

Decentred Totalities in *Doctor Faustus*: Thomas Mann and Theodor W. Adorno

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Thomas Mann's novel *Doctor Faustus* dramatizes a composer's willingness to sell his soul to the devil in order to revolutionize sterile aesthetic conventions. Linking Adrian Leverkühn's fate explicitly to Germany's Nazi period, Mann seems to suggest that the country he counted among the most civilized in Europe had literally gone to the devil. In radio broadcasts from America, written around the time he composed *Doctor Faustus* (1947), Mann reinforced this mythopoetic interpretation of German fascism. Following the author's hints, critics have consequently tended to consider *Doctor Faustus* as the "taking back" of Goethe's *Faust* in much the same way as Mann identifies Leverkühn's masterpiece, *The Lament of Doctor Faustus*, as the "taking back" of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*. According to this interpretative paradigm, the Nazi period was an inexplicable evil that unexpectedly befell an otherwise civilized nation from outside.

But *Doctor Faustus* also authorizes a rather different explanation. It is well known that Mann was heavily indebted to Theodor W. Adorno's analysis of Arnold Schoenberg in *Philosophy of Modern Music* (1949) for his depiction of Leverkühn's aesthetic education and experiments in composition. A cultural Marxist, Adorno analyzes aesthetic form as a carrier of ideological implications; his readings of musical form are consequently also critiques of broader socio-cultural discourses. By incorporating Adorno's dialectical approach into the history of music as it culminated in Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique, Mann introduces into his mythopoetic Faust paradigm an analysis of the material conditions to which music is a specific response.

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a book co-authored between 1939 and 1944 with Max Horkheimer, Adorno draws attention to the dark underside of the heroic Enlightenment narrative so prominently exemplified by Goethe's Faust figure.¹ Had Adorno chosen to comment on the Faust myth, he would, I think, have agreed with Marshall Berman's understanding of Goethe's Faust as a potentially dangerous social engineer. In *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, Berman departs from conventional interpretations of Goethe's Faust as the quintessential Enlightenment figure striving to improve mankind, arguing instead that his ambitious project to reclaim land from the sea to benefit all mankind compelled him to sacrifice the old couple, Philemon and Baucis, who stand in the way of progress.² Faust's investment in progressive action is from the beginning implicated in the exclusion of a certain category of human beings. For Berman, Goethe's Faust is an early exponent of social engineering projects that will find their most sinister application in the Nazi death camps. If Adorno's contribution to *Doctor Faustus* is taken seriously, then German fascism has always already been implicit in the German cultural tradition or, more broadly speaking, in modernity as such. Instead of taking back Goethe's Faust, Mann's Faust would then be the dark "fascist" extension of the "bourgeois" Enlightenment ideal.

In the exact centre of Mann's novel, the Faustian striver, Adrian Leverkühn, is visited by the devil. Shivering in the cold, the fictional composer finds himself face to face with a figure that keeps changing shape. This is the moment of the temptation that the reader has been expecting in a novel featuring a Faustian protagonist. Critics are generally agreed that Mann's devil is a psychological projection of Leverkühn's unconscious; the scene can then be grasped as a dramatic device to orient the reader's interpretative responses. What this scene confirms above all is the growing suspicion that the composer has indeed sold his soul to the devil. The parallel between the opinions of neo-fascist intellectuals, whom Leverkühn had encountered earlier in the novel, and his own aesthetic experiments can now be clearly situated in the mythic domain of the demonic. On an obvious level, the link between the socially isolated composer and the dangerously irrational ideologues implies the

capitulation of German civilization to the forces of evil embodied in Hitler's Nazism. However, on a closer reading of the Adorno-inspired music theory, this crucial scene invites a more complex assessment of *Doctor Faustus* as a parable of fascism. Under the surface of Mann's psychological and mythical articulations, we discover in the music theory he "borrowed" from Adorno a dialectical analysis of fascism as the logical outcome of the bourgeois-capitalist order. Having been exposed to the long-standing association of German Fascism and Soviet Stalinism, we may find Adorno's propensity to connect fascism with capitalism to be counter-intuitive. But this propensity was typical of members of the Institute for Social Research (later known as the Frankfurt School) to which Adorno belonged. Given the neo-Marxist inclinations of its members, it is not surprising that the Institute would link fascism and late capitalism as common enemies of communism.

When Mann met Adorno in 1943 while they were both living in exile in California, he had already written a few chapters of *Doctor Faustus*. Receiving from Adorno a manuscript version of *Philosophy of Modern Music*, Mann immediately recognized its relevance to his own preoccupations. In the first instance, the author of *Doctor Faustus* was delighted to have found in Adorno an expert in music whose knowledge would assist him in the depiction of Leverkühn's musical breakthrough. He was struck by the "moments of insight about Adrian's position" and about the "desperate situation of art" (my translation) that Adorno's manuscript provided.³ More importantly, though, Mann seems to have responded to the cultural critique implicit in Adorno's attempt to sketch out the social history of music as it culminated in Arnold Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique. As he elaborates in *Story of a Novel* (1949), Mann recognized "something important," namely "an artistic-sociological critique of the historical situation marked by enormous progressiveness, sensitivity, and depth which exhibited the most peculiar affinity to the idea of my own work, to the 'composition' in which I lived and on which I laboured" (42, my translation.) It is clear, then, that Adorno's influence went far beyond questions of music, extending to his Marxist-inspired ideology critique and socio-historical methodology. By integrating Adorno's interpretation of Schoenberg into *Doctor Faustus*, Mann invites an interpretation of the novel that is split between his own bourgeois-humanist paradigm and Adorno's trenchant critique of it.

Taking their cue from Mann himself, critics tend to privilege his long-standing investment in cultural humanism at the expense of Adorno's deconstruction of its illusory assumptions. The temptation scene at the exact centre of the novel is typically discussed in relation to the final scene in which the narrator, the humanist Serenus Zeitblom, seeks to save friend and country from their demonic fate. Encouraged by the novel's title and thematic emphasis, the Faust myth plays a crucial role in widely accepted interpretations that consider Leverkühn's implied salvation at the end of the novel to represent Mann's apology for fascist Germany's political and moral "aberration." This mythic-psychological framing of *Doctor Faustus* seems to be driven, above all, by the desire on the part of both Mann and his interpreters to exculpate art and the humanist tradition from complicity with fascist politics.⁴ Once fascism is squarely identified with a regressive inhumanity unintentionally abetted by Leverkühn's bold but socially irresponsible aesthetic revolution, it is possible to understand Zeitblom's "hope beyond hopelessness" argument at the end of the novel as Mann's reaffirmation of socially responsible art and democratically inspired politics. Although Leverkühn (and hence Germany) has sold his soul to the devil, it is implied, he may be able to "correct" his mistakes by returning to the liberal-humanist fold. According to this perspective, the Nazi period was simply a temporary deviation from Germany's otherwise impeccable humanist credentials.

Challenging the critical consensus that *Doctor Faustus* represents Mann's belated endorsement of (social) democracy, I want to argue that the incorporation of Adorno's history of music authorizes a different interpretive paradigm, a paradigm predicated on a "negative dialectic" hostile to the liberal-humanist redemption of "Auschwitz." As is well known, Adorno's neo-Marxist stance made him highly suspicious of Mann's far too "hopeful" ending of *Doctor Faustus* and hence the critical attempt to redeem Germany through social humanism. It appears from Mann's account in *The Story of a Novel* that Adorno initially objected to an earlier, even more optimistic, version of the novel's ending. Responding to the criticism, Mann concedes that he "had been too optimistic, too kindly, too pat, had

kindled too much light, had been too lavish with the consolation."⁵ Having read the revised version to Adorno, Mann assumes that he had satisfactorily dealt with this "adviser's" objections. But Adorno's narrative of the disagreement in "Toward a Portrait of Thomas Mann" shows that he continued to have reservations about the ending.⁶ Not wanting to hurt Mann's feelings, he could not quite bring himself to reiterate his earlier contention that the optimistic ending contradicted the logic of the novel:

I found the heavily laden pages too positive, too unbrokenly theological in relation to the structure not only of the *Lamentation of Dr. Faustus* but of the novel as a whole. They seemed to lack what the crucial passage required, the power of determinate negation as the only permissible figure of the Other.⁷

No matter how conciliatory Adorno wants to be, he cannot finally endorse Mann's retreat from the full implications of the "determinate negation" which he had imported into *Doctor Faustus* by borrowing his depiction of Leverkühn's twelve-tone technique from Adorno. Although commentators have pointed out that it is Zeitblom, rather than Mann, who wants to save both friend and country from perdition, the meaning of this yearning for the faintly positive resolution of "a light in the night" remains problematical in this Adorno-inspired cultural critique.⁸

If the interpretive focus remains on Leverkühn's aesthetic breakthrough, then Adorno's criticism is undoubtedly justified. A close look at the scene with the devil reveals that it signals a turning point in Leverkühn's education from the demystification of modernity in Kretschmar's Beethoven lectures to the breakthrough into the radical innovation of the twelve-tone series. In political terms, the composer turns his back on the *völkisch* rhetoric of the Winfried students and the intellectual circles dominated by Chaim Breisacher in order to experiment with a radically new logic that culminates in his twelve-tone masterpiece, *The Lament of Doctor Faustus*. Given Mann's explicit comments on the parallels linking the opinions of proto-fascist intellectuals and Leverkühn's aesthetic experiments, it is tempting to conclude that the *völkisch* rhetoric of a return to primitive vitality applies unproblematically to *The Lament*. The political dimension of *Doctor Faustus* could then be limited to the dangerous irrational forces lurking in the neo-Romantic yearnings for Rousseauistic simplicity exhibited by the students and Breisacher. Although Mann has rightly been praised for his accurate portrayal of neo-fascist ideologues, his depiction of Leverkühn's aesthetic breakthrough does in effect complicate, if not actually contradict, this explanation of fascism as the irruption of an imperfectly repressed irrationalism. According to the cultural critique informing Adorno's *Philosophy of Modern Music* (1973), the material conditions of modernity (primarily capitalism) made possible the emergence of both "Schoenberg" (avant-garde aesthetics) and "Hitler" (German National Socialism). The mutually reinforcing terms of the opposition between rational and irrational forces in Leverkühn's life and work thus suggest that fascism thrived as much on the rational propensities of the "Enlightenment narrative" as it did on the return of an irrational atavism. It is in the scene with the devil that Mann hints at Leverkühn's radical ideological departure from his previous allegiance to *völkisch* versions of the devil.

In this literally central scene, the devil himself emphasizes that Leverkühn's pact with him demystifies the past instead of providing an agenda for the future. "We make naught new," declares the devil, "[w]e only release, only set free" (230). The interview is not so much a new narrative development as the clarification of past events. Everything the devil says about music is a rehearsal of insights and contentions that Leverkühn had earlier communicated to Zeitblom. In the first part of the dialogue, the devil still reinforces the *völkisch* contention that too much reason has destroyed vital impulses. Leverkühn's visit to the whore Esmeralda, for the express purpose of infecting himself with syphilis, shows not only that he had long ago promised his soul to the devil but also that he follows the *völkisch* prescription of opposing modernity's privileging of reason via a return to primitive instincts. The pact with the devil conveys above all the composer's willingness to face any risk to achieve his aesthetic breakthrough, the liberation of music from sterile bourgeois conventions. He justifies himself by arguing that the situation is so dire that exceptional steps have to be envisaged, a rationalization the

devil reinforces when he contends that the renewal of art is today possible only with demonic help. At this stage in the novel, the devil promises “the archaic, the primeval, that which long since has not been tried” (230) which echoes the arguments of *völkisch* ideologues in the novel. The aptly named Deutschlin, for instance, advocates shaking off “the fetters of an outlived civilization, to dare – where others lack the courage – to plunge again into the elemental” (116). There can be no doubt that Mann here alludes in unmistakable terms to the neo-romantic or irrational appeal of German National Socialism so perceptively analyzed by George L. Mosse in *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (1964).⁹ At the beginning of this scene, in which the devil appears in the shape of the earthly Lutheran figure of Kumpf, the parallel between Leverkühn and the *völkisch* neo-fascist intellectuals is maintained.

However, as the conversation between Leverkühn and the devil progresses, this *völkisch* parallel breaks down and a different interpretation of the conditions that made the emergence of fascism possible begins to manifest itself. That the devil in *Doctor Faustus* is ultimately no simple neo-romantic ideologue is indicated when, after the introductory skirmish, the devil changes appearances, taking on Adorno-like features. Set to deconstruct *völkisch* appeals to irrational forces, he now looks and acts like “a member of the intelligentsia, writer on art, on music for the ordinary press, a theoretician and critic, who himself composes” (231). Once the conversation focuses specifically on music, the devil contradicts his earlier *völkisch* enthusiasm, mockingly rejecting the “folklorists and neo-classic asylists whose modernness consists in . . . wearing with more or less dignity the style-garment of a pre-individualistic period” (231). The neo-Romantic roots of fascism are here relegated to mere surface phenomena. Mann seems to be suggesting that the neo-fascist rhetoric of Deutschlin and Breisacher offers an overly simplified explanation for Hitler’s far more radical revolution. Although the Nazis relied on *völkisch* rhetoric to seduce the masses, their actual practices were marked by the cynical exploitation of the highly rationalized bureaucratization of the public domain that they decried in their speeches as the life-denying evils of modernity. Although Leverkühn cannot yet see clearly where his aesthetic breakthrough will take him, he is made to understand that the simple immersion in the irrational advocated by *völkisch* ideologues will not serve his purposes.

Although the Adorno-devil has no solution to offer, he teaches Leverkühn just how deeply in crisis modernity actually finds itself. Imitating Adorno’s socio-historical methodology, he points out that the relentlessly reifying conditions of late capitalism have forced musical form into an impasse: “Where work does not go any longer with sincerity,” he pontificates, “[c]omposing itself has got too hard” (232). It has “got too hard” because the principle of organic unity informing tonal music is, by the turn of the twentieth century, lagging behind the alienating material conditions imposed by late capitalism. Leverkühn has reached a moment of deep crisis, an intensification of the frustration Beethoven had earlier experienced during the composition of his late fugues. Although Beethoven has been represented by Mann’s character of Kretschmar as having inaugurated the farewell to tonal music in the piano sonata opus 111, in his later compositions, he himself and his successors worked hard to gloss over the gap manifesting itself between musical form and the musical material embedded in it. The interview with the devil signals Leverkühn’s recognition that he was fated to conclude the break with tonality that had for the first time in the history of music been intimated in sonata opus 111.

Kretschmar had earlier in the novel convinced Leverkühn that Beethoven did not write a third movement for the sonata because he began to doubt that the material conditions of bourgeois-capitalism were conducive to Hegel’s sublation of subject and object. Arguing against received opinion, Kretschmar contends that at the height of his most personal style, subjectivity in fact entered into its own death. In sonata opus 111, the subject eventually yearns again for the security of the very conventions it had temporarily left behind. In his later work, the *Missa solemnis*, Beethoven retreated from his insight into the irreconcilable contradiction between subject and object, reaffirming their harmonious coincidence in the creation of fugues at a time when he already knew that this form was no longer adequate to the socio-historical situation.

It will become Leverkühn’s task to pursue to their utmost the radical implications of sonata opus 111 that Beethoven chose to abandon. In his search for authenticity, Leverkühn will no longer have at

his disposal the organically harmonious principle that had entered into crisis in Beethoven's music and that is fraudulently being retrieved by the *völkisch* ideologues. As the devil puts it, the "the masterpiece, the self-sufficient form, belongs to traditional art, emancipated art rejects it" (232). If Leverkühn is to achieve an aesthetic breakthrough, he has to discover a form that speaks to his own times. It is, for instance, no longer possible for him to resort to the dissonant "diminished seventh" (232) with which Beethoven had so shockingly opened sonata opus 111; this innovation has since degenerated into an inauthentic cliché and thus contradicts the actual material conditions under which Leverkühn labours. Contrary to *völkisch* nostalgia, the devil insists that history thwarts the possibility of Leverkühn recovering the diminished seventh as an authentic musical expression. It follows that the devil dismisses tonal music because it is no longer capable of expressing the antagonistic reality of late bourgeois-capitalism.

The first step in Leverkühn's program of aesthetic regeneration was thus not fascist exploitation of neo-romantic nostalgia but Adornian demystification of aesthetic illusion: the "emancipation from the concept of harmony turns out to be a revolt against illusion."¹⁰ In his history of music in *Philosophy of Modern Music*, Adorno specifies that Beethoven (and Brahms) could still rely on "the unity of the motivic-thematic manipulation" whose task was to perform a "balance between subjective dynamics and traditional – 'tonal' – language" (57). The pre-industrial subject could still recognize itself in the illusory reconciliation of its concrete particularity with the abstract collectivity of society. It is this illusion that the devil uncovers: "The subsumption of expression into a general universality represents the innermost principle of musical illusion" (234, emended translation). In other words, social alienation has not yet reached the point at which human beings express what they really suffer; they let themselves be consoled by the myth of universal progress that Adorno targets in Hegel's dialectic.¹¹ Anticipating Fredric Jameson's contention that aesthetic discourse acts as a compensatory gesture for irreconcilable contradictions in the social world, the closed harmonic work asks subjects to misrecognize themselves in the reconciliation of opposites in the artwork's formal unity.¹² Composing at a time when modernity has entered into deep crisis, Leverkühn's initial aesthetic task is to demystify the "illusory character of the bourgeois work of art" (234, my translation). At no point in the dialogue, then, does the devil offer a specific positive program or blueprint for the new music Leverkühn yearns for; limiting himself to demystifying the illusions of tonal music, he is the voice of Adorno's negative dialectic. Occupying the half-way point in *Doctor Faustus*, this scene dramatically foregrounds the farewell to Beethoven that is for Adorno also the farewell to Hegel.

At the centre of the novel, Leverkühn realizes that the devil's help ends with the demystification of the "closed harmonious work" and hence the emancipatory illusions of Hegel's positive dialectic. From now on, Mann's protagonist is on his own, struggling with experiments in atonality that constitute a turning against the nostalgic investment in authentic origins and organic wholeness so obviously privileged in Hitler's *völkisch* rhetoric. Poised on the threshold of a radically new conception of aesthetic form, he disdains a simple return to the hierarchically centred tonal system in favor of a radically revolutionary system predicated on the uncanny complicity between fragmented atomistic notes and a decentred totality. In conformity with Adorno's interpretation of Schoenberg's career, Mann dramatizes Leverkühn's path from the rejection of tonality to the triumphant discovery of free atonality and finally to the degeneration into the strict twelve-tone system. Appreciating Schoenberg's intellectual revolution, Adorno reserves his highest praise for "the phase of 'free atonality,'" the beginning of which he traces to the *Georgelieder* and sees culminating in *Erwartung*.¹³ In Adorno's opinion, Schoenberg "scarcely ever composed anything which was freer than *Erwartung*" (162). However, this brief flowering of free atonality was constrained by the socio-historical conditions under late capitalism. Obeying an inescapable historical dialectic, free atonality gave rise to the twelve-tone system: "Just as free atonality developed out of the fabric of large tonal chamber music, the twelve-tone procedure in turn stemmed from free atonal composition" (162). In *Doctor Faustus*, Leverkühn passes through a phase of free atonality that testifies to his honest emancipatory aspirations. He wants to free the note from the oppression it suffers in the tonal key system. Drawing out the political symbolism of Leverkühn's life and work, Ritchie Robertson argues that the phase of

free atonality coincides with the establishment of the Weimar Republic and its parliamentary constitution.¹⁴ What Robertson fails to realize is that the seeds of fascism are dialectically already embedded in Germany's triumphant democratic moment. If democratic aspirations find their expression in a composition with the ominous title of *Apocalypsus cum figuris*, then the emancipatory potential of free atonality must already be infected by the logic poised to doom both Leverkühn and Germany.

In *Doctor Faustus*, it becomes clear that Mann had a more sophisticated understanding of the conditions that made the emergence of fascism possible than the conventional explanation of German fascism as the return of an imperfectly repressed authoritarianism in a country that had only recently been unified and democratized. In Leverkühn's music, the "democratic" phase of free atonality does not revert to the hierarchical tonal system. What horrifies the humanist Zeitblom above all is the realization that Leverkühn, far from dispensing with reason in the *völkisch* vein, imposes on music a rigorously rational system. In the process of emancipating music from the sterile conventions of bourgeois tonality, he finds that his aesthetic innovations eventually fall victim to their own totalizing logic. Free atonality fatally degenerates into a twelve-tone system that is marked by a decentred, mathematically predetermined structure. Having reacted against the subordination of notes to the hierarchical key system in tonal music, Leverkühn tried to prevent the formation of thematic clusters by giving each note the same value. In political terms, this strategy aspires to a radically egalitarian system. However, by pushing free atonality to this radical extension, he eliminates the normative constraints of tonality that had previously encouraged meaningful connections between notes. As Zeitblom realizes, in the absence of norms, the principle of variation triumphs at the same time as it no longer makes any sense. If there are no longer any norms against which variations can be measured, then Leverkühn's system condemns the freed notes to float as isolated atoms within an incomprehensible and ultimately chaotic totality.

The history of the democratization of Germany culminating in the Weimar Republic does in fact illustrate the dangers of the radical egalitarianism at stake in Leverkühn's aesthetic development. After the departure of Bismarck in 1890, the German Reichstag disintegrated under the strain of self-interested groups whose competing demands resulted in a succession of weak coalition governments. The Wilhelmine years, between Bismarck's resignation in 1890 and the birth of the Weimar Republic in 1918, were marked by political instability, the atomization of the public sphere, the First World War, and debilitating socio-economic crises. The Weimar Constitution stipulated that elections to the Reichstag were by proportional representation; even the smallest former sovereignties were given a voice. However, this laudable egalitarian arrangement fragmented the country into so many small parties that it was virtually impossible to establish a majority government. In the years ahead, Germany was to be thrown into political turmoil by a succession of weak coalition governments. Even more detrimental to the country's stability was the decision to entrench in the constitution the practice of popular initiative and referendum. Although mobilized by a praiseworthy democratic impulse, such plebiscitary initiatives were unfortunately abused later for sinister anti-democratic purposes. Germany's first truly democratic constitution was so open to fragmentation and dissent that a series of coalition governments proved too weak to withstand the anti-liberal elements that undermined the republic's lofty egalitarian ideals.

Germany's experiment with radical egalitarianism created such socially unstable conditions that Hitler was able to convince the people that they wanted him to restore order at all cost. It is this tendency toward dialectical reversals that Mann's depiction of Leverkühn's development of the twelve-tone system references. The democratic potential of "free atonality" is from the beginning undercut by Zeitblom's anxious responses to the sinister ideological implications he intuits in spite of his appreciation of Leverkühn's bold aesthetic innovations. In *Apocalypsis cum figuris*, the composition exemplifying free atonality, Leverkühn remains confident in the transformative power of his aesthetic experiments. However, since the description of the "apocalypse" comes to us through Zeitblom, who is both impressed and shocked by an aesthetic accomplishment which he calls the "herald of barbarism" (359), the positive aspects of twelve-tone technique are consistently challenged.

Failing to see the unconstrained formal "freedom" to combine elements in new ways, the narrator only sees the "anti-human appeal" (360) of a strategy which threatens to open compositions to a radically relativistic redefinition of values. Without an organizing centre, Leverkühn "playfully" reverses positive and negative associations, using dissonance to represent the "expression of everything lofty, solemn, pious, everything of the spirit" while reserving "consonance and firm tonality" for the "world of hell, in this context a world of banality and commonplace" (361). Realizing that *Apocalypsis cum figuris* upsets the categories and boundaries he relies on, Zeitblom is most seriously discomfited by Leverkühn's reversals and displacements. Once Zeitblom's investment in norms is demystified, the possibility of dangerous substitutions, unforeseen reversals, and unmanageable effects is appallingly present.

Being both mesmerized and appalled by Leverkühn's aesthetic experiments, Zeitblom is made to echo Adorno's own ambivalence toward Schoenberg's accomplishments. Adorno appreciates twelve-tone technique because it does not deny or gloss over oppositions like those between subject and object, consonance and dissonance, form and content, vertical and horizontal axes, instrument and voice. By foregrounding the radical incommensurability of contradictory perceptions, twelve-tone technique articulates the "truth" of modernity's inability to escape the real contradictions of late capitalism. Schoenberg's dissonance, for instance, counts in Adorno's eyes as the most adequate or "authentic" expression of the inauthenticity he attributes to cultures dominated by commodification. However, although Schoenberg is on the right track when he argues that twelve-tone technique contributes to the "critique" of the antagonistic social conditions under late capitalism, he fails to push this critique far enough. Atonality is suspect as a critique because it constitutes not the denial but the radical extension of the rationalized world against which Adorno is in revolt. As Robert W. Witkin indicates, what Adorno could not accept is the "dream of the total integration of music" which animates Schoenberg's attempt to reconcile the contradictions and antagonisms he so accurately represents.¹⁵ According to Witkin, for Adorno, "[m]usic that sought this kind of total integration – the product of a purified musical language – in an age of antagonistic and alienating social relations dealt in dreams and illusions, not in truth. Music could not successfully reflect the social process when its elements had been prefigured as a closed system" (136). As *Doctor Faustus* dramatizes in the depiction of Leverkühn, Schoenberg could be said to have hit on the correct diagnosis of the ills of his time, but he prescribed poison to deal with them.

The poison inadvertently released through the invention of twelve-tone music is not only the commodity structure of late capitalism but also the extreme case of fascist totalitarianism in Germany. By incorporating Adorno's critique of capitalism into his parable of fascism, Mann suggests in *Doctor Faustus* that commodification and fascist totalitarianism are part and parcel of the same paradoxical logic that is exemplified in the complicity between extreme order and extreme contingency in Leverkühn's masterpiece – *The Lament of Doctor Faustus*. Following Adorno's analysis, in *Philosophy of Modern Music*, of Schoenberg's twelve-tone system as an intensification of "Bach's recourse to older polyphonic forms" (90), Mann illustrates the process whereby Leverkühn reconfigures the organic principle of counterpoint as the totalized system of twelve-tone music. Hostility to the principle of hierarchy exemplified in tonal music drives Schoenberg-Leverkühn to devise a radically new kind of totality. Adorno was particularly sensitive to the dangerous implications of Schoenberg's dismantling of the key system. In the process of trying to "eliminate all such hierarchical means of ordering the new music" (Witkin, 134), Schoenberg created a system which Adorno, in *Philosophy of Modern Music*, considered "questionable as an ideal" (Adorno, 96) because the drive toward the total integration of all elements struck him not only as totalitarian in fascist terms but also as complicit with the destruction of meaningful social relations under the reifying impact of late capitalism. Adorno blames "the blatant emptiness of the integral composition" for merely registering, rather than resisting, the "'integration' of a society in which the economic basis of alienation continues to exist unchanged while the justification of antagonisms is denied by suppression" (98, 95). While providing insights into the illusory pretences of the closed bourgeois work, the twelve-tone composition does not recognize its own suspect ideological investments and

mystifications. It is in the attempt to eliminate the last vestiges of hierarchy that the serial system becomes totalitarian.

In political terms, it is the dream of absolute integration, of a pure homogeneous system uncontaminated by heterogeneity, that perpetrates a regime of violence symbolized for Adorno by Auschwitz. Mann's *Doctor Faustus* confirms Hannah Arendt's distinction in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1973) between older forms of authoritarian despotism and the radical novelty of Hitler's revolution. Contradicting popular opinion, she argues that fascist totalitarianism does not constitute a return to traditional forms of authoritarian despotism; instead, the Nazis targeted precisely the hierarchical distribution of power characterizing both monarchical and democratic forms of government.¹⁶ As Adorno points out in the context of tonal music, it was a hierarchically oppressive order which was, nevertheless, loose enough to allow for unexpected and spontaneous developments. Convergence in tonal music was still experienced as natural and open to creative innovation. Although there were strict rules, they were not designed to manage *every* aspect of the system. Hierarchical arrangements in aesthetic as well as political arenas relied not only on a controlling centre but on the relationships or alliances among parts. But the Nazi revolution rigorously targeted all hierarchical stratifications; they destroyed the political party system of the Weimar Republic, the social allegiances embedded in the class order, the economic power of aristocratic and military élites, the cultural privileges of intellectual groups, the legal appeals system, and the public space in which citizens used to be free to assemble. In her assessment of Nazism, Arendt clarifies that fascist totalitarianism differs not only from democratic but also from authoritarian regimes; Hitler's Third Reich was the result not of a conservative but of a radical revolution. As she points out, democratic freedoms "acquire their meaning and function organically only where the citizens belong to and are represented by groups or form a social and political hierarchy" (312); the Nazis did not reinstate an old authoritarianism by simply reversing the locus of power, but targeted the hierarchical distribution of power as such. Like the fictional Zeitblom, she observes and deplors the shift from a hierarchically structured system to a decentred totality which Mann and Adorno identify with Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique. One of the most visible signs of the difference between centred and decentred political systems is that dictatorial terror distinguishes itself from totalitarian terror in that the former "threatens only authentic opponents but not harmless citizens" (322). In other words, authoritarian regimes create and exploit power convergences through a system of rewards and punishments while totalitarian regimes act arbitrarily in order to eliminate the possibility of locating lines of power. Although attacks on political opponents in traditional authoritarian systems may be morally suspect, they nevertheless make rational sense. In contrast, exceeding political expediency, the elimination of "harmless citizens" introduces a level of unreality that allows totalitarianism to kick itself free of all constraints.

According to Adorno's dialectical analysis, Schoenberg tragically retreated from the flux introduced by free atonality and took refuge in a strict serial system designed to recontain the anarchy he had let loose. It is the emancipatory gesture of free atonality which generates in turn the strict form of twelve-tone technique. Intimidated by the threat of anarchy, the decentred structure yearned for some kind of order to contain the fragmentation of the totality into unrelated atoms. As has often been stressed, the paradox that *Doctor Faustus* foregrounds above all others is the uncanny complicity between total integration and extreme contingency. In Adorno's dialectical history of music, Brahms was already driven to bring everything contingent, coincidental, accidental, and inessential under the synthesizing power of the whole. Brahms is guilty of a violent synthesis that anticipates Schoenberg's totally organized system in which there is "no longer anything which is unthematic" (*Philosophy of Modern Music*, 57). Adorno suggests that Schoenberg's rejection of hierarchy deconstructs the illusions of the democratic ideal of equality by introducing a radical egalitarianism whose totalizing homogeneity reduces all singularity to undifferentiated indifference.

Not surprisingly, Zeitblom is made extremely uneasy by the paradox in Leverkühn's music of freedom from hierarchical domination being predicated on the strictly rational organization of the totalized system. In this situation, the atomistic elements (or social subjects) are so thoroughly integrated into the system that they only exist in "their neutrality towards each other due to complete

organization" (186). Being determined by their function alone, atomistic elements find that the system is no longer responsive to their specific needs and accomplishments. The paternalistic form of older hierarchies is being replaced by a predetermined totality which is as indifferent to singular notes (or social subjects) as these notes (or social subjects) are to each other.

With amazing acuity, Adorno recognized that subjective agency is curtailed not by the absolute decrees of a visible despotic power but by the virtually invisible operations of a system that is both total and fragmented. The paradox of serial music is that each note is exposed to an order that is both inescapable and unpredictable. Once the illusion of organic wholeness has been dispelled, the notes are so disconnected from each other that the formation of accords is now "left to chance and accident" (Mann 1968, 188). It is precisely because the totality binds all musical elements to itself that these are "free" to converge in accidental, contingent, and unpredictable ways. The principle of variation has been transformed into the strict convergence of all contingent elements; Leverkühn has thereby successfully eliminated the possibility of any kind of meaningful transgression of, or resistance to, the decentred totality. Paradoxically, then, the individual note is "unfree" in the sense that it cannot escape Leverkühn's rigorously rational organization but also "free" in the sense that the totalized system is indifferent to the place occupied by endlessly interchangeable elements. In a tragic move, Leverkühn thus liberates the note from hierarchical oppression only to subject all musical elements to their total integration within a totalized and indifferent system.

In political terms, the Third Reich was indifferent to the roles assigned to individual social agents as long as they accepted the absolute power of the totalitarian régime. In the "organized chaos" of Nazi rule, individuals were terrorized by a system that made orientation difficult by constantly changing decrees coming down from the top and by arbitrary actions permitted to party members on the ground. This complicity between totalization and fragmentation also characterizes capitalism; indifferent to interchangeable actors in the system, global corporations exercise the arbitrary power to control the conditions of existence of both producers and consumers. What Leverkühn's aesthetic version of modernity's devotion to rational planning or social engineering did not anticipate was that "his technically most rigid work, a work of extreme calculation" would result in the reconstruction "of expressiveness in its first and original manifestation, expressiveness as lament," that is, the elemental "howling" of the suffering creature (468).

Doctor Faustus illustrates Adorno's recognition that subjective agency is curtailed not by the decrees of a visible locus of hierarchical power but by the virtually invisible operations of a system that is both total and fragmented. Translating this aesthetic paradox into the political register of fascism, we recognize the appropriateness of Mann's Adorno-inspired paradoxical formulations. It seems to me that the ironic triumph of reason in Leverkühn's atonal masterpiece can be seen as the logical extension of modernity, a connection reinforced by Zygmunt Bauman in *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1991), his sociological study of German fascism.¹⁷ In this study of the bureaucratic rationality that made the death camps possible, Bauman advances the rather audacious thesis that the ideological assumptions of modernity are not only entirely compatible with modern genocide but are its enabling condition: "Modern civilization was not the Holocaust's *sufficient* condition; it was, however, most certainly its *necessary* condition. Without it, the Holocaust would be unthinkable. It was the rational world of modern civilization that made the Holocaust thinkable" (13). Although Bauman never refers to Mann or Adorno, he provides sociological evidence for the theoretical implications I am trying to draw out of *Doctor Faustus*; that is, he reinforces the contention that German fascism exploited the rationalizing tendencies of modernity for irrational ends. For this sociologist, Auschwitz was the ultimate triumph of the complicity between rational and irrational propensities that Mann symbolizes through Leverkühn's twelve-tone system. Characterized by an economy of infinite exchange, the twelve-tone system reflects Hitler's reconfiguration of the administrative apparatus made possible by strategies that Hannah Arendt analyzes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* as a "planned shapelessness" (402), the effects of which were as disorienting as Leverkühn's atonal compositions proved to be.

Rather than joining in the *völkisch* call for an organic paradigm of “closed” aesthetic form, the devil points the composer in a different direction. Anticipating postmodern critiques of the socio-cultural conditions under late capitalism, Leverkühn’s atonal serial experiments celebrate dissonance, exploit the instability of opposites by subjecting them to constant reversals, contest historical progress by spatializing time, emphasize difference only to turn it into indifference, replace depth with surface, and eliminate the possibility of distinguishing between the real and its simulacrum. *Doctor Faustus* thus captures the parallel that Adorno sees between fascism and late capitalism. The twelve-tone composition as a decentred totality incorporates Adorno’s perspective on late capitalism as a decentred system thriving indifferently on the infinite exchange of socially alienated atomistic subjects. In a prescient theoretical move, Adorno understood long before the impact of globalization became the subject of anxious debates that global capitalism and German Nazism operate on a totality that is no longer captured by modernity’s metaphor of the harmonious whole but by postmodernity’s destruction of distinctions through the radical convergence of all contingent elements. It is as if global capitalism was in the process of realizing the imperial ambitions of Nazi Germany. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue in *Empire* (2000), global capitalism is a “decentred and deterritorialized apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers.”¹⁸ Or, as Benjamin R. Barber points out in *Jihad vs. McWorld* (1995), global capitalism no longer corresponds to the metaphor of harmonious wholeness that posits the participation of disparate cultural producers in a shared creative enterprise; on the contrary, the “synergy” of the global market constitutes a “commercial totalitarianism – a single value (profit) and a single owner (the monopoly holder) submerging all distinctions and rendering all choice tenuous and all diversity a sham.”¹⁹ It is important not to mistake “a single owner” for an identifiable locus of power; Barber specifies that the market runs “on automatic pilot” so that “the political entailments of this logic are inadvertent: a kind of default totalitarianism without totalistic government” (150). The devil’s demystification of the Enlightenment narrative in *Doctor Faustus* thus opened an ideological space that included the *possibility* of fascism that has already been experienced in the Nazi period and that continues to haunt the logic of global capitalism.

Notes

¹ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1990).

² Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1988).

³ Thomas Mann, *Die Entstehung Des Doktor Faustus: Roman Eines Romans* (Frankfurt: Bermann-Fischer, 1949), 42.

⁴ The most explicit exponent of this humanist interpretation is Helmut Jendreich whose argument, in *Thomas Mann: Der demokratische Roman* (Düsseldorf: August Bagel Verlag, 1977), I am implicitly summarizing.

⁵ Thomas Mann. *The Story of a Novel: The Genesis of Doctor Faustus*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 222-23.

⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, “Toward a Portrait of Thomas Mann,” in *Theodor W. Adorno: Notes to Literature*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 12-19.

⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), 17-18.

⁸ Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 471. Subsequent quotations from the novel come from this edition.

⁹ George L. Mosse, in *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), provides a much lauded analysis of the *völkisch* ideology and its neo-Romantic roots that were later to be exploited by Hitler in his supposedly mesmerizing speeches. Although Mosse does not allude to Mann, his sociological study coincides to a large extent with Mann's depiction of the intellectual climate of the times.

¹⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 148.

¹¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nichol森 (Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 1993).

¹² See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).

¹³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1967), 160.

¹⁴ Ritchie Robertson, "Accounting for History: Thomas Mann, *Doktor Faustus*" in *The German Novel in the Twentieth Century: Beyond Realism*, ed. David Midgley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 128-48.

¹⁵ Robert W. Witkin, *Adorno on Music* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 136.

¹⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1973).

¹⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

¹⁸ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), xii.

¹⁹ Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad Vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism Are Reshaping the World* (New York: Ballantine, 1995), 139.