking begins with stereotypes, even among those who express openness and tolerance (which may be expressed in rigid ways). So the “rigid low scorers are characterized by strong superego tendencies and compulsive features. Paternal authority and its social substitutes . . . are frequently replaced by the image of some collectivity, possibly molded after the archaic image of what Freud calls the brother horde” (771)—so much for political activists (or political correctness) of whatever stripe. Other types include the “protestor,”

anticipating the Free Speech Movement to come (“While they are set against paternal authority, they have at the same time internalized the father image to a high degree”; 774); the “impulsive” type (“They certainly do not think in stereotypes, but it is doubtful to what extent they think at all”; 777); and the “easy-goer” (“No set pattern of control . . . has crystallized, but they are completely ‘open’ to experience; 779). The most convincing of Adorno’s low-scoring types, the one he clearly admires as the best possible solution to the antinomy between identity thinking and nonidentity, is the “genuine liberal,” who has a “strong sense of personal autonomy and independence. . . . His ego is quite developed but not libidized—he is rarely narcissistic. . . . His emotionality is not blind, but directed toward the other person as a subject” (781). At this point we may stand up and cheer the result; we are free to graduate from high school, climb every mountain, ford every stream. What rescues this type from a “banality of the good” (as Adorno sees it, there is ever a relation to the “banality of evil”) is the genuine liberal’s identification with the other, openness to experience, and capacity for art. Still, the type itself reproduces the larger framework of the typology; as one of Adorno’s female liberals claims, “I would like to marry someone like my father” (783)—revealing a productive mix of identity thinking and a capacity for nonidentity, in that her admiration lacks any self-injuring repression.

The Poetics of Personality

In claiming that a dialectic of authority and anti-authority was reproduced in a cultural poetics of personality in the postwar period—in tandem with a widespread public reception of The Authoritarian Personality—I want to turn to the centrality of “the person” in the lyric poetry of Robert Creeley, and then to the suspension or rejection of that category by the avant-garde, from Jackson Mac Low to my own “language-centered” work. To begin with Creeley: a remarkable gesture that follows directly from Adorno’s discus-

sion of the “liberal” type is his use of an epigraph from Allen Ginsberg at the opening of his epoch-defining collection Pieces (1969): “yes, yes, / that’s what / I wanted, / I always wanted, / to return / to the body / where I was born” (378). The explicit avowal of Oedipal desire for the mother, an Ur-confession if there ever was one (for a poet of Creeley’s “type”), the citation now appears, through our reading of The Authoritarian Personality, to be a frontal assault on the Oedipal mechanism by which the denying father is invested with love; rather, Creeley claims in his use of the epigraph, I am open to what is denied. A reading of Pieces that follows, then, would show a tensional relation between undoing “nonidentity” thinking and the will to form that will eventually cohere in stable identity. For Creeley, this stable identity is constructed at the level of poetic form, first and foremost—else it would be a preexisting form of identity “elsewhere,” tending to a personality type in Adorno’s terms. The opening of the first of Pieces’ poetic series bears this out:

As real as thinking
wonders created
by the possibility—

forms. A period
at the end of a sentence
which

began it was
into a present,
a presence

saying
something
as it goes. (379)

Thinking makes forms, which are experiential and temporal, not abstract categories. In order to do so, it accesses “wonders” (experience not subsumed by the already known and categorized) as “possibility” (a renewal of the condition of thinking, and of poetry). The poem generates this logic in its own form; hence, the form of the poem itself may claim to have disclosed an order based not in identity thinking but in an experience of wonder. More, the stable form of the poem makes an order of recurrence in the regular lineation of the stanzas that supplants any inferred order “elsewhere” that would make authoritative claims. “saying / something / as it goes” means not being subsumed under identity thinking; the thinglike quality of the language just is the emergence of the nonidentical. The tendency toward the nonidentical interrupts subordination in language; hence, the “it was” of the preterite is separated from the period at the end of the sentence in order to foreground the present as ground of experience, contesting its hierarchical subordination.

The use of “thinglike” to describe the form of the poem in Pieces recalls Adorno’s call for an account of personal identity (or personality in the study) as a mediating form. Personal identity or personality is a thinglike substrate that stands in the way of transcendental, transparent identity (in sum, the metaphysical equivalent of fascism for Adorno). We may proceed, then, to a major payoff for reading Creeley’s poetry: the way in which the linguistically dense, material, often opaque, and anti-transcendental form of his poetry itself enacts the mediation of personal identity Adorno calls for. At many occasions in his work, Creeley speaks of experience as a “pattern” of recurrences; so the form of the poem enacts, especially in its deployment of tightly lineated and stable stanza structures, a pattern of recurrences—one that in turn achieves the dynamic of his personality itself.

Anyone who knew him will testify to the extent that Creeley's personality, and the poetry that followed, was enacted as a pattern of recurrence in language—witness the intensity and present-centered focus of the self-presentation evident in his many taped interviews. This personality was also quite authoritative, and even at times arbitrarily authoritarian, but in a way that directly contests the structure and thus capacity for social reproduction of Adorno's types. Creeley, in fact, was given to using the terms authority and authoritative: authority was something you possessed if your personality were, in fact, coherent; and as Peter Middleton points out, Creeley often cited someone's use of information as "authoritative" (when I published my chapter on Olson in Total Syntax, Creeley's said it was "authoritative"—at which point, I wondered if I were being invited to join the club). But Creeley is, at the same time he avows "authority" as a necessary concern, looking for ways to found it in a way that is not reducible to authority elsewhere—precisely the dilemma of the authoritarian personality, who slavishly reproduces the orders he is getting from someone up the food chain. My claim—and I cannot completely make it without a much greater account of the cultural logic of the Cold War period—is that Creeley's concern with authority circulated in a period where "antidemocratic" (i.e., fascist) attitudes were being contested at every level of cultural experience. I can site numerous examples from 1950s jazz, from the emergence of the Black Arts movement, and clearly from the student protest movement, of a style of antifascism being deployed as a cultural politics. Creeley's contrarian refusal to adhere to stable patterns of social authority or typology, and his identification with hipsters and the Beats (he may even have been one), led him to strongly anti-authoritarian gestures, as we see in the epigraph to Pieces. At the same time, the assumption of authority to oneself produces a conflict that, for Adorno, is part of a larger cultural logic of authoritarian types; here, we might site Creeley's ambivalent relation to Pound and the self-styled rebelliousness of his company of isolatos in general.

I will propose then that Creeley's poetry, as a stable pattern of recurrence, and thus of personality per se, is the site of conflict between authority understood as elsewhere and authority as generated in the here and now by the agency of the poet. This assumption of authority demands a foregrounding of self-reflexivity and even self-destructiveness, while it forces an opening to that which is not subsumed under concepts—the lived content of experience, as one might read it in a poem that pushes it to its limits, "The Finger":

Either in or out of
the mind, a conception
overrides it. So that
that time I was a stranger

bearded, with clothes that were
old and torn. I was told,
it was known to me, my
fate would be timeless. Again

and again I was to
get it right, the story I
myself knew only the way of,
but the purpose if it

had one, was not mine.
The quiet shatter of the light,
the image folded into
endlessly opening patterns—

had they faced me into
the light so that my
eye was blinded? At moments
I knew they had gone but [. . .] (384)

This poem, I will claim, is Creeley's reply to the authoritarian personality simply for its openness to experiences that shatter any stable form of identity thinking. Nonidentity is all, from the opening paradox or antinomy of concepts overriding concept formation; to the identification with an alienated, distressed image of the self as bearded stranger with clothes that are torn, to the externalization of "fate" versus the necessity of self-reflection, to the shattering of self in the light, to the Oedipal moment of blinding as punishment for transgression, and to the form of the poem's leaps between ideational clusters. The poem will go on, in fact, to identify these moments of nonidentity with submergence in the feminine, dropping the stable boundaries of masculine ego to the extent that, in any normative psychic economy, it would simply be intolerable. At the same time, nonidentity precisely constructs identity, so that the poet ends up not only surviving the self-destruction he has initiated (by taking LSD, it so occurred), to becoming the site of a productive, wondrous, alive relation to the open cosmos as the ground of experience.

The choice is simply,
I will—as mind is a finger,
pointing, as wonder
a place to be. . . . [387]

In case you missed it, this just is the resolution of the Oedipal dilemma, in the choice of castration (the mind is a part object, the finger) in the face of unintegrated, nonidentical, feminized contexts of experience. Owning his oedipality, Creeley assumes its authority;

this would be the solution to the merely exterior determination of personality in Adorno without succumbing to the specious integration of the obviously banal “genuine liberal.” Otherwise put, in Creeley’s poem the masochistic giving over to the abstract father and his edict is entirely contested via an openness beyond the wildest dreams of any authoritarian. Yet while “aggressiveness is absorbed and turned into masochism [resulting in the dissolution of ego boundaries in the feminine] . . . another part is left over as sadism [the part object of the finger, both as cast-off of castration and a projectively identified negative of the self, i.e., Lacan’s moment of aggressivity in the formation of the imaginary], which seeks an outlet in those with whom the subject does not identify himself.” Here, the finger is a part of the self that becomes other: so “je est un autre” as traditional avant-garde dictum keeps closure from taking place. What keeps the self open is the rigid form of the finger turned back on the self, which accomplishes the masochism that an otherwise disavowed and slavish investment in authority would do. A little bit of fascism, in shattering the liberal monad, gets a big payoff in Creeley’s contestation of authority. “The Finger” presents, in every sense, a challenge to the strictures of identity thinking. At the same time, the “lovely, lovely woman” figure—who as a simultaneous destroying goddess will be overly familiar to readers of Creeley’s work, almost to the point of perceptual exhaustion—appears. In smashing the categorical construction of personality by means of the immediacy and vulnerability of experience (and at the hands of “woman”), it seems that Creeley has created a “mythic” figure who organizes more than a few cultural stereotypes. The anti-authoritarian projects instability onto the figure of a denying Other, in a way that partly parallels the rigid projection of fixed stereotypes by the authoritarian.

If the politics here are double-edged in terms of the construction of personality, that is something Adorno anticipated (and perpetuated in the dyad identity/nonidentity, given that nonidentity, as the only challenge to identity, can never have a stable ground).

Personality, in turn, was supposed to produce the externalized results of ideology in The Authoritarian Personality, whose method was to argue from ideologemes backwards to the underlying personality traits, needs, and drives that either accepted or rejected them. It will be useful then, to look at one of the few places in Pieces where what Voloshinov would call “ideological speech” enter in, in a series that beings with a strongly antipatriotic overtone that is a direct attack on the identity thinking of the authoritarian type:

The grand time when the words
were fit for human allegation,

and imagination of small, local
containments, and the lids fit. [. . .] (412)

followed by an attack on “America” (“Give back the people you took. // Let the sun shine again / on the four corners of the world // you thought of first but do not / own”; *ibid.*); a poem that baits the cultural competence of the “Citizen” (“Write a giggly ode about / motherfuckers—Oedipus— / or Lysergic Acid—a word / for an experience, verb”; 413); several fragments that track Creeley’s writing in space and time; another attack on “The Puritan Ethos” (“Happy the man who loves what / he has and worked for it also”; 414), which might have appeared as one of the personality measurements on Adorno’s F Scale; and an indictment of American global power, seen at the level of a slippage between its linguistic authority and what actually happens, the event: “Trying to get ‘our men / back’ and ‘our ship / back’—‘tactical / nuclear / weapons’—dig!” (415). The failure of American power to account for what happens in the world just is the attack on the identity thinking of the authoritarian personality, in exactly these words. But it is the turn to language that interests me most in this sequence: the way the conflicts around concepts of experience finally yield the following fragment as providing its own self-evidence of the problem:

CANADA

“The maple leaf forever”

“in 1867—”

“inspired the world

to say—” (ibid.)

The turn to language, here, is in the self-canceling of personality as a stable pattern due to the overriding logic of identity and nonidentity that subsumes it—as also occurred with Adorno. National identity as personal identity—Canadian or otherwise— is just inadequate. The turn to language initiated by Pieces, as taken up in the Language school, starts right here: with the scrapping of the monadic ego as guarantor of the lyric subject in favor of a more radical, unstable relationship between language, concept, and drives.

[I want to turn briefly here to the work of experimental poet Jackson Mac Low, whose texts and performance writing from the early 1960s jettisoned the concept of the unified personality entirely. In so doing, Mac Low invented multi-authored but rule-governed procedures for reading and performance his works that resemble the protocols of a sociological study in order to disclose the propensities of actual persons as a politics. Mac Low’s use of instruction cards to initiate performance decisions is very like the use of the surveys or “projective” questions in The Authoritarian Personality or in other forms of personality inventory (the MMPI) in use at the time. It is informed as well by an anti-authoritarian, indeed anarchist politics that might be troubled by the rigid structures of the liberal personality, even as it is ethically bound not exclude their interests as social.]

[Excerpt from Mac Low’s instructions to The Pronouns.]

[This rejection of “personality” as the site of poetic reproduction for a poetics of social discourse was extended, in the 1970s and as a reaction to the poetics of “the per-

son” with the New Americans, in the poetry of the Language School, which constructed “subjectivity effects” through a use of language dissociated from the self. Here, Adorno’s method of constructing questions, in which he would try to image two conflicting sides of a given complex offers a parallel: the mixing of true and false, self-identified and self-alienated, original and quoted material in Language poetry is informed by a sense that the “absent cause” of contradictory surface material is a site of necessary and cultural and psychological work. An important parallel exists also in their use of the “New Sentence” form, as mimetic of the employment in sociopsychology of dissociated value statements.]

[Excerpt from Barrett Watten, Progress here.]

The Poetics of Translation

What is a cultural logic? My claim is that Adorno and co-workers disclosed a mechanism for the social reproduction of subjectivity in The Authoritarian Personality, and that their analysis is readable, in cultural translation, as a poetics of authority of the postwar period. Of course, much work needs to be done to factor into this claim their inadequate account of class politics and the absence of any account of gender and race. While Adorno’s Minima Moralia reveals an at times violent confrontation with gender, the working group accepted a consensus notion of the gender and racial make-up of American polity. Simply, women vote and purchase and thus must be included any opinion analysis, but there is no larger account of the relation of gender to authority. Ethnic groups, on the other hand, need to be excluded from the study, the authors state, since one of its goals is to measure anti-Semitic and anti-ethnic bias. A culturally dominant, male-identified polity thus provided the raw material from which the authoritarian personality was manufactured, revealing yet another moment of its circularity. At this same time, the groups sampled did reflect a liberal consensus view of American polity in the period; this, as well as the basis

for “The Culture Industry” argument being Hollywood and its industrial production of culture, must be taken into account as a moment of cultural translation. Something like a moment of cross-cultural dialogue is indeed occurring if an “Innenfaschist” is being produced out of the ideologemes of a “democratic” polity. The disclaimer that what the researchers revealed was a propensity to accept fascism, and that the ground of this acceptance might well be American democracy, is something we may want to test at present. Tocqueville’s concept of “tyranny of the majority” would come in handy here.

In order to frame this moment of cultural translation, and locate the place of a cultural poetics in relation to it, I will need to begin with to extend my argument in two directions suggested by the current return to Adorno in the American reception, before moving on to the more difficult question of a dialogue between American and German cultures. Cultural poetics, it may be argued, would tend to unlink the univocal account of either theory or intellectual history, as it would attempt to recover a regional specificity of cross-cultural dialogue. Weimar, Hollywood, the Marktwirtschaftswunder, McCarthy, die Mauer, and Berkeley in the 60s each would be elements to consider on their own terms, specifically in any new genealogy or return to Critical Theory, which would amount to the same thing. My first line of argument, then, would be to take up the disconnect between the Frankfurt School and Cultural Studies, which in a recent collection of essays are claimed to be much closer than often supposed. The crucial text here, of course, is “The Culture Industry” (and Adorno’s troubling writings on jazz), whose perspectives would be entirely reversed in Cultural Studies—leading to one of the latter’s most resistant prejudices, Andreas Huyssens’s notion of the “Great Divide” between high modernism and mass culture. The feminist reaction against modernism and the avant-garde begins right here, with a supposed identification and denigration of women, consumerism, and entertainment that would be reversed in Cultural Studies work. Adorno’s

solution, his negative dialectics, would simply seem to reproduce the cultural elitism of the avant-garde and high modernism, however founded in a critique of reification it might be. If, however, we return to the scene of The Authoritarian Personality, we may discern the moment of splitting and projective identification (also reproduced in the Cold War) that led to the Great Divide in the first place (which then would accept the cultural consumerism of the Cold War as a ground for politics, while rejecting its Great Power politics). Undoing the Great Divide would amount to critically rethinking the logic of splitting and projective identification produced in Adorno's study, specifically to show how his drastic claims of alienation and reification in the Culture Industry depended on his immediate experience of German authoritarianism, translated into a cultural logic.

A second line of thinking would follow the currently active "Marxist-formalist" reception of Adorno, including Fredric Jameson's Late Marxism and much recent work that valorizes Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory as the summa of Adorno's work. Here, there are three moments to be rethought: the notion that an immanent critique can dispense with personality, and even the subject, and simply work within the philosophical tradition, focusing on the question of reification; that cultural issues from regional politics to gender, race, and class are to be bracketed; and that examples remain literary or even high modernist—thus ascribing to the "bad" side of the Great Divide—rather than be seen in terms of a larger cultural poetics. In ideology critique in this tradition, the poet or maker of cultural products tends to be set aside, while in its literary studies, there is an uncritical return to the "author" as site of literary production that should be broadened. Immanent critique and literary formalism tend to go together in this reception, which at the same time has the advantage of creating frameworks for a politics of negative dialectics in ways that motivated in the present period. In theory, Jameson needs to keep the critical methods of Marxism alive following the failures of Marxist states and their views

of totality; Adorno's dictum "the total is the false" serves him well here. For literature, the recent development of language-centered strategies, which defer or displace meaning without any guaranteed horizon of interpretation, gain support from a negative dialectics. My response to both is the call for a cultural poetics. In the first case, we must go farther than Jameson in "always historicizing" the precise cultural contexts for Marxist politics, and this means rethinking both the Cold War and the post-1989 period. In the latter, we need to show how the negativity of language-centered writing is a part of specific cultural logics. The thinglike nature of personality in Robert Creeley's writing; the attempt to found an anti-authoritarian polity as a form of text production and performance art with John Cage or Jackson Mac Low; and the use of social ideologemes in the New Sentence produced by the Language school all tend in the direction of specific cultural logics. A Left Adorno, then, would recover the specific cultural politics that gives these interventions their critical force, and would involve them as well in the project of Critical Theory.

In the third case, Adorno's German reception, help me fill in the blanks! Es lebe die negativen Dialektik als kultureller Dialog!

