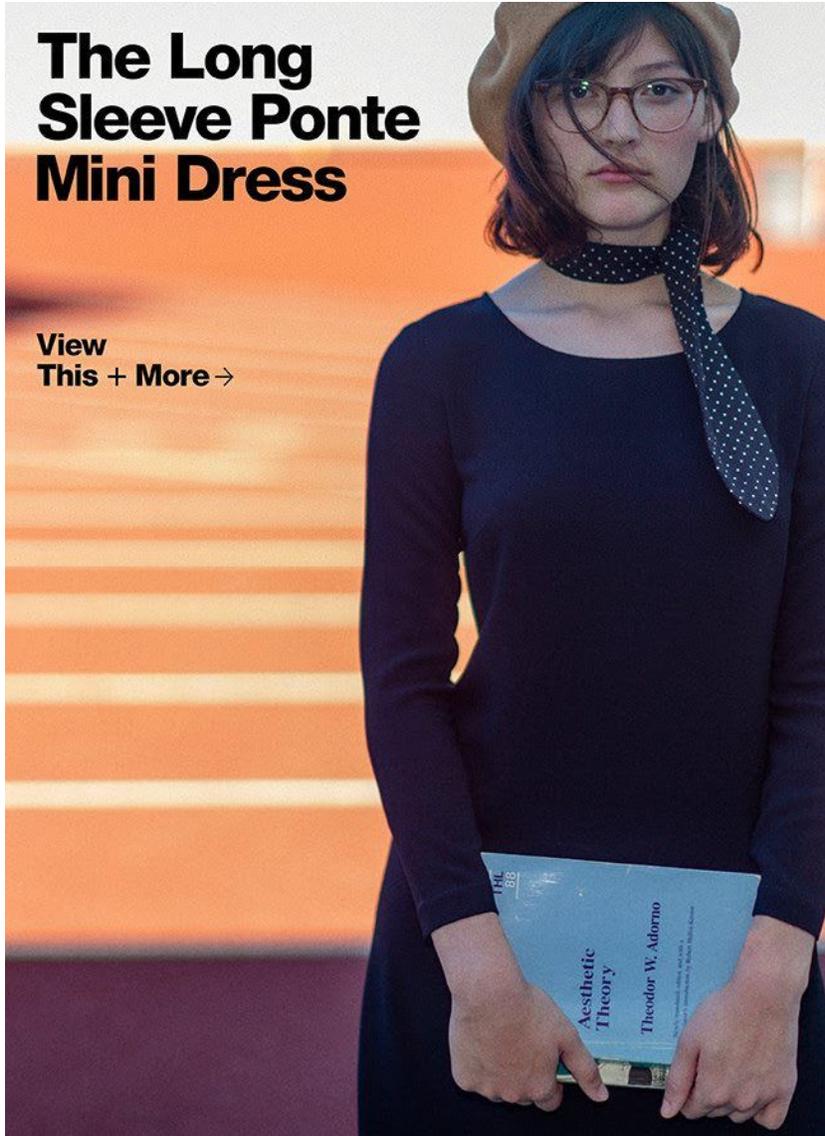


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Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*

Brandon Avery Joyce and Stefan Siegel

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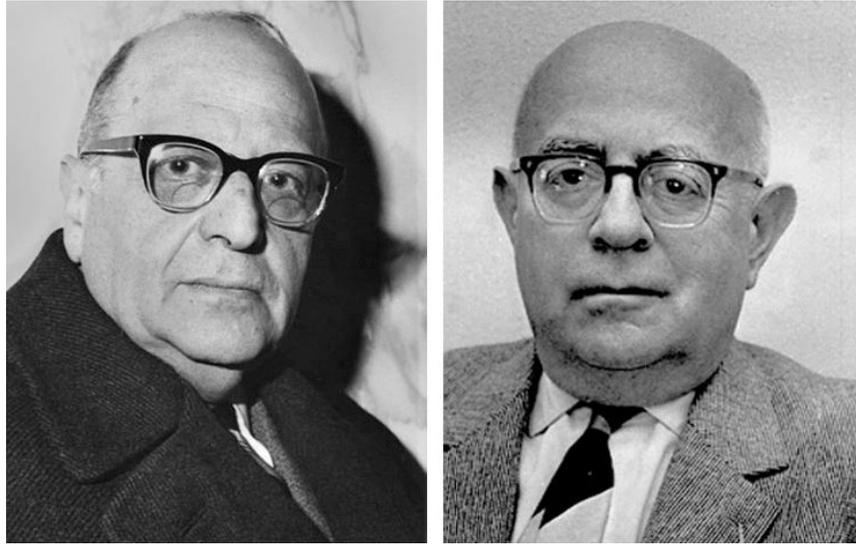
Spring 2019

Some of you may have preconceptions about Theodor Adorno: a little bitter if not snooty, impossibly thick prose, a staunch defender of modernism, *something-something* about domination and the culture industry— and the reputation is partly deserved. I get it. However, don't let this stop you from dipping into his greatest work, the *Aesthetic Theory*. It's not only *his* greatest work, but in my opinion, *our* greatest work of aesthetics, and the one most badly needed in contemporary life and culture. Adorno is, above all, a champion for uncooperative, truthful, “emphatic,” autonomous cultural production. “Autonomy” here does not mean hermetic separation from the forces, institutions, or power structures that might compromise a work, as it was sometimes interpreted in the 20th century. Quite the opposite. Great works create autonomy out of their very struggles and engagement with those forces, institutions, and power structures, and in so doing, prefigure emancipation for us in the wider world (and on the world wide web). For Adorno, “every work is a forcefield” which negotiates without resolving or escaping the contradictions of modern life, the contradictions between the demands of form, content, subject, object, construction, expression, historical conditions, productive forces, social systems, genre, cliché, pleasure, expectation, boredom, aesthetic taboos, success, failure, beauty, ugliness— even what Adorno calls the “immanent necessity” of the work itself. What's important is *how* a work negotiates these tensions, and whether it does so boldly and truthfully. What's really *not* important is whether you or anyone else “likes” the work, where it brings its makers glory or fortune, or whether the work satisfies some predetermined aim or function of art and culture. Culture is not here to satisfy, flatter or fit into the world as it is, but to negate it and fight to bring another one into being, even if only as a glimmer.

This Assembly on Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*— to be held this spring at Navel if selected— is not so much going to be *about* Adorno or even *Aesthetic Theory*, nor is it going to be a reading group (we're not delusional: the book is pretty long and slow-going). Instead, it's going to be about a critical, dialectical way of thinking about culture and cultural production. Rather than reading the book from cover to cover, we'll take short passages and tease out how some of the big ideas— “truth content,” “mimesis,” “immanent necessity”— all work together. Most importantly, we're going to make the case for Adorno's relevance, by thinking through these passages in relation to current cultural forms and practices of all sorts. Participants of the assembly can contribute their own texts or projects to the cause, help out by reviewing, editing, or giving feedback on texts or projects, or just breeze through out of curiosity. Remote participation might also be possible. I'll also be using this assembly as an opportunity to resuscitate my campaign to get Adorno a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame (more details below and to follow).

Those interested in participating should write to: research@universalresearch.group

The Stars Down to Earth



This campaign is dedicated to recognizing [Max Horkheimer](#) (1895-1973) and [Theodor W. Adorno](#) (1903-1969), either separately or conjointly, with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Their years in Los Angeles as Jewish émigrés from Nazi Germany were among their most productive— and certainly the most philosophically fertile for the city itself, seeing the conception, partial creation, or publication of [Dialectic of Enlightenment](#), [Eclipse of Reason](#), [Minima Moralia](#), and the namesake of our campaign, [The Stars Down to Earth](#). Yet for all that, there isn't any indication of this anywhere in the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area. Not so much as a plaque.

Frankfurt, on the other hand, does boast of an Adorno [Denkmal](#), or memorial, though surely a bizarre one from the perspective of any Adorno student. The *Denkmal* consists of a large tempered-glass cube, encasing a writing desk, presumably Adorno's, with a piece of a manuscript and a metronome. Inlaid on the ground around the cube is a maze of Adorno quotes from *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*, an idea-labyrinth protecting the greater public from the man himself. It's an odd tribute: honoring a deeply dialectical philosopher by freeze-framing his legacy in a hermetically-sealed jar.

Our campaign insists on recognizing the role Adorno and Horkheimer played in Los Angeles, and vice versa, as well as doing so in a fitting, negatively dialectical manner.

[The petition \(now closed\).](#)

PRESS:

[The Baffler](#)

[WELT: Hollywoods bester Hauptdarsteller war Teddy Adorno](#)

[Wiener Zeitung](#)

[Deutschlandfunk](#)

The Nomination Process:

Securing a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame requires submitting a nomination, with a financial backer in the case of a successful nomination, to the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce. This backing amounts to \$30,000, most of which goes toward the fabrication and maintenance of the star, as well as the ceremony. There are five nominees selected every year. The nominee must meet minimum criteria for establishing their relevance to Hollywood and the entertainment industry, though the nominating committee is able to make exceptions if it sees fit. Adorno does meet at least one of the pre-established criteria, particularly in his involvement with radio. However, Adorno would also be a posthumous nomination, which is a five-year process and may require the involvement of his estate. For more information, click on the link below.

Hollywood Walk of Fame ([Home](#))