RECONSIDERING ADORNO

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Man is a result, not an *eidos*, the cognitions of Hegel and Marx penetrate to the inmost core of the socalled questions of constitution – Adorno

The problem of difference – from Heidegger to Levinas to Derrida – has functioned as something akin to a proving ground for Husserl's phenomenology. Is phenomenology, in Husserl's hands, capable of registering the unicity of difference and its transformation of philosophy? This is a proving ground for which Husserl both prepares us and is famously (allegedly) under-prepared himself. The story is well-known: Husserl's phenomenology, with its lust for things transcendental (and so subjective), forgets those fundamental divisions constitutive of the very subject and subject matter with which it is concerned. Ontological difference, the Other, the sign – based in these motifs, the opponents' 'critiques' are familiar, as are, to a certain extent, the 'responses' from Husserl's allies. (Let us pass over the odd fact that matters of such significance often take on quasi-military phrasing.) In this varied story about difference, however, one rarely sees Adorno's name, and so rarely hears the apparatuses of critical theory brought to bear on the conversation about phenomenology's possibilities. Why has Adorno been so quickly forgotten as a reader of Husserl?

Part of this forgetting, to be sure, lies in the nature of the thinker and his programme. The Frankfurt School is rightly known for its incisive cultural and political critique. From the early works on sociology to Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to the popularization of critical theory in the work of Marcuse and Fromm, the Frankfurt School is typically read as meta-commentary on mass culture, the decay of the West, and so on. But this rendering of Adorno's philosophy forgets his first work from the early 1930s: critical studies of Husserl's phenomenology, later compiled and reworked in the mid-1950s, then published as *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie* (translated as *Against Epistemology*).¹ This is such a peculiar forgetting. At the outset of his intellectual career, then again nearing its peak, Adorno is compelled to address Husserl's work. Why

¹ Theodore Adorno, *Against Epistemology: Studies in Husserl and the Phenomenological Antinomies*, trs. Willis Domingo. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983. Hereafter referred to as ME.

Husserl? First, a note on what Husserl 'means' to Adorno. As Adorno makes clear in *Metacritique of Epistemology*, his concern is not to advance documentary or archival scholarship, but rather to offer a reading of the fundamental motifs and motivations of Husserl's work. This reading, as we shall see, identifies through what Adorno calls 'immanent critique' a dialectical movement at the heart of what should be neutralized phenomena. Dialectics do not so much 'oppose phenomenology with a position or "model" external and alien to phenomenology,' Adorno writes, 'as it pushes the phenomenological model, with the latter's own force, to where the latter cannot afford to go.' (ME, 5) This tells us how Husserl's work is to be addressed. Lodged within phenomenology's own terms, Adorno wants to show the necessity of dialectical thinking.

Yet, to ask it again, why Husserl? Given the dominance of Heidegger's work in European thought from the thirties onward, the choice strikes me as unlikely, even odd. Yet, as his correspondence with Benjamin makes clear, Adorno took his work on Husserl very seriously. Let me assert two reasons why he takes up, with earnestness, the motifs of classical phenomenology. First, and Adorno makes this a part of his exposition of the phenomenological method, Husserl breaks decisively with rationalism and empiricism, yet retains much of the force of each. Husserl therefore marks an important moment in the history of philosophy. As an intellectual descendent of Hegel and Marx (albeit a disloyal one), such important historical intervals demand Adorno's attention. Second, Adorno is himself attuned to the basic phenomenological disposition: return to the things themselves. Indeed, if immanent critique is to amount to anything other than literary criticism - and surely Adorno wants more than that from his analysis - then clearing the space for the resonance of the dialectical moment of and within the things themselves is paramount. Further, and I think necessarily, we must conclude from this that an encounter with the internal transformation of Husserl's phenomenology is essential to how Adorno thinks – and therefore how he is to be read. What would it mean, then, to take this work on Husserl seriously as a part of Adorno's own philosophical development? What would it mean to read Adorno as lodged within Husserlian phenomenology, even as Marxism and psychoanalysis later come to frame so much of critical theory? If we take Adorno seriously as a phenomenologist and critic of its classical model, then how might he help us ask further about the place and possibilities of phenomenology in cultural critique? What would it mean to read Adorno as an important transformation (so not just criticism) of phenomenology?

My reflections here take Adorno's work seriously as a contribution to and critical intervention in Husserl's work. Adorno's *Metacritique* is admittedly, obvious from the title, a meta-critical study of phenomenology. Thus, from the outset, Adorno is careful to

constrain his comments; he makes no pretensions to work through manuscripts, occasional studies, secondary literature etc., but rather examines the animating spirit of transcendental phenomenology. Adorno is concerned with how phenomenology expresses various limits inherent in philosophies of subjectivity and immanence (in a word, 'idealism'), as well as how social critique renders the motivations of idealism something quite other than a-historical or culturally neutral. To that extent, some might argue that Adorno's reading is limited. How can one offer an immanent critique, yet admit only having concern with an animating spirit of that thought? How can one make claims about Husserl's work without a comprehensive study of the texts? One response to both questions is that a great thinker never reads another great thinker in the register of commentary. Fidelity is rarely a characteristic of master-philosophers reading one another.

A second response, and one that touches on the fate of both thinkers, is the fact that the *philosophical* engagement of phenomenology by way of ideology-critique and dialectics comes to bear important and genuinely radical fruit in Adorno's later work (especially *Negative Dialectics*). The terms of that later work, I would argue, can be seen as emerging from out of the antinomies generated by Husserl's phenomenology. Rather than simply critical conclusions, these antinomies become productive in Adorno's hands. Adorno's set of philosophical problems (singularity, negation, transcendence, etc.), though often eclipsed by the same motifs in post-WWII French philosophy, lie at the contested heart of Husserl's phenomenology, and indeed comprise that cluster of enigmas from which so many critiques of Husserl have been undertaken. But Adorno does not simply leave off where he sets Husserl's limits. Contradiction, after all, is the lifeblood of dialectics (even in the peculiar practice of them in critical theory), so limits and critique are co-extensive with renewal, negation and complication with possibility.

In the end, then, what interests me about Adorno's critical engagement with Husserl is how his critique generates, for lack of a better word, a 'positive' philosophical position. This in no small way distinguishes Adorno from many of Husserl's critical readers. The antinomies Adorno discovers drive dialectic, rather than simply underscoring Husserl's as a confused or self-defeating project. Adorno's work on dialectics, to the extent that it is pushed along by antinomian limits, invigorates phenomenological description. So, Adorno's work as a philosopher, when read as a kind of phenomenology, can also be said to address much of the future of phenomenology as critical work and as a possibility. Is this not the very best of one great thinker reading another? Is it not worthwhile, even decisive, to ask again and again about the possibility of a philosophical project?

Let me return to the specific context of Adorno's reading of Husserl. To where is Adorno taking us in *Metacritique*? The end, of course is the question of the relation of dialectics to phenomenology. Already we seem to push outside phenomenology. Indeed,

Husserl defined phenomenology at least in part against dialectics. Part of the purchase of description lies in the distance such a method takes from extra-phenomenal explanations of the given. But, if Adorno is right in locating antinomies at the heart of Husserl's phenomenology, then phenomenology, of necessity, must encounter dialectics as constitutive of its own project. First, then, the question of method.

Adorno's methodology is nicely expressed in his late essay 'Subject and Object.' In this essay, Adorno begins a surmounting of Husserlian intentionality – the intentionality of idealism. On the one hand, the essay's main thesis – that we can neither have subject without object nor object without subject – is plainly another version of the insight into intentionality, with the important shift from the subjectivity of the subject to the reversibility of relationality. Adorno writes:

The difference between subject and object cuts through both the subject and the object. It can no more be absolutized than it can be put out of mind. Actually, everything in the subject is chargeable to the object...The object, though enfeebled, cannot be without a subject either. If the object lacked the moment of subjectivity, its own objectivity would become nonsensical.²

At this point, Adorno's position approximates that of Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible*, as well as many of the analyses of affective life in *Ideas II*. There is no subject without object, no object without subject, except that for Adorno the object is more heavily weighted. This marks his first break with Husserl, namely, the idealism rendering of consciousness as consciousness of something. For Adorno, while there can be no object without its subjective shadow – i.e., an object is an object *as* something known – the subject that becomes in the relation to its object, the ego of intentionality, is marked by a stronger sense of dependency. Reversible, yes, but with a sense of the priority of the object. 'The object, too, is mediated,' Adorno writes, 'but according to its own concept, it is not so thoroughly dependent on the subject as the subject is on objectivity.' (SO, 502) Whatever the mutuality, the object is first in the sense of needing less of the subject than the subject needs of the object.

Adorno's shift away from idealism's insight into intentionality as a doubled relation – reversible perhaps, but always anchored in an active subject – inheres in the resubstantialization of the terms of intentionality. If the first step of phenomenology lies in suspension of belief in the external world, as well as the same vis-à-vis inner-perception in reflection, then Husserl's work proceeds on the basis of a de-substantialization of the poles

² Theodor Adorno, 'Subject and Object,' in Arato and Gebhardt, eds., *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. New York: Continuum, 1997, 508-509. Hereafter referred to as SO.

of relation (and so too what constitutes the 'between'). Thus, phenomenology can concern itself with transcendental subjectivity and its immanent contents without withdrawing from the world or forgetting the world's transcendent character. De-substantialization does not mean the elimination of transcendence in immanence *per se*. The world retains its otherness in the sense-structure of transcendence (as opposed to a metaphysical conception), so immanence is not initially threatened by the epoche's and reduction's de-substantialization of what is given. This does not mean, however, that Husserl's sense of immanence understands its own internal structure. Adorno writes:

The qualification of the absolutely first in subjective immanence founders because immanence can never completely disentangle the moment of non-identity within itself, and because subjectivity, the organ of reflection, clashes with the idea of an absolutely first as pure immediacy. Though the idea of a philosophy of origins aims monistically at pure identity, subjective immanence, in which the absolutely first wishes to remain with itself undisturbed, will not let itself be reduced to that of pure identity with itself. What Husserl calls the "original foundation" of transcendental subjectivity is also an original lie. (ME, 23)

Immanence is divided within itself – an insight Adorno attributes to Lask – and while this must certainly be seen as a strength of Husserl's analysis (that one can investigate transcendental subjectivity without forgetting the world), it is also a decisive structural weakness. The 'original foundation,' the correlation of noesis and noema within immanence, returns the subject-object problematic to what is manifest within the reduction. While Husserl may have translated the terms of subject-object in the reduction, the problem of separation and relation – heretofore solved by the insight into the reversibility of intentionality – resurfaces; the implications of separation and relation remain obscure, yet still obtain. This obtaining, even in the reduction, repeats the question of the significance of interdependency between the two terms of relation, and therefore opens the question of mediation. This is all Adorno needs from Husserl in order to infuse the things themselves with dialectics: separation, relation, and interdependency. *The reduction does not eliminate the problem of mediation*.

Adorno's theorizing of the subject-object relation is therefore neither naïve nor prephenomenological. Rather, and this is the reason for my emphasis on the 're' of resubstantialization, Adorno returns to a quasi-substantial character of the terms of intentionality on the basis of the performance of the things themselves. Subject and object – across separation, in and against relation – simultaneously sustain reversibility and irreducible difference in the very dynamism of the world. And, if Eugen Fink is right that the reduction makes the world 'shoot up like sparks' and returns us to 'wonder in the face

of the world,³ then we can surely read Adorno's re-substantialization of the terms of intentionality as provoked by lived-experience. In this case, it is a lived-experience that contests the first processional step: suspension of belief. The resistance of subject and object, noesis and noema, to coincidence and reversibility – something manifest most vividly in contradiction – gives us justification for attributing to the poles of relation a quasi-substantial character. With such resistance and recurrence (and this is decisive for Adorno), the principle of non-identity comes to structure relations of meaning and non-meaning.

The conclusion we are to draw from this claim is that phenomenology is transformed in a *post*-reduction moment, the moment in which the resistance and recurrence of substantialization (perhaps the metaphysical?) resurfaces as a force *in the character of the things themselves*. Further, this resistance and recurrence indicates a decisive dialectical presupposition in the phenomenological field itself.

In *Metacritique*, Adorno makes this explicit in his account of Husserl's discussion of logical validity. To recall, Husserl's treatment of logic – as phenomenological – has to avoid two paths: psychologism and a kind of ontologism. That is, Husserl must demonstrate how the laws of logic obtain without ascribing to them either a purely psychological character or real being. The universality of logical law cannot be simply the product of the psyche, nor can the same be said to exist as an object. Yet, Adorno claims, the matters themselves implicate something akin to *both* a psychologism *and* an ontologism, whatever Husserl's critique of those two paths.⁴ How does this implication work? The laws of logic must be rational, reasonable, and true unto themselves, without a dependent reference to the individual consciousness to which it appeals for rationality or reasonableness. So, Adorno writes,

Consciousness confronts logic and its 'ideal laws.' If consciousness wishes to substantiate the claim of logic as founded and not crudely assume it, then logical laws must be reasonable to thought. In that case, however, thinking must recognize them as its own laws, its proper essence. For thinking is the content of logical acts. Pure logic and pure thought could not be detached from each other. (ME, 73)

³ Eugen Fink, 'The Phenomenological Philosophy of Edmund Husserl,' trs. R.O. Elveton in *The Phenomenology of Husserl*, ed. R.O. Elveton. Seattle: Noesis Press, 2000.

⁴ Husserl's critique of psychologism at the outset of *Logical Investigations*, which was part of his critical engagement with Frege, is fairly well-known. J.N. Mohanty's *Husserl and Frege* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983) is the exemplary study. Husserl's critique of ontologism, though somewhat less attended to in scholarship, is central to his conceptions of reflection and reduction – in other words, central to the very meaning of phenomenology. See Burt C. Hopkins, 'Husserl's Account of Phenomenological Reflection and Four Paradoxes of Reflexivity,' *Research in Phenomenology* 19 (1989): 180-194 for a systematic study of the question.

The initial, unappealing alternative to this reduction of logic to psychology is the very kind of dogmatism inherent in ontologism. That is, there are two problematic aspects to simply asserting the internal validity of the laws of logic. First, the simple assertion of internal validity, i.e., asserting the self-sufficiency of laws of logic, begs the question of the *origins* of validity. We must always ask: to what do the laws of logic appeal for their justification? Second, such an assertion risks a naïve character to the being of those laws. Simple assertion is pre-, even anti-, philosophical. So, Adorno writes of the laws of logic, '[t]hey would remain dogmatic, unproven, and contingent.' (ME, 74)

This sets up an antinomy within Husserl's own analysis. The epoche and reduction eliminate any legitimate appeal to the being of each pole of relation, so Husserl can neither appeal to the individual psyche nor law in itself. Psychology and Platonism (here meant in the worst sense) are swept aside, rightly, as a matter of method. Yet, for the analysis to work, the force of psychologism and a kind of ontologism are necessary. That is, logic must be reasonable to consciousness *and* self-legitimating. The result, for Adorno, is that

[b]y suppressing the subjective moment, thinking, as the condition of logic, Husserl also conjures away the objective, the subjective matter of thought which is inscrutable in thought (ME, 67)

This leaves Husserl's thought at an important impasse. This impasse only dead ends because Husserl's analysis –at least here in *Logical Investigations*, the text from which Adorno works – remains concerned with logic as a *theme*. As a *process*, however, logic becomes a problem of the dialectic between the subjective and objective poles of determination. 'Logic is not being,' Adorno writes, 'but rather a process which cannot be reduced purely to either a "subjectivity" or an "objectivity" pole. The consequence of the self-critique of logic is the dialectic.' (ME 74) Dialectic emerges as internal to the matter of logic itself, rather than as an extra-phenomenological critique of Husserl's account.

In appealing to a dialectical relation, Adorno avoids choosing the path of either psychologism or ontologism; to that extent, we can say that he takes the epoche and reduction seriously. Still, there is something important about the recurring force of both of Husserl's strategic opponents. Recurrence suggests the mediated character of both poles of determination. Thus, Adorno retains the Hegelian insight that the object of thought is both independent and dependent, both 'the *true* and the *known*.'⁵ The aim of this excursus into Adorno's critique of Husserl's logic, then, is to expose the dialectical tension between what, on Husserl's account, ought to have been pure phenomena, the location of which is

⁵ See the brief remarks in Brian O'Connor, *Adorno's Negative Dialectic: Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005, 142ff.

allegedly neutralized in the reduction. Dialectical tension is a re-substantialization in the sense that Adorno, unlike naïve or pre-phenomenological thinking, takes the problematic of validity seriously, yet sees a kind of substantialization as necessary to make sense of the project itself. That is, the universal force of logic in mind and world must be understood as fractured by the necessity of subjective reasonableness and objective law. Without both terms of relation, logic ceases to make sense (logic must both make rational sense and bind all argumentative grammars).

This fracture, which is indeed a contradiction of sorts, *produces* rather than suppresses the significance of logic. And it underscores the opacity that accompanies thinking toward transparency. The contradiction of subject-object builds opacity into clarity, and contradiction only works if we attribute a quasi-substantiality to the terms of dialectic. But intentionality as Husserl describes it is incapable of carrying the force of dialectical terms. This is clear from the centrality and sheer repetition of metaphors and figures of coincidence and overlap in Husserl's descriptions, especially in *Ideas I*.

How are we to understand this re-substantialization in Adorno? On the one hand, it is important, perhaps even enough, to establish the structural necessity of such a character of the terms of relation. On the other hand, leaving such an important, even philosophically decisive, turn at just that begs an important question: whence re-substantialization? Adorno's claim is not metaphysical, at least not in any traditional sense, although it does point to the persistence of the metaphysical often indicated in the performance of the things themselves (e.g., auto-affecting transcendence). Rather, for Adorno, the substantial character of the terms of relation issues from the work of history, work in and through which 'things' are laden with a significance that transcends the construal of relations of subject-object, noesis-noema, transcendental-mundane, etc., within the sphere of ownness. This is why, in the 'Subject and Object' essay, Adorno will say that man is a result, not an eidos. (SO, 511) It is important that Adorno does not say that man is a 'fact'; subjectivity, and all of the relations that comprise that term, is neither another object in the world nor to be understood in terms of its thrownness. Neither sense of fact obtains. As well, subjectivity is not an eidos, by which Adorno means subjectivity is never transparent to itself. The sphere of ownness, no matter its nuance with the insight into intentionality, obscures what is most fundamental about the subject and its irreducible relationality: history.

In this appeal to (from) history, the Adorno of *Metacritique* relies on Husserl's truncated insight in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* that every sense-formation has a sense-history. Husserl writes that:

The essential peculiarity of such products [judgments] is precisely that they are senses that bear within them, as a sense-implicate of their genesis, a sort of historicality; that in them, level by level, sense points back to original sense and to the corresponding noematic intentionality; that therefore each sense-formation can be asked about its essentially necessary sense-history.⁶

Adorno abuses this quotation, for sure, when he comments that 'Husserl hardly ever went further than in this passage.' (ME, 216) Adorno has the letter of the written record, in this case, plainly wrong. For Husserl, the sense-history of a sense-formation points back to the prior operations of the transcendental ego, so it is certainly not the case that Husserl goes no further than this quotation. Also, we know from 'The Origin of Geometry' that Husserl took the question of history seriously as, at the very least, an occasional site of investigation. What Adorno certainly has in mind here, and he is of course right, is that Husserl did not take the enormous question of social and cultural production of knowledge, and all of the transcendencies that production introduces to acts of knowing, seriously. Rather, for Husserl, sedimentation signifies, in the end, something very close to (if not exactly) a coincidence of thinking and historical origin. It is worth repeating Husserl on reactivation:

[T]he writing-down effects a transformation of the original mode of being of the meaning structure, [e.g.] within the geometrical sphere of self-evidence, of the geometrical structure which is put into words. It becomes sedimented, so to speak. But the reader can make it self-evident again, can reactivate the self-evidence.⁷

Sedimentation ensures self-evidencing reactivation for Husserl, which is another way of making thinking and historical experience transparent to one another.

Adorno's work takes sedimentation and the function of cultural objects as irreducible, but this comes with a price: the loss of transparency and pure translation. That is, for Adorno we cannot easily (if at all) think outside the historical conditions of thought, nor can we dispense with culturally-laden objects (such as, and perhaps most importantly, discourse). The positioning of dialectic at the center of the things themselves effects this: our relation to the *Lebenswelt* is itself mediated, never transparent. So, we inherit as much as we enact, we enter into relationality as passively as we construct the same. This passivity of relation does not 'melt' into the associations that 'put things together' and 'where all

⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, trs. Dorion Cairns. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970, 184. Quoted by Adorno in ME, 216.

⁷ Edmund Husserl, 'The Origin of Geometry,' trs. David Carr, in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970, 361.

meaning arises,' as Husserl has it in 'The Origin of Geometry.' The passivity of historical experience entails a forgetting at worst, a complication at best, of how it is possible to speak. The primacy of the object in Adorno's methodology here pays a difficult dividend. Thinking is anxious, no longer master of itself. (Perhaps this is why Adorno speculates that Husserl prefers mannequins to real women). Transparency, in other words, is impossible and we labor in thought and discourse with a certain opacity toward and from the things themselves.

Far from extra-phenomenological, I think this actually situates Adorno within these two intertwined phenomenological problematics. First, the significance of Husserl's 'discovery' of the sedimented character of lived-experience in Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology and especially 'The Origin of Geometry.' I repeat this connection because Husserl transforms phenomenology in this discovery – though, for Adorno, phenomenology is transformed in ways unanticipated by the Master even as Husserl himself unfolds the radical insight. Sedimentation moves the question of history from a special science to the center of phenomenology's self-understanding. After the discovery of sedimentation, the explication of lived-experience has a sense-history that does not refer one back to the transcendental ego as such, but rather to the communalization of the human, the trans-historical activity of transcendental egos borne by the 'persisting existence of ideal objects." This advances the analysis left truncated in Formal and Transcendental Logic. For Adorno, this will have enormous consequences. If the possibility of thinking is essentially related to – that is, it cannot extricated from – history, then we *must* understand that history to be densely layered with questions of ideology. Indeed, what would remain of history without apparatuses to reproduce ideas? What it means to examine those ideological layers cannot be understood as an extraphenomenological concern, but rather as something built into the things themselves. Here, too, the consequences of weighting the object of relation come into relief. To wit, if Adorno describes idealism as typical of late modernity and bourgeois culture (a characterization common in *Metacritique of Epistemology*), this is not to be read simply as a rhetorical quip. Rather, and this presupposes difficult and extensive phenomenological work, Adorno's claim is rooted in the sense-history of not just a particular instant of judgment in Husserl's text, but, importantly, in the very terms that make the disposition of that judgment possible. In other words, Adorno's claim is rooted in that sense-history which makes possible Husserl's philosophical work.

Second, and folded over from the first, there is the phenomenological significance of Adorno's citation of Epicharmus' Fragment 20 at the outset of *Metacritique*: 'a mortal must think mortal and not immortal thoughts.' The centrality of the problem of history

⁸ 'Origin of Geometry,' op. cit., 360.

offers Adorno an immanent critical tool against Husserl's phenomenology, namely, a legitimacy in investigating the alleged bourgeois character of subjectivity. How might Adorno's notion of history alter our understanding of what it means to do phenomenological research and description? The appeal to mortal thoughts contests Husserl's exclusion of cultural objects early on in his *Cartesian Meditations*. How is phenomenological language transformed by placing – in both a critical function and as an object of critique – cultural objects at the center of philosophy? To think with cultural objects, to begin with what is explicitly produced by history, is to lodge thinking in the mortal: we think with our own tools. This might mean the death of *prima philosophia* in the sense that one never returns to self-evidence and transparency. Opacity is our constant companion. In that sense, Epicharmus' fragment could be said to bring Adorno's famous pessimism to bear – immanently, we might add – on Husserl's work.

Yet, in a more productive direction, the sedimentation of history yields a phenomenological context for thinking about Adorno's signature question: how to philosophize 'after Auschwitz.' 'After Auschwitz' of course denotes something specific the catastrophe of the Holocaust - but also something larger about the movement and meaning of thinking with cultural objects produced by a history saturated with violence and loss. Philosophizing 'after Auschwitz,' something authorized by a certain reading of the sedimentation of history, is nothing other than thinking mortal thoughts against immortal thoughts, attending to the trauma of our mortality without immortality and its detachments functioning as a quasi-theodicy. For Adorno, the sedimentation of catastrophe and what it both says about extant and transforms in possible cultural objects (viz., language, thinking, and art) is decisive for philosophy. What catastrophe does to philosophy is put in question the status of its instruments. This putting in question, of course, resonates in various sites, but chief among them is the question of how a philosophy generated by historical experience, and so one that takes cultural objects seriously, is effected - even affected - by catastrophe. Fink's questions about the relation between the transcendental and the mundane, especially how and if transcendental language is possible,⁹ become in Adorno's work weighted by the moral and political disaster of the long twentieth century.

This is mortal thinking, mortally phenomenological. Mortal thinking takes cultural objects seriously, even when those cultural objects move from thematics of investigation to conditions for the possibility of thinking. In his reading of Husserl, Adorno recovers this mortal thinking against the immortal as a transformed Husserlian problematic, and so a

⁹ See Fink, op. cit., and also the work of Len Lawlor for the significance of Fink's insight in contemporary French philosophy. In particular, Lawlor makes the case that Derrida's post-Husserlian trajectory is determined, in large part, by an encounter with Fink's work. See Leonard Lawlor, *Derrida and Husserl: The Basic Problem of Phenomenology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002.

thinking at once critically theoretical and concretely phenomenological. It is a thinking and a describing attentive to perhaps our most halting dialectic: that between the sadness of history in our words and the utopianism of our obstinate futurity.