

Kyle Kaplan

“Dear Adorno: On the Limits of Personal and Practical Advice”

I. Timeline of “Sexual Taboos and Rights Today” and Related Events¹

1961

Aug 1	Hans Bürger-Prinz invites Adorno to provide “the sociological contribution” to a planned connection on the problems of sexual crimes and criminal law reform.
Sept 11	Adorno politely declines the invitation, noting he is not a legal sociologist therefore it is “better nothing than something half dilettante” and his “thoughts only thrive in earnest contact with the material.” (Also notes that he is overwhelmed with university obligations and the conclusion of “his book on dialectics.”)
Dec 4	Fritz Bauer “cordially” asks Adorno to reconsider if even he is able to provide a “brief contribution on the overall topic or a single question.”

1962

Jul 22	Co-editor Herbert Jäger sends Adorno his past essays on moral offenses, mentioning that he is looking forward to Adorno’s contribution.
Aug 30	Musicologist Georg Borchardt asks Adorno to sign a petition for the repeal of 175 organized by Kurt Hiller and the Wissenschaftlich-humanitären Komitees.
Sept 13	Adorno declines, noting he “can better serve the cause [...] through this essay than by signing a petition.” He is also reluctant to sign due to Hiller’s chosen language [“secret of being”, “spiritual”] and because, if his information is correct, Hiller “attacked him in the most malicious matter during a lecture given in a socialist student group.”

1963

	Essay published in <i>Sexualität und Verbrechen: Beiträge zur Strafrechtsreform</i> [<i>Sexuality and Crime: Contributions to Criminal Law Reform</i>], eds. Fritz Bauer, Hans Bürger-Prinz, Hans Giese, and Hebert Jäger (Frankfurt: Fischer).
Sept 9	Hans Giese informs Adorno about series of follow-up articles to be published in <i>Der Stern</i> .
	“Linguistically improved” version of the essay published in <i>Eingriffe: Neun kritische Modelle</i> [<i>Interventions: Nine Critical Models</i>] (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp).

1964

Apr 4	Participates in a symposium hosted by the German Society for Psychotherapy and Depth Psychology on “Homosexuality and Criminal Law.”
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1967

Oct 16	Gives lecture in version of the essay in Vienna.
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1968

Mar 9	Receives letter from art student.
	Essay quoted in “Schärfste Opposition gegen jede Art sexueller Repression,” <i>Weder Krankheit noch Verbrechen: Plädoyer für eine Minderheit</i> [“Strongest Opposition Against any Kind of Sexual Repression,” <i>Neither Sickness nor Crime: A Plea for a Minority</i>] ed. Rolf Italiaander. (Also includes entries by Max Horkheimer, Karl Jaspers, Ulrike Meinhof, Karlheinz Stockhausen).

¹ All relevant correspondence was consulted at the Walter Benjamin Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin. My thanks Michael Schwarz for his guidance and hospitality, and the Sexualities Project at Northwestern who funded this research.

II. Quotes from “Sexual Taboos and Law Today”²

1. Rational society, which is founded upon the domination of inner and outer nature and disciplines the diffuse pleasure principle that is so harmful to the work ethic and even the principle of domination itself, no longer needs the patriarchal commandment of abstinence, virginity, and chastity. On the contrary, sexuality, turned on and off, channeled and exploited in countless forms by the material and cultural industry, cooperates with this process of manipulation insofar as it is absorbed, institutionalized, and administered by society. As long as sexuality is bridled, it is tolerated. (72)
2. Thus despite everything it is necessary to take up once again the subject of sexual taboos and the legislation of sexuality, not only because of a presumably powerless solidarity with the victims but also in consideration of all the damage that might be done by the increasing repression accompanying society integration. (73)
3. Murders of prostitutes go unpunished, and indeed perhaps in each individual case there might be a plausible reason why this is so; nevertheless, the frequency of such unsolved cases, in comparison with the swiftness, for instance, with which just is meted out in cases of crimes against property, indicates that society’s power, however unconsciously, wishes death to those who in its eyes incarnate, erroneously, the pleasure that ought not to be. (79)
4. In principle and with unavoidable exaggeration, one could surely say that *in law and morals sympathy is accorded to everything that perpetuates the modes of behavior of societal oppression—and ultimately sadistic violence—whereas modes of behavior that are contrary to the violence of the social order itself are dealt with mercilessly*. (83) [Adorno’s emphasis]
5. Although women won emancipation professionally, they still have to bear their surplus of social burden, and even while being tolerated passively, they sense the taboo that can fall upon them at any moment: for example, they may fall foul of the law on procuration that has been expanded absurdly to cover absolutely anything, or they may become pregnant. This engenders vindictiveness. Part of the hopeless dynamic of what sociology likes to call interpersonal relations is also the fact that those who feel pressure attempt to transfer it onto other, weaker groups, and either rationally or irrationally perpetuate the odium. (79)
6. There are said to be many homosexuals who are intellectually gifted, psychogenetically the probable explanation being that the extreme identification with the mother leads them to internalize those traits the mother possesses in contrast to the father, the representative of a practical sense of reality. If my observations do not deceive me, then precisely among the intellectually gifted homosexuals is the psychological shackling of their productivity conspicuous, the inability to realize all that they are surely capable of. (80)

² Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 71-88.