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Lorenz JÖ¤ger. *Adorno. Eine politische Biographie.* Munich: DVA, 2003. 320 pp. EUR 22.90 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-421-05493-7.

Stefan MÖ¼ller-Doohm. *Adorno. Eine Biographie.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003. 1032 pp. EUR 36.90 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-518-58378-4.

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Adorno: New Portraits of a Permanent Exile

Theodor W. Adorno's one-hundredth birthday on September 11, 2003, prompted a media spectacle that the theoretician of the culture industry would certainly have appreciated as a new sign of its all-consuming hegemony. Besides an astonishing number of newspaper articles and TV features, there was a wave of conferences, exhibitions, and publications. Among the latter were three biographies–a number which can serve as an indicator of the unusual attention devoted to this multifaceted intellectual figure who was at the same time philosopher and sociologist, composer and musician, cultural critic and public intellectual. Certainly such a life–spent in the Weimar Republic, in exile, and in post-war West Germany–can be the topic for different biographies and different biographers. Together with Max Horkheimer, Adorno formed the intellectual center of the so-called Frankfurt School, which not only still constitutes one of the liveliest traditions of continental philosophy and social thought, but also played a major role in post-war West German cultural history. Due to this role, the renewed interest in his life and work may turn out to be more than a simple media hype: namely, an attempt to understand a central development in the intellectual history of the late twentieth century. The three biographers master this task in different ways: Stefan MÃ¼ller-Doohm writes a comprehensive biography that guides us through Adorno's life from cradle to grave, Lorenz JÃ¤ger paints a cursory intellectual portrait that is effectively cleansed of any admiration for its subject, and Detlev Claussen reads Adorno's life as a many-layered palimpsest.[1]

MÃ¼ller-Doohm, a former student of Adorno, now Professor of Sociology at the University of Oldenburg, has already earned a reputation with numerous publications on the Frankfurt School and especially on Adorno's social theory. His biography, more than 1,000 pages long, is the outcome of a large-scale research project funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. The sheer amount of material MÃ¼ller-Doohm lays out before the reader's eyes, drawn from archives, Adorno's

writings, published and unpublished letters, and interviews with collaborators and friends, is amazing. Adorno belongs to perhaps the last generation whose intellectual development can be reconstructed from their correspondence. The list of people he exchanged letters with reads like a Who's Who of twentieth-century intellectual history: Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Alban Berg, Thomas Mann, and Paul Celan, among others.[2] Unfortunately, even today not all of Adorno's massive correspondence is available in archives, let alone published. The policy of the Adorno Archive in Frankfurt is irritatingly restrictive, so that, for example, the extremely important correspondence between Adorno and Siegfried Kracauer (one of his oldest friends, and who introduced him to philosophy) is still under lock and key and may not be quoted.[3] Such difficulties, however, do not prevent MÃ¼ller-Doohm from reconstructing Adorno's life in minute detail. I will briefly follow the path laid out in the nineteen chapters of his book.

Theodor Ludwig Wiesengrund-Adorno was born in Frankfurt am Main in 1903, where he grew up, went to school, studied at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, wrote his dissertation on Edmund Husserl's epistemology with Hans Cornelius as his advisor in 1924, and a *Habilitation* on Kierkegaard's aesthetics with Paul Tillich as his advisor in 1931, and then taught as a *Privatdozent* until he was suspended by the Nazis in 1933, on his thirtieth birthday. In the first part of his biography, MÃ¼ller-Doohm gives an informative account of the environment of Adorno's maturation: the wealthy city of Frankfurt with its liberal intellectual atmosphere. Adorno had what he retrospectively called a "happy" childhood in a materially secure and politically liberal family, in which music played an important part. The slow but steady disintegration of bourgeois society, of its economy, its values, its cultural traditions, and, at least in Germany, its political system, constituted the dominating experience of the time. This transformation had a profound impact on Adorno, and his way of understanding it was shaped by four friends he came to know in the early 1920s: Kracauer, a writer for the *Feuilleton* of the famous *Frankfurter Zeitung*; Horkheimer, Cornelius's assistant at the university; Benjamin, who had an enormous influence on Adorno's views on aesthetics and the history of philosophy; and Berg, the composer from Vienna, center of the "Neue Musik," where Adorno studied composition in 1925, after he finished his dissertation. Although in his early years Adorno's academic interests were rather traditional (probably in order not to spoil his career chances, with Benjamin's failure at the university as a warning example), his engagement with avantgardist art and literature was intense. Until the mid-1930s, Adorno was considering a career as composer and music critic as a serious and at times more promising alternative to being an academic philosopher.

This dual philosophical and musical career in Frankfurt and in Vienna is the object of the second part of MÃ¼ller-Doohm's biography. It is probably the experience of being part of a musical revolution that fed Adorno's "elitist" condemnation of popular and consumer culture, which found its most notorious expression in his denunciation of jazz, which, according to him, only served the ideological function of distracting the disadvantaged from existing social antagonisms. The Marxist background of views such as these became increasingly important for Adorno as he was more closely integrated into the discussions at the famous *Institut fÃ¼r Sozialforschung*, founded in Frankfurt in 1924 as a Marxist research institute. Horkheimer had already presented a sketch of the theoretical framework that would become so influential under the name "critical theory," when he became the new director in 1931. The Institute's *Zeitschrift fÃ¼r Sozialforschung* developed into one of the main forums for critical and nondogmatic dialogues on the academic left in the years of its publication (1933-1939, 1941), with Adorno as one of its most important authors and collaborators.[4]

For all three biographers, the major break in Adorno's life occurred in 1933-34. On January 30, 1933, the day Hitler came to power, Adorno published a revised version of his *Habilitation* under the title "Konstruktion des Ãsthetischen"; nine months later, on his thirtieth birthday, he was thrown out of his alma mater by the Nazis, as were Horkheimer, Tillich, Karl Mannheim, and so many others. Although Kracauer, Benjamin, and Ernst Bloch had left Germany shortly after the Reichstag fire, Adorno exhibited a remarkably naÃ¯ve political attitude towards the new regime, thinking it would not be able to last for long. To have illuminated this difficult time in Adorno's life (in the first chapter of part 3) is one of the merits of MÃ¼ller-Doohm's work. Of course Adorno experienced an unknown degree of intellectual isolation, political pressure, and material insecurity, but he hoped to be able to "hibernate" in the Third Reich and to keep on working under the new political conditions. Anxiety about the fate of his parents in Frankfurt and of his fiancÃ©e Gretel Karplus, whom he had known since 1923 and who was still living in Berlin, also played a role in his decision to stay. He even applied for membership in the Reichsschrifttumskammer, a condition for publi-

cation, in November 1933, but he was refused. All this confronted Adorno, who was baptised as a Catholic but whose father was Jewish, with his "Jewishness," which apparently did not play a considerable role for him until then. How hard it was for Adorno to cope with these circumstances can only be guessed from the fact that in at least two publications on music Adorno used a language that showed many similarities to the National Socialist ideological vocabulary–here even MÃ¼ller-Doohm's explanations come to an end. Confronted with these writings by students in the early 1960s Adorno tried to vindicate them with reference to the difficult situation he was in–of course without receiving much understanding. Only in 1934 did Adorno realize that it would not be possible for him to live and work in Germany. With the help of relatives and the Academic Assistance Council he managed, not to get an academic position, but to enroll at Merton College, Oxford, in the summer of 1934 as an "advanced student." He planned to obtain a degree that would enable him to pursue an academic career in the Anglo-American world and he started to work on a thesis that took up some of the themes of the dissertation on Edmund Husserl he had completed in Frankfurt ten years prior. The intellectual and personal isolation under which Adorno suffered in England was only remedied by the intense correspondence with Horkheimer, Benjamin, Sohn-Rethel, and Kracauer (Berg died surprisingly in 1935), and by regular trips to Germany, where he visited his parents and Gretel.

Exile in Oxford, however, turned out to be only an interim solution: after his marriage to Gretel in London in 1937 and a job offer from Horkheimer (partly at the Institute of Social Research, and partly at the "Princeton Radio Research Project" under the direction of Paul Lazarsfeld), Adorno was ready to move to New York together with his wife. There, in a very short period of time, he had to adapt not only to a new way of life, but to the new way of doing empirical social research. He remained, however, deeply skeptical with regard to the possibilities of "measuring" culture so that a clash with Lazarsfeld became inevitable–in 1940, Adorno was lucky to become a full member of the Institute of Social Research, which had previously been transferred to New York in 1934. Besides Horkheimer and Adorno, Erich Fromm, Friedrich Pollock, Leo LÃ¶wenthal, Franz Neumann, Otto Kirchheimer, and Herbert Marcuse were full members at the time.[5] Of course, intrigues and competition were common among the de facto and would-be members of the circle, due to the intellectual and economic pressures of exile. Adorno himself often acted strategically in order to achieve a better position with regard to Horkheimer, who, as the director of the Institute, was in control of the available positions and finances. Especially, Adorno's relationship to his close friend Kracauer was severely damaged by this imposed struggle for recognition. MÃ¼ller-Doohm uses letters and other material to show the difficulty of the situation, but a more detailed historical analysis of the networks between exiled academics is still needed. Benjamin's suicide during his flight from the Nazis at the Franco-Spanish border is the most tragic reminder of the importance of such networks in these times.[6]

When Adorno's parents caught up with him in New York in 1939-40, their son was about ready to leave again. For private and institutional reasons, Horkheimer had moved to California and more or less dissolved the institutional structure of the Institute. Adorno followed him in 1941, their common plan being to collaborate more closely on a book that was published years later and quickly became Critical Theory's bestseller, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Horkheimer and Adorno together with their wives settled in an area close to Hollywood that was popular among more affluent German emigrants. In "Deutsch-Kalifornien," as Thomas Mann called it, they brought Weimar culture to life again, though only in miniature: Bertolt Brecht, Arnold SchÃ¶nberg, Hanns Eisler, Fritz Lang, and Thomas Mann were the most prominent inhabitants of this "exile in paradise," which MÃ¼ller-Doohm portrays in chapter 5 of part 3 and which is also one focal point of the other two biographies. On one episode all three, however, have little new to say: during his naturalization in 1943, Adorno formally dropped his family name "Wiesengrund" and registered as "Theodor W. Adorno"–a move in which some less sympathetic commentators saw a rejection of his Jewish "identity" in difficult times. What really motivated him to adopt his mother's name will probably remain unknown–and perhaps should not be overinterpreted. In any case, California provided far more opportunities for Adorno than Oxford: he was involved in an empirical research project on the genesis and psychological structure of antisemitism and fascism (published in 1950 under the title *The Authoritarian Personality*), worked on his philosophy of music, wrote the deeply pessimistic collection of aphorisms under the title *Minima Moralia*, and as an "advisor" to Thomas Mann had an immense influence on the writing of *Doktor Faustus*.

Edward Said has pointed out the importance of the experience of exile for the self-understanding of twentieth-century critical intellectuals, and this is es-

pecially true for Adorno, who once described himself as a permanent exile. Nevertheless, Auschwitz, which for Adorno stood for the unimaginable horrors committed by the Nazis, had an even deeper influence on his thought. It changed everything: theory and culture could not be the same after 1945 and for Adorno this catastrophe left humanity with only one imperative: never let this happen again. His *Negative Dialectics* (1966) is the philosophical result of his effort to live up to this demand. It must have been his hope to contribute to the task in more practical ways that motivated Adorno's return to Germany as a teacher–apart from his love for his hometown Frankfurt, for German culture and its language. As early as 1945, Adorno began to think about a return to Europe and in 1949-50 both Horkheimer and Adorno came back to West Germany and became professors at their old university in Frankfurt. The Institut fÃ¼r Sozialforschung reopened in 1951 and soon became the almost mythical center of the transformation of critical theory into the Frankfurt School–with Adorno as its director from 1958 on. This highly ambivalent process of homecoming can teach us a lot about the early history of West Germany, and MÃ¼ller-Doohm devotes most of part four to it.[7] Adorno's role in the post-war Bonn Republic was, however, at least threefold, and one has to consult other sources in addition to the three biographies in order to grasp its complexities: as a sociologist and philosopher Adorno influenced the major academic discussions, from the "positivism dispute" with Karl Popper and the debate over late capitalism with Ralf Dahrendorf to his critique of Martin Heidegger and his influential followers (*Jargon der Eigentlichkeit*, 1964);[8] as a literary and cultural critic Adorno–himself "ein Schriftsteller unter Beamten"[9]–played a considerable role in promoting what George Steiner called "Suhrkamp Culture," literature by contemporaries like Celan, Samuel Beckett, Ingeborg Bachmann, and Hans-Magnus Enzensberger, and modern art in general (theoretically grounding his criticism in the posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory*); as a public intellectual he opposed the repression of the past and restorative tendencies in the conservative and anti-communist climate of post-war West Germany. In this latter function he was so influential that–together with Horkheimer–he can be counted among the intellectual founders of the Bonn Republic which combined a commitment to western democracy with a critical attitude towards Germany's past.[10] Adorno became–especially after Horkheimer's retirement–the most influential representative of the Frankfurt School. Part of its program was the institutionalization of the non-conformist and critical intellectual against conservative and positivist tendencies and the specialization of academic philosophers and sociologists–and Adorno, through his writings, his public presence, but maybe most importantly his teaching, was its most influential model.[11] This influence would only prove its historical force towards the end of Adorno's life in an–at least for him–unexpected way.

The history of the student movement of 1968 has attracted a lot of Attention recently; its intellectual background, however, especially the influence of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse, is still often left to speculation. An edition of the most important documents by Wolfgang Kraushaar and a study by Alex Demirovic have now made a more sober assessment possible and MÃ¼ller-Doohm's treatment in the last chapter of his biography is informative and fair, although he once again clearly takes sides with Adorno.[12] It is interesting to note in this context that Adorno already had his reservations against the new social movements that emerged in the late 1950s in opposition to West Germany's rearmament and the use of atomic energy. However, his diagnosis of modern society as an irrational order marked by deep social antagonisms had a strong influence on the radical student movement that developed in West Germany, especially in Berlin and Frankfurt–as in Berkeley and Paris–in the late 1960s in response to the war in Vietnam and the repressive tendencies in German society and politics. In contrast to the much more radical Marcuse, Adorno (as well as JÃ¼rgen Habermas, his former assistant and at the time Horkheimer's successor as a professor in Frankfurt, and whose theoretical work is now seen to constitute the second generation of critical theory) was deeply skeptical about what he considered to be the voluntaristic, irrationalistic, and in the end, even protofascistic tendencies on the radical left. Like Habermas, he was nevertheless much more willing to engage in a constructive dialogue with the students than Horkheimer, who had left Frankfurt to live in Montagnola. This dialogue finally failed: students in Frankfurt and Berlin interrupted Adorno's lectures and he called the police in order to end what he experienced as the occupation of the Institute.[13] Adorno's conviction that under the given social conditions emancipatory practice could only exist in theory, and his critique of the activism and revolutionary pathos of the student movement led to a break between the teacher and his students, who pronounced the verdict "Adorno as an institution is dead." Half a year later, on August 6, 1969, shortly before his sixty-sixth birthday, Adorno died in the Swiss Alps.

As this short tour has shown, Adorno's biography

reflects the history of Germany's "age of extremes," its brighter as well as its darkest side. It is certainly one of the most difficult tasks of a biographer to bring out this intertwinement of history and biography; for this, the classical biographic narrative chosen by MÃ¼ller-Doohm, though informative, in the end seems to be too simple. A related difficulty is due to the specifics of Adorno's case: it concerns the possibility–or maybe rather the legitimacy–of writing a biography of a thinker whose whole work casts doubts on the very idea and value of biographical and autobiographical writing and its own illusions of the coherence, unity, and "truth" of a life. Against these, Adorno put forward the thesis of the fragmentation of experience and of the individual's life under the present social circumstances.[14] Adorno's own biography is, however, marked by a certain tension between his theoretical rejection of the bourgeois category of the individual as an autonomous subject leading a distinct life and the way he lead his own life as a *BildungsbÃ¼rger* par excellence. Although MÃ¼ller-Doohm seems to be aware of these problems and wants to focus on the relation between the "objective" content of Adorno's works and their historical and social situatedness (pp. 11-12), his book largely follows conventional modes of biographical writing and hardly ever leaves the chronological path. It is written in a "the life-and-times" mode and reveals MÃ¼ller-Doohm's intention to give a complete and objective picture of Adorno's life. The result is a comprehensive, maybe "definitive," but certainly "official" biography of Adorno–commissioned by Adorno's publishing house, Suhrkamp, on occasion of the one-hundredth birthday, and is unfortunately not free of hagiographic tendencies. Sometimes one gets the impression that it is the work of a student who wants to honor his admired teacher. In its orthodox style and its linear narration, it is certainly more detailed, reliable, and accurate, but also more dry than JÃ¤ger's and Claussen's works.

JÃ¤ger and Claussen are both less ambitious–they focus not so much on a linear biography, but try to capture "biographical moments" and "intellectual constellations," which, on a formal level, is definitely closer to Adorno's own thinking and less tedious. So it might be said that they achieve more by aiming lower. But JÃ¤ger's book has certain serious disadvantages. He does not substantiate his main interpretive thesis that Adorno's work is an attempt to understand the cultural and political constellation of 1903 and only shows the obvious: that its ensuing decline and the catastrophe to which it led were also experienced by Adorno. Furthermore, the book's subtitle misleadingly promises–or threatens–a "political biography." First, the book provides more of a concise intellectual portrait than a biography, and, second, it is "political" only in the sense that it tries to show that the apparently scientific vocabulary of critical theory–a blend of Marxism and psychoanalysis he deems obsolete–served to mask its political aims (p. 205), which JÃ¤ger describes as those of a "twentieth-century inquisition" (p. 202). Finally, JÃ¤ger himself rationalizes and plays down the widespread post-war refusal to come to terms with the National Socialist past when he identifies its "rational core" in the hypothesis that it could have led to an allied politics of retaliation (p. 222).[15] While MÃ¼ller-Doohm and Claussen are full of sympathy for Adorno, JÃ¤ger's book is the at times disrespectful attempt at the demystification of an intellectual hero of the left. As an antidote to the other mostly admiring publications, it may be of some use–but as a contribution to intellectual history, it is far less convincing than the other two biographies and one can only be happy that it will not remain the only one translated into English.

In order to get a sense of Adorno's complex life, the development of his thought, and his place in intellectual history, one will certainly have to read all three biographies. The resulting impression, however, may be that they only constitute the first, imperfect attempts at understanding this phenomenon. The improved understanding of Adorno's personality and intellectual development they make possible will only have a lasting effect if the focus on the personal again gives way to a focus on Adorno's work and its place in twentieth-century intellectual history. "Die Wunde Adorno schlieÃt sich nicht."[16] One hopes that this statement may turn out to be as true for Adorno as it was for Heinrich Heine–another author Germans often found annoying–on the centenary of whose birthday Adorno coined this expression.

Notes

[1]. Detlev Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno. Ein letztes Genie* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer 2003). The review focuses on MÃ¼ller-Doohm's and JÃ¤ger's contributions. JÃ¤ger's book has recently been published in an English translation by Yale University Press; MÃ¼ller-Doohm's biography has as yet only found a French publisher, but an English translation has been announced by Polity Press. The interested reader should also consult the nicest publication on the occasion of the anniversary, which gives us a mosaic of Adorno's life through photographs and texts: Theodor W. Adorno Archiv,

ed., *Adorno. Eine Bildmonographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003). The proceedings of the major conference held in Frankfurt will be published shortly: Axel Honneth, ed., *Dialektik der Freiheit. Frankfurter Adorno-Konferenz 2003* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005).

[2]. The correspondence with Benjamin, Berg, Mann, Celan, Alfred Sohn-Rethel, Elisabeth Lenk, Ernst Krenek, his parents, and with his publishers Peter Suhrkamp and Siegfried Unseld is already published. A new edition of the correspondence with Horkheimer was initiated by Suhrkamp in 2003.

[3]. The Adorno Archive regularly publishes its findings along with commentaries in the *Frankfurter Adorno BlÃ¤tter* (Munich: edition text + kritik). In addition to the collected works edited by Rolf Tiedemann and completed in 1986, there is now an edition in progress of Adorno's fragments, notes, lectures, interviews, and similar materials that will take many more volumes and many more years to complete.

[4]. Besides Horkheimer's director's address "Die gegenwÃ¤rtige Lage der Sozialphilosophie und die Aufgaben eines Instituts fÃ¼r Sozialforschung" of 1931, his essay "Traditionelle und kritische Theorie," which was published in 1937 in the *Zeitschrift fÃ¼r Sozialforschung*, was the most influential sketch of critical theory's research program. On the early history of the institute see the first and still authoritative study by Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1973), and Rolf Wiggershaus, *Die Frankfurter Schule. Geschichte, theoretische Entwicklung, politische Bedeutung* (Munich: dtv, 1988), chapter 1 (translated as *The Frankfurt School*, Cambridge: MIT, 1994). On the history of the institute's journal see Alfred Schmidt, "Die Zeitschrift fÃ¼r Sozialforschung. Geschichte und gegenwÃ¤rtige Bedeutung," *Zeitschrift fÃ¼r Sozialforschung*, ed. Max Horkheimer, reprint (Munich: dtv, 1980), vol. 1, pp. 5-63.

[5]. On the history of the institute in the USA see: Wiggershaus, chapters 3-4.

[6]. On Benjamin see Willem von Reijen and Herman van Doorn, *Aufenthalte und Passagen. Leben und Werk Walter Benjamins: Eine Chronik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001).

[7]. See also Wiggershaus, chapter 6, and JÃ¼rgen Habermas, "Die Zeit hatte einen doppelten Boden. Der Philosoph Theodor W. Adorno in den fÃ¼nfziger Jahren. Eine persÃ¶nliche Notiz," *Die Zeit* 37 (2003): pp. 45-46.

[8] On the history of West-German sociology after 1945 and Adorno's and Horkheimer's role, see Alex Demirovic, *Der nonkonformistische Intellektuelle. Die Entwicklung der Kritischen Theorie zur Frankfurter Schule* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), chapter 6.

[9]. JÃ¼rgen Habermas, "Ein philosophischer Intellektueller" (1963), in *Philosophisch-politische Profile* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), p. 161.

[10]. See Clemens Albrecht, et al., *Die intellektuelle GrÃ¼ndung der Bundesrepublik. Eine Wirkungsgeschichte der Frankfurter Schule* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2000).

[11]. See Demirovid, ibid.

[12]. See *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung. Von der Flaschenpost zum Molotowcocktail*, ed. Wolfgang Kraushaar, 3. vols. (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1998); Demirovi [DEMIROVIC], chapter 7; and Wiggershaus, chapter 8.

[13]. For a more critical assessment of Adorno's role in this conflict see: Wiggershaus, pp. 702-704.

[14]. On these problems in writing about Adorno's life see: Claussen, pp. 13-26.

[15]. Furthermore, no reference is given for an apparent quote from Alexander Mitscherlich that refers to the experience of German prisoners of war who compared their own situation under American custody to the concentration camps of the Nazis (pp. 223-224). Arno Widmann in his review of the book in the *Berliner Zeitung* (September 15, 2003) remarks that a telephone interview conducted with him by JÃ¤ger is misrepresented and that he is uncertain as to the correctness of some of the other references.

[16]. Alexander GarcÃa DÃ¼ttmann, *So ist es. Ein philosophischer Kommentar zu Adornos "Minima Moralia"* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), p. 139.

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