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On *Critique and Disclosure*: A reply to four generous critics

Nikolas Kompridis
University of Western Sydney, Australia

I am deeply grateful to Amy Allen, Fred Rush, Morton Schoolman and Robert Sinnerbrink for their careful and thoughtful responses to *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory between Past and Future*. In particular, I am grateful for the generous spirit in which they express their reservations about my proposal for renewing critical theory. An author cannot expect to have better readers than they, attuned as they are to critical theory's need of renewal, as well as to the obvious (and not so obvious) difficulties in providing it a new orientation in light of Heidegger's idea of world disclosure. Since they have done such a good job of representing, clearly and graciously, the main lines of argument that run through the book I am spared the task of restating them here.[1] This leaves me free to reply to their reservations and doubts about my project, elaborating some new developments where I can.

Receptivity, ontology, critique

Morton Schoolman discerns insightfully the centrality of the concept of *receptivity* to my reformulation of critique as reflective disclosure. Although Schoolman evinces no lack of sympathy for my endeavour, he is nonetheless very sceptical of the Heideggerian conceptual presuppositions of my account of receptivity in the peripatetic sub-chapter of *Critique and Disclosure*, 'Receptivity, not Passivity'. According to Schoolman I fail to acknowledge the (non-ontological) conditions of receptivity, leading me to overstate its normative power. He wonders if it is at all wise to allow my reformulation of critique 'to take such singular direction from Heidegger'. Schoolman thinks this commits me

Corresponding author:
Nicholas Kompridis, Centre for Citizenship and Public Policy, University of Western Sydney, Bld 4, Bankstown Campus Locked Bag, 1797, Penrith, NSW 2751, Australia
Email: N.Kompridis@uws.edu.au

unnecessarily to a 'bottom-heavy' ontology, which would be understandable if non-ontological formulations of the inherited background understandings that underlie our practices and institutions were unavailable to contemporary theorizing. As an example of an ontology-free construal of the inherited background, or pre-understanding, as Heidegger called it, he recommends William Connolly's linguistic 'model' of contestation, which supposedly lets politics, not ontology, do the talking (or talking back) to the inherited background. This involves a construal of the background as *contingent*, and therefore eminently and immanently contestable.

I am not the student of Connolly's political theory that Schoolman is, but my impression is that 'non-ontological' construals of the background, Connolly's or anyone else's, will not be nearly as rich in explanatory and critical resources as Heidegger's. One must certainly recognize the sheer contingency of the inherited background, as Heidegger and other world-disclosure theorists certainly do, but, at the same time, one must also recognize *and* grapple with its *persistence*. We are held captive (to use a Wittgenstein term of art) by this background, and are linguistically and conceptually dependent upon it as well, for it alone provides the conditions of intelligibility under which we are able to make sense of (and contest) things, the enabling and limiting conditions of our thought and action. That does not mean, as critics of Heidegger such as Habermas claim, that the background construed in this way robs us of our power as agents; it does mean that we must attenuate and alter our inherited conceptions of agency and freedom.

The kind of transcendence that is open to us is, in a sense, internal to any background understanding as part of what the background enables. Not only does the background set the conditions of intelligibility, it also sets the conditions of possibility, conditions that we can modify, enlarge, or transform through our activity as receptive/disclosing agents. But such transcendence as we are speaking of here can only be transcendence of a *part* of the background, not of the background as a whole. Over time, and in extraordinary times, we can initiate a shift from one particular background understanding to another, as Foucault and others have shown; but we do not transcend the background as such. That is the insight of Heideggerian ontology, and it is reproduced in later Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. As Taylor put it in an essay on Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's shared construal of the background, the idea of making the background completely explicit, 'of undoing its status as background, is incoherent in principle'.[2] It is because we cannot undo its status *as* background that we must reflectively and critically disclose it again and again.

So to have a view of the background in this sense is to have a view of it that is perforce ontological. Which is to say, a view that recognizes its contingency and persistence, its disclosedness and opacity, its horizon-opening and horizon-receding character. To represent a view of the background as non-ontological is to misunderstand or misrepresent the phenomenon in question. Put another way, to think coherently of politics as a practice of linguistic contestation one must presume that such contestation can take place, if it is to take place at all, only against a shared background understanding of what is contested (be it implicit, partial, and distorted). Whether it succeeds or fails, such contestation will depend upon the conditions of intelligibility/possibility provided by the shared background understanding; and whether it succeeds or fails will also depend upon the degree to which contestation can critically test and redisclose that part of the background that it

first thematized and disclosed. This is the reciprocal (but not symmetrical) interaction between *pre-reflective* (1ˢᵗ-order) and *reflective* (2ⁿᵈ-order) world disclosure that I discuss and develop in the book.

Schoolman seems to be averse to ontological thinking in general (and not just to the Heideggerian kind) apparently because he is of the view that ontology is either irrelevant or an impediment to politics. I do not think it is wise to drive a wedge between ontology and politics, or to see the former as irrelevant to the latter. Our background understanding of things speaks through us and to us. It behoves us therefore to take notice of, to reflectively receive and disclose, what is being said by the background understanding that tells us 'what kind of object anything is',[3] for not only does this allow us to make sense of things, it also allows us to make sense of how to change them.[4] This aversion to ontological thinking leads Schoolman to infer, wrongly, that when I speak of enabling conditions of intelligibility and possibility, these conditions *guarantee* that our cultural traditions and social practices will be received and passed on in reflective ways. This is neither Heidegger's view nor my own. (Nowhere in the book do I state such a view, but I might have pre-empted any misunderstanding if I had been clearer than I was.) Since conditions of intelligibility and possibility are *both* constraining *and* enabling, and in ways we cannot fully survey or control, the success of our reflective and critical practices cannot be guaranteed in advance.[5] To say that we need to redisclose our possibilities to open up the space of freedom, to make the future more welcoming to our genuine needs, is not to say that the conditions that enable such activities are such as to guarantee our success, not when they are also such as to resist and constrain them.[6]

Schoolman's reservations about my conception of receptivity are an extension of his reservations about Heideggerian ontology (reservations shared by all four of my interlocutors), and here, too, he recommends an alternative view which he believes to be normatively superior: Adorno's concept of aesthetic rationality anchored in the normative principle of non-identity. If receptivity begins from the principle of non-identity, reason and critical reflection are pressed into finding 'meaning in addition to meanings already being lived'. The contrast that is implicitly drawn here is one that makes receptivity as I conceive it seem inherently conservative, oriented to already existing, not to new possible, meanings. This can hardly be the case, as Schoolman himself makes clear just a little later in his text, summarizing correctly the view I develop starting from Emerson and Heidegger:

> Kompridis offers a convincing reading of [Emerson's] idea of receptivity as openness to utterly unfamiliar and new possibilities, as moral insight into different ways of being by which we learn of the limitations of our own way of life. Receptivity emerges as a deconstructive sensibility to an other that preciously hints at the intersubjectivity Kompridis attaches to his concept of reflective disclosure.[7]

Once again Schoolman draws a mistaken inference from my account of receptivity (for the shortcomings of which I must also once again take full responsibility), leading him to conclude that receptivity as I conceive it will always culminate in successful reflection and learning once under way. I fail to see, according to Schoolman, that receptivity is determined by the conditions under which it is solicited, conditions of a non-ontological kind

– i.e. socio-economic, psychological, ideological, along with considerations of class, gender, race, and so on. He takes my elaboration of Cavell's analysis of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* to be evidence of that failure, evidence of my failing to listen to Torvald, and therefore of failing to take notice of conditions that can limit or block our capacity for receptivity.

I find this objection puzzling, and it may be a function of our very different conceptions of receptivity. It appears to me that for Schoolman receptivity is more or less synonymous with openness. This impression is reinforced by his attempt to show the limits of receptivity in connection with Emerson's superbly prescient remark about a 'talking America', whose compliant citizens are ruined by their 'good nature, and listening to all sides'. Well, yes, this kind of openness in which we are equally open to all views, leads not only to untenable relativism, it also leads to impassivity. How can we act at all if, *per impossibile*, we are open to '*all* new possibilities'? A mind that is equally open to all possibilities would be a mind unminded, rendered incapable of judging anything, precisely because a mind to whom everything mattered equally would be a mind to whom nothing mattered. In short, nothing we could recognize as a *human* mind. If we take openness to capture the essential meaning of receptivity, distinguishing it from passivity becomes impossible, leading to conceptual and normative incoherence. Certainly, openness is a necessary component of receptivity, but receptivity is by no means reducible to or exhausted by it.

Similarly, if receptivity is construed only as a sensory experience, as in the passage he cites from Emerson reflecting on a sensorium that becomes 'too irritable by pleasure and pain, so that life stagnates from too much reception', we are not talking about reception in the normatively and epistemically relevant sense. For Emerson that sense appears in those passages of 'Experience' where he says things like:

> All I know is reception; I am and I have: but I do not get, and when I have fancied I had gotten anything, I found I did not...
>
> But I have not found that much was gained by manipular attempts to realize the world of thought...
>
> I take this evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch hardest, to be the most unhandsome part of our condition.

In these interrelated remarks we can see the outline of Emerson's philosophy of receptivity as an inversion of Kant's theory of knowledge (as Cavell has shown), and his pre-Heideggerian critique of clutching, grasping thought. It can also be seen as a precursor to the Adornian idea of non-identity since Emerson's point about the unhandsome part of our condition is what comes 'when we seek to deny the stand-offishness of objects by clutching at them',[8] and that includes not only the object of our grief, but grief itself. And this then may be what Emerson means when he says that grief has taught him nothing.

On my view, receptivity is an expression of a particular normative attitude and normative relationship, for which Stanley Cavell has given the name *moral perfectionism*.[9] It implies, and demands, a relation of obligation between oneself and an 'other', and, moreover, between one's current self and a possible, eventual, 'higher' self. The obligation in question is to make oneself (more) intelligible to oneself by responding to the

normative challenges posed by an 'other' – by *their* claims to intelligibility, their demand of it from us. The receptivity called for here is not to be qualified by the presence of mitigating circumstances. Receptivity is not a distributive good; it is an inescapable condition of making sense of things and others, and a normative demand we place both on ourselves and on others. But it is more than that, as well. In addition to the kind of receptivity that involves reflection and self-conscious agency, there is a pre-reflective kind of receptivity that is always happening, in the background and as part of it. Receptivity in this sense is the correlate of first order or pre-reflective world disclosure. In the mode of pre-reflective receptivity, we are always receptive, but selectively – receptive to some things, some persons, but not to others. It is the task of our reflective forms of receptivity to take notice of, to acknowledge what and whom we had previously failed or were unable to be receptive to, and to take on the normative demands that follow from such acknowledgement.

I agree with Schoolman about there being conditions of receptivity, but not about there being mitigating circumstances that *justify* (rather than explain) why one fails or is unable to be reflectively receptive in response to the normative demands of the 'other'. Acting rightly can be very difficult, and there is no guarantee that we will succeed (even if we are Kantians following the correct procedure for morally justifiable action). To say, however, that we should not hold one another accountable for failing to listen, for failing to be receptive to one another because we were not favourably situated to do so, is to misunderstand the nature of the obligation to be receptive. It will include breaking free from our current patterns of making sense of others, otherwise, how on earth could change be possible, for that is what it is all about in the end. To say that we cannot expect someone to be receptive because of mitigating conditions is to come much too close to saying that we can change only under the most ideal conditions. Unfortunately, we do not ever get to enjoy such ideal conditions, which, in any case, would make change both frictionless and unnecessary.

Change of this kind is hard not to resist because it demands a change in who we are and in what matters to us, and, of course a change in our relationships to one another. We are all Torvalds when faced with this kind of challenge, and so it is a matter of struggling to become free of a picture that has held us captive. The reason that Torvald's failure to listen to Nora, to render her pain and captivity intelligible, is given primacy in my reading and in Cavell's, is because Nora has taken on that struggle with herself, whereas Torvald has not. Yes, Nora deceived him, and yes, he is understandably hurt by her insensitivity; but he never relinquishes his image of Nora as a 'songbird', preferably caged and domesticated, his ideal wife. To think of her in this way is to fail to contest his pre-reflective understanding of people and things, in the very circumstances in which the possibility of doing so arises. He reminds Nora that a 'songbird needs a clear voice to sing with', a reminder that she must not violate the conditions of her own intelligibility (and his). But this is the risk Nora must take if she hopes to speak in a voice of her own, for the voice in which she speaks now is compromised, able only to voice, unintelligibly to Torvald, the pain of her voicelessness, making her a victim of inexpressiveness.

Of course Torvald is also in pain, but Nora and Torvald understand the circumstances of their pain differently. Nora cannot go on as before; Torvald wants only to go on as before. He is even willing to forgive her, as an offer of reconciliation. Like Rawls'

ideally rational individual, Torvald does not think *he* has anything to reproach himself for. But as Cavell points out, 'the issue of *A Doll's House* is precisely that of treating a grown woman, a wife and mother, as a child'.[10] Nora, on the other hand, most certainly feels she has reason to reproach herself, not least for giving her consent to the conditions of her own oppression. As Nora tells Torvald in the concluding scene, 'Yes, I have changed' (and not just her clothes!). And that change sets her on a path: 'I must find out who is right – the world or I.'

How will Nora find out? What does 'find out' mean here? Emerson's great essay, 'Experience', begins with the question, 'Where do we find ourselves?' The question can be understood as meaning where are we now? What are our current circumstances? And it can also mean *where* do we find ourselves? Where must we go to find ourselves and be found? Nora cannot find out who is right until she finds herself, finds herself in a world in which she can also be found. Of course, there are no rules for finding oneself or for finding a world in which one also can be found. What we are looking for has to come into being, but how do we find that which does not yet exist, for which we have no map? 'But I have not found that much was gained by manipular attempts to realize the world of thought.' So what to do, if finding ourselves means changing ourselves, and if not much is to be gained by 'manipular attempts' to change ourselves? Why do our attempts at change so often slip through our hand then when we clutch hardest? Perhaps, as is suggested by my Emersonian and Heideggerian reflections in *Critique and Disclosure* about the connection between agency and receptivity, we need to rethink what it means to be agents of change and transformation. What would that take? Perhaps, it is not something that is there for the taking. This is the thought around which my Emersonian and Heideggerian reflections on receptivity revolve, on which they are staked.

My insistence on the role of receptivity in learning and agency is connected to this problem of change. That is one reason why I have tried to rethink critique as a practice of receptivity and reflective disclosure. And it is why I cannot accept Schoolman's view that critique is prior to receptivity. He thinks I must recognize that 'receptivity is situated and can surface only under specific conditions that critique first may be able to uncover. Those conditions are the largesse of politics, not of ontology.'

I have already said something about why I think it is unwise to think of ontology as irrelevant and unrelated to politics. Let me now say something about why it is equally unwise to think of critique as prior to or as independent of receptivity.

Consider the following questions. What do we expect of critique? What is supposed to happen, to the world, to us, when critique is exercised? Conversely, what does critique demand of us, not only as its addressees but also as its authors? In other words, in what does the normativity of *critique* consist? This question is quite distinct from, should not be confused with, *or come after*, the question of which normative principle/principles should serve as the ground of this or that model of critique. Critique has its *own* normativity, and we shall fail to understand in what its specific normativity consists if we think of critique as derived from, and in the service of, normative ideals or principles external to it.

I am speaking of normativity as though it were a clear and distinct object of philosophical knowledge, possessed of an uncontroversial and uncontestable meaning. Of course, that is by no means the case. In the domain of ethics and politics, of practical

reason, generally, there is at least some agreement that what we are trying to invoke when we speak of normativity is something that has an obligatory character, an 'ought' of some kind, concerning something or someone to which we are answerable. Through our capacity to be answerable, which is to say, our capacity as normative beings, we construct and reconstruct our normative reality.

The peculiarity of normativity construed in this way is that it is internally related to and dependent upon the articulation of some possibility, a possibility that may appear improbable, if not unintelligible, from within our current normative reality. Now if we think of normativity, as we typically do, as a phenomenon that is rule-like in character, we will be ill-equipped to make sense of our own normative creativity. Although Kant laid the foundations for thinking of normativity as something rule-like in character, he also recognized, was perhaps the first to recognize, that normativity is internally related to possibility, and normative innovation to the disclosure of new possibilities. It is to this internal relation between normativity and the disclosure of possibility that Kant avers when he talks about actions that we come to regard as 'necessary even though they have not taken place and, maybe, never will take place'.[11]

If there is anything we can say we expect of critique, it is at least this: to disclose possibilities that make certain actions 'necessary even though they have not taken place and, maybe, never will take place'. Once disclosed those possibilities make demands on us, demands we may or may not wish, may or may not be able, to meet. Nonetheless, that we experience them as demands, even if they are only 'possibilities', tells us something about the specific normativity of critique: what we expect of critique, and what critique demands of us, is to initiate some kind of change, in the world, in our relations with one another, in ourselves, the possibility of which, critique first discloses or rediscloses in some new way. Let me summarize the foregoing in the following, rather curt way:

> *The possibility of change is the condition of the possibility of critique.*
> *Receptivity to critique is the condition of the possibility of change.*
> *The conditions of successful critique is receptivity to the objects and addressees of*
>   *critique.*

If I am right about the normativity of critique, then this leads to a critique-specific conception of normativity, telling us what critique should be like – the form it should take, and the way/ways it should relate to, how it should treat, its objects.

Power, reason and disclosure

Amy Allen offers an incisive summary of the argument of *Critique and Disclosure*, helpfully distinguishing the interpretive from the constructive dimensions of the argument. Frankly, I could not have done it half so well as she has. I want especially to thank her for recommending that the book be best read as an attempt to 'develop a new model of critique, understood as reflective disclosure' rather than as an occasion to engage in 'partisan bickering over the correct reading of one's favourite German philosopher'. As Allen points out, my attempt to develop this new model of critique draws on both Habermas and Heidegger, and has far-reaching implications for how we think about reason and

agency, about temporality, and about how we should relate to our own traditions and practices. Allen's reservations about my reformulation of critique are conceptual, and, implicitly, normative. She wants to show that power is 'the book's unthought'. To make her point, Allen cites a passage from the book, which I should like to cite again:

> . . . everyday practices govern and regulate what shows up as significant and relevant in ways that are not transparent and immediately accessible. The concern is with how everyday practices constrain what can show up as significant and relevant, how they can obstruct or mislead our interpretative efforts, how they can discreetly colonize the logical space of possibility. (*Critique and Disclosure*, p. 74)

Allen then asks what if we 'substitute the phrase "relations of power" for "everyday practices" in this passage', does it not then become more obvious how 'everyday practices are permeated by relations of power in ways that we as actors often do not fully understand'? I want to ask Allen, in reply, what is it exactly that the substitution of everyday practices by 'relations of power' adds to this passage? What insight is actually gained thereby? Are there practices, expert culture practices, for example, that are not permeated by relations of power? Allen does not want to reduce everyday practices to relations of power, but on the other hand, if all practices are shot through with power, what is it about everyday practices that we should be especially wary of? Are they more worthy of our suspicion than the practices of expert cultures? Was it not the laudable aim of Habermas' reformulation of critical theory, inspired by American pragmatism, phenomenology, and later Wittgenstein, to return critical theory to the everyday, to focus its attention on the semantic and critical potentials of everyday speech and action? My complaint is that Habermas' appeal to the everyday is intermittent and half-hearted, compromised by insufficient distance from an expert-culture mentality, and by a faith – itself an extension of that mentality – in the power of normative foundations that transcend time and history (an abuse, one might say, of transcendental modes of philosophical analysis).

Given my Heideggerian account of primary (1st-order) world disclosure, what practices could there be that are *not* 'permeated by relations of power in ways that we as actors often do not fully understand'? Indeed, relations of power are themselves but one dimension of our inherited ontological background. We as actors no more fully understand them than we fully understand what alternative possibilities are open to us, distinct from those we can already name. In seeking to make the relation between power and disclosure more explicit, Allen unintentionally makes explicit why it is that we need reflective disclosure. Since we are not dealing with theoretically accessible forms of domination, we need to make accessible to critical reflection what had been previously inaccessible. We have no other way of doing so but through reflective disclosure. Of course, I am speaking of normatively guided disclosure, to be sure, but as I have argued throughout the book, the idea that reflective disclosure is normatively neutral or normatively indifferent is deeply to misconstrue what it is.

My impression is that Allen is using her response to my book as a way of testing (and pushing) her own boundaries regarding the issues I raise; particularly, since she wants to grant so many of my claims regarding the 'hopeless entanglement of power, validity, and reason'.

> If history, culture and language are shot through with relations of power – and who could
> deny that they are? – then this claim leaves us but a short step from asserting reason's depen-
> dence on power relations.

Well, yes, of course. Why would we think otherwise? At this point, how can we? If rea-
son is incarnated in history, culture and language, and if these in turn are embedded in
relations of power of some kind, then all human practices are such that they will need to
be reflectively disclosed and redisclosed, again and again. This theoretical constraint *and*
normative demand is what one takes on board once one accepts what Heidegger and
Wittgenstein have shown us about the inherited background, the conditions of intelligi-
ibility and possibility on which our thinking and acting inescapably depend. So while
we can distinguish the 'subordinating and dominating' from the 'empowering and
enabling' of *already visible* relations of power, the distinguishing does not, and cannot
ever come to an end: it is an internal part of the practice of reflective disclosure. How
can we draw sharp normative distinctions about what we do not fully see or understand,
about dimensions of our human forms of life that can never be made fully transparent,
and, hence, can never be fully mastered and controlled? That does not mean that we
cannot make *any* normative distinctions, only that any normative perspective will be
disclosure-dependent in the same way that any reflective disclosure will be norma-
tively guided.

When Allen says that she wishes I 'had gone one step further … and owned up to the
danger inherent in these moves' it is as if she confirms my impression that she is not just
arguing with me but with herself, as well. Perhaps, I can be of help to her here, by empha-
tically and unequivocally owning up to the dangers of hopeless entanglement. But let us
just pause for a moment and consider just what Allen's wish assumes. That we can the-
orize without taking on board dangers and risks? That we can arrange our institutions and
practices according to a normative perspective that is *free* of risks and dangers (and
comes with a certified guarantee)? Is this itself not a dangerous way to think? What
we need also to own up to, are the dangers inherent in a metaphysical picture that seduc-
tively promises a final disentanglement of power, validity and reason. It is a picture that
must perforce deny rather than own up to the dangers inherent in the way of thinking it
fosters and promotes. So, please, for the sake of intellectual consistency and intellectual
honesty, when we ask others to own up to the dangers of hopeless entanglement, let us be
sure also to own up to the dangers of *denying* hopeless entanglement.

If in the end our normative perspectives cannot enjoy their previous certainties, is this
really such a bad thing? After all, it is not as though we are left with nothing at all. There
is much to be said for normatively significant differences between practices that allow
for more freedom for critical self-reflection than others – for practices that reveal or are
open to revealing their own disclosedness (which is not the same as saying that they
become fully explicit and transparent). As I said in the book, 'reflective disclosure makes
its own practice possible, makes it reflective and reflectively accessible, by making room
for rather than driving out other possibilities of disclosure, and by revealing rather than
concealing its disclosedness' (*Critique and Disclosure*, p. 221). I cannot add much here
to persuade Allen, unfortunately (perhaps, in the not too distant future). But I would say
that the example of gender subordination, which she refers to as an example of a

structure of domination that remains in place even after it has been denaturalized, does not succeed as an example of reflective disclosure. Reflective disclosure is not identical or reducible to unmasking critique. The expectation that the abstract denaturalization of gender would all by itself bring an end to gender subordination is one of the conceits of critique practised as a form of metaphysical unmasking.[12] It is not enough to expose or unmask the power relations underlying this or that structure of domination; one needs also to initiate alternative ways of being, of going on with our *everyday* practices differently, compellingly.

One of those practices that can make a difference in practice is critique, and my argument for *intimate critique* is in part based on the observation, although not mine alone, that critique as unmasking has been a failure. Not an irredeemable failure, for the 'unmasking' moment deprived of its epistemological immodesty and its metaphysical orientation, is internal to the practice of critique. But critique does not have to end up in the culs-de-sac of skepticism if it is practised in a richer, epistemologically democratic, hermeneutically sensitive way – if it is practised as a form of open-ended mutual learning. Fred Rush brilliantly summarizes this idea of reflective disclosure as a learning process:

> . . . disclosure under reflective conditions consists in attentively putting oneself in the position of another, subject to two regulative constraints. While disclosure in this sense does not require wholly divesting oneself of one's antecedent feelings or beliefs when in dialogue with others, it does require (1) putting those antecedent elements in play in a way that puts them at potential risk of challenge, revision, or even overthrow and (2) treating oneself potentially as just as 'other' as others are treated by one.

Furthermore, my idea of *intimate critique* is also an attempt to take pluralism seriously right from the start. We can no longer practise critique at a distance from the objects of critique: we are entangled with others in complex ways, in a world that has grown ever more tightly connected – politically, economically, technologically and ecologically. It is a world in which we confront 'strangers' daily on the street, in the classroom, in the workplace. It is most definitely a 'stranger' world than we have known before, and it requires new ways of addressing those with whom we wish to engage reflectively and critically. 'We' and 'they' are *intimate* strangers, made so by forces not under anyone's control; but how we live with inescapable pluralism, now no longer an abstract ontological idea but an existential threat and a normative challenge, is something over which we can have a say, something which we can model in everyday practice. And for this reason, receptivity to others has become central to my reformulation of critique as reflective disclosure.

Romanticism and/of the everyday

Fred Rush, his own sympathy for romanticism notwithstanding, questions whether a 'realistic view on political interest and power can be accommodated within the framework of romantic self-understanding'. He also questions whether uncritical relations of power 'present in the everyday will be expunged via reflective disclosure, or at least

transformed into something far less troubling'. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, I want to say once again that I do not think the kind of learning involved in reflective disclosure is of the kind that allows us to overcome relations of power once and for all. That is a fantasy and I do not share in any of its manifest forms. However, I do share the hope that some troubling practice can be 'transformed into something far less troubling'. This is my romanticism. Is there any alternative to such romanticism, one that is not itself another (unacknowledged) iteration of it?

Let us face it, there are certain forms of individual and cultural change that are simply inconceivable apart from our romantic understanding of such change, and our romantic need of it. So long as you aspire to a kind of change in which 'You are different, what you recognize as problems are different, your world is different',[13] then you are bound and answerable to the demands of romanticism. What is demanded of you, in spite of all the obstacles and constraints, in spite of the improbability and possible futility of it all, is to find and found new ways of looking at things, new ways of speaking and acting, new kinds of practices, and new kinds of institutions. Anyone who thinks such change is not only necessary but also (improbably) possible, whatever their view of 'romanticism', is, like me, a hopeless romantic.[14]

Even Wordsworth's disappointment with the French Revolution – its betrayal of its own ideals, not to mention its fervent deification of 'naked' reason – did not dampen Wordsworth's faith that such change as romanticism prefigures can be made visible in romantic writing, and when made visible, made realizable.

> . . . and I remember well
> That in life's every-day appearances
> I seemed about this time to gain clear sight
> Of a new world – a world, too, that was fit
> To be transmitted, and to other eyes
> Made visible . . . (*Prelude*, XIII: ll. 367–92)

Any critical vocabulary that operates without some (not unassailable) faith in the possibility of 'a new world' – a faith fostered by 'every-day appearances' here and now, would not only be ineffectual *as* a critical vocabulary, it would also be inconceivable. It would have to treat the aspiration to bring about a change in which 'You are different, what you recognize as problems are different, your world is different' as naïve romanticism, and romantic claims such as 'all things have second birth' (*Prelude*, X: l. 83) as mystifications of 'real' social change. But then it would leave unanswered the question of how we are to imagine 'real' change if it does not lead to, and is not *seen* as leading to, a new world – this world made anew. For such a new world to arise as a world that we can realize, it must first be prefigured in 'every-day appearances', attentively perceived and made visible:

> Not in Utopia . . .
> Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!
> But in the very world, which is the world
> Of all of us, – the place where, in the end,
> We find our happiness, or not at all! (*Prelude*, XI: ll. 140–4)

A critical vocabulary that thinks it must renounce romantic notions of change and transfiguration will find itself hugely incapacitated, existentially, and not just theoretically.

romantics have given us good reason to doubt that justice without transfiguration is possible. Neither justice nor transfiguration can be achieved merely by providing 'good arguments'. Conventional arguments, however 'good' they might be, cannot cast our problems in a new light, nor can they adjust the light so that we can see ourselves and the things that matter to us in a new way. And as some romantics understood, all this has to take place at the level of the everyday and of everyday practices. It is the level at which learning processes must be facilitated and anchored. It requires, as Cavell put it in the spirit of Emerson, Freud, Heidegger and Wittgenstein, a *descent* into the everyday; in other words, a return to, not an escape from, where we have always been, but not as it has been before. Yes, any transfiguration of the everyday will carry forward relations of power *as well as* the resources for resisting them, disclosing them anew, which is consistent with the analysis of reflective disclosure as a process of learning.[15]

Disclosure and aesthetic critique

It is fitting that in ending with a reply to Robert Sinnerbrink, I must once again reassert the inseparable connection between primary (1st-order) and reflective (2nd-order) disclosure. Sinnerbrink finds the idea of world-disclosing critique congenial and promising, and thinks it can be integrated into the general normative framework of critical theory as a form of aesthetic critique. Understandably, he finds that recent critical theory of the Habermasian variety has let this important practice of critique wither away. The idea of critique as disclosure seems to be an ideal way to retrieve the practice of aesthetic critique from the dustbins of critical theory. But what Sinnerbrink means by 'world-disclosing critique' has precious little to do with world disclosure in its primary sense, understood as referring to conditions of intelligibility and possibility, and, therefore, little connection with reflective disclosure. His use of the term, and in this he follows Honneth, is divorced from the ontological analysis of world disclosure, and so can mean any kind of eye-opening 'aesthetic critique'. It gets no special meaning from Heidegger's notion of world disclosure or Wittgenstein's analysis of the background: it is merely a decoration. It is also fatally disconnected from everyday practice, and thus freighted with all the problems of aesthetic critique as practised by Adorno.

The critical strategy Sinnerbrink follows is an unduly cautious one, for which he pays a considerable price. Accepting the normative framework of critical theory as it is and has been since Habermas (and Honneth's reformulation of critical theory remains Habermasian in its form if not its content), he seeks, rightly and admirably, to return aesthetic critique to its former prominent place within critical theory, a place of honour. The price to be paid for his cautious approach is set the moment he concedes that aesthetic critique draw its normativity from outside itself, from 'normative criteria' that 'define and elaborate the critical function of such a model of disclosing critique'. The only criteria on which Sinnerbrink can immediately draw, however, are those of Honneth's theory of recognition.[16] Unfortunately, the criteria of successful recognition (as is the case with the criteria of successful justification) cannot possibly function as the normative criteria of an 'aesthetic critique of modernity': we are mixing up apples and

oranges here. If Sinnerbrink were to think further about this strategy he would find out for himself that, contrary to his recuperative intentions, aesthetic critique would once again be rendered of secondary importance, a sideshow, really, in favour of 'those normative forms of analysis and reflection that remain rooted in experiences of social suffering, which are precisely what continue to give critical theory its normative ground and theoretical impetus'.

By construing the role of aesthetic critique as supplementary to these normative forms of analysis, Sinnerbrink puts aesthetic critique right back to where it always was in the Habermasian normative framework – which is to say, nowhere at all. This is not what Sinnerbrink wants but it is what he gets because he is still in the grip of Habermasian critical theory. As I have argued for a long time, it is not an accident that aesthetic critique cannot find an honourable place within such a normative framework, for it is, and must be, excluded from the start. Unlike the rest of us poor slobs, Habermas is a genius theorist. If he could not figure out how to make aesthetic critique normatively congruent with his conception of critical theory, nobody can. And since Sinnerbrink buys into the presumption that aesthetic critique has to play a *supplementary* role to normative forms of analysis, he is also buying into the idea that aesthetic critique (ergo any disclosing critique) lacks normative criteria of its own.

As a normative pluralist, I do not think that we can rely on one source of normativity for all of our moral and political practices. The problem with critical theory as formulated by Habermas and his followers is its normative monism (and normative foundationalism), its inability to make room for other kinds of normativity without devaluing them by placing them at the bottom of their normative hierarchy. But this is not all, for like the philosophical tradition in general, Habermasian critical theorists remain fixated on a very narrow conception of normativity, one that is committed to the view that normativity, all normativity, must be rule-like or law-governed by nature. Thus the kind of normativity that I have been exploring in my analysis of reflective disclosure cannot count as a form of normativity, but must be dependent on something higher, on some 'real' normative criteria.

It is a mistake to think of reflective disclosure as something to be salvaged in the form of an aesthetic critique of modernity. Neither in Heidegger's nor in my own construal of disclosure is disclosure reducible to an aesthetic form of disclosure. Aesthetic critique is just *one* form reflective disclosure can take – moral, political, cultural, epistemic, linguistic, practical. It is not reducible to aesthetic critique. Thinking that it is, is the mistake Habermas made, and Sinnerbrink repeats it here. When one recognizes the necessary link between primary and reflective disclosure one does not start looking for normative criteria. They are there already. But one has to open one's eyes to other normative possibilities, and to do that, one has sometimes to struggle against oneself, to overcome one's time in oneself, as someone once said.

Notes

1. Indeed, it is a great relief not to have to respond to careless, disengaged and obtuse readings of the text such as those offered by Maria Pia Lara in 'The Future of Critical Theory?', *Constellations* 15(2) (June 2008): 265–70, Dana Villa in *Perspectives on Politics* 6 (2008): 374–6 and

James Glass in *Political Theory* 38(5) (October 2010): 712–22). I hope to respond at another time to these reviews and to others more faithful to the text, such as Fred Dallmayr's in *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (6 February 2009).

2. Charles Taylor, 'Lichtung and Lebensform', in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 69; emphasis added.

3. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997), p. 373.

4. This idea of conditions of intelligibility that we owe to early Heidegger and later Wittgenstein has become rather fashionable in political theory of late because of the growing influence of Rancière's idea of the 'partition of the sensible'. Unfortunately, Rancière's structuralist reformulation of this idea, presented without any attribution, is far more conceptually limited and politically problematic. See my 'Receptivity, Normativity and Critique', forthcoming in *Ethics and Global Politics* (Fall 2011).

5. Habermas goes further than Heidegger and Wittgenstein in claiming that the background or life-world provides a bulwark, or ontological guarantee, if you like, against the threat of massive scepticism and dissensus. See *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, trans. T. McCarthy (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1987) and *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. W. Rehg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

6. Possibilities are just that; they are not certainties. While they do not come with guarantees, they do come with normative demands to which we can respond in better and worse ways. Their successful realization will also depend on contingencies and circumstances beyond our control. Luck plays no small part in it. Chance, too. It is all so improbable that it is hard to believe that 'change we can believe in' can ever happen. But then things do happen; unexpectedly, really new possibilities emerge, and we are shaken out of our hopelessness and lethargic faith in the future, if only for a time, always too short. Because far too often the new possibilities are thwarted, remaining unfulfilled, we have to contend with more disappointment and more despair after fervent hopes are crushed once again. How do we go on then? How do we sustain our faith in the future? How can we go on without such faith? What kind of agency can we be capable of without it?

7. Adorno's concept of mimesis belongs to a family of ideas of receptivity, which are enriched and deepened by Heidegger's ontological contribution. I do not think of them as in competition with one another but as essential resources for a richer theory of receptivity than is now available (which is not saying much since there is no currently available theory of receptivity). I hope to rectify this situation in the near future.

8. Stanley Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque: Living Batch Press, 1989), p. 86.

9. For the best account of what this means, see Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

10. ibid., p. 114.

11. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 541.

12. I think Allen missed some of Linda Zerilli's argument in the paper to which she refers, 'Doing without Knowing: Feminism's Politics of the Ordinary', which is an argument *from* the everyday and the ordinary *against* the metaphysics of abstract unmasking critique. As she writes, 'feminist theory has not been exactly immune to this theoretical practice of

decontextualization and abstraction from the ordinary'. See Zerilli in Cressida Heyes (ed.) *The Grammar of Politics: Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 133. For my own arguments against critique as identical with unmasking, see 'Reorienting Critique: From Ironist Theory to Transformative Practice', *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 26(4) (July 2000): 23–47.

13. Stanley Cavell, 'The Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy', in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) p. 87.

14. For a fuller statement of my romanticism, see 'romanticism', in Richard Eldridge (ed.) *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), and my contributions to Nikolas Kompridis (ed.) *Philosophical Romanticism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

15. I should add that I agree with Rush that negative dialectics is a type of reflective disclosure or world-disclosing argument, and an important type at that. My reservations about Adorno's conception of critique are due to its disconnection from and suspicion of everyday practice. As for Heidegger's purported scepticism (in comparison to Cavell and Wittgenstein, or Emerson for that matter) toward the everyday, I think the latter are just as sceptical as Heidegger about the everyday as it now is, and are fully *d'accord* with Heidegger about the possibility of transfiguring the everyday *through* the everyday. None of them recommends an escape from the everyday into some extra-mundane realm of 'authenticity', least of all Heidegger.

16. I do not have the space here to respond to Sinnerbrink's probing and intriguing questions about the relation of my model of reflective disclosure to the Hegelian model of recognition employed by Honneth. Fortunately, I will have the opportunity to reply to Sinnerbrink's more elaborate treatment of these questions in a forthcoming issue of *Constellations*. I can promise that my concept of receptivity will play a major mediating role in my reply.