

Abstract

Björn Billing, *Modernismens åldrande. Theodor W. Adorno och den moderna konstens kris* [*The Aging of Modernism. Theodor W. Adorno and the Crisis of Modern Art*]. Dissertation in Swedish. Department of History of Ideas and Science, Göteborg University, Sweden, 2000.

This study deals with the aesthetic theory of the German philosopher and sociologist Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969). It focuses on his idea that modern art is developing into a state of crisis by following its own immanent logic towards autonomy and expressive subjectivity. According to Adorno, the material and formal means by which modernism established a critical position in bourgeois society, in relation to traditional art and entertainment, gradually undermined its possibilities to maintain that position and to produce subversive meaning. Modernism is eventually forced to direct its negative or idiosyncratic strategies at the most fundamental aesthetic categories, even the concept of art itself. At one point in history, modern art is therefore bound to face up to its radical loss of substance and identity. For Adorno, this dilemma became acute by the mid twentieth century, in particular within the field of experimental music. He critically pinpointed the situation in a controversial radio talk in 1954, in which he spoke of "The Aging of the New Music".

In this study, I analyse Adorno's concept of the aging of modernism. Emphasis is put on his theory of the dialectical process behind the concept, i.e. the historical perspective that he develops in connection with his judgements about the contemporary situation of modernism. In many respects, Adorno's historical perspective on the development of art in modern society, is centered around the theme of crisis and loss, of transience, petrification and discontinuously increasing problems for the creative subject. I show how this thought in its turn interconnects with his anthropological and epistemological theories, and I also study how it permeates his language and use of metaphors. In addition to the analysis of Adorno's historical perspective on modernism, I put his aesthetics in a relevant biographical and contextual frame.

Keywords: Theodor W. Adorno, modernism, aesthetics, philosophy of art, negative dialectics, The Schoenberg school, twelve-tone music, serialism, mimesis, enlightenment.