THE MEDIATIONS OF MUSIC

Critical Approaches after Adorno

Edited by Gianmario Borio

The Mediations of Music

Adorno believed that a circular relationship was established between immediacy and mediation. Should we now say that this model with its clear Hegelian influence is outdated? Or does it need some theoretical integration? This volume addresses these questions by covering the performance of music, its technological reproduction and its modes of communication – in particular, pedagogy and dissemination through the media. Each of the book's four parts deal with different aspects of the mediation process. The contributing authors outline the problematic moments in Adorno's reasoning but also highlight its potential. In many chapters the pole of immediacy is explicitly brought into play, its different manifestations often proving to be fundamental for the understanding of mediation processes. The prime reference sources are Adorno's *Current of Music, Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction* and *Composing for the Films*. Critical readings of these texts are supplemented by reflections on performance studies, media theories, sociology of listening, post-structuralism and other contiguous research fields.

Gianmario Borio is professor of Musicology at the University of Pavia and director of the Institute of Music at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice. In 1999 he was awarded the Dent Medal by the Royal Musical Association. In 2013 he was Distinguished Visiting Professor at The Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America. Since 2013 he has been member of the Academia Europaea, since 2016 corresponding member of the American Musicological Society, and since 2019 corresponding fellow of the British Academy. He is the director of the book series *Musical Cultures of the Twentieth Century* (Routledge) and the online-journal *Archival Notes*. His publications deal with several aspects of the music of the 20th century (theory and aesthetics, political background, the audiovisual experience), with the history of musical concepts and the theory of musical form.

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The Mediations of Music
Critical Approaches after Adorno

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Contributors

Gianmario Borio is professor of Musicology at the University of Pavia and director of the Institute of Music at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice. In 1999 he was awarded the Dent Medal by the Royal Musical Association. In 2013 he was Distinguished Visiting Professor at The Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America. Since 2013 he has been member of the Academia Europaea, since 2016 corresponding member of the American Musicological Society, and since 2019 corresponding fellow of the British Academy. He is the director of the book series *Musical Cultures of the Twentieth Century* (Routledge, London) and the online-journal *Archival Notes*. His publications deal with several aspects of the music of the 20th century (theory and aesthetics, political background, the audiovisual experience), with the history of musical concepts and the theory of musical form.

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Preface

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Theodor W. Adorno, in 2019, the Arnold Schoenberg Center (Vienna) and the Accademia Musicale Chigiana (Siena), in collaboration with the Giorgio Cini Foundation, Venice), hosted two thematically linked conferences dedicated to a vast array of topics covered by the German philosopher, sociologist and musicologist. They included the functions of notation, writing of music, the sonic rendering of musical texts, and more recent forms of mediation in music.

The *Interdisciplinary Conference on Adorno's Theory of Musical Reproduction – The Music, Writing, Difference*, held in Vienna from 3–5 April 2019, was part of the 'Writing Music Research Project' directed by Federico Celestini (Universität Innsbruck), Matteo Nanni (Universität Gießen), Simon Obert (Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel), and Nikolaus Urbanek (Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst, Vienna). The papers focused on the relationship between notation and sound production, an issue around which Adorno's unfinished *Theory of Musical Reproduction* revolves.[1] This text was also one of the main references of the conference *The Mediations of Music: Theodor W. Adorno's Critical Musicology Today*, held in Siena from 21–23 November 2019. The scientific committee led by Gianmario Borio, with Stefano Velotti and Stefano Jacoviello, took a very different perspective. The relationship between sign and sound was investigated and compared with the new forms of mediation of music made possible by the digital technologies of today; moreover, the participants discussed mechanical reproduction techniques and their relationships with the mass media, which Adorno had insightfully analyzed in the context of the political and social transformations of the mid-20th century. This is a topic that is confirmed to be of absolute relevance today when aesthetes and critics are forced to engage in brand new ways of listening to music.

A term that implies a change in the essence of musical work by introducing the role of technical and social mediation systems between producer and receiver, mediation has become a key word for the sociology of music in recent decades. However, up until now, the concept of mediation in music remained relatively poorly defined. In an era when the listening and enjoyment of music are going through a new, radical change thanks to digital communication and the increasingly widespread diffusion of *streaming*, one of the main goals of this conference was to contribute to a more precise understanding of this issue. It

may behoove the reader to remember that the conference was held just a few weeks before the eruption of the Covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in a long phase when music was present in the world exclusively through forms of mediation.

Theodor W. Adorno's philosophic vision is central to this issue, even if his approach to mediation processes has not been the subject of a systematic analysis. But what is more important, even extraordinary, is how the great German philosopher, who, together with Marcuse, Fromm, Horkheimer, and subsequently Habermas, was a member of the Frankfurt School, managed to predict the main processes of listening to music in the following decades. In his introduction to a fundamental text, the 1962 *Sociology of Music*, Adorno approached mediation according to Hegelian criteria within the dialectic between music and society. His paradoxical definition of 'technological mediation', with its inextricable interrelationships between disturbing absences and presumed presences, still needs to be examined. In *Sociology of Music*, Adorno also anticipated a phenomenon based on the opposite of mediation, namely immediacy. His critical evaluation of jazz is located in this context, and during the Siena conference, a deep investigation of Adornian positions on the criticism of jazz was made in an attempt to identify the rationale at the core of his philosophy. At the same time, in light of the categories of Adorno's philosophy and precisely in relation to these theoretical entanglements, the conditions for a possible aesthetic recovery of the historical experience of jazz were also verified. A tireless explorer of new musical forms, this pupil of Alban Berg, who collaborated with Thomas Mann to draft the parts related to the description of the dodecaphonic method in *Doktor Faustus*, was also the first great philosopher to relate music to the mediation of historical processes, especially in Schoenberg's music. In his reading of Schoenberg's masterpiece *A Survivor of Warsaw*, Adorno described the composer's ability to suspend the aesthetic sphere through the recollection of experiences which are inaccessible to art. In the present volume the treatises of the great philosopher and sociologist of the Frankfurt School are considered and discussed in light of the most recent findings, unfolding in a transversal debate that involved participants from all areas of the humanistic and social sciences.

The conference on Adorno and mediations captured a particularly meaningful moment in the regeneration of the Accademia Chigiana coinciding with the newest edition of '*Chigiana' Journal of Musicological Studies* was presented. Now in its 49th issue since its foundation in 1939, after being stopped for several years, publication of the journal is set to resume annually. It is therefore with this meeting that one of the most historic and renowned institutions in Italy returns to playing a leading role in the field of musicology on the international stage. Today, the Accademia Chigiana is relaunching its cultural and artistic 'identity' while respecting its prestigious tradition, managing also to seize new opportunities contained within a crisis situation. In just a short span of time the Chigiana has found itself on a successful path of transformation and adaptation to the new scenarios of the socio-cultural and economic context of music in Italy and in Europe. Resuming activities in

the musicological field is an essential part of this journey, including organizing international conferences and meetings that take on crucial issues spanning the relationship between musicological studies and current philosophical exchanges on music in our society.

To summarize, the Accademia Chigiana aims to reconsider its wealth of experience by proposing itself as a decisive reference point for training young musicians, and helping to launch their careers in the professional world, and for music production and dissemination in line with similar leading institutions abroad. The Chigiana is an institution dedicated to the innovation of performance and performing practice and to the various forms of contemporary composition. In the past, it featured an important course in music for film, which is currently in the process of being reintroduced having been organized according to the standards of new media languages. Thus, an institution such as ours could not fail to confront Adorno's theories on mediation in music. The original framework of the Adorno conference is fully coherent with both the mission and strategic guidelines of the Accademia Chigiana. Each year, young talents from all over the world come to Siena to study, to improve their instrumental and vocal performance practice, orchestral conducting, composition, improvisation techniques, live electronics and sound and music computing. Their presence gives life to the Summer Academy and International Festival and maintains a strong impulse towards the music of our time. Presenting papers on a wide spectrum of topics, this volume critically confronts the issues highlighted in Adorno's writings, illustrating the relevance of his theories, which, if we consider the era in which they were conceived and the society in which they were formulated, remain particularly striking. It was even more fitting then perhaps that, after the conference was opened with introductory remarks by Gianmario Borio, in the historic Aula Magna of the University of Siena, one of the best ensembles of the new generation of Italian musicians, the Quartetto Adorno, performed a composition by the German philosopher, along with works by Webern, Manzoni, Schnebel and Zemlinsky. In addition, the composer Giacomo Manzoni, to whom we owe the Italian translation of many of Adorno's fundamental writings on musical subjects, offered an important speech at the beginning of the conference.

To conclude, I would like to express my sincerest thanks to Gianmario Borio for the effort he put into the realization of the conference in Siena, and for his editorial work on this precious book. I would also like to thank all those who participated in the conference, the authors who contributed to this volume, and all of my colleagues at the Accademia Chigiana who made this extraordinary event possible.

 Nicola Sani, Artistic Director of the Accademia Musicale Chigiana of Siena

Note

1 As a follow up to this conference this volume was published: *Dialektik der Schrift. Zu Adornos Theorie der musikalischen Reproduktion*, ed. by Julia Freund, Matteo Nanni and Nikolaus Urbanek, Paderborn: Brill Fink, 2022.

1 Popular Culture and Post-Traditional Arts

Debates and Controversies During Adorno's Exile in the USA

Gianmario Borio

1 Contents and Effects of Art in the New Media

During Theodor W. Adorno's exile, a far-reaching debate took place in the USA on the changes affecting art and culture on account of the new means of communication. Adorno's involvement in the Radio Research Project, directed by Paul Lazarsfeld, is indicative of an interest in the theories developed in Europe; in particular, those concerning the social dimension of artistic production, the role of the media in its reception, and the origins of mass culture.[1] Before their emigration, a significant part of the studies carried out by members of the Institut für Sozialforschung was focused on these issues. Once they had taken up posts in American academic institutions, Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Siegfried Kracauer, Leo Lowenthal and Herbert Marcuse explored these topics, dealing with lines of research that were already established or taking shape in the USA; this applies in particular to the approach of the so-called 'New York intellectuals' and to research on public opinion by sociologists rooted in pragmatism.[2] Exposure to these currents of thought occurred in varying degrees amongst the members of the Institut für Sozialforschung. However, it is not an exaggeration to say that the Frankfurt School's approach to the cultural industry underwent changes. This was not only due to the ability to compare their own ideas with the specific aspects of mass culture in democratic society, but also their absorption of topics developed in those schools of thought, even if it was not always openly declared.

Horkheimer's 'Art and Mass Culture' was the first study published in the USA in which a member of the Frankfurt School discussed the problems and contradictions that culture faced under the influence of the new media (Horkheimer 1941). In this essay, which was available to American intellectuals well before the English translation of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, we find the themes that will go on to animate the post-war discussion. I am referring in particular to the dislocation of interior life in what was no longer the exclusively private sphere of free time, to the escapist function of culture in mass society, and to the break that modern art made with the dominating symbolic system. Unlike idleness in pre-modern societies, leisure is a sphere of socialisation that, in principle, should be removed from the constraints of work;

nevertheless, as Horkheimer observes, the 'late-capitalist' society subjects it to the same criteria of production and valorisation from which it should be freed. The debate intensified in this period also thanks to the belated reception of Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, in which we find a first formulation of the thesis on the escapist role of culture and an early criticism of consumer society (Veblen 1899).[3]

In a retrospective article, Eliuh Katz and David Foulkers link leisure to the concept of alienation and the ideological function of the mass media: 'People are deprived and alienated, it is suggested, and so they turn to the dreamlike world of the mass media for substitute gratifications, the consequence of which is still further withdrawal from the arena of social and political action' (Katz & Foulkers 1962: 379). Despite this admission, the two authors object to critical theory as not taking into consideration the multiple repercussions of the exposure of individuals to the media, ironing out the analysis on the manipulation of consciousness. Katz, whose doctoral thesis is integrated into the first part of *Personal Influence* (co-authored by Paul Lazarsfeld), approaches the themes developed by Leo Lowenthal in the context of the sociology of literature (Robinson 2006). In a methodological article, which probably adopts themes from the lectures held at Columbia University in 1948, Lowenthal's line of reasoning opens up a new space in Adorno's and Horkheimer's otherwise inflexible critique of the culture industry:

> Take the commonly accepted notion that the main function of mass literature is to provide an outlet for the escapist drives of frustrated people. How do we know that this was ever true or is still true today? Perhaps the functional content of the novel today is much less escapist than informative: literature has become a cheap and easily accessible tool for orientation in a bewildering outside and inside world. The reader is looking for prescriptions for inner manipulation, an abridged and understandable psychoanalytical cure, as it were, which will permit him by way of identification and imitation to grope his way out of his bewilderment. Escape involves an attitude of self-reliance and is much more likely to be found in times of individual stability than in our present period, characterized by ego-weakness needing alien crutches for survival. Whether this hypothesis is justified or not, it might fruitfully be pursued in studying the patterns of identification and imitation offered by mass literature.
>
> (Lowenthal 2016b: 280)

If one follows this reasoning, it must be assumed that two forces are at work in the circuits of popular culture: on the one hand, popular culture acts as a means of promoting 'false consciousness', generating neurotic behaviour and blind submission to the dominant ideology; on the other, it acts as a field of reflection for the desires and expectations of the individual *hic e nunc*, and therefore the scholar should reflect upon 'the question of how mass media can be used as instruments for encouraging the cultural and educational development of broad segments of the population' (Lowenthal 2016d: 59).[4]

In this first phase, centred in New York, a series of exchanges took place, with intellectuals and artists gravitating around *Partisan Review* and *Commentary* (Hohendahl 1992). 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' by Clement Greenberg, which Adorno approvingly quotes in *Philosophy of New Music*, is a paradigmatic work for that heterogeneous current known as 'Western Marxism' which laid the roots for the anti-establishment movements of the 1960s (Greenberg 1939).[5] In a single move, Greenberg rejects socialist realism and the commercialisation of cultural products in capitalist societies, placing the artistic avant-gardes, 'the only living culture we now have' (Greenberg 1939: 101), as the driving force of cultural progress. On a social level, however, Greenberg notes that their relationship with the bourgeois elite, who had supported artistic innovation from its very beginnings, was weakening. In the previous phase of history, the only market for 'formal culture' consisted of those who, in addition to knowing how to read and write, possessed the essential requisites for any type of cultivation: leisure and comfort. Literacy was inseparable from this condition of economic and social ease. Greenberg uses the German term 'kitsch' to define the cultural surrogate devised to satisfy the urban classes, spawned by industrialisation who no longer identify themselves with folk culture. This surrogate, which uses 'the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture' (Greenberg 1939: 102) has taken on the same character as other products of capitalist society: commodity.

The relationship between the Frankfurt philosophers and the New York intellectuals is studded with elements of reciprocity. For example, in an influential article on his investigation of popular music, Irving Howe welcomes the theme of standardisation introduced by Adorno and extends it to film production (Howe 1948). Conversely, the notion of 'Middlebrow', advanced by Dwight Macdonald 1953, includes traces of Adorno's 'Theorie der Halbbildung' ['Theory of Half-Education'] ([1959]1972a).[6] However, amongst the American sociologists, whose writings reveal greater congruence with critical theory, the names of David Riesman and Charles Wright Mills stand out. In 1950, in collaboration with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, Riesman published *The Lonely Crowd*, a book that exerted a notable influence on the sociology of communication and on culture theory (Riesman, Denney & Glazer 1950). His analysis of American society, in particular of its 'outer-directed character', owes much to the social psychology of Erich Fromm, an exponent of the Frankfurt School. Fromm contributed to the dissemination of the methods and contents of critical theory with two books that made the bestseller list for decades: *Escape from Freedom* and *Man for Himself* (McLaughlin 2001). In the early 1940s, Riesman had been a patient of Fromm, and he is mentioned, along with Adorno and Lowenthal, in *The Lonely Crowd* and in several connected essays. In turn, the Frankfurt School paid particular attention to Riesman's work; this is demonstrated by both the scattered references to the above mentioned book in several of Adorno's writings, and by Lowenthal's initiative to dedicate a collection of studies to the most salient issues that he had addressed (Adorno 1954).[7]

The pragmatist terrain on which Riesman develops his theory allows us to focus on phenomena of mass society that remained secluded in the writings of the Frankfurt thinkers: the ways in which the mass media worked, their position in different socio-political contexts, and the formation of communities around symbolic values (Hardt 1992: 31–76). A key role in Riesman's sociology is played by the notion of the 'peer-group', i.e. a set of persons of a comparable age, social class and cultural background. Riesman observes that the mass media 'exert a constant pressure on the accepted peer-groups and suggest new modes of escape from them … autonomy, building on an exploration of a tension between peers and media, must take advantage of both sides of the tension' (Riesman, Denney & Glazer 1950: 291). These ideas form the basis of an article that Riesman dedicated to the reception of popular music (Riesman 1950). Adorno's writings on radio music and the psychoanalytic investigation of cinema by Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites are cited here as examples of 'content analysis' (Wolfenstein & Leites 1950).[8] In his critique of the culture industry, however, Riesman sees the risk of a one-sided and rigid vision that could cause misunderstandings about the ongoing social processes; for this reason, he proposes to integrate 'content analysis' with 'audience analysis'. Empirical research can show, for example, that the audience 'manipulates the product (and hence the producer), no less than the other way around' (Riesman 1950: 409). In an approach akin to that of Howard Becker, though with more ambitious objectives, Riesman turns his attention to the sometimes even numerically small communities that formed around lifestyles and symbolic systems (Becker 1951 and Becker 1953). Jazz listeners are a particularly interesting case, described as 'individualists who reject contemporary majority conformities' (Riesman 1950: 415). The collective component of rebellion underpins certain reactions in the fruition of cultural products conveyed by the media: 'Far more frequent will be the peer-group's opportunity to establish its own standards of criticism of the media. Groups of young hot-jazz fans, for instance, have highly elaborate standards for evaluating popular music, standards of almost pedantic precision' (Riesman, Denney & Glazer 1950: 108). A scale of values can thus be produced within social groups, as a consequence of their members' interactions and their emotional investment in participating in cultural events and processes; this hierarchy can have a distinct autonomy and diverge significantly from prevailing standards.

The concept of content at the basis of 'content analysis' seems to be the polar opposite of effect; however, such a contrast is illusory and can give rise to paradoxical outcomes.[9] First of all, the word 'content' is used in various ways. Bernard Berelson, one of the representatives of the nascent sociology of media, defines it as 'that body of meanings through symbols (verbal, musical, pictorial, plastic, gestural) which makes up the communication itself. In the classic sentence identifying the process of communication – '*who* says *what* to *whom, how*, with *what effect* – communication content is the *what*' (Berelson 1952: 13). He considers analysis as a 'research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication' (Berelson 1952: 138). The adjective 'manifest' reveals its

unsuitability for grasping ambiguous or latent contents; this limitation merely shifts the problem, since symbolic content – as George Gerber points out – can consist of layers, some of which are not immediately perceptible (Gerber 1958).[10] Reflecting on these problems within the framework of the research on the mindset of the citizens of the Soviet bloc, which he carried out from 1951–1952 for the International Public Opinion Research in collaboration with Paul Berkman, Kracauer proposes 'qualitative analysis' as an integrative and corrective method for the 'quantitative' one (Kracauer & Berkman 1956). This technique, which may also apply to content, continues to be based on empirical findings, but does make use of statistical procedures:

> Qualitative analysis by definition differs from quantitative analysis in that it achieves its breakdowns without special regard for frequencies. What counts alone in qualitative analysis … is the selection and rational organization of such categories as condense the substantive meanings of the given text, with a view to testing pertinent assumptions and hypotheses.
>
> (Kracauer 1952–53: 637–638)

Kracauer recalls Rudolf Arnheim's research on soap operas and Lowenthal's study on biographies as examples of qualitative analysis (Arnheim 1944 and Lowenthal 1994). Among the objects of investigation, he does not make a clear distinction between literary texts and the interviewees' statements, making certain passages of his reflection obscure. However, in both spheres, the analysis assumes the character of an exegesis of a text that takes into account ethical and political premises, implicit intentions and the context of phrasing. Thus, the method shows points of contact with literary hermeneutics, but also differs from it by paying particular attention to the channels of the communication process, and the social effects that came about in each historical phase. The intertwining of content analysis and effects analysis emerges intentionally in a study on cinema by Marjorie Fiske, a member of the first group of researchers at Columbia University's Bureau of Applied Social Research, co-written with Leo Handel:

> Content analysis of any medium of communication serves two functions. It may constitute the basis for a sociological study to determine what cultural patterns and stereotypes are reinforced in a given medium or in a given segment of a medium, or it may be used as the first step in an 'effects' study. The first type of content analysis is a major research undertaking itself, and may comprise analyses of settings, plots, characters, symbols, or any other specific attribute of content.
>
> (Fiske & Handel 1946: 130)

The debate on content turns out to be part of a wider discourse concerning the relationship between empirical research and critical theory. This dual path was a much-discussed topic within the Bureau of Applied Social Research;

the director, Paul Lazarsfeld, offers a detailed analysis in an article published in the first American issue of the journal of the Institute for Social Research. The two sectors appear here as 'administrative research' and 'critical research': the former being financed by a public or private body and subordinate to its needs, while the parties involved in the latter independently set out to investigate 'the general role of our media of communication in the present social system' (Lazarsfeld 1941: 9). Lazarsfeld's goal was to promote an integration of the two approaches, which could have consisted in a modification of the theory according to the data collected or, conversely, in focusing the interviews on the problems identified through critical reasoning. A paradoxical situation arose with regard to the activities carried out under his direction: on the one hand, the empirical investigations made by various collaborators – Adorno, Lowenthal, Fiske and Herta Herzog – were effectively guided by the criterion of blending the two approaches, albeit in different degrees and with a different focus; on the other hand, the methodological discussion became ingrained between irreconcilable positions (Lasswell & Leites 1949; Lowenthal 1961; Adorno 2000).[11] Adorno had already expressed his objections in a document for a staff meeting of the Princeton Radio Research Project held in 1938. He suggested that greater weight should be given to individually focused interviews, abandoning the administration of a set of questionnaires aimed at establishing average values; for him the methodological flaw in the statistical procedure consisted in assuming that the individual is autonomous and not a product of the social powers, which should represent the final goal of the research. Here, Adorno also mentions the need for a transition to qualitative analysis, which in the case of the enjoyment of radio programmes became an examination of the issues underlying the emotional reactions observed by the researcher (Adorno 2006b: 671–676).

The approach of Charles Wright Mills, who worked at the Bureau of Applied Social Research between 1945 and 1948, is also characterised by an entanglement of elements of critical theory and pragmatism. In this perspective, he repeatedly calls into question 'experience', a term that had its origin in the philosophy of John Dewey, and went on to play an important role in the debate on popular culture (Dewey 1934) involving the cognitive processing of sensations, their objectification in linguistic forms, and their subsequent relocation within a shared framework of meanings. In a lecture given at the London School of Economics in 1959, part of an unfinished project entitled *The Cultural Apparatus*, Mills claimed that men 'are aware of much more than they have personally experienced, and their own experience is always indirect. … their experience itself is selected by stereotyped meanings and shaped by ready-made interpretations' (Mills 2008: 203).[12] Here the dialectic of immediacy and mediation that will become the driving force of Adorno's texts and the affiliated critical theories of communication takes shape: immediacy manifests itself as a false image of what is instead the result of mediation; on the other hand, mediation can reach such a degree of

internalisation that it is perceived in the form of immediacy. In Mills' work, the category of experience takes the place of Adorno's consciousness and therefore, unlike Dewey, involves the question of 'false consciousness'. In this repositioning, it largely loses its individual perspective, and enters the sphere of intersubjectivity: experience is indeed an individual fact, but it is grounded in social interactions. Herbert Mead's idea of the 'generalized other' resonates in this theoretical framework, laying the foundation for the 'internalized audience' and the dialogic structure of communication (Mead 2015).[13]

The 'cultural apparatus' that Mills outlines is the set of organisations, institutions and environments in which the artist, the scientist and the intellectual carry out their work; it represents the theatre in which communication takes place, and at the same time its limitations. Our standards of truth, our definitions of reality, our modes of sensitivity are determined 'much less by any pristine experience than by our exposure to the output of the cultural apparatus' (Mills 1958: 175). When he describes experience in his famous book, *The Power Elite*, Mills observes:

> The media have not only filtered into our experience of external realities, they have also entered into our very experience of our own selves. They have provided us with new identities and new aspirations of what we should like to be, and what we should like to appear to be. They have provided in the models of conduct they hold out to us a new and larger and more flexible set of appraisals of our very selves.
>
> (Mills 1956: 314)[14]

2 Debates within the Frankfurt School

The Frankfurt School did not develop a truly defined theory on media. The works of its members that concern media fell within the framework of a critique of culture, deemed necessary, both in order to revise the Marxist theory of superstructure, and to carry out an in-depth analysis of the use of cultural propaganda by European dictatorships, before and after the Second World War.[15] This twofold rationale must be taken into account in order to explain the primary role the members of the Frankfurt School attributed to the manipulation of opinions and the pre-formation of needs. As Jürgen Habermas points out, they developed 'theories of fascism and of mass culture which deal with the socio-psychological aspects of a deformation that penetrates into the deepest regions of subjectivity and takes hold of the motivational foundations of the personality, which explains cultural reproduction from the perspective of reification' (Habermas 1984: 368–369). Adorno's essay on the regression of listening, which outlines the loss of the use-value of cultural assets and their flattening into the form of goods, is an important key to understanding this set of issues (Adorno 2002). Habermas believes that this is exactly where a flaw of the critique of mass society lies: having overlooked the fact that the media are 'technical amplifiers of linguistic communication,

which overcome spatial and temporal distances and multiply the possibilities of communicating; they intensify the network of communicative action, without, however, uncoupling action orientations from lifeworld contexts as such' (Habermas 1984: 372, translation slightly modified).

As Habermas notes, the image of the culture industry presented in the homonymous chapter of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* is closely linked to the ways in which authoritarian regimes obtained consent and imposed subordination. It is then no coincidence that radio and cinema, the new media put into play to achieve these goals, are the preferred objects of Adorno's and Horkheimer's criticism. During their exile, the Frankfurt philosophers worked on extensions and variations of that interpretative model, transferring it to the so-called 'late capitalism'. It was precisely in the context of this relocation – Habermas fails to point out – that a rift emerged within the Frankfurt School: on the one hand, the idea prevailed that the media and culture industry were tools for the consolidation of a centralised and ubiquitous power; on the other, research was addressed towards recognising and exploiting the spaces of free action that the media by their very nature generated. Evidence of the latter trend can be found in the writings of Kracauer and Lowenthal, without them having abandoned the principles of the former. The topics of their works written during the period of emigration are emblematic: Kracauer continued his studies on cinema and finally published *Theory of Film*, many passages of which can be viewed as a theory of media and audience; Lowenthal published research on biographies, which aroused great interest in the academic community, and he continued to work on the history of popular culture in Europe from the eighteenth century to the rise of Nazism (Kracauer 1960a; Lowenthal 1944; Lowenthal & Fiske 2016).

It is worth pointing out that the representatives of both trends adopted a similar stance, one that cannot be reduced to the drastic alternative for or against the culture industry; they all recognised the disruption that the media have produced throughout the history of culture and artistic creativity, and judged this situation to be irreversible. The difference between these two camps lies rather in the theoretical consequences that can be drawn from this recognition. For Adorno, artistic creativity was linked to resistance and denial; there was no room for positive content in the restrictive conditions imposed by the culture industry. Instead, for Kracauer and Lowenthal mass culture – as they call it, according to the Anglo-Saxon conventions – was not only an observation field of the manipulation of consciousness, but also contained indications for understanding the symbolic system and its potential for change.[16] This line of thought was less structured but historically relevant because it prefigured the path on which the 'march through the institutions' of the 1968 movements would be defined, and Habermas would develop his theories of public sphere and communicative action (Habermas 1989; Negt & Kluge 1972).

In the early 1960s, Lowenthal raised a series of questions that foreshadowed an alternative or complementary approach to the theory of the culture industry:

(a) *Are we really dealing here with a dichotomy* or are the two concepts simply formed in different logical contexts? …

(b) *Are the equations* art ↔ insight ↔ elite *on the one hand, and* popular culture ↔ entertainment ↔ mass audience *on the other valid*? Do elites never seek entertainment and are the broad strata *eo ipso* alienated from high culture? Does entertainment, on the other hand, preclude insight? …

(c) This leads to a further question, namely *whether and under what conditions art can become popular culture.* …

(d) But if we confine ourselves to contemporary expressions, the question remains *whether the gap between art and popular culture will widen* as the mass media spread through modern civilization …

(e) This leads to the important problem, no less familiar to a nineteenth-century historian than to a twentieth-century social scientist: *who makes decisions about the kinds of entertainment and art offered in a given society*? …

(f) In connection with these questions, there arises the problem of *what is "good" and "bad" in the arts and popular culture*?

(Lowenthal 1961: XIX–XX)[17]

Cinema is one area where the gap between the two positions was clearly visible. If we compare the writings of Adorno and Kracauer, two complementary facts immediately capture our attention: 1 in *Theory of Film* Kracauer only occasionally cites *Composing for the Films* (without making any reference to Adorno's co-authorship), even though his discussion of the functions of music in film touches on various theories that were developed in that book; 2 in 'The Curious Realist', a historical-philosophical profile of his friend written for his 75th birthday, Adorno praises the *Theory of Film* for having investigated cinema as a social fact and analysed its ideological substratum, but does not delve into the main idea of the unveiling of reality, nor the implications for the relationship between traditional art and mass culture (Adorno 2019).[18] The reasons for the disagreement become all too evident in their letters, casting doubt on a possible reconciliation.[19] Adorno reproached Kracauer for having ignored the consequences of the full integration of cinema into the system of production and distribution of goods; this form of art would never manage to unfold its 'immanent law' (*immanente Gesetzlichkeit*) and thus would limit itself to being 'an entity "for other things" [*Für anderes*] not "in itself" [*An sich*]' (Adorno & Kracauer 2019: 471). Kracauer answers by claiming an autonomy of 'photographic media', which is imposed beyond political and economic conditioning; he insists that this autonomy is far more apparent in mainstream cinema than in works by 'well-intentioned intellectuals', such as Jean Cocteau and Alain Resnais, who have distorted the medium's potential by bending it towards 'higher purposes' (Adorno & Kracauer 2019: 471). The subject of the dispute was of such importance that Adorno proposed a radio roundtable on *Theory of Film*. [20]

In his exchange of ideas with Kracauer, Adorno insisted, as he had previously in *How to Look at Television*, on the close relationship between the economic, social and aesthetic dimensions. This was meant in a hierarchical way: the marked dependence of film production on the industrial system places this aspect at the apex, from which social dynamics and aesthetic properties descend; for this reason, cinema cannot be art except in some particular cases, or it is so 'intermittently'.[21] In later years, also thanks to his association with Alexander Kluge, Adorno was drawn to the group that had formed around the Oberhausen festival; which, already in the 1950s, was programming films by François Truffaut, Norman McLaren, Alain Resnais, Bert Haanstra and Lindsay Anderson, and represented a key moment in the development of directors of the New German Cinema, in particular Werner Herzog, Volker Schlöndorff and Wim Wenders. In his last article on cinema, *Transparencies on Film*, Adorno refers to the Oberhausen Manifesto of 1962, which concluded with the following remarks:

> This new film needs new freedoms. Freedom from the conventions of the established industry. Freedom from the outside influence of commercial partners. Freedom from the control of special interest groups.
>
> We have concrete intellectual, formal, and economic conceptions about the production of the new German film. We are as a collective prepared to take economic risks.
>
> The old film is dead. We believe in the new one.
>
> (MacKenzie 2014: 153)[22]

Unlike Adorno, Kracauer was convinced that cinema as a medium had the right characteristics to be able to assert itself beyond the changing socio-economic conditions; he presumed a space of authenticity that escaped the ideological structure; on this basis a concept of art was produced that diverged from the traditional one. However, in order to clearly support the thesis of the 'redemption of reality', Kracauer tended to identify the 'essence' of cinema with the realistic school, thus barring his theory from areas of audiovisual creativity that escaped the established channels of distribution – his silence on the *nouvelle vague* is most telling.[23]

3 Cinema and Jazz: Fields of Observation for Critical Media Theory

The concept of experience plays a decisive role in *Theory of Film* (Hansen 2012). After citing Dewey and Whitehead, Kracauer states that the remedy for the abstraction produced in the contemporary world by technology and scientific thought is 'the experience of things in their concreteness' (Kracauer 1960a: 296). This looks like a homeopathic remedy: the malaise caused by technology should be cured with technological tools. Experience was also central for Robert Warshow, a member of the editorial board of *Commentary* and *Partisan Review*, who dedicated an entire research project to cinema and

'immediate experience' and was one of Kracauer's most important inter-locutors during the gestation of *Theory of Film* (Moltke 2016). In his application for a scholarship at the Guggenheim Foundation in 1954, Warshow cited Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* as an example of an approach that considered films as 'indexes to mass psychology or, sometimes, the "folk spirit"' (Warshow 2002: XXVI), a trend that opposed the one represented by Sergej Eisensteijn and Arnheim, which focused instead on the strictly artistic aspects.[24] In Warshow's opinion, these two approaches neglected 'the actual, immediate experience of seeing and responding to the movies as most of us see them and respond to them' (Warshow 2002: XL).[25] An affinity therefore exists between Kracauer's commitment to discovering in cinema the medium that allows contemporary man to grasp the complex determinations of reality and the need posed by Warshow – which is not so distant from Lowenthal – for 'a criticism of "popular culture" which can acknowledge its pervasive and disturbing power without ceasing to be aware of the superior claims of the higher arts, and yet without a bad conscience' (Warshow 2002: XXXVIII).

In his review of Ernest Lindgren's *The Art of Film*, Warshow makes it clear that this is not a choice between two irreconcilable fields of expression, or between an outmoded method and one aligned with the contemporary era (Lindgren 1948). Lindgren, who was also mentioned in *Theory of Film*, glimpsed an 'operation of the mind' in the editing process that was comparable to when Cezanne stood in front of a blank canvas; thus the director's work shared the characteristics of invention and production of the traditional arts. Warshow does not dispute this, but rather the conceptual apparatus with which Lindgren approached the 'seventh art':

> And in the films, though it is obviously desirable to respond as fully as possible to the aesthetic complexities of technique, these 'pure' values are at least equalled in importance by the medium's immense power of communication, which always raises aesthetic problems that go beyond the boundaries implied by the idea of 'appreciation'.
>
> (Warshow 2002: 286)

In the chapter on 'Issues of Art' of his *Theory of Film* Kracauer warns against the tendency to consider cinema as an artistic medium only in cases (like German Expressionism) in which films do not so much explore reality as they create it freely. This would be a misstep because these films ignore the medium's reproductive obligations and put themselves in competition with theatre or fiction; it also would obscure the specific value of the films that fully satisfy the inner requirements of the medium. In Kracauer's reflection, the immediacy of the film experience became the starting point for a series of mediation processes: 'In experiencing an object, we not only broaden our knowledge of its diverse qualities but in a manner of speaking incorporate it into us so that we grasp its being and its dynamics from within – a sort of blood transfusion, as it were' (Kracauer 1960a: 297). As regards that

particular quality that Warshow called 'the absorbing immediacy of the screen' (Warshow 2002: XLII), cinema has the ability to reproduce (not 'copy') reality with a degree of pervasiveness that induces a synthetic and mobilising experience in the viewer.[26]

In the post-war period, the debates on cinema and jazz showed points of intersection that could help to recompose the diverging branches of a critical theory of mass culture. The first question is whether their products can be considered art. This question not only concerns aesthetic legitimacy and social prestige, but reveals a problem of principle in applying the criteria of aesthetics to these areas of creativity, which were added to the traditional arts at the end of the nineteenth century. In this sense, one can define cinema and jazz as post-traditional arts.[27] These two genres were strongly anchored in the technologies of reproduction: cinema for the production process itself, jazz as it enjoys a wide and markedly authorial diffusion thanks to record production (Borio 2015; Caporaletti 2015). The roots of the controversy probably lie in their lack of adherence to the principle of autonomy: cinema and jazz are closely linked to industrial production and the means of distribution; their products are characterised *ab ovo* by their commodity character, and their reception is linked to the circuits of mass communication.[28] The film and record industries tend towards monopolistic management, the homologation of styles and the creation of idols (the charming actor or actress, the virtuoso musician). Furthermore, it is a fact that within the dynamics of mass culture the production system allows and even encourages the formation of niches characterised by experimental languages, which in certain phases can be associated with political trends. Finally, regular exposure to these two artistic genres is closely linked to free time, recreation and leisure; the type of reception is in both cases immersive, that is, coherent with the social form from which they originated, and which resists the categories of traditional aesthetics.

All of these features made cinema and jazz targets of opponents of the culture industry. Nevertheless, the debate on the aesthetic claim that took place during those decades found its justification in a series of phenomena that eluded the pattern of either/or. First of all, a scale of values was outlined that became the benchmark for criticism (and for the community of artists) and was not necessarily connected to the degree of commercial success. In the preface to an emblematic reader for the new trends in jazz criticism, edited by Nat Hentoff and Albert J. McCarty, the two editors observe:

> The nature of writing on jazz has begun to change markedly. In place of appreciators whose main means of analysis were adjectives, there are now historians and critics who are applying the disciplines of historical and critical traditions in other fields to jazz.
>
> (Hentoff and McCarty 1959: Preface, page without number)

The gradual recognition of the artistic nature of jazz came about in two moments: first, the reconstruction of a history with protagonists, schools and

technical innovations; and then the analysis of harmonic and rhythmic struc-tures which highlighted the constructive logic of the individual pieces.[29] However, the primary impulse came from the musicians themselves, who began to conceive compositions of a certain length with formal complexity and expressive intensity, pieces that were not amenable to being performed in nightclubs. Added to this was the creative process in the recording studio, in which the musician could concentrate his/her thoughts without the influence of external factors. Hentoff observes:

> Within the community of jazz musicians, most young players feel that jazz has become a music primarily to be listened to rather than a back-ground for dancing and drinking, or both; and it is, therefore, 'art music' in that sense.
>
> (Hentoff 1959: 327)[30]

Thus a type of 'work of art' was born that did not collide with apparently extra-artistic factors: the improvisational component, collective authorship, the role of technology, and involvement in a profit-oriented production system.

On a sociological level, the two forms of expression – cinema and jazz – appear as platforms for the recognition and sometimes self-reflection of the new social groups whose hybrid composition makes classification difficult. This subject matter, which had already emerged in Kracauer's writings prior to his exile, is evident in the passages that Robert Warshow dedicated to the gangster figure in Hollywood films. Here, the key concept of experience reappears:

> What matters is that the experience of the gangster as an experience of art is universal to Americans …. In ways that we do not easily or will-ingly define, the gangster speaks for us, expressing that part of the American psyche which rejects the qualities and the demands of modern life, which rejects 'Americanism' itself.
>
> (Warshow 2002: 100)[31]

Experience here indicates a field of interaction between author and spectator that goes beyond a naive identification as a diminished mode of reception, as bad immediacy.[32] This concept was also popular amongst communities of jazz musicians, as the following statement by Charlie Parker reveals: 'Music is your own experience, your thoughts, your wisdom. If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn' (Shapiro & Hetoff 1955: 405). This experience corre-sponds with the user's side: the audience establishes a special bond with the musicians who, through sounds, come across a common search for meaning; the identification of the listener and his/her participation in the psychophysi-cal process of the performance has a psychological aspect, without which the musical content would occur in a reduced form. Finally, both cinema and jazz

have established a competitive relationship with the official arts; both are involved in searching for a specific social place for the new creativity, which in its various forms (night club or outdoor venue) is characterised as a receptacle for an indistinct community – *Faces in the Crowd*, as the title of Riesman's second book indicates.

Notes

1 On the origins of the Princeton Research Project and Lazarsfeldt's work see Morrison 1978a. On the difficult relationship between Adorno and Lazarsfeld, see Morrison 1978b and Jenemann 2007.
2 The intertwining of these trends is tangible in a collection of essays published in the period in question: Rosenberg & Manning White 1957. A similar approach, but in a historical retrospective, is found in Peters & Simonson 2004. On the relationship between American sociology of communication and critical theory, see Hardt 1992.
3 The debate on leisure can be reconstructed by consulting Larrabee & Meyersohn 1958; in particular see the articles by Greenberg and Riesman. See also the quarterly *International Social Science Journal: Sociological Aspects of Leisure* 12/4 (1960), which includes among others 'Popular Culture: A Humanistic and Sociological Concept' by Leo Lowenthal (reprinted in Lowenthal 2016c: 303–314). See also Adorno 1983, and Adorno 1991.
4 See also Hardt 2012.
5 See Greenberg 1939; Adorno 2006a: 13.
6 See also Adorno [1959] 1972b.
7 Lowenthal edited with Seymour Martin Lipset a book dedicated to Riesman: *Culture and Social Character: The Work of David Riesman Reviewed* (1961). Lowenthal had asked Kracauer to write an article for the book (see their letters) and he himself published a chapter: 'Humanistic Perspectives of *The Lonely Crowd*' (2016a).
8 Riesman had probably never read the 'Musikalische Warenanalysen', which Adorno had written in the 1930s, and which can be considered exemplary for this type of study in the musical field (see Adorno 1978); Cf. also Adorno 2006b: 477–496.
9 See Adorno's later critique of Alphons Silbermann (Adorno 1972b).
10 Gerber quotes Lowenthal on p. 88: 'Creative literature conveys many levels of meaning, some intended by the author, some quite unintentional' (Lowenthal 1986: ix).
11 See also Katz & Katz 2016.
12 In *The Politics of Truth* also see pp. 174–176. On the whole project see Sawchuk 2001.
13 See also Carey 1997.
14 In general, see the chapter 'The Mass Society', pp. 298–324.
15 'The affirmative character of culture' by Marcuse can be considered a milestone in this field that is linked to the chapter on the cultural industry in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. See Marcuse 2009.
16 The dual pathway can also be recognised within Adorno's writings; see Mariotti 2016: 1–24.
17 See also Lowenthal 2016c [1967].
18 In his last article on cinema, Adorno takes some motifs from Kracauer's book, opening up the perspective to a different assessment of the creative potential of the audiovisual arts; see Adorno 1966, and Hansen 2012.

19 See also Kracauer 1960b.
20 Adorno proposed this to the critic Enno Patalas who had published a review he felt to be extremely pertinent: Patalas 1965. Kracauer was put out by this proposal as Patalas had misunderstood several aspects of the book; see Adorno & Kracauer 2019: 482–483.
21 See Adorno & Kracauer 2019: 475 and Adorno 1966.
22 See also Adorno 1966.
23 See also Kracauer 1960: 175–192.
24 See also Arnheim 1957 and Arnheim 1963.
25 This belief seems to anticipate the problem of experiential immediacy, recently developed by Richard Shusterman in a free interpretation of John Dewey's texts. However, Shusterman's version of pragmatic aesthetics and the discussions that followed deviate markedly from the context I am reconstructing. Neither in Warshow nor in Dewey does the broad vision of aesthetic experience imply the vindictive use of popular culture over traditional culture; moreover, the priority of the carnal dimension over the spiritual one is not presupposed by these authors.
26 According to Miriam Bratu Hansen, Kracauer's theory leads us to understand cinema as 'sensory perceptual matrix of experience' (Hansen 2012: 255).
27 Mill's reflections on the work of the designer are useful to understanding the problem of post-traditional arts; see Mills 1958.
28 In his review of the books by Wilder Hobson and Winthrop Sargeant, Adorno notes: 'Jazz and the radio match each other as if they were patterned in the same mold. One might almost say that jazz is the sort of music which in its life performance already appears as if it were transmitted by radio' (Adorno, 1941: 177–178).
29 See particularly Schuller 1958.
30 See also Russo 1959.
31 See also Kracauer 1946.
32 This is one of the critical remarks appearing in Adorno 1981.

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Part I

The Dynamics of Musical Mediation

2 The Logic of Judgement-less Synthesis

Theodor W. Adorno on *Vermittlung* and the Language of Music

Dieter Mersch

The starting point of this exploration is Theodor Adorno's philosophy of music. It is less concerned with his works on the sociology of music, although the concept of '*Vermittlung*' or 'mediation' is also prominent in his discussions of the correspondences between music and society (Adorno 1976). Rather, it harks back to *Vermittlung* as a central concept in the philosophy of Georg Friedrich Hegel, especially in his *Science of Logic*, seen always in relation to his doctrines of the 'unity of immediacy and mediation' (Hegel 1970a) and the 'identity of identity and difference' (Hegel 1970b).[1] 'Mediation' refers to the flexibility of the concept; it is epistemological and situated within a dialectic 'logic of "reflexion"'. Thought, in a three-tiered process of transcendence and sublation of the abstract immediate (as presented to the senses), progresses from the 'mediated immediacy' of its conceptual 'penetration' (*Durchdringung*) and goes through the varying reflexive stages of becoming conscious, to in the end reach 'absolute reason' in the sense of 'self-knowledge of knowledge'. Hegel takes aim at the illusion of direct access to truth, which can only be reached via an endlessly mediated knowledge. This knowing is in the end transparent to itself, so that it stands not at the beginning but at the end of rational cognition. Adorno builds on this by formulating its exact counterpoint. For him, the process of mediation is never completely subsumed in the conceptual. For that reason, he speaks not of the 'identity' of the relationship between identity and difference, but of its 'non-identity', of habitual residues and of non-subsumption. The process of mediation addresses something that cannot be mediated or settled (Adorno 1973a). This is exactly what Adorno's 'negative' dialectics, as opposed to Hegel's 'positive', refer to.[2] We shall return to this point. For now it shall suffice to note that, for Adorno, exactly this evidence of irreconcilability or resistance is, to a substantial extent, inherent to the practice of art – and to music as an example thereof – as long as it draws the power of its knowledge from critique, in particular from a 'critique of society': 'The common ether of esthetics and sociology is critique'(Adorno 1976: 216).

In contrast, for Hegel philosophy is conceptual understanding, and art, as non-conceptual, therefore contains an inherently insufficient element. Concepts in turn are dependent upon language, within which judgement takes on

the form of a linguistic proposition. Thus, at the site of any comparison of art – in its non-propositionality (Mersch 2014) – and language, and their relationship to one another, something cumbersome or non-subsumable appears, that Adorno came to see as that which cannot find its way into the rationality of mediation. It is the objects themselves, their uniqueness or singularity, that resist the violence of conceptual appropriation, and art must both provide a channel for the expression of this violence and restore to the objects the exceptionality of their thingness. This is all the more true of the incompatibility of the aesthetic construct and its societal use, because 'a composer is always a *zoon politikon* as well, the more so the more emphatic his purely musical claim' (Adorno 1976: 211). Artists participate within their society even when they distance themselves from it. At the same time, their dissociation, their variance from what Karl Marx dubbed the 'social condition', reveals something about their era and its inadequacies. It is art's systemic refusal to conform that simultaneously articulates the utopian potential of aesthetics: 'Art should never guarantee or mirror law and order, but force the emergence of that which has been banned beneath the surface' (Adorno 1982: 49), Adorno wrote in his essay on the politics of music in the Eastern bloc, where everything was meant to serve communist education.[3] 'Were art to relinquish such contradictions, it would lose its aesthetics along with the element of critique' (Adorno 1982: 49).

Mediation, Mediality, and *Vermittlung*

At this juncture, we are confronted with a problem of translation. *Vermittlung* is one of those difficult, 'untranslatable' German words that contains multiple connotations: *Mitte* or 'center', *Mittel* or 'means', as well as *mitteln* or 'to average' and *mittelbar* or 'non-immediate' or 'indirect', all of which have different content.[4] *Vermittlung* is not quite captured by the English 'mediation' or the Italian 'la mediazione', nor by references to 'media' or 'means' or '*i media*', '*mezzo di communicazione*' or '*lo strumento*', all of which suggest instrumental use for a certain purpose. Neither do German terms from media theory such as *Medium, das Mediale* or *Medialität*, which mostly address technology, have much to do with the philosophical concept of *Vermittlung*, notwithstanding Hans-Georg Gadamer's attempts – when asked about the strained history of relations between culture, hermeneutics, and new media – to bring mediation and non-immediacy, *Vermittlung* and mediality into a productive relationship (Gadamer 1997). Martin Heidegger says '*Vermittelung*' instead of '*Vermittlung*' to stress the *Mittel*, or means of the mediation, which insert themselves into the process of mediation, transforming that which is to be mediated (Heidegger 2003). This underlines the *difference* that, in the process of mediation, disturbs the target identity, so that the process never comes to an end and there is no closure. In this way, as in Adorno's thought, Hegel's concept of reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) is disrupted: the means (*Mittel*) of achieving reconciliation are not up to the task.

The difficulty of grasping the term is made even more difficult by its other, just as fraught, history, namely the tension between philosophy and sociology. The analysis of media is most at home in social science research, in communications studies, and in media studies, while mediation (*Vermittlung*) is a decidedly philosophical concept and, as the terminus of Hegel's *Logic of Science*, has been associated from the beginning with the philosophy of Enlightenment and Adorno's critique thereof. And yet a *tertium quid* remains in both philosophies that makes it nevertheless possible to set them in relation to one another. There is something as incongruent as it is irreconcilable, something that cannot be grasped in the relation between 'concept and thing' or 'subject and object'. The difference and simultaneous closeness of 'mediation' and '*Vermittlung*' calls for a philosophical definition that looks at the concept of 'media' from the perspective of media philosophy, and, at the same time, at '*Vermittlung*' from the perspective of sociology (Mersch 2006). The entanglement of the two perspectives is made possible in particular because the concept of 'media', understood correctly, references the same paradoxical center that is at the core of the term '*Vermittlung*', so that the two, despite all divergencies, exhibit a latent convergence in their inner 'figurality' (Mersch 2005 and 2008). As can be seen in most media theory since Marshall McLuhan, the term 'media' lends itself to being misunderstood as ontological, as if it refers to an object, a technical or institutional system, or the like. But that which is 'medial' or acts as media, can, similar to processes of *Vermittlung* or mediation, only be delineated in the form of *practices*, which in turn exhibit the idiosyncrasy of retaining an 'immedial' or 'amedial' element. 'Immediality' – as an opposite of mediality – does not denote something immediate, but something that cannot be mediated, because the mediality of the medium can only appear at the site of the *disruption* of mediation, becoming invisible when it is completely successful (see in particular Mersch 2004 and 2007). Enabling and failure, like transparency and opacity, thus prove to be linked to such a degree that both are able to shed light on the mediality at their foundation. The medial always needs an Other, for example, the ground of materiality or, to an equal extent, performances that resist the practice of mediation (Mersch 2010). Adorno also alludes to this aporetic structure, but to uncover it fully, we need to traverse a complex terrain of interdependent associations and intersections, making it possible to more exactly delineate the relation between 'mediation' and '*Vermittlung*' as well as between 'music' (or art in general) and 'society'.

The key medium of *Vermittlung,* and as such the paradigmatic site of 'mediation' in philosophy, remains language. For this reason, it is necessary to first revisit the philosophy of language as its theoretical starting point which, it should be noted, advanced as early as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to become – through the work of Wilhelm von Humboldt and then Ferdinand de Saussure, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Martin Heidegger – the first locus of media theory analyses. These early explorations were sparked by linguistics and literary theory. In these theories, language acts as a model

for transmission and communication, as well as for *Vermittlung*, while the technical side of mediality was considered less important – until it became virulent at the onset of so-called digitalization in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet within this discussion, little attention has been given to the role of art as providing emphatic momentum to critique and reflection. The main branches of media theory, at least from the 1960s to 1990s, ignored this key link to aesthetics, which can be reinstated by taking a closer look at Adorno (see Mersch 2006: introduction). Hence, this chapter examines firstly the transition from art to language, more precisely Adorno's famous dictum that music resembles language (is *sprachähnlich*), claiming in the same breath that it was unlike speech and thus marking a profound difference to language (Adorno 1998c). Music functions *like* a language – in its structural nature or syntax but also, as Albrecht Wellmer has put it, in its world-relation (*Welthaltigkeit*) (Wellmer 2004) – but it is not a language: it does not make any assertions. With this Adorno is emphasizing the complex dialectics of the propositional and the non-propositional nature of aesthetics (see also Mersch 2014). The dual and simultaneous attributes of position and negation not only make it possible to explore questions of mediation and its inherent inaptitude, but also to draw from the tension between music and language that which determines the particularity of musical mediation, which Adorno marked with his contradictory phrase 'judgement-less synthesis' – we shall deal with this concept in the second part.

In principle, this tension characterizes all aesthetic manifestations, but specifically musical compositions and their expression. Two paradoxical attributes can thus be compared: on the one hand, the paradox of mediality and its characteristic aporetics of presence and absence (as well as appearance in disappearing and disappearance in appearing), and on the other hand, Adorno's paradox of a synthesis without judgement and his claim that music resembles language 'without itself being a language'. As we shall see in the second and third part, , both of these aspects reference one another and also with the critical as well as utopian impact of art. The intrinsic connections will help us to better understand that which Adorno, in his works on the sociology of music, describes as the mediation or *Vermittlung* between art and society, or between artwork, history, and the 'administrative' world. These connections resist – as is also true for Hegel – any simplified representational depiction (*Abbildlichkeit*). Musical content, just like the 'world-relation' of music, cannot be applied one-to-one to 'the social condition' as if it were a portrait thereof. Rather 'the esthetic quality of works … converges with social truth' (Adorno 1976: 215). What *Vermittlung* means, as we shall see in the conclusion of this chapter, can only be related to the works as a whole, because *Vermittlung* only exists in relation to an entireness, it cannot be understood when it is, as it were, atomized, torn apart and unconnected to its elements, means of expression, or topics. Here, I am less interested in Adorno's individual paradoxical turns, and more in that which they evoke: the idea of the special power of aesthetic thought as an irreplaceable and irreducible

dimension of culture. This power is always antagonistic, and breaks out, so to speak, from mediation. It even remains active when we are flooded with mass media, and its transformation via electronic technologies.

'Make things in ignorance of what they are'

Adorno ended his emblematic Kranichstein lecture, *Vers une musique informelle* – in which he attempted to encapsulate the state of his philosophy of music at the dawn of the 1960s – with his vision of the aim of artistic utopias: 'to make things in ignorance of what they are' (Adorno 1998b: 322). This phrasing was apparently important to Adorno, who repeated it often. This strange wording calls forth a paradox. What can it mean to make (*poein*) things, without knowing what they are, or what they are about and what they mean? Isn't 'making' itself intentional? Are artists ignorant about what they do? And are the recipients of art then faced with puzzles, because they don't understand the artworks? Ignorance makes a very distinctive demand on our attention: we desire what we do not know. But the unknown, like ignorance, resists all delineation per definition. It is exactly this antagonism, the pull of something whose ground is questionable, that makes this phrase so equivocal; the strangest part of which is perhaps that it situates the terminus of utopia at a place where we are staring into an abyss. Its telos is indeterminacy, which stands opposed to determinacy as a function of judgemental synthesis. This sentence states that the aesthetic only reveals its utopia at a site that resists concept and synthesis to reveal an enigma.

   Formally, Adorno's terminology most certainly builds on Kant, who saw the main work of synthesis in judgemental speech that, through predication, attached subject and object. Aesthetics does not know such attachments. The rejection of synthesis correlates with the de-disciplinary impulse of artworks, which do not allow anyone to tell them *what* they are, or *how* they should be, or *which meaning* they should reflect. Their rejection of both definition and hermeneutics, which Adorno repeatedly stresses in *Aesthetic Theory*, is a spurning of all assimilation with the general, with the normal, and with normativity. Hence art also turns away from propositional language that subjugates all speech to the logic of 'A is B' (Adorno 1997).[5] For this reason, the epistemic character of philosophical aesthetics as a theory of art has always been disputed, and at the same time repeatedly affirmed. To restore these epistemic properties, we need to clarify their relationship to judgement. Hence, when Adorno attests a specific measure of truth in art, which he names *Vermittlung* or 'mediation', and at the same time claims that there is no rational determinacy for the 'medial form' of aesthetics, for its means of mediation, then what is needed is a more precise grasp of the artistic epistemic itself, as well as of the character of its autochthonic synthesis.

   In *Musik, Sprache und ihr Verhältnis im gegenwärtigen Komponieren* ('Music, Language and their Relationship in Contemporary Composition', a shortened version of which was later published in *Quasi una fantasia* as

'Music and Language: A Fragment'), Adorno attempts to sound the depths of the above question. 'Music resembles language', the essay begins, 'But music is not identical with language …'. And it ends: 'It is by distancing itself from language that its resemblance to language finds its fulfilment' (Adorno 1998b: 1 and 6). For music, as he adds in an essay from about the same time, 'On Some Relationships Between Music and Painting', speaks through a 'renunciation of the communicative' (Adorno 1995: 72). These passages are particularly volatile in that they deal not only with the disparity between music and language, but also with that between music and philosophy, approaching that which seems to be the crux of a philosophy of music: the heterogeneity of musical expression and the work of the concept. Put another way: the difference between the two is that 'music lacks the conceptual medium that forms the very essence of philosophy' as Adorno contests in his work on Beethoven, begun in 1937 but never completed (Adorno 1998a). Thus while music can speak, it cannot bespeak, in the sense of 'indicate' or 'signify', as that would require judgement and definition. There is a gulf within any experience that, like music, possesses all the connotations of sug-gestion, showing or intimation, but cannot be translated into or commu-nicated in discourse; it cannot be 'mediated'.

With this, we return to the beginning and to the two faces of medium and immediately. For Adorno, music is the Other of language, it refers to but cannot merge with language; its place is beyond understanding, and also touches upon that which language cannot express in statements. This does not mean, as Romanticist philosophies of music claimed, that music transcends all language. This is not a question of sublimity, but of disparity, of alterity. Aesthetic works are different from everything which constitutes language, yet that does not make them speechless, lacking in all significance, or unable to create their own meaningfulness. For this reason, Adorno sees music and language in a dialectical relationship. On the one hand, music approaches language – it can indicate as precisely as an argument – on the other hand it is distanced from language because its argument, or 'Argumentum' as Roland Barthes says, functions as an 'exposition', an 'account', or an 'inventive nar-rative', and operates not by means of cause and effect but choreographically, as it were, by means of tension, relief, and renewed contrast, as if we were dealing with attraction and repulsion, or desire and rejection, at the same time (Barthes 1978). Hence the event of the musical, as something nameless and opaque, takes place in the chasm or gap between the two. It breaks with the *logic* of the sign without relinquishing its *significance*. Put another way, Art does not 'speak' through signs, and music cannot be subsumed in the semiotic system from which it nevertheless draws. Music is not dictated by its score or structure of notes, nor does it culminate in an interpretable mean-ing – and yet it remains the most eloquent language, which reveals by hiding its content.

Here, Adorno is not negating or relativizing the function of aesthetic speech, rather he is strengthening it by attesting to it a different kind of

language, for true language is the evocation of a 'silent' poetics. At the same time – and this is the most interesting moment of Adorno's theory – he resists naively categorizing music as incomprehensible. Rather, music proves to be both adequate as a language as well as above language, filling space with a different kind of transcendence. For this reason, a further note from the never-realized Beethoven study shows, Adorno aimed to 'decisively establish the relation of music and conceptual logic' (Adorno 1998a: 11), to prove that 'music can express only what is proper to itself'(Adorno 1998a: 10). That should certainly be seen as an attempt to explain something he had approached from another angle in his Kranichstein lecture, namely, that the inimitable revelation of art is that it reveals expressly by concealing. This is also confirmed in *Aesthetic Theory*:

> Through form, artworks gain their resemblance to language, seeming at every point to say just this and only this, and at the same time whatever it is slips away. … That artworks say something and in the same breath conceal it expresses this enigmaticalness from the perspective of language.[6]

> (Adorno 2018: 120)

Judgement-less Synthesis

At this point it is perhaps helpful to also look at the short remarks subsumed under the title 'Music and Concept' in the Beethoven book. There, too, Adorno expands on the relationship between music and logic: 'The "play" of music is the play with logical forms'. For Adorno, this means in particular a ludic approach to 'identity, similarity, contradiction', and to the relation between 'the whole and the part'. He continues: 'They, the logical elements, are largely unambiguous – that is, as unambiguous as they are in logic', whereby the 'boundary between music and logic is not … located within the logical elements', themselves, 'but in their specifically logical synthesis' (Adorno 1998a: 11). At the same time, they embody a 'logic *sui generis*' (Adorno 2018: 9). While Kant postulated synthesis as the medium of philosophy – via the *fluidum* of thought – represented in spoken language by the copula 'is', the musical 'sentence' or its equivalent is of another type, because musical compositions neither know an 'is' nor meanings that are joined by it and that could be reflected on in language. Nevertheless, it achieves – and this is Adorno's thesis – a specific aesthetic synthesis: a 'synthesis of a different kind, constituted solely by the constellation of its elements, not their predication, subordination, subsumption' (Adorno 1998a: 11).

The key word here is 'constellation'. If synthesis is achieved by 'is' in a sentence, in the aesthetic realm, it is reached via configurations. 'Constellation' and 'configuration' – Adorno uses them almost interchangeably – are key concepts in *Aesthetic Theory*. This is the very form of a com-position, literally a 'positioning together', since the Latin prefix 'con' or 'cum' means 'with' or 'together' – an element that connects and simultaneously separates

divergent 'positions'. Again, the paradoxical formulation is a characteristic of aesthetic 'language' itself, as well as a sign of its non-discursivity.

For this reason, aesthetics 'cannot simply be subsumed under the concepts of reason or rationality, but is, rather, this rationality itself, only in the form of its otherness, in the form … of a particular resistance against it' (Adorno 2018: 9). It should be said that some composers, for example Dieter Schnebel and Hans Zender, are decidedly opposed to this idea, and believe there is a more radical difference. They postulate a 'structural difference' between music and language (Schnebel 1993: 28 and 32ff). Musical expression manifests itself beyond the symbolic and exclusively in the form of 'differences in sound'. This is not a negative concept, but signifies differentness in the arts, whereby 'perception itself gains dominance … over language', as Zender writes in an essay dedicated to Wellmer (Zender 2014: 137 and 139). Wellmer contested this. He believed that composition, as he explained in a letter to Zender, never took place 'independent of language' in that 'an ability to reflect that is tied to language, is the *precondition* for composing and understanding music' (Letter from January 29, 2013; Zender 2014: 150–157; cit. 151). Differentiation is therefore key, especially because to correctly understand the postulate of music's resemblance to language 'without being a language', or of 'judgement-less synthesis', a permanent promotion of the paradox is necessary, since inherent to the paradoxical is that it brings things to a head. More importantly, Adorno held on to art's 'status as truth' – to the fact that it has meaning and therefore fulfils an epistemic function (Adorno 1998a: 7). For this reason, art must resemble language, which means it should not shy away from a comparison with language, but neither should it be confused with the same, because it 'knows' without making use of the central role of 'as' or 'as something'. The similar exists only in the unsimilar, which is why, Adorno attests, discourse and aesthetics cannot be played against one another. Instead, aesthetic knowledge is drawn genuinely from the elements of the constellation that make up the work and are joined within it.

When Hegel says, 'the truth is the whole', he means that there can be no aesthetic truth without reference to entirety. Adorno, of course, turned this adage on its head and claimed 'the whole is the false' (Adorno 1979: §29, 50). But, the truth of this untruth is in turn only visible in the observation of the whole, so that in aesthetics, mediation must both look at the whole and to the same extent divulge its failure or falseness. In this process, the way in which the parts are brought together, their seams, are key and no less 'synthesizing' than theoretical discourse, even if it cannot be traced back to the latter. Independent of concepts and without recourse to proof, art's 'insight' is nevertheless *objective* and not subjective – the realm to which Kant relegated aesthetic judgement, stripping it of any general status because it followed no rules. But, constellations do not need rules. They link together to 'de-monstrate' by means of *deixis*, a kind of displaying that shows that which cannot be otherwise said. For this reason, Adorno wrote in his 1967 lecture on philosophical terminology, parallel to the 'defining method' of 'explaining a

concept with a concept' exists, 'of equal importance, the deictic method'. These methods are 'fundamentally different' from one another (Adorno 1973b: 11). 'The difference between music and philosophy must be defined', Adorno therefore writes in his Beethoven notes, that aesthetics and philosophy differ when one understands 'aesthetics' less as the theory and more as the practice of the arts (Adorno 1998a: 12). Yet this difference at the same time cannot deny the close relationship between the two, and it exists without discarding the epistemic, or art's particular access to knowledge. Most important here is that 'music is able to speak, without word, image, or content', that it is a kind of unsayable speech, which says no less than spoken discourse – but differently (Adorno 1998a: 28). This focus not only stresses the aspect of the unsayable, but also the event of the episteme that takes place through it. The point is, hence, not that music is without words, nor that it is impossible to capture it with words, but explicitly that its original judgement-less state makes something *other* than language possible by articulating it by other means in another medium (see Mersch 2015).

Being without judgement is therefore a statement without a predicate, without the verbal phrase 'A is B', in particular without 'is B', but also without 'is', without the premise of 'being'. Rather, it is an exposition of A's in connection to other A's, a relation as it were between A, A', A'', etc., which join in a constellation while preserving and developing their singularity. We are confronted with something other than language, with a quasi series of nouns without verbs or adjectives or, more precisely, with positionings made of 'thing-language' (*Dingsprache*), as Walter Benjamin called it in an early essay (Benjamin 1996). They are 'languages issuing from matter', which, through art, redeem the divine (Benjamin 1996: 73). If we compare this idea with the classical ontological logic of Aristotle, it means that art, by combining various A's, relies on substances without, however, pursuing a substance logic or drawing from the theories of similarity that were founded on them as countermodels to medieval scholastics in the early modern era. Rather, in the context of music and aesthetics, we are dealing with that which Gilles Deleuze called 'percepts' in order to designate phenomena as perceptual events with a specific, passive resonance that makes them able to perceive that which is lost in the violence of conceptual subsumption.

For similar reasons, Adorno opposed the semblance of concepts in *Negative Dialectics*, holding up art against the conceptual for its ability to restitute 'nonidentity'. Knowledge gained by judgement, he claims there, condemns the Other, that which is alien, to its rule. It leads to the colonization of the Other by the identical. Thought 'eliminates all heterogeneous being' (Adorno 1973a: 26). For, 'the appearance of identity is inherent in thought itself, in its pure form. To think is to identify. Conceptual order is content to screen what thinking seeks to comprehend. The semblance and the truth of thought entwine' (Adorno 1973a: 5). Every philosophy, even the most critical, is therefore 'idealistic' because it subsumes objects under concepts in this way. It becomes mere metaphysics. Philosophy therefore

invites the general objection that by inevitably having concepts for its material it anticipates an idealistic decision. In fact, no philosophy, not even extreme empiricism, can drag in the *facta bruta* and present them like cases in anatomy or experiments in physics; no philosophy can paste the particulars into the text, as seductive paintings would hoodwink it into believing.

<div align="right">(Adorno 1973a: 11)</div>

In Adorno's 1965 notebooks, we find the following excursion:

By virtue of its mode of operation, all philosophy has a prejudice in favor of idealism. For it must operate with concepts and is unable to stick contents, non-concepts, into its text ….. However, this ensures that a priority is given to concepts as the materials of philosophy…. But philosophy is able to become cognizant of and to name this necessarily postulated *pseudos* [untruth], and when it goes on thinking from that point it is further able if not to eliminate it, at least to restructure it so that all its statements are immersed in the consciousness of that untruth.

<div align="right">(Adorno 2008: fn19, 218)</div>

The Aesthetic Utopia

The utopia of art, at least of musical composition, is hence made up of that which it can deliver to counter the chronic insufficiency of philosophy. By confronting the material, compositional thought – found for example in collage or in installations that embody a 'thinking' in the form of things, similar to a musical composition that continuously forms new constellations to demonstrate something through and with moments that presentation alone is unable to provide – still, however, like the logic of discourse, uses an analog unambiguity of elements, and an exactitude of sequences and sequiturs in the sense of a *deductio*. In its own way, it ensures the resurrection of the excluded, of the societal dregs and that which has not been settled, that which philosophy, in the form of the critique of philosophy, attempts to save in vain. Artistic praxis is not inferior to theoretical practice, neither in terms of intellect nor of precision. It is even able, without a structure of recursion or returning, to integrate knowledge gained from recursion and reflection in the sensual realm alone, making it no less enlightening.

The paradox of philosophy is that it attempts to use concepts to say what cannot in fact be said with concepts (Adorno 1973b: vol. 1, 56 and 1973a: 153); the aesthetic reflection of art pokes its finger in just this wound to 'indirectly' mediate the unsaid. 'The plain contradictoriness of this challenge is that of philosophy itself, which is thereby qualified as dialectics before getting entangled in its individual contradictions. The work of philosophical self-reflection consists in unraveling that paradox' (Adorno 1973a: 9). Art, on the other hand, makes it possible to grasp that paradox as a direct experience.

That which language philosophizes only to fall back into silence, art can expose as a riddle that confuses, because no clues are given as to how to interpret it. Thought, with its inherent violence of exclusion, can only create contradictions, making its efforts in vain. For art, however, such contradictions are an elixir. Thus, that which logic requires and discourse forbids is transformed in the work of art to become something that explodes the systematic in the system, the system's tendency to close itself off: 'Since that totality is structured to accord with logic, however, whose core is the principle of the excluded middle, whatever will not fit this principle, whatever differs in quality, comes to be designated as a contradiction. Contradiction is non-identity under the aspect of identity' (Adorno 1973a: 5). Art, in contrast, is able to coexist with contradiction and even make it productive. It takes that which in philosophy is irreconcilable or even undiscovered and puts it on display. The 'matters of true philosophical interest', Adorno continues, are therefore 'nonconceptuality, individuality, and particularity' or, in the real meaning of the word, aesthetics (Adorno 1973a: 8). It expresses this interest, surrounded by totalitarian conceptualization, by calling attention to that which is immune to the cooptation of the conceptual, thus striving to regain whatever escapes the rage of the system.[7] It is art which must capture the always elusive moment of singularity, must bolster its recalcitrance and provoke its rebelliousness so that it can, time and again, expand its non-conformist impact.

   This is the point at which philosophy, as understood by Adorno, makes inroads into sociology, and music into the sociology of music, to concretize that which is formulated by abstract thought. For sociology is not simply the description or even theory of society, it is a critique thereof. While philosophical critique is aimed at philosophy itself, at its failure at the conceptual level – coming to a head when conceptual mediation (*Vermittlung*) becomes incommunicable and points towards something outside itself – in the sociology of music, the problem of *Vermittlung* revolves around communicating the relationship of philosophy and art to society, including how both, as forms of critical intervention, can themselves tackle the problem of social injustice. This is most clear in the final chapter of Adorno's *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, entitled 'Mediation', which looks again at the difficult dialectics of this concept and its relational structure. Music, the least material of the arts, is particularly elusive, since it 'denies directly social data' (Adorno 1976: 195). Nonetheless, and this is Adorno's main point,

> esthetic and sociological questions about music are indissolubly, constitutively, interwoven…. Esthetic rank and the structures' own social truth content are essentially related even though not directly identical. No music has the slightest esthetic worth if it is not socially true, if only as a negation of untruth; no social content of music is valid, without an esthetic objectification.
>
> (Adorno 1976: 197)

But how can we elucidate this rather dogmatic-sounding idea, namely that art and society are interwoven and that music, especially new music, has a critical 'tone', and a drive to resist? Throughout his life, Adorno railed against the naivety of the logic of representation, the idea that musical material is an unfiltered mirror of social facts. He despised theories of reflection, such as those proposed by Georg Lukács or by apologists of socialist realism (see for example Lukács 1972, esp. vol. 1). For him, mimesis was neither mimicry nor adaptation, but *difference*, or a bearing in mind of insufficiencies and failures. Art deals with that which goes wrong in society, and incoherent material, fragmented motifs, and fragile forms show something of the missteps of society itself, which has left its traces. For this reason, works of art are more intimate with dissonance, with that which is 'shocking' or 'alienated', than they are with meanwhile anachronistic forms of beauty and representational-ism.[8] Art, as Adorno stated repeatedly in his explorations of aesthetics, is a mimetic behavior that renounces mimesis. It is the voice of 'nothing' – of negativity. It mediates that which cannot be mediated by protecting the interests of the unassimilable, of the exception, of that which cannot be brought to closure, defending them against social co-optation, against the logic of economics, and against the ubiquity of usefulness. A mimesis of the failure of mimesis is therefore a mimesis of the excluded that cedes to the demands of the twisted and the monstrous. For these reasons, the telos of musical compositions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is the rejection of its commodity form. It is the stamp of its resistance to exploitation, through which art best manifests its longing for and simultaneous distance from society and its totalization of the totalitarian. That is why Adorno continually found new variations of stating, for example in his 1958–9 lectures on aesthetics, that artistic 'expression always amounts to the expression of suffering' and helps to bring to the fore that which is 'not rational', to 'object to the ever-advancing control of nature itself' (Adorno 1997: 49; 50).

It is therefore necessary, as intimated at the start, to see Adorno's understanding of '*Vermittlung*' or 'mediation' dialectically. Adorno says as much in his discussion of 'divergence' in his *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*. Mediation does not occur 'outwardly', but 'within the matter' and without clearly identifiable results (Adorno 1976: 207). Mediation is in this case more akin to philosophy, but 'conceptlessly known, not photographed' (Adorno 1976: 209). Hence, '[t]he relation of works of art to society is comparable to Leibniz's monad. Windowless –', and all the more opaque the less explicitly it acts (Adorno 1976: 211). This also means that 'all of society' and its will to rule is sedimented within every individual piece, within every work of art, including the concurrent oppression and the stigmata that it inflicts upon its subjects: wild, unsystematic, and erratic (Adorno 1976: 213). 'Concrete mediation', Adorno explains in his notes on Beethoven, is 'the whole, as pure becoming', which however, can only be understood by interpreting the wounds, the scribblings, the symptoms (Adorno 1998a: 24). The traces of societal violence and guilt are found deep within the material, in the very

structures of the compositions, not as a program that can be extracted, but as a path that is almost impossible to decipher, just as in psychoanalysis, symptoms hint at much stronger suppressed experiences. For this reason, sociology and aesthetics 'are not immediately one: no work of art can vault the chasm to existence – its own or society's – which defines it as a work of art' (Adorno 1976: 215). And yet, this gap and the impossibility of bridging it is the source of art's utopia. Art interacts with society by confronting it and stripping from it the semblance of objectivity and permanence. This is the source of the aporia that continually raises its head (Adorno 1976: 215): art's preferred means is incomprehensibility. 'Every dissonance is a small remembrance of the suffering', every consonance is a reminder of something still uncompleted and out of harmony (Adorno 2018: 39). Art, as the forming of the deformed, in this way returns to the subject that which has been denied or taken away in real life.

In other words, 'mediation', can only take place when it is completely negative. Here is the site where philosophy, sociology, aesthetics, and theory – as well as mediation and *Vermittlung* – intersect and interfuse. While the philosophy of negation attempts to think conceptually of the negation of the singular by the concept, sociology has discovered the singularity of the non-subsumable and the non-identical, or alterity, as a site of social resistance. Where theory is able only to conceptualize its own inability to express itself, reaching the apex of theoretical self-reflection: the suspension of its rights, aesthetics is able to restitute that which has been suppressed and excluded, giving it a home in the sensual. And where, finally, 'mediation' states the absolute necessity of an immediate Other, it also reaches its limits, which, however, contain a hint of its utopian potential, expressed not in a vision of success, but in the self-assertion of something intransigent and unfulfillable.

Philosophical *Vermittlung*/mediation, as the evocation of that which cannot be transmitted conceptually and the utopia of which is art; and sociological mediation, as deciphering the symptoms of the incompatibility and irreconcilability of the subject with the 'administrated world'; and, finally, aesthetic mediation, as those elements of the sensual constellations of artistic works that jump out; provide stumbling blocks, and are wild and insubordinate (*unfüglich*) – all three belong together. Mutually, they reveal manifestations of the same phenomenon, and only in their interaction and contradiction do they express the 'truth of untruth', which Adorno, in his negative dialectics, his critical theory of society, and in his aesthetics, was continually seeking to expose, albeit always under a different guise.

Notes

1 Hegel 1970a: vol.5, 63–79; Hegel 1970b: §§ 61–78, 148–168.
2 Adorno's and Schelling's philosophies meet in this critique of Hegelian dialectics, although the respective value they accord the terms 'negative' and 'positive' is inverted. Nevertheless, both see art as the custodian of that which evades the Hegelian system. See Sziborsky 2019.

3 This passage is aimed in particular at superficial critique as found in the 'socialist aesthetics' of the GDR [German Democratic Republic]. All translations by Laura Radosh unless otherwise noted.

  On this see in particular Inwood 1992: 183–184.

4 An (unauthorized) transcription of Adorno's 1967–68 lectures on aesthetics states explicitly: 'The task of aesthetics is rather to understand this incomprehensibility to understanding' which has a twofold meaning: understanding the incomprehensibility of the artworks and the development of a historical understanding that the works represent both their own incomprehensibility and the demand that this incomprehensibility should be understood; see Adorno 1973.

5 An (unauthorized) transcription of Adorno's 1967–68 lectures on aesthetics states explicitly: 'The task of aesthetics is rather to understand this incomprehensibility to understanding' which has a twofold meaning: understanding the incomprehensibility of the artworks and the development of a historical understanding that the works represent both their own incomprehensibility and the demand that this incomprehensibility should be understood; see Adorno 1973.

6 The 'riddle character of art' is one of the fundamental motifs of Adorno's aesthetics. He refers to it as early as 1956 in the essay 'Music, Language and their Relationship in Contemporary Composition' and again in the lectures compiled in Adorno 2018: 9, 17–18 and in the lecture 'Vers une musique informelle', 305ff.

7 The system is the belly turned mind and rage is the mark of each and every idealism' Adorno continues in Adorno 1973a: 23.

8 On Adorno's concept of 'mimesis' see in particular Adorno 1997: 45ff.

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3   Beyond mediation

Esteban Buch

Mediation has been a keyword in the sociology of music over the last few decades, allowing for new appraisals of the agency of music, and of the role of technical and social intermediaries between producer and receptor. Among others, Antoine Hennion and Georgina Born have developed a sociology of mediation that, according to Born, provides an invitation to see music as 'a medium that destabilizes some of our most cherished dualisms concerning the separation not only of subject from object, but present from past, individual from collectivity, the authentic from the artificial, and production from reception' (Born 2005: 8). However, throughout their work the concept of mediation remains polysemic and relatively undefined, and that is arguably one of the reasons why it has had such a heuristic power in the first place.

Theodor W. Adorno was not absent from that conversation, but his own approach to mediation did not undergo systematic scrutiny. This would have been no easy task, given the evolving meanings and contexts of the concept in his writings, from the 1930s to the 1960s. The role of intermediaries and that of technological and social mediations are addressed in *Current of Music* and in several early texts on the culture industry, including *Dialectics of Enlightenment*. The word *mediation* seldom occurs in them, though; arguably, only today's dominant understanding of it allows a retrospective reading of them as being 'on' mediation. On the other hand, his 1962 book, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* does include an important chapter entitled 'Mediation', where the term chiefly designates the capacity of a work of music to reflect society's contradictions to the very extent that they are autonomous from its determinations. Also, in *Aesthetic Theory*, this kind of Hegelian *Vermittlung* provides for 'art – as something spiritual – to undergo subjective mediation in its objective constitution' (Adorno 2002: 41).

This chapter highlights some of these conceptual tensions, before pointing out the simultaneous existence, in Adorno's oeuvre, of hints of a sociology of music based on the opposite of mediation, namely immediacy. This happens in two different, yet somehow complementary ways. On one side, Adorno claims in his 1936 article 'Über Jazz' that 'the pace of the gait itself – language bears witness to this – has an immediate reference [*unmittelbaren Bezug*] to coitus' (Adorno 1989: 62), thus suggesting a relationship between

music and the body that is not mediated by musical conventions or techniques. On the other side, in some postwar texts, Adorno describes Arnold Schoenberg's music as encapsulating *Angst* by eschewing representation, and allowing for the perception of the 'subcutaneous' (Adorno 1981: 152). This connects to his 'after Auschwitz' claim that, in *A Survivor from Warsaw*, the composer 'suspends the aesthetic sphere through the recollection of experiences which are inaccessible to art' (Adorno 1981: 170). Thus, the Freudian opposition between Eros and Thanatos arguably articulates Adorno's conceptual alternative to mediation, in a way that has scarcely received any scholarly attention, and that is potentially heuristic for contemporary research.

'Une sociologie de l'intermédiaire'

The concept of mediation becomes salient in music studies in France in the 1980s, with Antoine Hennion's ethnography of the work of music professionals, such as artistic directors, whose role in the production of pop songs he describes in the article 'Une sociologie de l'intermédiaire' (Hennion 1983). This essay was included in a special issue on artistic professions of the journal *Sociologie du travail.* In the introduction, Raymonde Moulin, a specialist of visual art markets, points out that Hennion's contribution was 'founded on a system of analogies between the fabrication of pop music and scientific experimentation in laboratories' (Moulin 1983: 385). Hennion himself acknowledges the precedent of the sociology of science, namely Bruno Latour's early work on Pasteur (Hennion 1983: 464). Thus, cross-fertilization between the emergent sociology of artistic professions and early actor-network theory forms the basis of what Hennion eventually named, not a 'sociology of intermediaries', but 'a sociology of mediation'. This was the subtitle of his 1993 book, *La Passion musicale*, originally a dissertation entitled *La médiation musicale,* presented at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris (Hennion 2016 [1993]).

Such a switch from operator to operation, as he described it, resulted in a more inclusive concept than a descriptor of social actors.

> Understanding the work of art as a mediation, in keeping with the lesson of critical sociology – writes Hennion –, means reviewing the work in all the details of the gestures, bodies, habits, materials, spaces, languages, and institutions which it inhabits. Styles, grammar, systems of taste, programmes, concert halls, schools, entrepreneurs, etc.: without all these accumulated mediations, no beautiful work of art appears.
>
> (Hennion 2002: 2)

This approach to mediation led to hyperbolic claims such as 'music *is* a theory of mediation', and 'music *is* a sociology'. (Hennion 2016: 3 and 246 emphasis added).

Tia DeNora's research also focuses on music production's intermediaries, and their crucial role in shaping musicians' 'reputation in-the-making'. In her 1995 book, *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius*, DeNora analyzes the role of patrons, amateurs, publishers, critics, and other social actors, and claims that 'Beethoven's eventual success was the product of social mediation' (DeNora 1995: 5). The qualification of mediation as 'social' differs from the 'musical mediation' she fleetingly alludes to in her work from 2000, *Music in Everyday Life*:

> Music can be seen to place in the foreground of perception an ongoing, physical and material 'way of happening' into which actors may slip, fall, acquiesce. This passing over into music, this musical mediation of action, is often observable, often known to self as a feeling or energy state.
>
> (DeNora 2004: 160)

Now, despite her affinities with Hennion, whose work she championed in the English-speaking academia, *mediation* is not a keyword in DeNora's sociology of music. Nor is it in Pierre-Michel Menger's *Le paradoxe du musicien,* a pioneering 1983 study of avant-garde music in France, focused on composers, institutions, and '*intermédiaires professionnels*', which is praised in a preface by Raymonde Moulin as a 'sociology not only of creators, but also of musical creation' (Menger 1983: 6). This might be related to DeNora acknowledging her reading of Howard Becker's 1982 *Art Worlds,* as 'something of a watershed' (DeNora 2003: xi), where occurrences of *intermediaries* are paramount, and *mediation* nowhere to be found (Becker 2008). In 1988, Menger, in turn, wrote a preface for the French edition of Becker's book, which became an important reference in his later work, and does not address mediation as such either (Menger 2009).

On the other hand, *mediation* does play a significant role in Georgina Born's 1995 *Rationalizing Culture.* Focused on the iconic French avant-garde institution IRCAM, the Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/ Musique, founded by Pierre Boulez in 1974, the book 'stresses the multi-textuality of music as culture, and the need to analyze its various mediations – aural, visual-textual, technological, social' (Born 1995: 17). In her 2005 article 'On Musical Mediation', the concept gives further programmatic impetus to Latour's actor-network theory [ANT] and to Alfred Gell's anthropology of art. 'Music's mediations have taken a number of forms, cohering into what we might term assemblages, which themselves endure and take particular historical shapes' (Born 2005: 8). A footnote adds: 'I define a (musical) assemblage as a particular combination of mediations (sonic, discursive, visual, artefactual, technological, social, temporal) characteristic of a certain musical culture and historical period'. This echoes her acknowledgment of Paul Rabinow's and Gilles Deleuze's readings of Michel Foucault, who defined a *dispositif* as 'a resolutely heterogeneous grouping comprising discourses, institutions, architectural arrangements, policy decisions, laws, administrative

measures, scientific statements, philosophic, moral and philanthropic propositions' (quoted in Rabinow 2003: 51). In a 2010 plea for a 'relational musicology', Born distinguishes four kinds of 'social mediation', namely 'socialities' produced by musical practice and 'virtual collectivities' derived from listening, as well as the embodiment of 'structures of class, race, nation, gender and sexuality', and of wider economic and political forces (Born 2010: 232). For all its intellectual sophistication, mediation-cum-assemblage or *dispositif* exemplifies the relative indetermination of a concept that allows first to speak simultaneously of 'musical mediation', 'social mediation' and 'technological mediation', and later to sort out four heterogeneous kinds of 'social mediation' itself.

Both Hennion's and Born's expansion of the concept of mediation was attuned to trends outside the sociology of music. In Bruno Latour's 1994 article, 'On Technical Mediation', mediation is less defined than exemplified through four different meanings or subcategories, namely translation, composition, reversible blackboxing, and delegation. 'Everything in the definition of macro social order is due to the enrollment of nonhumans – that is, to technical mediation', says Latour, thus summarizing one of ANT's crucial contributions to the epistemology of the social sciences (Latour 1994: 51). In his 2015 essay, 'On Radical Mediation', Richard Grusin writes in turn that 'all activity is mediation', and that 'there is no discontinuity between human and nonhuman agency, or semiosis'. Putting forward William James's 'radical empiricism' and Charles Sanders Peirce's 'thirdness', he calls for a break 'with the tradition from Hegel to Adorno and [Raymond] Williams, in which mediation is secondary to *ontos* or being' (Grusin 2015: 140–141). Also, in her recent *Social Appearances*, Barbara Carnevali makes a case for 'aesthetic mediation' being necessary to all social communication (Carnevali 2020: 28).

Together with the critique of the Hegelian tradition, we can stress Grusin's remark as a useful reminder that Theodor W. Adorno was indeed crucial in discussions on mediation, both in the sociology of music and beyond. In her 2005 article, Born writes that by 'rejecting idealist ontologies in favour of a materialist aesthetics predicated on the analysis of mediation and of the evolution of musical materials, Adorno began the project on which later writers such as Tia DeNora and Antoine Hennion are now engaged' (Born 2005: 12). De Nora states in her 2003 book, *After Adorno*:

> In particular, my aim is to discuss the topics that formed the core of Adorno's agenda, in ways that make them amenable to empirical investigation. It is for this reason that I have called the book 'After Adorno' and I hope that readers will appreciate the double meaning here – both in homage to Adorno … and, simultaneously, moving beyond (to the side of?) his original methods and levels of theorizing.
>
> (DeNora 2003: xii)

In this book, however, she addresses mediation quite fleetingly, by quoting Hennion once (DeNora 2003: 86) and by calling 'mediation' how 'cultural

materials, of which music is one, enter into and therefore mediate knowledge formation', both in 'the realm of personal and self-knowledge', and in the 'realms where more "public" forms of knowledge are wrought' (DeNora 2003: 68).

Hennion discusses Adorno's concept of mediation in *La passion musicale* at some length, if only to denounce what he sees as two incompatible positions. On one side, he says, Adorno is 'the thinker who formulates the refusal of any form of mediation' (Hennion 2016: 60). This he gathers from Adorno's ideas on the autonomy of music, especially *Aesthetic Theory*, while simultaneously downplaying *Dialectics of Enlightenment*'s discussion of the culture industry's intermediaries as fatally biased by personal dislikes. On the other hand, Hennion apologetically singles out Adorno's *Mahler* as a 'unique aesthetic novel' (Hennion 2016: 67), where 'with consummate literary skill, he deploys the multiple opacities of a long and heterogeneous series of mediations'. For him, Adorno 'systematically does the opposite to what he claims to be doing' by engaging in this particular book, in a 'literary' description of mediations 'outside any empirical control', while defending elsewhere a non-mediated, allegedly solipsistic concept of art (Hennion 2016: 64–65).

This account arguably misrepresents the theory of autonomy by obliterating its dialectical nature, illustrated by Leibniz's 'monads', which in Adorno's view are anything but 'solipsistic':

> That artworks as windowless monads 'represent' what they themselves are not – he writes in *Aesthetic Theory* – can scarcely be understood except in that their own dynamic, their immanent historicity as a dialectic of nature and its domination, not only is of the same essence as the dialectic external to them but resembles it without imitating it.
>
> (Adorno 2002: 5)

At a more empirical level, in the chapter 'Mediation' of *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* Adorno says the very opposite of what Hennion claims he says, namely that the analysis of 'countless mediations' [*ungezählte Vermittlungen*] is relevant for a sociological approach to *all* music, be it the product of the culture industry, or an 'autonomous' artwork (Adorno 1988: 202).

Hennion's dismissal of Adorno might have been part of a strategy of distinction aimed at buttressing his claim to originality, which also shows up in his deeming Becker's analytical strategy '*simple et traditionnel*' (Hennion 1985: 196). Yet a similar critique of Adorno as '*le modèle de l'indifférence aux médiations*' appears already in Menger's 1983 book on avant-garde music institutions (Menger 1983: 18). Also, in her 1995 book on IRCAM, Born acknowledges Adorno's tracing 'the ensemble of mediations of musical practice – aesthetic, theoretical, technological, social, economic – as a decentered totality', yet she claims that 'he fails to provide a sociology of "autonomous" music to match his aesthetic theory' (Born 1995: 22).

Beyond the personal strategies of each author, this suggests that, at the time, Adorno was received mostly as a formalist 'philosopher of music', against which

the emerging sociology/anthropology of music struggled to define itself. It also bears witness to the fact that Adorno's notion of mediation is far from univocal and transparent. Indeed, the polysemy and vagueness of the term in recent literature can often be traced back to his writings.

'Ungezählte Vermittlungen'

The 'countless mediations' mentioned in *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* herald an unbounded diversity of potential referents and meanings. Indeed, the passage alludes to the epistemological challenge their very multiplicity entails, as a concession in the way of stressing the primacy of 'production'. Society's 'musical consciousness', says Adorno, is 'finally determined by the production of music, by the work congealed in compositions, although the infinity of intermediaries [*ungezählte Vermittlungen*] is not altogether transparent' (Adorno 1977: 202). The emphasis on production is coherent with the epistemological subsidiarity of reception studies throughout Adorno's oeuvre, up to *Aesthetic Theory*. According to Max Paddison (1993: 123), 'he considers that, because musical reception is itself socially mediated, it cannot as an area of study be a substitute for the analysis of the specificity of the work itself'. Indeed, Adorno's negative formulation on 'countless' mediations does not help to disentangle their opacity – and, of course, neither does the inaccurate translation of *Vermittlung* as *intermediary* in the 1976 English edition.

The issue is further complicated by the fact that Adorno does not often use the word *mediation* to describe phenomena that count as paradigmatic examples of it today, namely technical devices. Starting in the 1930s, Adorno addresses the role of technical mediation in the texts within the project *Current of Music*, and in his writings on the culture industry, including, not only the chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, but also his essays on jazz, on popular music, on the 'fetish character in music', and others. From radio as a source for music reproduction, and radio as having a 'voice' of its own, to the recording industry and its actors, film music, and standardization techniques, all these topics, and more, were intended to seize the paramount role of mediation in the cultural sphere, and how binary oppositions like 'producer and consumer', or 'music vs society', are by themselves incapable of providing adequate descriptions of practice.

Yet *mediation* is not a keyword in this part of the Adornian corpus. In most texts of the 1930s and 1940s, including the chapter on the culture industry of *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, it never appears at all. And when it does, as in a few occurrences in *Current of Music*, its meaning is far from univocal. Technical mediation does seem to be privileged, as in this comment on loudspeakers:

> When a private person in a private room is subjected to a public utility mediated by a loudspeaker, his response takes on aspects of a response to

an authoritarian voice even if the content of that voice or the speaker to whom the individual is listening has no authoritarian features whatsoever.

(Adorno 2009: 70)

Elsewhere, speaking of 'technical structure in general', Adorno comments: 'Nor does the authority of the monopolistically and administrated means of communication, which underlies those processes, directly produce these irrational effects. They are mediated by the technical structure of what the listener comes in contact with when listening to his set' (Adorno 2009: 349). With radio, he writes:

> there is no gap between the time in which something is happening and the time in which one is listening to it, and therefore no mediation seems to introduce between the two spheres, such as the printed word in serving the publication and distribution of news. This immediacy and presence has a touch of paradoxy since the very beginning.
>
> (Adorno 2009: 377)

Yet another example, taken from the same book, points towards a kind of social mediation:

> As against [Paul] Bekker, the medium in which the individuality of the listener is sublated and integrated is no community, either real or fictitious, but the organizing principle of the work of art itself, which is pointing, in a mediated manner only, to the possibility of a real community.
>
> (Adorno 2009: 352)

In this case, *mediation* designates the operation through which the 'organizing principle of the work of art' relates to social phenomena, in a way akin to its later meaning in *Introduction to the Sociology of Music.* For Adorno, this is a *formal* operation, whose best examples are to be found in musical technique, not in the technological sense, but in the compositional one. 'Use any pop song to illustrate song form, showing the idea of the bridge as that of mediation', he writes in 'What a Music Appreciation Hour Should Be', an essay included in *Current of Music* (Adorno 2009: 225). Also, in Haydn's music 'the themes are not in stark contrast; rather, he constantly mediates between them. This constant mediation produces the image of a whole that does not simply *exist,* but rather *becomes*' (Adorno 2009: 256).

When speaking specifically about music, be it a pop song or Haydn, Adorno suggests that, rather than technical mediation being a particular case of mediation, mediation is what technique actually does. But what is technique? In his 1936 letter to Benjamin on the *Work of Art* essay, Adorno suggests that 'technicity' encompasses both technological devices *and* compositional procedures, in other words, technology and technique: 'You underestimate the technical

character of autonomous art and overestimate that of dependent art – he writes –; put simply, this would be my principal objection' (Adorno & Benjamin 1999: 131). Thus, the polysemy of mediation is articulated, indeed cumulated, with that of technique. These elective affinities between mediation and technique do seem to give technical mediation a paradigmatic status, at least at an epistemological level. We read in *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*: 'The interrelation [*Vermittlung*] of music and society becomes evident in technology [*Technik*]. Its unfoldment is the *tertium comparationis* between superstructure and infrastructure' (Adorno 1988: 216).

The earlier comment on Paul Bekker's approach to the symphony gives a hint of why, in later texts by Adorno, the concept of mediation is headed not on explaining technique as such, but on the 'organizing principle' of the articulation of music and society, especially through his conception of the autonomy of art. This is consistent with John Guillory's remark that 'communications theory is eager now to extrapolate a general process of mediation from the operation of technical media, but the philosophical tradition put the term for process in every way *first*' (Guillory 2010: 343). The idea of a work of art, whose formal structure is all the more related to social structure the more autonomous it is from it, is unthinkable without a Hegelian *Vermittlung*; that is, the operation that allows dialectical thinking to function by negating a negation that has conserved what it had negated (Löwith 1972). Speaking of mediation in Adorno's conception of the subject–object relationship, Brian O'Connor says that 'Adorno believes this concept to be essentially Hegelian'. Yet, he suggests, 'mediation conflates, rather than synthesizes, two very different claims: first, a materialist claim about the priority of non-conceptuality and second, an idealist claim about the conceptual nature of experience' (O'Connor 1999: 12). Moreover, in O'Connor's view, 'mediation is, in fact, an equivocal term which in both Hegel and Adorno covers a variety of entirely different conceptual relations' (O'Connor 1999: 1).

However, Adorno's conception of autonomous art is distinct from Hegel's own views on the relationship between artist and society. In the section 'The spiritual work of art' in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, the 'bard' [*Saenger*] is a mediator between the *epos* and the community, but the word Hegel uses for that is not *Vermittlung*, mediation, but *Mitte*, a more static *medium* or middle term.

> He is the organ vanishing within its content; what counts is not his own self but his muse, his universal song. But what in fact is present here is the syllogism, in which the extreme of universality, the world of the gods, is combined with that of singularity, the bard, by the mediating middle [*durch die Mitte*] of particularity. The mediating middle [*die Mitte*] is the people in its heroes, who, like the bard, are singular people but only as representationally thought, and they are as a result universal, like the free extreme of universality itself, namely, the gods.
>
> (Hegel 2018: 418–418)

Adorno, instead, does use the word *Vermittlung* to make a comparable point:

> The subjective mediation, the social element of the composing individuals and the behavior patterns that make them work so and not otherwise, consists in the fact that the compositorial subject, however necessarily it may mistake itself for a mere being-for-itself, constitutes a moment of the social productive forces.
>
> (Adorno 1988: 211)

The tension between *Mitte* and *Vermittlung*, between a passive and an active view of the role of intermediaries, is another symptom of the difficulty of obtaining a stable picture of the category.

Towards the immediacy of music

This quick overview of the concept of mediation, from recent sociology of music, through Adorno, back to Hegel, might suggest that, as a category, it is hopelessly vague. The polysemy of the word *mediation* was arguably one of the reasons for it having such a heuristic power in the first place, but this has probably worn out through the very success of the empirical program it contributed to inspire. Along these lines, one might reach the conclusion that it would be better to discard it altogether in contemporary research. This is what the title of the present essay, 'Beyond Mediation', might suggest at first glance. However, it aims to make quite a different case, venturing 'beyond' mediation by putting its contrary, immediacy – as it also appears in some texts by Adorno – to the test.

This still means to be in Hegelian territory, so to speak; for *Unmittelbarkeit* is directly related, and indeed inseparable, from *Vermittlung*: 'The determination of mediation is contained in that very immediacy, against which the *understanding* (in accordance with its own fundamental principle of immediate knowing) is not allowed to have any objections', writes Hegel (*Encyclopaedia Logic* §6 in O'Connor 1999: 11). Adorno comments Hegel's point in *Negative Dialectics*:

> Mediation by no means says that everything would go into it, but postulates what it is mediated by, something not completely worked through; immediacy itself however stands for a moment which does not require the cognition, the mediation, in the same way this latter does of the immediate. So long as philosophy employs the concepts immediate and mediate [*mittelbar*], which for the time being it can scarcely do without, its language announces the matter-at-hand, which the idealistic version of dialectics denied.
>
> (Adorno 2001a: 174)

Stressing the role of immediacy in Adorno's conception of cognitive activity does not mean attributing to him a kind of naïve realism, where sensorial data would no longer be associated with concepts. Brian O'Connor and Gilles Moutot discuss Adorno's critical stance following a similar analysis of Hegel by John McDowell (2008 [2003]), towards what they call, 'the myth of the given'. Against this last, O'Connor (2004: 99) says that, for Adorno, 'thought alone determines what the given comprises'. According to Moutot (2012: 72), Adorno holds to 'the reciprocal mediation of the functioning of sensibility and of the effectuation of conceptual capacities'. The relationship between mediation and immediacy is always dialectical. Rather than imagining a subject listening to music as a 'given' without engaging in cognitive activity, Adorno's take posits an unmediated, 'matter-at-hand' access to music by actors who skew the mediation of *aesthetic* experience.

A first case in point is Adorno's critical appraisal of jazz, which he seems to conceive as having an unmediated relationship with sex. This is to be understood, again, in a dialectical sense, for his first contention is that jazz has only the *appearance* of immediacy. In his 1936 article 'Über Jazz' he takes issue with its 'improvisational immediacy', 'the unity of the pseudo-liberated and pseudo-immediate and of the march-like collective basic meter', and in general with 'the immediacy of its use' (Adorno 1989: 53, 67, 48). On the other hand, he does attribute to jazz a relation to sex that is not an appearance:

> All too willingly, the hits give their contingency a sexual meaning which is by no means an unconscious one; they all tend toward the obscene gesture. The cheese then reminds us of anal regression; the bananas provide surrogate satisfaction for the woman, and the more absurd the nonsense, the more immediate its sex appeal. The pace of the gait itself – language bears witness to this – has an immediate reference [*unmittelbaren Bezug*] to coitus; the rhythm of the gait is similar to the rhythm of sexual intercourse, and if the new dances have demystified the erotic magic of the old ones, they have also – and therein at least they are more advanced than one might expect – replaced it with the drastic innuendo of sexual consummation. This is expressed in the extreme in some so-called 'dance academies', where 'taxi girls' are available with whom one can perform dance steps which occasionally lead to male orgasm.
>
> (Adorno 1989: 62)

The *unmittelbaren Bezug* Adorno posits between the rhythm of music and that of copulating bodies is an actual physical identity, which today might find an updated empirical rationale in the findings of cognitivist psychology: 'The reasons we enjoy sexual experiences – says Adam Safron (2016: 5) may overlap heavily with the reasons we enjoy musical experience, both in terms of proximate (i.e. neural entrainment and induction of trance-like states) and ultimate (i.e. mate choice and bonding) levels of causation'. Adorno's acknowledgment of the 'conscious' sex content of the cheese and bananas

mentioned in the lyrics of some hits of the time arguably points in the same direction. This surprising reversal of the Freudian method of taking dreams as a mediation of unconscious materials postulates music as a direct manifestation of sex drive:

> This sexual moment is, however, deliberately emphasized in all jazz. In contrast to the practice of psychoanalysis but using its terminology, one would like to designate the symbolic representation of sexual union as the manifest dream content of jazz, which is intensified rather than censored by the innuendo of the text and the music. One cannot free oneself of the suspicion that the crude and easily transparent sexual secretiveness of jazz conceals a secondary, deeper, and more dangerous secret.
>
> (Adorno 1989: 62)

This 'secret', as Adorno sees it, is social domination. For him, jazz is a 'music of slaves' or, in psychoanalytic terms, a sonic form of castration. Since its publication, in 1936, this depiction has regularly caused outrage, not least because of a misunderstanding of the author's views on race, actually directed against racist assumptions about black people's 'natural' sensibility to rhythm (Buch 2020). In any case, these controversial statements do not annihilate the heuristic power of conceiving a subjective experience of music which does not imply the mediation of art and aesthetics. Rather, Adorno hears in that music – the music of the culture industry he so vehemently despises, as opposed to the autonomous music he reveres – what we might call, to stay in the Freudian realm, the very voice of Eros. The dance of jazz is described here as a means, and the taxi girls are active mediators – even if, in a typically masculinist stance, not a word is said about their own subjectivities. Yet the cumulative effect of the girl and the dance on the man is orgasm, an experience to which the understanding can hardly *object*, to paraphrase Hegel's dictum. In Adorno's view, orgasm comes as an unmediated result of an identity of formal traits between music and sex.

In the 1936 essay, the notion of an *unbittelbaren Bezug* between music and sex, that lies at the heart of a critique of the culture industry, was to become one of the most distinctive features of the Frankfurt School. Yet, throughout Adorno's oeuvre, the thread of a 'sexual theory' of music remained mostly implicit (Buch 2020). It is all the more striking to find a similar idea in the *Paralipomena* of *Aesthetic Theory*:

> The demise of art, which is today being proclaimed with as much glibness as resentment, would be false, a gesture of conformism. The desublimation, the immediate and momentary gain of pleasure that is demanded of art, is inner-aesthetically beneath art; in real terms, however, that momentary pleasure is unable to grant what is expected of it. The recently adopted insistence on culturing uncultivation, the enthusiasm for the beauty of street battles, is a reprise of futurist and dadaist actions.

The cheap aestheticism of short-winded politics is reciprocal with the faltering of aesthetic power. Recommending jazz and rock-and-roll instead of Beethoven does not demolish the affirmative lie of culture but rather furnishes barbarism and the profit interest of the culture industry with a subterfuge. The allegedly vital and uncorrupted nature of such products is synthetically processed by precisely those powers that are supposedly the target of the Great Refusal: these products are the truly corrupt.

(Adorno 2002: 319–320)

The notion of 'repressive desublimation', accounting for the apparent contradiction between the allegedly repressive nature of capitalist societies and the public proliferation of sex content, in the context of sexual liberation movements, is associated with Herbert Marcuse's 1955 *Eros and Civilisation* and 1964 *One-Dimensional Man.* Even if Marcuse is not named in this passage, it is a likely source for Adorno's using the word *Entsublimierung* in the first place (Lachaud 2009). Yet, as Max Paddison has argued, the concept of desublimation is akin to 'regressive listening', 'fetish character', and other expressions Adorno forged in the 1930s 'to discuss the phenomenon of treating art as a source of immediate gratification' (Paddison 1993: 133). The 1936 essay on jazz and the posthumous *Paralipomena* signal a persistent approach to cultural productions that, by positing them 'beneath' art and afar from 'aesthetic power', attribute to the subject an 'immediate' experience of music, whose foremost manifestation is no other than sexual pleasure. The fact that these ideas were inseparable from strongly negative moral and political judgements, and also from barely hidden personal distastes, is no argument against their originality and heuristic power for the sociology of music.

Adorno's views on the immediacy of jazz can be compared with those he held on music he perceived as its very opposite, namely the works of Arnold Schoenberg. In *Philosophy of New Music*, he says that in Schoenberg's expressionist works 'passions are no longer faked; on the contrary, undisguised, corporeal impulses of the unconscious, shocks, and traumas are registered in the medium of music'; indeed, 'the first atonal works are depositions, in the sense of psychoanalytic dream depositions'. He goes on to say that 'the seismographic record of traumatic shock at the same time becomes the technical law of music's form'. This implies nothing less than the 'destruction' of 'musical "mediation"', through the suppression of 'the distinction of theme and development, the steadiness of the harmonic flow, and the unbroken melodic line as well' (Adorno 2019: 35–37).

A similar idea appears in an article written shortly after Schoenberg's death in 1951 and published in *Prisms,* together with the famous sentence on poetry after Auschwitz. 'In the midst of the blindness of specialization, his music suddenly saw the light that shines beyond the aesthetic realm', writes Adorno. The article ends with a positive commentary of *A Survivor from Warsaw*: '[In] this piece, Schoenberg, acting on his own, suspends the aesthetic sphere

through the recollection of experiences which are inaccessible to art'. In particular, 'the Jewish song with which the *Survivor from Warsaw* concludes is music as the protest of mankind against myth' (Adorno 1981: 170–171).

Adorno's 1951 approval of Schoenberg's *Survivor* might be compared with what he writes about the same piece in his 1962 article *Engagement*, namely that 'there is something awkward and embarrassing' about it:

> The so-called artistic rendering of the naked physical pain of those who were beaten down with rifle butts contains, however distantly, the possibility that pleasure can be squeezed from it. The morality that forbids art to forget this for a second slides off into the abyss of its opposite. The aesthetic stylistic principle, and even the chorus' solemn prayer, make the unthinkable appear to have had some meaning; it becomes transfigured, something of its horror removed.
>
> (Adorno 1992: 88)

In ten years, his appraisal of Schoenberg's piece had radically changed, but the principle of his judgement had not. As in 1951, poetry and aesthetics are morally suspect, whereas the unmediated expression of physical suffering is not.

This goes along with the revisal in *Negative Dialectics* of his famous dictum on poetry 'after Auschwitz': 'Perennial suffering has as much right to express itself as the martyr has to scream; this is why it may have been wrong to say that poetry could not be written after Auschwitz' (Adorno 2001a: 354). On several occasions, Adorno speaks of Schoenberg's music as encapsulating *Angst* by eschewing representation, aesthetics, and art altogether, while allowing for a direct expression of the unconscious and the 'subcutaneous'. In the 1951 text, his music is characterized by 'the absence of all mediations': 'What he designated as the "subcutaneous" – the fabric of individual musical events, grasped as the ineluctable moments of an internally coherent totality – breaks through the surface, becomes visible and manifests itself independently of all stereotyped forms' (Adorno 1981: 152).

In Adorno's musical universe, atonal music and jazz are polar opposites in almost any conceivable sense: the first is autonomous, whereas the second is dependent; the first conveys the true historical experience of the times, while the second exemplifies the role of ideology in veiling historical experience; the first supersedes formal mediations, and the second is based on the standardization of formal mediations; the first is unpopular as a consequence of its negativity, whereas the second is popular as the consequence of its affirmative character; the first is demanding for the listener, while the second is easy-listening; the first is inassimilable by the market, and the second is pure merchandise; the first is what is left of art's ethical significance after Auschwitz, whereas the second is the musical expression of slavery and inhumanity. And yet, Schoenberg and jazz have something in common – something crucial for these two kinds of music's epitomising polar opposites in the first place, namely their unmediated relationship to the unconscious and the body.

The seismograph of culture

The importance of the body in Adorno has been highlighted by feminist authors Rebecca Comay (2000), Eva Geulen (2006), and Lisa Yun Lee (2006), among others. And, in these texts as elsewhere, the body is often related to sex. As Geulen points out, while *Minima Moralia* invites us to see the sexual act as a model for happiness and utopia, *Aesthetic Theory* compares the 'immanent dynamic' of artworks with sexual experience:

> This immanent dynamic is, in a sense, a higher-order element of what artworks are. If anywhere, then it is here that aesthetic experience resembles sexual experience, indeed its culmination. The way the beloved image is transformed in this experience, the way rigidification is unified with what is most intensely alive, effectively makes the experience the incarnate prototype of aesthetic experience.
>
> (Adorno 2002: 176)

Sexual experience as the prototype of aesthetic experience, orgasm as the prototype of musical climax, and even sex as the prototype of art, all this is quite far from the dominant view of Adorno as a radical anti-hedonist, which soon after the posthumous publication of *Aesthetic Theory* prompted Hans Robert Jauss's 'small apology' of aesthetic experience (Jauss 1982). It is also hard to square with Adorno's professed contempt for the 'culinary pleasures' of dependent art, as he sometimes writes echoing Kant's general view of music. Now, of course, sexual experience cannot be reduced to a bodily experience. But sex does participate in Adorno's thoughts about the body, against common perceptions about his work and personality. Even the common narrative on the infamous 1969 'bare-breasts incident' is such a cliché, which makes of the humiliating contact of the old-fashioned professor with three half-naked female students nothing less than the cause of his death (Yun Lee 2006) – an episode that can rather be seen today as an early example of feminist 'artivism', to which Adorno angrily responded: 'why me, one who has always stood against all erotic repression and sexual taboo!' (Müller-Doohm 2004: 286).

At the conceptual level, Adorno's thoughts on the body participates in his critique of Hegel in *Negative Dialectics*, where the importance of the body is stressed in favor of materialism. As Marc Sommer points out:

> Adorno makes of the somatic element the crucial instance of his objecting to the primacy of the spirit, as it dominates Hegel's philosophy. This has to do not only with the epistemological domain, but also with the moral domain, since bodily suffering, he claims, should be accepted in all its harshness, which no theodicy can ever compensate.
>
> (Sommer 2011: 14)

The association of the body with the unconscious in Adorno's vision of unmediated music also participates in this critique, as two levels of human reality that go against the reduction of the subject to consciousness.

Now, if the possibility of an art form set in unmediated contact with the pleasures and sufferings of the body enters into Adorno's critique of Hegel, it is also an indication of his indebtedness to Freud (Sherratt 2004). This is, of course, a major element in the project of critical theory as a whole, one whose consequences, however, are not straightforward when it comes to art and aesthetics. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno objects to the alleged reduction of art to psychic reality at the price of ignoring objective reality, and takes issue with the concept of sublimation (Adorno 2002: 8–11). Yet what Adorno says about *A Survivor* clearly elaborates on Freud's vision of war in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as the triumph of Thanatos, and Freudian vocabulary also inspires the description of Schoenberg's music as the 'deposition' of 'undisguised, corporeal impulses of the unconscious'. The 'subcutaneous', the screaming voice of a tortured self, the protocol of dreams, the traces of trauma, all this speaks of a human being who resists to death by saying *no* to reality as it stands.

Now, Adorno's interest for an expression with no aesthetic mediation suggests a culture lying outside the realm of hermeneutics so to speak. Schoenberg's music, he says, is 'the seismographic record of traumatic shock'. Why a seismograph? Not by accident, since in *Minima Moralia* he claims that 'taste is the truest seismograph of historical experience' (Adorno 2001b: 156). Already in 1938, he writes that since Mahler's music 'takes its material from regressive listening', in it 'this experience was seismographically recorded forty years before it permeated society' (Adorno 1978: 298). And further back in time, in an early article on Schubert – Adorno is twenty-five –, the seismograph already describes a music that, he says, moves the body without the mediation of the soul:

> In jagged lines, like a seismograph, Schubert's music has recorded the tidings of man's qualitative change. The right response is tears: the desperately sentimental tears of *Lilac Time* [the operetta *Dreimädlerhaus*] and tears from the trembling body [*erschüttertem Leib*]. Schubert's music brings tears to our eyes, without any questioning of the soul: this is how stark and real is the way that the music strikes us. We cry without knowing why, because we are not yet what this music promises for us. We cry, knowing in untold happiness, that this music is as it is in the promise of what one day we ourselves will be. This is music we cannot decipher, but it holds up to our blurred, over-brimming eyes the secret of reconciliation at long last.
>
> (Adorno 2005: 14)

Since the turn of the twentieth century, seismographs were used not only to predict the earth's catastrophic discontinuities, like earthquakes, but also to figure out its systemic continuities.

To the practitioners, the seismic survey of the whole earth, whether under-taken on a micro or a macro scale, offered what could be called a material substrate for the growing awareness among Western nation states of being globally embedded and interconnected in many terms: 'political, economic, scientific and cultural', writes Andrea Westermann, noting that 'across the different sciences of the time, the self-inscribing graphs were hailed as the true language of nature and the universal language of science' (Westermann 2011: 53 and 74).

Throughout Adorno's oeuvre, the seismograph is the name of a generic mechanical instrument that captures somatic, psychic, artistic, and cultural facts with the objectivity of natural science, without the mediation of the 'soul', nor that of hermeneutics. This scientific metaphor might look surpris-ing, given Adorno's critical stance towards positivism. Today, it could be perhaps replaced by an up-to-date medical device that, much in the way of a seismograph recording the vibrations of the earth, registers the vibrations of the human body – the *erschütterter Leib* –, namely *echography* (Buch 2020).

Still, the seismograph metaphor has the heuristic advantage of going beyond the individual. According to Gilles Moutot (2010: 21), by recording the variations of individual suffering, its needle responds to 'the tension between an inner nature, with all its more or less diffuse drive and affective dimensions, and a social order that imposes itself on it as a second nature'. Indeed, geological imagery was already key to Adorno's 1928 essay: 'Although Schubert's music may not always have the power of active will that rises from the inmost nature of Beethoven, its endemic shafts and fissures lead to the same chthonic depth where that will had its source' (Adorno 2005: 3). Along these lines, Adorno's seismograph invites to see cultural productions as part of the natural world – this nature whose fragility under the Anthro-pocene was so hauntingly foreseen in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* –, while suggesting an epistemological model for the humanities that would *not* be based on interpretation. At least, as much can be read in Adorno insistently describing works of music as being *themselves* technical, 'matter-of-hand', automated devices.

Yet, the very notion of art expressing something, be it the subcutaneous or the unconscious, still makes it into a kind of mediation. For all the allusions to immediacy, the first draft of Adorno's 1936 'theory of jazz' intended to solve, in very classical Marxist terms, 'the problem of "*Vermittlung*" between infrastructure and superstructure' (Chadwick 1995: 264). And what is a seis-mograph, if not a technological mediator?

Acknowledging this persistence of mediation does not amount to taking sides against Adorno with the sociologists of radical mediation, though. Adorno's vision of mediation and immediacy is always dialectical, and it does not presuppose the ontological stability of the object, nor its epistemological preeminence. 'Mediation is in the object itself, not something between the object and that to which it is brought', states Adorno, as quoted by Raymond Williams, who comments: 'works of art are mediated by specific social

relations but cannot be reduced to an abstraction of that relationship' (Williams 2015: 154). And this is, in the long term, an element of Hegel's legacy, despite and beyond all materialist reversals. In a sense, it is probably impossible to go beyond mediation without somehow remaining in Hegel's shadow. Beyond mediation, there is still more mediation. So be it.

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4   Media, Mediation and 'Bildung' in Adorno's *Current of Music*

Michela Garda

1 The Voice of the Radio

If we share something today with Adorno's experience, it is the shock of facing a technological revolution which questions our human, social, and political dimensions. Reflecting upon a technological revolution that changes our way of communication is fatefully linked to concern about the political subjects who could seize these new media as instruments of power. Adorno dealt with the second major technological revolution after printing: the mechanical reproduction of sound (via radio and phonography). From a historical-political point of view, he was concerned both with totalitarianism in Germany and the hidden powers steering mass culture in the United States. In fact, as Hullot-Kentor suggests, Adorno's involvement with radio in the first seven months after his arrival in New York, during which he produced the bulk of his reflections collected now in *Current of Music*, could hardly have been based on substantial experience in the United States (Hullot-Kentor 2006a: 34 and 2006b: 111). In many parts of *Radio Physiognomics*, Adorno hints at the authoritarian use of the radio in Germany, but other passages reveal that, for the emigrant, the recollection of Hitler's voice on the radio still lurked behind his obsession with the authoritarian character of the 'radio-voice', and within the very idea that radio does indeed have 'a voice':

> It may be safely said, however, that this sound possesses something of the vagueness and lack of clarity of bad photographic enlargements. At the same time, it also gains a specific sort of 'expression,' which can be described as aggressive, barking, and bellowing. It resembles somewhat a political harangue, hostile and threatening to the listener.
>
> <div align="right">(Adorno 2006: 90. See also 151 and 193)</div>

The experience of hearing Hitler's voice broadcast by radio has been vigorously evoked by Eric Havelock, who was born in the same year as Adorno. In his late collection of essays *The Muse Learns to Write*, Havelock recalls this experience as one of the seeds of his involvement with orality (Havelock 1986: 31–32).[1] In this context, he observes that 'Franklin Roosevelt and Adolph

Hitler embodied power and persuasion over men's minds which was electronically transmitted and which proved functionally essential to the kind of political influence that they wielded' (Havelock 1986: 31). For both of these thinkers, Adorno and Havelock, the radio experience was, first of all, that of a 'forced marriage' (to use Havelock's term) between voice and technology, with mainly political consequences. And, of course, it opened up different perspectives regarding their intellectual paths.

Currently, amid the digital age, we are experiencing a very similar feeling of shock, in the sense that we are dealing with the obscure, ambivalent power of digital media, and are mostly concerned with its political, social and aesthetical consequences (Floridi 2014). Of course, I do not intend to suggest here that we can learn something from Adorno in order to understand our present situation. However, we can be more attentive, and perhaps more sympathetic when rereading his oeuvre, letting go of the anxiety about jettisoning Adorno's uncomfortable heritage and peremptory judgments.[2]

2 Aura and the Search for Materialistic Aesthetics

It is worth remembering that Adorno's reflections about the radio are rooted in a double intellectual context: that of his new position at the Princeton Research Project, in addition to his ongoing discussion with Walter Benjamin about the problem of technological reproduction and the decay of the aura. According to Benjamin, technological reproduction marks the shift from the hand to the eye. Here, the focus rests on the transformation of perception, on the fact that, due to photography, 'the process of pictorial reproduction was enormously accelerated', because 'the eye perceives more swiftly than the hand can draw' enabling the eye 'to keep pace with speech' (Benjamin 2008: 21). The end of the millenarian alliance between the hand and the tool, the organic and the inorganic, reconceptualizes the tool as a medium in a twofold way: radically transforming human perception and redefining the relationship between original and copy. On the one hand, thanks to technology, visual art has shifted from the status of autographic to allographic. The new techniques of photography and cinema produce copies of originals, which exist only as master copies. On the other hand, these copies have lost the quality of original production made by the artist's hand, its 'auratic', in other words, its traditional 'aesthetic' value. This shift implies a transformation of the concept of art and its fruition. Therefore, the claim raised by Hennion and Latour (2003: 93–94) about the continuity between the traditional artistic practices of replicas (as in the case of copies of statues in antiquity, as well as engraving, etching, and lithography) and the modern medium of photography hinges on a misunderstanding of Benjamin's theory of technological mediation. On the contrary, the relative autonomy of replicas from their originals, which was already a characteristic of traditional practices, does not impact the overall conception of visual art.

The transformation of human perception enabled by the new media – the eye's acceleration and the discovery of what Benjamin later in the text calls

'optical unconscious' – finds a correlation in the new condition of mass culture. In Benjamin's words, they satisfy 'the desire of the present-day masses to "get closer" to things and their equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing's uniqueness by assimilating it as a reproduction' (Benjamin 2008. 23). The increase of the sense for 'all that is the same in the world' urges one to get hold of an object as a facsimile, a reproduction, an *Abbild*, instead of as an image, *Bild*. Thus, in mass culture, an 'urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at close range in an image [*Bild*], or, even more so, in a facsimile [*Abbild*], a reproduction … Uniqueness and permanence are as closely entwined in the latter as are transitoriness and repeatability in the former' (Benjamin 2008: 23). The shift from the image [*Bild*] to reproduction [*Abbild*] describes the different sides of the ontological status of the works related to time (permanence vs. transitoriness) and identity (uniqueness vs. repeatability).

This distinction also captures a different form of mediation between object and subject. Mediation happens at the level of what Benjamin calls 'the apparatus' putting aside the role of subjectivity.[3] The *Abbild*, the reproduction, captures 'a space informed by the unconscious' instead of one informed by 'human consciousness' (Benjamin 2008: 37), whatever 'unconscious' means for Benjamin in this context. The viewer, or according to Adorno, the consumer, is both anonymous and part of a 'simultaneous, collective reception'. The reactions of the individuals 'which together make up the massive reaction of the audience' are 'determined by the imminent concentration of reactions into a mass' (Benjamin 2008: 36). On this basis, we can add that, on the contrary, the *Bild* is the result of a direct mediation of subject and object. The decay of the aura is, therefore, a symptom of the depersonalization of art; it marks the dawn of its expressive function. On the other side, reproduction (*Abbild*) seems to move towards the concept of a technologically mediated immediacy.

In his letter of 18 March 1936, Adorno's reaction to this position was, first of all, a political one, playing Lenin against Benjamin to reaffirm the mediating role of the intellectuals, and resisting the alleged assignment of a 'counter-revolutionary role' to the 'auratic art'.[4] In the same letter, Adorno was fully aware of the 'liquidation' of traditional bourgeois art, and of the urge for an aesthetical definition of post-auratic art. However, shifting from visual media to music, he let the concept of Benjamin's second technology (an ambiguous umbrella term, which includes the use of simple instruments to raise nature up to the highest developed modern technology) converge with that of the musical technique.[5] This is a crucial point because it enables Adorno to rescue the art of the past and to define the present, modern art. For him, autonomous art, the 'great' bourgeoise art, does not collapse entirely in the concept of auratic art, as a form of magic or a theological symbol; it does not belong entirely to the realm of the myth: it is 'inherently dialectical' as a mediation between a magical element and freedom (Adorno 1999: 127).[6] Non-auratic art, such as Schoenberg's music, is thoroughly

mediated.[7] It is allegoric. The second technology, also with regard to musical technique, introduces a shift or a twist in the dialectic of subject and object, which can be provisionally approached with the help of Raymond Williams' definition of mediation 'as an active process in which the form of the mediation alters the things mediated' (Williams 1985: 205). It is not a neutral process of the interaction of separate forms. Therefore, from the beginning of his aesthetical reflection, Adorno provides a complex conceptualization of the musical work of art, historically grounded and differentiated, and immanently mediated, which can hardly be dismissed as sheer metaphysics.

3 Technological Mediation in Adorno's *Current of Music*

Considering Adorno's intellectual path in the late 1930s, with his focus on the cultural industry's role in the downgrading of 'serious music' to 'light music', some themes from *Current of Music* are not surprising, notably the part concerning the consequences of radio atomistic listening prevailing in the reception of symphonic music (Adorno 2006: 86–97). What is striking is the unexpected role that immediacy plays in approaching radio as a medium from the perspective of the voice. Parts of *Radio Physiognomics* and *Radio Voice* are devoted to exploring what Adorno defines as a radio voice. This is something different from the content of the broadcast and unmasks its alleged 'illusional immediacy'. The radio as a medium is authoritarian, not only in the sense that it has become a tool for the totalitarian strategies of persuasion and control, but because – as a medium – it collaborates intrinsically with monopolistic strategies. Furthermore, it takes advantage of the combination of the power of anonymity and ubiquity, together with the effect of the personal and intimate communication of its alleged 'transparent voice'. The invention of the radio itself is grounded in the interest of controlling powers: 'Only in a mass society governed by monopolistic institutions in which the taboos of the individual have faded away has radio technique been fully developed' (Adorno 2006: 100). Therefore, technological mediation plays a totally different role than that of musical technique; it lies between live music and the listener; and, in producing a distorted copy of the live performance, deteriorates music.

However, Adorno does consider positive uses of this medium. The first one is reserved for educated people who can use radio as a prop, or as a utility to concentrate on the score, 'as if through a microscope' (Adorno 2006: 105). Although it is clear that in this case Adorno assigns a role to the radio that is later played by phonograph records, the argument as a whole points toward the construction of a culture of structural hearing. This kind of listening promotes an individual and intellectual relationship with music; and enhances analytical work, coupling it with the real sound. The phonograph, and, to a certain extent, the radio, offer the perfect conditions for separating hearing from any other perceptual stimulus. This medium suspends multimodal perception and escapes the ephemerality of live performance. In this case,

Adorno envisions a culture of listening, which will go on to characterize a trend that emerges later with HiFi. The second trend focuses on the possibility of achieving an immediacy of the medium, as opposed to the manipulative illusion of immediacy. The broadcasting of studio-produced records overcomes, according to Adorno, the false relationship between the live original and the broadcast copy. Technological mediation takes place in the studio as a part of the performance, as a mediating process: 'the conductor of the original performance could rehearse the broadcasting of the record in the studio with the sound control engineer, and together they could determine how the sound must be "steered"' (Adorno 2006: 127). To overcome the 'reification' of the medium, Adorno provides a third, radical possibility which he calls 'playing on the radio'. In other words, avoiding the double mediation of channeling the sound of traditional instruments through mechanical devices, and instead, by using electrical instruments. This would mean, in Adorno's words, 'to replace the pseudo-immediacy by genuine immediacy' (Adorno 2006: 128). Again, he is visionary in imagining what later would become actual projects of electronic compositions for the radio, which emerge (and disappear) some decades later, and in claiming certain arguments about the immediacy of studio-recorded music and the electronic instruments that would be supported by Glenn Gould in the 1960s (Brech 2000 and De Benedictis 2004).[8] At the beginning of this decade, Adorno himself came back to this topic, suggesting that some features of the most recent music of that time, such as aleatory, conciseness, absence of form development and concentration on the moment, are probably more suited to radio listening, than the 'advanced music' of Weber and Boulez (Adorno 1976 383–384).[9]

At that time, Adorno was not alone in advocating for a new culture of listening in the age of phonography and radio. Rudolf Arnheim, in his early contribution to radio theory, even praises the condition of 'blind' listening and emancipation from the body made possible by broadcasting.[10] Although the radio encourages distracted listening, because people turn on the radio to tune into the flow of existence, he reminds the reader that concentrated listening was rooted in the original use of the radio, when people gathered with their families and used to pay full attention to the radio (Arnheim 1971: 9). Moreover, he mentions the fact that, in Europe, radio has always been used more deliberately as a cultural instrument. This statement gives a real historical context to Adorno's pledge for the use of radio as a tool for experts.

Unlike Adorno's utopic project of 'playing on the radio', Arnheim, in his book about the radio, tackles broadcasting as a means of expression and does not focus primarily on the medium's capacity for diffusion and communication. Blurring the difference between art and media, he includes radio in the new group of 'aural arts' together with music, the theatre and sound-film; but encapsulates music and broadcasting as the only two arts which renounce the eye entirely and operate exclusively with the ear (Arnheim 1971: 22). It upset Adorno that he was not in the least interested in the manipulative potential of the radio, but rather in the expressive potential of the medium across sound

and voice, and music and words. The voice of the radio was, for Adorno the composer and the musicologist, an ambiguous channel for the diffusion of music, which could be vindicated for an advanced, but still utopian, musical use. For intellectuals less concerned with music, like Havelock and Arnheim, broadcasting revealed the power of the voice, as well as the difference between the written and the spoken word: 'The rediscovery of the musical note in sound and speech, the welding of music, sound and speech into a single material is one of the greatest artistic tasks of the wireless' (Arnheim 1971: 30). Even if Arnheim neglects the broad and differentiated exploration of the musical face of language being developed in poetry, as well as, increasingly in music from the 1930s (see Garda 2016 and 2020), in the introduction to the second edition of his book he quotes a passage by Michel Butor, which captures the very concept of broadcasting the book outlines:

> the experience of working for the radio where the sound qualities of language predominates, leads one to consider the text of a broadcast as a musical score. One is compelled to note not only the sequences of words, but the ways in which the sequences of words follow and overlap each other; and one must refine his sensitivity much more than the traditional theatre required, for intonation, tempi, intensities, pitches. Through the ages, musicians have done an enormous amount of work in this respect. Mallarmé thought that it was time for literature to retrieve its own from music and attempted himself to do a score-book, the ancestor of our own experiments.
> (Arnheim 1971: 10)[11]

In fact, beyond the pledge for 'blind' listening in music, Arnheim's book is focused mainly on the voice in radio plays, but also in the news of the day, reportage and discussions. Put in a broader context, this approach could be considered as a complement to Adorno's analysis of musical broadcasting, in addition to being the positive counterpart in a discussion about the potentialities and dangers of the medium.

4 Progressive Broadcasting

If we consider these questions within the perspective of McLuhan's (1964) distinction of 'hot' and 'cold' media, it is easy to detect Adorno's attitude towards radio as typical, for the specialist of the writing culture facing a hot new medium. For Adorno, one of radio's main consequences is that it conveys a distorted and manipulated copy of the music. As I will explain below, for him, the only countermeasure is to implement a special line of broadcasting in order to protect and spread progressive culture. It is interesting to observe that Paul Lazarsfeld, in his investigation about the radio, excluded the broadcasting of classical music. He considered it as atypical for the medium, because of its close relationship with written culture. Moving from the assumption that 'radio has broken the monopoly that print had once held

on the communication of ideas', he argued that serious broadcasts could not really reach the strata of population which have not been reached by print so far (Lazarsfeld 1940: xII and Chapter 1). Despite Adorno's diagnosis of the collusion of radio with marketing strategies, Lazarsfeld was able to understand radio as a resource for democratic communication by focusing on the broad variety of programs offered at that time: quiz shows, serial dramas, and the so-called service broadcasts, intended to give advice about house-keeping, cooking, efficient buying, home-furnishings, self-improvement.[12] Rather, he considered serious broadcasting to be a 'supplementary communication for people on higher cultural levels' more than an opportunity for a mass educational project. Lazarsfeld clearly grasped how radio in the 1930s could satisfy the new needs in matters of individual, everyday life for that group of illiterate population that was slower to catch up with the rapidly changing American way of life. Yet, he was oriented towards making empirical investigations, rather than proposing a theoretical approach to the medium.

Even if Adorno was uninterested in the kind of analysis addressed by Lazarsfeld, it would be a mistake to reduce his critical observations as relics of the writing era. Despite differences in style and terminology, Adorno was persuaded, no less than McLuhan, that a new medium radically transforms the previous one, and there is no turning back. Adorno, however, conflated the sociology of production in the form of a culture industry critique, with an analysis of the medium. This move resulted in a crude diagnosis of the risks associated with broadcasting serious music. From this point of view, serious music programs could simply not survive as 'supplementary communication for people on higher cultural levels', as Lazarsfeld suggested, but they should be integrated into an overarching project of progressive broadcasting.

There is, however, a fundamental difference between Adorno's theory of mediation and the visionary outline of media as an extension of consciousness in McLuhan's *Understanding Media*. Obviously, the time between Adorno's drafts collected in *Current of Music* and McLuhan's book spans more than twenty years, decades marked by huge developments in the media and their social functions. In his 1964 introduction to *Understanding Media*, McLuhan writes that:

> in the electric age, when our central nervous system is technologically extended to involve us in the whole of mankind and to incorporate the whole of mankind in us, we necessarily participate, in depth, in the consequences of our every action. It is no longer possible to adopt the aloof and dissociated role of the literate Westerner.
>
> (McLuhan 1964: 4)

The global extension of technology as a gigantic network was probably far from Adorno's experience in totalitarian Germany before his emigration, and that of the divided Europe he witnessed after his return to Germany. However, he neither fit into the role of the aloof and literate European, nor that of

the conservative intellectual who refuses to accept the technological shift imposed by the new media. Less prone than Benjamin and McLuhan to acknowledge the role of the media as an extension of the senses, Adorno insisted on the concept of mediation as a means to unveil the supposed transparency of the medium, as well as to enable the medium itself to critically mediate culture.

'Progressive broadcasting', as Adorno defines the overall project to overcome the illusionary and manipulative immediacy of radio, is fueled by the major concern of protecting the 'great music' of the past from the process of deterioration which threatens it in late modernity as well as a concern for the possibility of advanced, 'non-auratic' music in the technologically mediated world of the future. A political issue lurks behind the idea of 'progressive broadcasting', because it implies a democratic control of the media (still an urgent issue, which has become much more complex and unmanageable in the digital era). In a 1966 interview with Umberto Eco broadcast by RAI about media and particularly television, Adorno maintained that before the war, institutions supported by the private sector offered more freedom for critique than those organized by the state. According to him, the situation changed radically in democratic countries after the war, which gave a larger possibility for independence within public institutions. On the contrary, when private interests were at stake, the control was stricter and more rigorous, as documented by the case of the American Broadcasting System.[13] This black and white picture of the media as a public service refers to the years immediately before the diffusion of commercial and independent broadcasting. Still, it captures and defines the space in which independent intellectuals could exercise their right to critique.

5 Education as Cultural Mediation

Upon returning from his American exile, Adorno manifested trust in and engagement with both radio and television, considering his contribution to the media to be a substantial part of his intellectual engagement.[14] In fact, according to Michael Schwarz (2011: 290 and 292), over twenty years Adorno gave about 114 radio talks and conversations, most of them about music. This attitude apparently breaks the spell that his negative dialectics casts on readers, discouraging every positive individual emancipative undertaking. In the post-war era of European democracies, Adorno promoted a broad educational project involving the public, sustained by critical theory. In two well-known interviews, he defined this project as an 'education towards autonomy and responsibility' (*Erziehung zur Mündigkeit*). Education after Auschwitz focused on the urge to avoid and actively fight every possibility to fall back into a totalitarian and barbarian moral, social and political condition.[15] The reference to Kant's pamphlet about Enlightenment in the advocacy to *Mündigkeit*, autonomy and responsibility, leads to the question of how critical theory can sustain the original emancipatory project of

Enlightenment after its historical defeat; in other words, how can critical theory switch from the negative dialectics to a positive pledge of emancipatory values. Both Shannon Mariotti (2014 and 2016) and Fabian Freyenhagen (2013 and 2014) defend Adorno against the critique of elitism and quietism, to take refuge in theory avoiding political practice, and assert Adorno's ethical and democratic engagement. Yet, to understand how Adorno overcomes this paradoxical entanglement of negative theory and positive engagement, it is crucial to focus on his attitude towards education. In fact, the switch from social theory to education, from collectivity to individual consciousness, is itself a mediation, as Adorno argues in 1959: 'Education is culture from the perspective of subjective appropriation. Culture however has a double character. It refuses society and mediates between this and half-education' (Adorno 2018: 94). According to Adorno, after the failure of the revolutionary movements, culture has separated from real life and survives in a reified form as *Kulturgüter*, cultural commodities. Yet, as 'Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed, so culture preserves its critical potentiality and this is precisely the place of mediation' (Adorno 1973: 3). This double character of culture made it possible 'to stick on education, after society has removed its ground' (Adorno 2018: 121).

Music education offers a good example of 'half-education' and Adorno goes back in this essay to one of the arguments he used to criticize Walter Damrosch in his 'Analytical Study of the NBC Music Appreciation Hour': memorizing the main themes of the symphonies, instead of explaining their structural function (Adorno 2006: 255–58 and 293–294). The reference to Sigmund Spaeth's 1936 book sounds quite anachronistic in an article published in 1959, although the book had been reprinted in 1952. It shows, however, how the scrutiny he gave to the gigantic educational program issued by Damrosch in the years 1938–40 was pivotal to his understanding of a 'progressive broadcasting' as part of a larger educational project.[16] Damrosch and Adorno's assumptions about the role of radio in education could not be more different. The former was still imbued by the pioneer rhetoric of the radio as a tool giving access to culture to all the people who were excluded from it, for economic as well as geographical grounds:

> Now the first time in history, those who live on farms and ranches, in small towns and villages, in mining camps, lumber camps, and in other remote places, may come into intimate personal contact with the music of Mozart, Beethoven and Wagner. A new world has opened to them, and their response has been phenomenal.
>
> (Damrosch 1935: 91)

Moreover, Damrosch believed in the power of radio to stimulate the practice of music in a country, where a tradition of amateur musicians was still lacking:

Most appreciative letters from music supervisors from all over the country tell me how they themselves have made up for the loss of contact with distant concert series of school broadcasts. The growth of orchestras and bands in the schools is astounding. There are now, I am told, more than 50,000 young orchestras and 75,000 bands in our schools. Already amateur civic orchestras are being formed by the graduates of these young orchestras, and thus musical centers are being established in cities and towns which previously had little or no acquaintance with the great music of the world. I'm glad that the influence of our Music Appreciation Hour has been helpful toward stimulating desire to play orchestral instruments, and that our programs have served as models for the type of music to be played by these young performers.

(Damrosch 1931: 24)

Damrosch's project was consistent with the understanding of radio in its initial stage, as a tool, which could reinforce and amplify education in schools, supplying the shortcomings of the educational system with its power of diffusion. His project was rooted in a holistic pedagogy, which understood education as a sort of exercise to train children to become *useful* members of society, functional parts of the social machine:

Music is a vital and necessary part of the education of every child. It is one of the most important means of bringing him to a civilized state from the status of a young animal which is his natural condition at birth.

Our schools were established to educate the *whole* boy and the *whole* girl, not just a part of them. Physically, mentally and emotionally, this young animal must be trained for the purpose of making him a useful member of society. In the progress of the world, there has been no change in the essential qualification of the useful members of society.

(Damrosch 1933: 19)

Adorno's critique of the program ranged from the 'unspecific explanations' and the 'unrepresentative examples' to the more radical jab about, what we today would call, the 'gamification' of learning. According to Adorno, training pupils and students to recognize motives and themes leads back to the regressive process of music standardization, which conveys 'a feeling of social conformity' (Adorno 2006: 297). It is grounded on a 'fetishistic concept of music' and on the authoritarian cult of personalities. The later concept of *Halbbildung* has its template here: 'These features of the *Hour* virtually produce musical pseudo-culture' (Adorno 2006: 285).[17]

Adorno's positive take on musical education in the late 1930s is illustrated in *What a Music Appreciation Hour Should be*, an essay first published in *Current of Music*. The two enterprises are, however, incommensurable; and not because of the trivial fact that the 'Music Appreciation Hour' was a program which lasted fourteen years, while Adorno's project was never

implemented. The latter was conceived as an autonomous cultural program independent from the school system, and it can be considered as an early model of Adorno's musical radio talks, together with his broadcasts for WNYC in the first half of 1940, collected in *Current of Music* (Adorno 2006: 319–398).[18]

His suspicion regarding the manipulation of the audience response, however, prevented Adorno from detecting the opportunities of the medium as a tool for community building, which was indeed the strong point of Damrosch's interactive enterprise, despite his bombastic and universalistic goals. Community (*Gemeinschaft*) was obviously a taboo concept for Adorno, affected as he was by its regressive use in Nazi Germany; on the contrary the rise of community radios was yet to come. From this perspective, the cultural mediation envisioned by Adorno is, unsurprisingly, a mediation from above, mostly directed to cultivate and reinforce the culture of focused attention, and the ascetic and intellectual approach to 'great music'.

6 Mediating Immediacy

Positive reference points can be found at the core of Adorno's critique, which was unmistakably rooted in the tradition of his German musical education. These definitions take the shape of formulations, such as 'full and mature understanding', 'fully adequate art experience', 'living relationship with music' (Adorno 2006: 263; 286; 309);[19] they play a heuristic role, and hit the mark regarding Adorno's critique on a profound level:

> In the case of fully adequate art experience, something of this sort may occur, given an *ideal listener* (my italics), his immediate apperception and the full meaning of the work would coincide. But this coincidence cannot be presumed to exist at that point from which music education has to start. In other words, the *Music Appreciation Hour* must treat its pupils as if they were ideal listeners for whom the meaning of the work of art coincides with the effect it has upon them.
>
> (Adorno 2006: 286–287)

If we set aside the pre-aesthetic musical effects, where can the trigger of a 'living relationship with the music' be located? In the introduction of the *Analytical Study of the NBC Music Appreciation Hour*, there is a brief passage that suggests listening through and possibly modulating Adorno's judgmental voice, which sounds particularly irritating in the above mentioned text:

> It may suffice to mention that a person who is in *a real living relation* (my italics) with music does not like music because, as a child he likes to see a flute, then later because music imitated a thunderstorm, and finally because he learned to listen to music as music, but that the deciding childhood experiences of music are much more like a shock. More

> prototypical as stimulus is the experience of a child who lies awake in his bed while a string quartet plays in an adjoining room and who is suddenly so overwhelmed by the excitement of the music that he forgets to sleep and listens breathlessly.
>
> (Adorno 2006: 252)

Adorno projects us into a bourgeois interior, but if we were to change the setting, the example would still work. Very close to Freud's 'primary scene', this passage depicts, in fact, an archetypal scene that enables us to grasp the role of immediacy in *Current of Music*. The trigger of the musical experience is – in the literary sense – a passion, an overwhelming power that affects the listener. In this regard, music as a performative art is rooted in the mythic past of magic: 'No matter how aloof from practical necessities it may have been, music was still something in itself and not an image of something: It was on the order of prayer and play; not of painting and writing' (Adorno 2006: 182). In Adorno's thinking, immediacy, however, is the fleeting goal of the dialectic. A brief remark from his notes for an unfinished book on Beethoven sheds light on the role of the lost, irretrievable experience of childhood immediacy in fueling the work of the concept: 'Reconstruct how I heard Beethoven as a child' (Adorno 1998: 3).

The acknowledgment of the performative side of music is at the core of Adorno's comment on Benjamin's concept of aura. Yet this acknowledgment emerges theoretically only at the moment in which 'liveness' is threatened and distorted by the radio voice; in other words, it emerges when 'the authentic original has ceased to exist, and as a category, it has fallen behind the actual state of technical development … whereas the illusion of the original is maintained' (Adorno 2006: 142).

In conclusion, for Adorno, in a very Benjaminian way, immediacy emerges ex-post as a representation of loss and, as such, it remains unavailable. In *Current of Music*, suggestions of the voice, the face, childhood experience, metaphors as they are for absolute, unadulterated presence, are ubiquitous. As expressions of a nostalgia for the future, they modulate the severity of the critical theory. Precisely as a figure of loss, immediacy still matters. The arduous task of coming of age, of becoming autonomous and taking responsibility as a music listener, as well as a citizen, dwells in the work of mourning a loss, and preserving the energy of that which was lost, as a mediated immediacy. Adorno's voice resonates from a past that is becoming remote for our living memory. In a world of escalating interconnectivity between human and non-human agencies, his dialectical humanism addresses us with its uncomfortable voice, urging us to not forget our most cherished desires.

Notes

1 Havelock is referring to Hitler's speech of 1939 directed at persuading enemies (Canada indeed was one of them) to step away from hostilities.

2 Over the last two decades, the discussion about mediation in the sociology of music has converged into a parallel effort to disentangle the concept of mediation from Hegelian dialectics and from Adorno's allegedly metaphysical conception of the work of art, aiming to 'implement Adorno's idea empirically' (De Nora 2003: 21) and to get a 'positive conception' of mediation (Hennion 2003: 3). See also Born 2005 and Born and Barry 2018.

3 Benjamin employs this term in the double meaning of technical equipment used for a particular activity and the complex structure of an organization, which functions indeed as a machine; see the use of this term at the end of chapter X of Benjamin 2003: 31.

4 For if you legitimately interpret technical progress and alienation in a dialectical fashion, without doing the same in equal measure for the world of objectified subjectivity, then the political effect of this is to credit the proletariat (as the cinema subject) directly with an achievement which, according to Lenin, it can only accomplish through the theory introduced by intellectuals as dialectical subjects, although they belong themselves to the sphere of a work of art which you have already consigned to Hell' (Adorno 1999: 129).

5 You are well aware that the question of "liquidation" of art has been a motivating force behind my own aesthetic studies for many years, and that my emphatic endorsement of the primacy of technology, especially in music must be understood strictly in this sense and in the sense of your second piece on technology [*zweiten Technik*]'(Adorno 1999: 128). For Benjamin's definition of second technology, see Benjamin 2008: 26.

6 He returned to these topics in Adorno 1973: 371–372.

7 See Adorno's letter to Benjamin, 18 March 1936 (Adorno 1999: 124).

8 See in particular two articles by Glenn Gould written respectively in 1966 and 1968: 'The Prospect of Recordings' and the 'Record of the Decade'. The second one is about the Wendy Carlos LP, *Switched-on Bach*, released in the same year (Gould 1984a and b). Carlos' LP was a milestone in blurring the borders between high art music and popular music, a perspective partly supported by Gould, but entirely rejected by Adorno.

9 After 1960 Adorno was rethinking his take on the avantgarde music from the 1950s, as witnessed by his lessons at Darmstadt in 1961, published as *Vers une musique informelle* (Adorno 1978; see also Borio 2005).

10 Rudolf Arnheim (1971), chap. VII 'In Praise of Blindness: Emancipation from the Body'. Written during Arnheim's exile in Rome, the first edition of *Radio* appeared first in the English translation in London in 1936 and in the Italian translation in 1938. The first German edition was published in 1979 with the title of *Radio als Hörkunst.* Arnheim also participated in the Princeton radio research project and published two related articles (Arnheim and Collins Bayne 1941 and Arnheim 1942–43).

11 The quotation from Butor refers to Butor 1978.

12 About the role of serial drama in broadcasting policy see also Arnheim 1942–43.

13 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WC_gz7jykaY

14 About the activity of Adorno at the radio see Albrecht et al. 1999; Boll 2004; Reichert 2010; Schwarz 2011.

15 'Erziehung nach Auschwitz' (1966) and 'Erziehung zur Mündigkeit' (1969), in Adorno 1971: 88–104; 133–147.

16 Walter Damrosch's 'Music Appreciation Hour' started in 1928 and ended in 1942. About this series of radio broadcasts together with the teaching material distributed in the schools, see three dissertations: Goodell 1973, Himmelein 1972 and Perryman 1973, with references to the archival materials preserved in the New York Public Library. More recently, see Wieland Howe 2003 and Gregory 2016.

17 About the link between Adorno's concept of 'half-education' and Dwight Mac-
   Macdonald's 'middlebrow', see chap. 1, p. XX and n. 13.
18 See also Hullot-Kentor's commentary in Adorno 2006: 60.
19 About the discussion on the notion of experience in Adorno's later thought and in
   a broader context see Jay 2004 and Crawford 2018.

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Part II

Notation and Performance

5 'Every written note is the image of a beat'

Rethinking Adorno's Critique of Notation

Andreas Meyer

At first glance, Adorno's notes on a 'Theory of Musical Reproduction' correspond perfectly with Arnold Schoenberg's position of a radical *Texttreue* ('fidelity to the text'), according to which there is little to interpret in Western art music. Rather, as Schoenberg formulates drastically, one must 'force the musicians to play what is written in the notes' (Schönberg 1976 [1926]: 215).[1] Significant for this stance is the term 'reproduction' itself. Although raised by Hegel – at least in this context –, since the 1920s it has borne an interpretation-critical patina, true to the idea of 'New Objectivity' (alongside other constructions such as 'Wiedergabe' and 'execution'). The violinist Rudolf Kolisch, who at times was the intended co-author of Adorno's *Theory of Musical Reproduction*, declared downright positivistically that musicians should extract a 'maximum of objective information' from the notation marks, in order to limit 'the bounds of interpretation, namely of subjective decisions' (Kolisch 1983: 14–15).[2] Correspondingly, Adorno's notes abound with warnings against 'unfaithfulness to the text' (Adorno 2006: 2), against unmotivated tempo modifications, against the 'dropping of shorter notes' (Adorno 2006: 111), or the sheer 'sensual pleasure at sound' (Adorno 2006: 6). The author criticizes purely technically motivated '"manners" of presentation' (Adorno 2006: 135) and argues in favor of 'precise analysis as a self-evident precondition of interpretation' (Adorno 2006: 2). That is a demand already familiar to readers of Adorno from his *Der Getreue Korrepetitor* ('Faithful Accompanist', Adorno 1976 [1963]), where it was associated with the felicitous formula of 'microscopic' music reading. It is on this basis that, in 2013, Nicholas Cook raised the *Theory of Musical Reproduction* as an antagonist to his own concept of 'music as performance.' Cook sees Adorno – alongside Schoenberg, Kolisch, or even Heinrich Schenker – as a principal advocate for the dismissal of musical performance, and as a chief witness for a naïve 'page to stage' approach that would limit musical practice to the obedient transmission of texts and text-based analysis (Cook 2013: 8–24, and passim).[3]

Upon finer examination, however, the conceptual relations within Adorno's text are somewhat more complex. More clearly than Kolisch, Adorno sees that an exact and judicious reading of a musical text does not suffice, even by approximation, for a 'true reproduction'. In fact, there is even the danger of text fetishism. As Adorno puts it:

> No musical text, not even the most meticulously notated modern score, is
> so unequivocally decipherable as to force the appropriate interpretation
> of its own accord. No control on the part of the singer, the instrumen-
> talist or the conductor over their respective material … is sufficient in
> itself to lend the interpretation that character of truth which directs every
> performance as an indispensable idea. Even a conscientious musical per-
> formance is impaired by a certain non-committal, experimental, even
> improvisatory element.
>
> <div align="right">(Adorno 2006: 163–164)</div>

This atextual mode is not merely a question of the lacunæ in the writing, their
necessary inexactness, 'but rather [points to] a *gestural* element that is *funda-
mentally* beyond the sphere of notation' (Adorno 2006: 55).[4] 'Gesture' is, as
we know, a hotly disputed category of the present aesthetic debate – maybe a
clue, that these reflections are not as outdated as Cook suggests.[5] The gestural
in music refers to a corporeal, deeply human dimension, as opposed to any
mechanistic understanding of reproduction. With regard to analysis, Adorno
states outright that the 'true reproduction' is '*not* simply a realization of the
analytical results. This would give rise to an insufferable rationalism, and
would tend towards an instatement of musicology as the authority on musical
presentation' (Adorno 2006: 81).

Defining his terminology, Adorno distinguishes three stages of the perfor-
mer's musical 'experience': the Idiomatic, the Mensural, and the Neumic. The
Idiomatic is a cultural formative influence, a quasi-native language (resem-
bling *langue* in the structuralist sense). It not only relates to the performers,
but also to respective composers and listeners. Interestingly, here Adorno's
considerations apparently depart from current discussions about jazz, namely
regarding the issue of notating rhythms. But even the keyword 'Vienna',
exemplified by Alban Berg's indication 'wienerisch', comes up in this context
(Adorno 2006: 67), pointing to Adorno's own lifelong adherence to this tra-
dition. The well-known example of a copy of Schoenberg's String Quartet Op.
10, annotated by the composer for a string quartet in Paris, may illustrate the
extent to which a score from the Schoenberg School presumes an idiomatic
background; if the piece were to be played outside its own tradition, then an
almost excessive amount of additional marking and commentary would be
required (Danuser 2014a [1998]).

The Mensural, the second stage in Adorno's model, is 'the epitome of all
that is unambiguously given through symbols' (Adorno 2006: 67) – the
domain of scrupulous notation and musical analysis. As has often been
observed, the tendency towards ever more detailed notation is typical of the
early 20th century; one striking example is the oeuvre of Max Reger. The case
of Schoenberg's string quartet suggests that the Mensural may, to a certain
extent, be able to replace the lacking self-evidence of what was once the
Idiomatic, but even the most elaborated notation could never be completely
successful in this respect. Lastly, the Neumic points – as already indicated –

to the gestural dimension of music. Adorno connects it to the concept of mimesis, and draws parallels to the 'emulating' behavior of a theater performer (see, for example, Adorno 2006: 159). One may also think of the movements of a conductor or any other musician, as embodying a gestural element of the music itself. At this third and final stage – as Hermann Danuser summarizes it – 'the results of the most exact, rational notation reading of the Mensural stage [are] "forgotten"' (Danuser 2014b [2003]: 522) in order to recapture the æsthetic immediacy of the Idiomatic.

Ironically, it may be counted among the advantages of Adorno's text (as edited by Henri Lonitz in 2001) that the author did *not* complete the intended book. Thus we can witness Adorno's philosophizing and pondering of open questions, even contradictions. Occasionally, he writes (self-)critical annotations in the margins; even annotations from his wife, Gretel Adorno, can be found here. Whereas the three-stage model of the Idiomatic, the Mensural, and the Neumic has a somewhat pragmatic veneer, in certain notes from the mid-1940s we find a drastic and, thus far, rarely observed outline of a radical *critique* of notation, which Adorno did not develop further, rather focusing on more practical considerations instead.[6]

Musical notation, writes Adorno in a longer note from 1946, 'is an element of discipline. It dispossesses the memory by supporting it' (Adorno 2006: 54). In contrast to 'naturally evolved' transmission, a 'unity of memory and alteration' (Adorno 2006: 54), it betokens an authoritative structure that aims for 'identical repetition' and the surrender of spontaneous expression. In this sense, notation means regulation, constraint, repression, directed against musical spontaneity and lively transmission. The 'spatialization' of music in the form of notation is the expression of 'rhythmic-disciplinary systems':

> Every written note is the image of a beat: the objectification of music, the conversion of the temporal flow into a spatial one, is not only formally a spatialization, but according to its own original *content*, namely the spatialization of experience for the purpose of controlling it.
>
> (Adorno 2006: 53)

Musical writing 'also contains the opposite to the musical – to its own content. Rationalization, the condition for all autonomous art, is at once its enemy' (Adorno 2006: 53).

This is rather strong medicine. And we should not belabor the fact that Adorno's hierarchical diction or – in the same context – his disparaging talk of 'primitive peoples' or 'barbarians' is at odds with present-day sensibilities. Here, as ever, it would be a mistake to block off theoretical perspectives due to word usage which is no longer appropriate. Adorno's drastic stance touches on, for example, Christian Kaden's (1997: 1639–45)[7] very fundamental critique of 'western' notation. Adorno, however, would scarcely adopt a 'regressive' (in his understanding) stance, promulgating a 'unitary' (*ganzheitliche*)

musical experience: aesthetic freedom *and* discipline, autonomy and fetishism are inseparably bound to one another in musical reproduction.

Again, it might be useful to confront Adorno's very general assessments with some more specific – albeit broad-brush – references. If, for the moment, we allow this world-historical perspective, Adorno is indeed correct that literate culture and power structures are virtually amalgamated to one another. Mesopotamian cuneiform, in which we find a sort of music notation (instructions to use specific intervals or scales), was a byproduct of a complex sociopolitical order essentially based on violence and religion-based authority. On the other hand, in non-literate music cultures 'the memory … proves [indeed] *strong*' (Adorno 2006: 52); it does not require music notation at all. A case in point, well researched in Adorno's time, can be found in the 'heroic songs' of epic poetry in the Balkans: an astonishingly complex, extensive repertoire, orally transmitted, as it seems, for centuries.[8] Under the term 'oral composition', present-day research covers quite exactly what Adorno understood as the 'unity of remembering and change': a composition based on elaborated formal principles, without changing into 'identical repetition' (Adorno 2006: 53). A striking example, which has taken on a certain notoriety in this context, is East African *amadinda* music (Kaden 2003: 152–155). Based on two interlocking melodies, the identity of specific compositions is given by numerical proportions and simple beat patterns – deep structures, which permit spontaneous variation on the surface level. Although *amadinda* represents an exceedingly complex polyphony, it is realized within an entirely textless situation.

It is no coincidence that Adorno's critique of notation is found in the immediate chronological ambit of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (which appeared in its European edition in 1947). It represents a theoretical radicalism which reflects the immediate experience of the Second World War and fascism; the later Adorno was more conciliatory (and sometimes more boring). In this framework, musical notation is a tool of dominion over nature, which turns against music itself, against its temporal lived experience. For 'human beings purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted' (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 6). It is fascinating to see – and would be worth a study of its own – to what degree Adorno's stages of musical experience correspond to the stages of human development postulated in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, from the 'primitives' through 'barbarian cultures' up to the outset of 'civilization'. The term 'mimesis,' central to the understanding of the Neumic – for the 'emulating' execution is the goal of every musical performance – represents in the book on the Enlightenment an early, magical-animistic stage (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 7–11, 256, referring to Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert). By reading both books in parallel, we gain insight into how much music, for Adorno, represents a pre-rational, archaic force, and that the utopian claim of great art is actually directed towards a reconciliation with nature.

Leaving his prehistoric speculation aside, Adorno's concept of the Neumic and the Mensural was obviously inspired by music history, probably from reading Hugo Riemann's *Handbook of Music History*. Although his knowledge in this respect was limited and sometimes misleading, we may once again take up

this perspective for a better understanding of his categories. While neumic nota-tion – as understood by present-day studies in medieval music – effectually con-veys something of the gestural character of music, of its relation to vocal and corporeal movement, mensural notation is indeed a way into abstraction. It implies the dissection of melodic phrases into discrete individual notes. As recently analysed by Matteo Nanni, transition from neumic to mensural nota-tion deals with two different visualization strategies: the one gestural, the other iconic; the one mimetic, the other signifying.[9] Even the earliest known Greek music notation, the letter notation (as found on the famous 'Seikilos Stele'), is abstraction in the extreme: not only does it fail to capture the musical gesture, it also gives an impression which is presumably incorrect, namely that Greek music was built on stepwise, 'discrete' pitch material. While Aristoxenos differentiates between an 'associated' – *synechēs* – and a 'separate' – *diastematikē* – form of voice-motion, Boethius takes yet a third position, holding something of a median between the two (Schmid 2016 [2012]: 21). Here we might bring Ador-no's critique of 'Mensural' writing, of the 'rigidity of the sign', once more to a point – while resisting all too simple narratives of historical progress.

Since the early 16th century, as the mathematical conception of music declined and the study of music rather sought proximity to the rhetorical disciplines, one finds increasing complaints about notes being 'dead' signs. (The impression of rigor would perhaps be further intensified by the typical print image of this time.) Martin Agricola, being only one of many voices in this respect, writes that 'vocal singing, as it is made by the living voice, and the measure that it has in itself cannot be written down or otherwise grasped'.[10] Current research into *porta-mento* and *vibrato*, for example (Leech-Wilkinson 2006; Bork 2020), is one way of dealing with this sort of insufficiency. In a certain way, the most valuable part of music is precisely that which eludes the symbolic order, transcending the black and white of staff paper or of the piano keyboard (the keyboard itself, far from being an arbitrarily replaceable aid, is as a sort of 'reification', as Adorno would say, of music theory, its transfer into *material culture*).

Nevertheless, European music notation, since the 13th century, represents somewhat of a compromise between the two strategies: in 'common practice notation' there are still Neumic remnants – as Adorno has already correctly observed – such as the principle of spatialization (movement 'upward' or 'down-ward'), and also of connecting smaller note values through beams or phrasing slurs. It is common knowledge that phrasing slurs cannot always be neatly differ-entiated from legato slurs; the note sign does not merely serve a technical purpose. On the whole, here we are entering a terrain requiring a high degree of historical expertise, which may have been one of the reasons for Adorno postponing the project again and again. In any case, Gretel Adorno wrote in the margin alongside a passage about ancient Greek music theory: 'Is that not a little too much music history?' (Adorno 2006: 174). The revised version of the draft breaks off roughly at this point.[11]

*

Returning to the question of 'music as performance' – and taking into account Adorno's digression into music history –, I would suggest adopting a more flexible approach. Submissive, humble interpretation, subservient to the composer and the work, is not some invention of Evil Musicology (or of Adorno's). It has been a historical fact or rather, and more specifically, one option among others since the 19th century, at least since the late Beethoven and the end of the *Kunstperiode* around 1830. It does not pertain to all parts of music culture equally – one thinks of opera, or of literature for virtuosi. But it is certainly the case for the 'classical' stance in the wake of Mendelssohn or Schumann. It is related to those ideas of musical autonomy and the 'dignity of *Tonkunst*' that Lydia Goehr brought forth in her formulation of the 'Beethoven paradigm' (Goehr 1994). Part of this is an increasing obligation to authentic texts, which gave rise to the editorial standards of critical *Gesamtausgaben* and related projects during the late 19th and 20th centuries. Nicholas Cook himself, in *Beyond the Score*, gives an illustration of the fascinating watercolor 'Quartettabend bei Bettine von Arnim' by Carl Johann Arnold (Cook 2013: 19); but he comments quite sparingly on this, and it is worth considering the specific situation more precisely (see Figure 5.1).

The 25-year-old violinist Joseph Joachim, here performing in the red salon of the 70-year-old Bettine von Arnim at her Berlin home ('Unter den Zelten 5'), exemplifies submissive interpretation at its purest: as Arnold depicts him,

Figure 5.1 Carl Johann Arnold, Quartettabend bei Bettine von Arnim (ca 1854/56).
Source: Frankfurt am Main, Goethe-Museum. © akg-images.

he remains entirely in the shadows; the viewer sees only his darkened, but clearly delineated, profile from behind. The other musicians, probably including Clara Schumann's half-brother Woldemar Bargiel as the violist, are rather sketchily presented. All the more brilliant, then, is the written music on the violinist's stand: most likely a quartet (from Op. 59?) of Beethoven's, with whom Bettine, adrift in her own listening on the right, had been personally acquainted decades before. The lighting creates a quasi trinity out of Beethoven's music, the 'mysterious silver altar, bathed as it were in its own inner light'[12] (that is Bettine's model of a monument to Goethe), and the busts of gods along the wall above – these are *not* composers, to be sure. Representing the idea of the Classic period, or of the 'classical' Romantic, any more strikingly is impossible: the remembrance, indeed the 'presencing' of the absent masters demands our complete humility and devotion. Joachim is known to have seen himself in this role until the end of his life – as did Clara Schumann, his preferred chamber music partner. And it is yet another story, that there is a 'darkened side' of this self-concept in Joachim's life: the renunciation of his own composing; the delimitation of 'gypsy-like', dissolute violin playing in the manner of Ede Reményi; and lastly, the renunciation of the love of his life, Bettine's daughter Gisela von Arnim (possibly depicted in the picture's foreground). For Bettine, who had encouraged the younger Joachim to give up his virtuosic life in 'chaste' service to 'serious' music, could not accept the Hungarian-Jewish violinist as son-in-law (whereas the cellist in the picture, Albert von Flemming, did marry her daughter Armgart).[13] Leaving personal entanglements aside, as well as the wholly unmitigated adoration of the 'classics', Adorno's concept of reproduction is precisely illustrated in this sort of scene, including the narrowness of the repertoire in question and his hierarchical understanding of authorship.
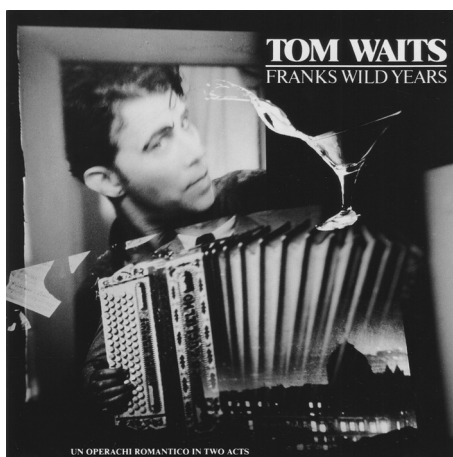
Figure 5.2 Tom Waits, *Franks Wild Years* (1987). cover illustration.
Source: © Island records/Universal Music.

In setting this text-based world against its radical opposite, we might for a moment draw on the example of Tom Waits' involvement with Frank Sinatra. This is not to say that in the output of Waits, who has staged entire operas (in collaboration with Robert Wilson), written music does not play any role. But Waits does not 'interpret' Sinatra's songs, and certainly not in their printed form. Again, we have to distinguish between different phenomena. A case such as the cover version of 'Young at Heart' on Waits' album *Orphans*, from 2006, is still rather conventional. The original composition by jazzman Johnny Richards, written in 1953, remains basically recognizable; it forms a sort of 'script' (to use a term brought to the debate by Cook) that one can handle more or less freely. Waits' primary reference is Sinatra's languorous performance – which was included in the main credits of the eponymous film with Doris Day – with perhaps a sidelong glance at the version from Bob Dylan.

This would correspond well with the diagram in the middle of Figure 5.3 that comes closest to Cook's theory. More interesting, however, are those cases in which Tom Waits refers to the *image* of 'Ol' Blue Eyes' rather than to his music – or better: in which Waits sinisterly costumes himself as Sinatra's revenant without performing a specific 'script' whatsoever. A case in point is Waits' 'I'll Take New York' from the album *Franks Wild Years* (1987), subtly related to 'New York, New York', a song generally associated with Sinatra as its boasting protagonist (even though it was first performed by Liza Minnelli). Without explicitly referring to Sinatra or giving credit to Fred Ebb and John Kander (the composer and the lyricist, respectively), Waits alludes to 'New York, New York' only by way of a few pitches and a simple rhythm as a token of recognition. 'I'll Take New York' is a performance, so to speak, of Sinatra's unbounded megalomania. By taking this figure to its absurd extreme (or, if you will, to its counter-extreme), Waits is neither giving the interpretation of a binding text nor the performance of a script. After three minutes of this disaster of a song there remains only a single, obsessively repeated tone. The vocalist 'wheezes out jazz phrases', while he 'staggers about in front of an audience of drunks' (Sante 1997: 27). This is not simply a devastating critique of Sinatra, to be sure. Waits, 'the gravel-voiced crooner from the wrong side of the tracks' (Whatley 2019), venerates him in his own idiosyncratic and antithetical manner. One could, of course,
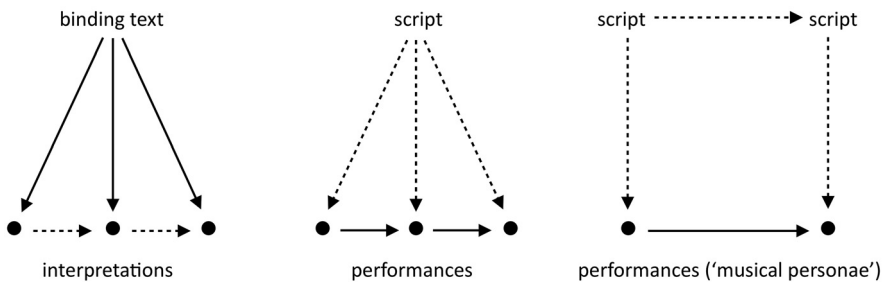
Figure 5.3 Constellations defining 'interpretation' and 'performance'.

analyze this example 'intertextually', which in itself wouldn't be uninteresting (we'll come back to that); but predominant is the element of a rather nasty, inverted performance – the performance of a persona, as Philip Auslander has termed it (Auslander 2006, 2020), with its habitus, its appearance, a certain social framing that tells something of America and its hidden underside. This, too, is (as Adorno would say) a form of mimesis – a spiteful mimesis, as it were. The Mensural element here is virtually leapfrogged or is at most secondary (as indicated in the diagram on the right of Figure 3; the constellation may be further complicated by introducing *different* scripts or *several* personae as references).[14]

That said, one has to acknowledge that Auslander's model especially applies to some particularly radical cases of a performer-centered practice, even though he himself labels it as a general theory. It is no coincidence that his examples – and many of the examples given by Cook – focus on the realm of popular music, and on pop music stardom. On the other hand, the difference between the two paradigms – music as interpretation of a text vs. music as performance (either of a script or of a musical persona) – is not strictly based on historical evidence or on the distinction of musical genres. One could easily interpret Joachim, who was quite famous in his time (up to the distribution of portrait postcards in his later life), as a peculiar 'persona'. In some way, the fascination with this *persona* results from a certain reserve – its face remains hidden, so to speak (like in Arnold's picture). And vice versa, the reference from 'I'll Take New York' to 'New York, New York' is complicated in a way that would make a thorough analysis of the song text (with its specific stress pattern) and the alienated 'melody' worthwhile. In the first line ('I tip the newsboy'), in contrast to what one would expect, Waits emphasizes the second and fifth syllables ('*tip*' and '*boy*') – as if he intended to wing an entirely different start of the text, namely 'Start *spread*ing the *news*'. The melodic curve of Sinatra's line is thereby roughly recognizable. Moreover, the keyword 'news', of course, serves as a kind of intertextual bridge linking the two songs. Thus, the difference between the two paradigms refers less to different situations or 'objects' than to different ways of dealing with them. And inasmuch as the idea of 'music as performance' opens up new methodological perspectives, the opposing model of 'music as text' or even as 'reproduction' – at the level to which Adorno elevates it – maintains its legitimacy.

To give our considerations one final twist, we might at least touch upon those no less interesting cases in which a new music or avant-garde practice is based on binding music texts, without implying mandatory reading. Tobias Bleek recently referred to György Kurtág's experiments with indistinct, 'fuzzy' notation from the 1960s, notably in a second version of the String Quartet Op. 1 – a highly significant example because Kurtág had previously worked with minute notational specificity (Bleek 2017).[15] It was probably the insight into the gestural ('Neumic') moment of music that animated him in those efforts. In other cases, the possible meaning of a text may be part of a quasi riddle that the composer sets before the musicians. The predecessor of any
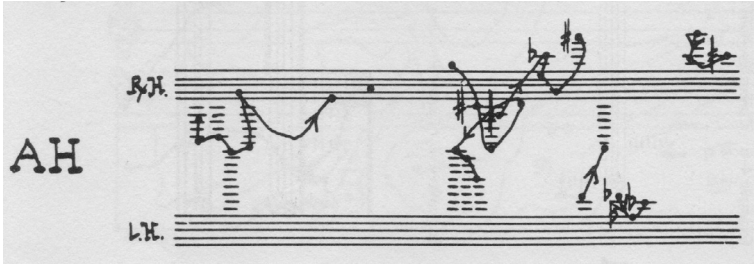
Figure 5.4 John Cage, *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1957–58), Solo for Piano, notation AH.
Source: © 1957 by Henmar Press, Inc., New York. Reprint with kind permission C.F. Peters Ltd & Co. KG.

'non-notational score' – to borrow a term from N. Andrew Walsh (2021) – is certainly John Cage: who 'liberated' sounds and noises (and the musicians who play them), who proclaimed 'anarchic harmony' and yet would never relinquish the written form of his compositions. Under no circumstances would Cage have regarded his musical texts as tentative scripts; far more, he himself conducted them very precisely, and never discarded his 'time brackets' or other means of representing time (Pritchett 1993: 105–137).[16] Then again, in cases like 'notation AH' from his Concert for Piano and Orchestra (see Figure 5.4), we would not get very far with a Mensural analysis. But perhaps with a Neumic one? Our conventional understanding of notation itself comes to an end here, without giving way to a nonbinding concept of 'script'. The ever more complex involvement of music and text remains an open question and an intellectual challenge – across time and across all musical genres or styles.

Notes

1 Shorter citations from German texts like this are generally translated into English. – I would like to thank N. Andrew Walsh for translating my presentation, and Christine Erhart and Samantha Stout for revising the text in its final stage. I am also grateful to Daniel Feige, who read an early version and gave some useful advice. Michael Seitz helped in preparing the illustrations, especially Figure 5.3.
2 For a broader discussion of this issue, see also Loesch and Meyer (2018: 44–47).
3 See also, with less emphasis on Adorno, Cook (2012).
4 On the differences between Kolisch and Adorno, see also Hinrichsen (2004: 204–205). Even Gianmario Borio, in his chapter for the volume *Dialektik der Schrift. Zu Adornos Theorie der musikalischen Reproduktion*, ed. by Julia Freund, Matteo Nanni and Nikolaus Urbanek, Paderborn: Brill Fink, 2022, defended Adorno's theory of reproduction against Cook's critique.
5 For a representative account of the debate on 'gesture', see Eggers and Grüny (2018).
6 This was possibly also due to the fact that in the 1950s Adorno occasionally taught courses on musical interpretation (e.g. at the Darmstadt Summer Courses 1954, in conjunction with Kolisch and Edward Steuermann) or gave lectures at conservatories (e.g. at the Frankfurter Musikhochschule), at which his former theoretical radicalism was less in demand than more pragmatic approaches.

7 For Kaden, composing 'in and with writing' represents a 'systematic negation of integration' and thereby a 'socially isolated act,' i.e. the loss of the integral communicative structure (Kaden 1997: 1639–1645). For a discussion of this issue, see Loesch and Meyer (2018: 54–55).

8 Cf. the work of Milman Parry, covered in Foley (1988), 31–35; Strumpf et al. (2003). I am grateful to Tobias Robert Klein for providing additional information on this subject.

9 Nanni, at the conference on Adorno in Vienna in 2019, further developed this argument on the basis of medieval manuscript sources (see the forthcoming publication of the proceedings).

10 Martin Agricola, *Musica figuralis* [1532], quoted in Schmid (2016 [2012]: 23): 'dieweil der gesang, so durch die lebendige stym gemacht, also und der mas, wie er inn sich selbst ist, inn keinerley weis geschrieben odder sonst gefasset werden mag'.

11 Since the English edition only contains the first draft and not its – much shorter – revised version, one has to consult the German original to notice this (Adorno 2001: 230, 295).

12 Hoffmann-Axthelm 2006: XXI; cf. this text for more details.

13 See Meyer (2008), Mey (2004). Joachim's ambiguous attitude towards 'Hungarianness', as conceived in his Second Violin Concerto, Op. 11, has been analyzed by Calella (2008).

14 For an excellent account of the ongoing debate on 'music as performance', see Cecchi and Lutzu (2020). Cook himself, partially under the influence of Auslander, has placed even less significance on 'text' or 'script' in recent years; for performance in this use of the term is not mainly about music at all but about, in a sense, staging the self.

15 Tobias Bleek came back to this example in his Viennese presentation at the Adorno conference in 2019.

16 See also Meyer (2020); in this article I try to show the preciseness in which Cage's notation extends to 'indefinite' events, specifically in the beginnings of this aesthetics.

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6 Towards a Practice of Musical Performance Creativity

Daniel Leech-Wilkinson

Western classical music has changed less, since Adorno's time, than most of white western culture's artistic practices. Perhaps that is why, for most westerners, classical music has fallen entirely off the cultural map. Symptomatically, it is now rare to encounter a critic of theatre or the visual or media arts who knows or cares much about it. It has lost the ability it once had to speak of the current concerns of the cultural commentariat for whom it used to be – certainly in Adorno's Frankfurt and Vienna – a matter of regular, informed debate (Jäger 2004). This may be partly a problem of composition, which for the first half of the past century discouraged many *amateurs* of classical music. But composition has become more user-friendly over the last half century and yet there is little sign of classical music regaining its public role. The problem, I think, is with more than composition; it is also a problem of ideology and (they belong together) of performance. Performances are now so similar, save to experts, that no one imagines that a performance could have any function other than to reaffirm the identity of the score,[1] the sanctity of the dead composer, and, as Christopher Small put it, to say for those (predominantly the white, middle-class, educated, elderly) who still attend concerts, 'this is who we are' (Small 1998: 43, 134). Relatively few seem still to think, with Adorno, that 'art' music can and should do more than that.

When it came to performance, though, Adorno's position was also quite narrow. I think it is clear, in so far as anything is clear from his incomplete theory of reproduction (Adorno 2001), that emotionally he preferred what Richard Taruskin (1995: 108–111) has called 'vitalist' and Nicholas Cook (2011: 302) has called 'rhetorical' performance,[2] essentially the norm with which he grew up in the first decades of the twentieth century. I have suggested previously that this preference was a factor in his inability to complete the book (Leech-Wilkinson 2012: § 4.4).[3] This vitalist or rhetorical style focuses attention on the musical surface, not on whatever you believe is the musical structure. This is not to say that it pays no attention to structure, but its performance of that is much less obvious than ours. Christopher Terepin, for example, has recently shown how variable synchronisation of parts in early recorded string quartet playing, which used to be dismissed as messy ensemble, is in fact sounding different levels of compositional structure

(Terepin 2022); although much of its affect comes from its highly sensitive response to the changing musical surface (hence the 'rhetorical' and 'vitalist' labels). The highly-subtle sounding of structure going on beneath the surface – possibly even without the performers being aware of it – was much harder to recognise intellectually, let alone to theorise, than it became once formal analysis became part of musical training and once a performance style in which phrases were delineated by tempo with loudness – what Cook (after Neil Todd; Cook 2009) has called 'phrase-arching' – became the norm. Once theory and phrase-arching were components of a new lingua franca (universally from after the Second World War, though it had been coming on gradually for most of the first half of the century) Adorno's (and indeed Schenker's) ideas about the necessity of sounding structure became generally shared by a younger generation. Adorno's tastes in performance, however (like Schenker's; Cook 2011), belonged to that earlier, pre-structural, vitalist age. Although he believed in musical structure, and in the performance of structure, he did not want to hear it as the only content of performance – which is what it more nearly became, as the twentieth century developed, in the streamlined playing that he associated with Toscanini and hated so much. Much of the interplay he desires between the mensural, the neumic, and the idiomatic, and between analysis and mimesis, reflects an attempt to do justice to the complexity of these idealised interrelationships while taking account of both his conceptual and subjective understandings of how music must be. These remained irreconcilable, I suggest.

Adorno believed in something essential that constituted the nature of a musical work, its essence: 'the work's essence is in direct agreement with this necessity [the necessity of its correct presentation in performance]' (Adorno 2006: 54). And he saw it as the performer's job to sound that essence and to sound it ideally, correctly indeed. For it is clear from the notes *Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction* that he believed in the concept of an ideal performance; yet at the same time believed that no performance could ever sound it: 'there is an absolutely correct interpretation, or at least a limited selection of correct interpretations, but it is an *idea*: it cannot even be recognized in its pure state, let alone realized. … something is *always* wrong' (Adorno 2006: 92).

The notion that to perform is always to fail is a long-standing trope in classical music teaching and criticism, one that ensures that the critic always has power over the performer; because whatever the performer does, the critic can and must be able to show how they have failed to realise some aspect of what the critic believes to be essential to the imagined work. That a work should be impossible to realise in performance, indeed, is an essential feature of its mystique and of the view of the composer as genius. Adorno writes about this again and again, directly or indirectly. The beauty of vitalist performances – like the Klingler Quartet's, or the Kolisch's or the Czech Quartet's, as discussed by Terepin (in progress) – is that in their variety of colours and *tempi* and *rubato* and *portamento* and ensemble, in that constantly

shifting surface, it is easy to feel that some intangible essence is being brought to life in sound: there is an adaptive character arising out of the moment-to-moment changes in the score that feels as if it ought to be a true evocation of something that defines the essential nature of a work. Whereas in a straight in-tempo performance, with perfect ensemble and no *portamento*, of the sort we now take for granted, all you can get is what is visibly printed in the score, elegantly phrased, plus some large-scale structural demarcation, elegantly marked. Performance in the later twentieth century, while beautifully presented, becomes more nearly (when so beautifully presented it seems harsh to say 'merely') a text and a formal analysis. So one can see how Adorno's preference for rhetorical performance style, and his belief in musical essence defining the nature of a work, supported one another.

> Title of the study: True Interpretation (??)
>
> (Adorno 2006: 39)

What Adorno aimed to do (though one hopes only momentarily) was to formulate a set of rules for 'True Interpretation' that would systematise the way in which performers should ideally use the expressive performance style he loved, so as to ensure the reliable evocation of at least some of the essence that he felt was there in an underlying work, thereby elevating what *he* imagined as the identity of the piece into something more valuable than any possible experience of it.

Clearly, then, for Adorno there is a work, defined by an essence that somehow lies behind a score; and music for him – 'the music' – is more than an experience of the now moment in a performance plus some memory of what led to it and some anticipation of what might follow, experienced within a cultural and personal context; which is what a phenomenological view might realistically suggest. There is a belief, for Adorno and indeed in current classical music ideology, that that essence was put there by the composer who perceived it in his composition; that it is more than something performers produce in making sound from scores; and that sounding the composer's experience of that essence would constitute an ideal performance; that something of it *can* be recreated in sound; and that no performance that generated a different essence could be as powerful, or certainly as valid. There's the assumption that a sufficiently sensitive musician and thinker (Adorno, for example) can define it sufficiently fully and yet generally that it can be expressed in rules (see especially Adorno 2001: 92ff; 2006: 70ff); and an assumption – although he is conflicted about this – that those rules will always be valid, whatever the musical and cultural environment in which a performance is made.

Almost all of these assumptions are still shared by most classical music professionals in practice and in academia.[4] But they are shared with damaging consequences – damaging for performance creativity and freedom of expression, for musicians' wellbeing, for the economics of the music business,

and for the social use to which classical music is put. To accept this work-centred ideology, even to draw on the concept, is to be unable to accept – and this was part of Adorno's problem – just how enormously varied are the ways in which a performance can seem to communicate a wholly persuasive sense of meaning. It fails to recognise and to take account of the extent to which music – 'the music' – changes over time. 'The music' is not fixed and therefore it is not 'essential'. Adorno was not oblivious to this:

> Main evidence in Wagner of the historical character of interpretation …
> (Adorno 2006: 30)

> Joachim's quartet, which established the style of Beethoven interpretation, would today probably seem like a German provincial ensemble, and Liszt like the parody of a virtuoso.
> (Adorno 2006: 6)

> Not only do characters escape from works; new ones also develop.
> (Adorno 2006: 6)

Adorno knew perfectly well that performance style changed over time. He quotes Wagner making the same point; he remembers how differently the Joachim Quartet, Sarasate and Paderewski had made music. He was aware that compositions changed as performance changed. In these respects he was a remarkably acute listener given how little recorded evidence had accumulated then. Perhaps it is only now, after a century of recorded examples, that we can all hear how greatly performance changes. And that is why we can see, as Adorno's generation could not, that as well as the hugely different performance styles of the past century, there must be very many other possible styles in which these scores could be made to sound differently meaningful and true. In all these styles the music sounds so differently that it cannot plausibly be said to have a fixed identity beyond the notes in the scores. The essence dissolves in those differences. And it becomes clear that whatever character a piece seems to have is very substantially constructed in particular performances, and changes not just slightly between them, which we've always accepted, but greatly over time. The identity of composers changes with it.

What is stable, then, apart from the score? There are scores, and there are performances, and there are experiences of performances; and those experiences are 'the music', which is made in the minds of performers and listeners as they participate in performances. What is permanent about the experience arising from a particular score remains to be seen, though not anytime soon. We shall only be able to acquire a sense of the extent of the possibilities in the light of many centuries of recorded performances (supplying the evidence) made by performers trained into different (constantly changing) expressive habits and made in different social and cultural contexts. Until then it might be wise to claim rather less about the essential nature of any composer's music.

Let us now switch perspectives and ask how classical music ideology,[5] which in many ways Adorno encapsulates, works as a political system. Because this should also have been part of his argument in his theory of musical reproduction; his more than anyone's.

Let us start again from the belief that performance must always fail 'the work'. It is not hard to imagine how it feels from the performer's perspective if every performance one gives is a failure: it is not exactly conducive to mental health. But giving critics power over performers is fundamental to normative thinking about classical music. In this model the performer is always subservient: she is the faithful, obedient servant of the dead composer, enacting the dead man's wishes, over and over for ever and, because this is a quasi-religious practice, worshipping Him, hoping still to please Him.[6] At the same time, for the living, she is the employee; the artisan or craftsperson offering a reproduction for critical inspection, while the expert checks, on behalf of the employer, its authenticity and the accuracy of its copying. The performer is trained to believe in the sanctity of the composer's text, in the notion that her role is to reproduce what is authorized, and to train subsequent generations to do the same, just as they were trained by their predecessors, in the same way, with the same faithful obedience. (Style change is again completely overlooked in this institutional fantasy.) Recording forces performers to compete, each striving to be more faithful, more perfectly accurate, and yet more persuasive in the performance of that faithfulness. The values of the musical state (which the state manipulates to ensure its continuing authority) get themselves performed ever more perfectly; leading to less and less variation, less freedom of expression, less creativity. And so this notion that performance must always fail 'the music' usefully encapsulates the whole perverted ideology that surrounds and bedevils classical music as a practice.

Is this what Adorno wanted? I think musically it probably is – the perfect performance of the music eliding with the perfect musical performance – but it is surely not what he believed in politically. At any rate, it is not what most of *us* believe politically, which is now far more to the point. For this whole political structure, in which gatekeepers make a living policing performers who make a living obeying gatekeepers in order that everyone can claim to be sounding dead composers' works that never existed in the first place, this whole fantasy built around power and subservience is absolutely opposed to everything liberals claim to believe about artistic expression.[7]

What does this regime do to performers? It is no coincidence that classical musicians suffer more illness, psychological and physical, than performers in other musical genres.[8] We can hardly be surprised, given the pressures.[9] Notice how impossible it is to reconcile what is required of them. They believe their role is to serve the composer's wishes, but no one knows or (for the centuries before recording) will ever know what those were. At the same time performers are led to believe they bring their own interpretation to a score. And yet they are supposed to perform a normative reading, the reading

that is accepted as normative by the industry at the moment. When, as there often is from old recordings, there is overwhelming evidence that the composer's reading is quite unlike the industry norm, the composer's recording is simply ignored. So much for the genius-composer's wishes. Obedience to current gatekeepers, and the stability of the profession and the business it serves are the only absolute requirements. No wonder performers are conflicted as to who they are or what they are supposed to be doing. No wonder that after years getting up on stage and playing essentially the same performance to similar audiences they no longer know if they are making music or if they are simply sounding the system. No wonder so many suffer muscular dysfunction and mental breakdown.[10]

Only the gatekeepers (through status and power) and the business (through minimal rehearsal costs) benefit from this intolerant and repressive political system. Critics do well, adjudicators, managers, record companies, Google, Spotify: they all benefit. For the performer and listener the advantages are knowing what is expected; for performers, knowing how to conform safely; and for listeners, knowing that all is well in their world. This is not the only sense in which classical music is neoliberalism in sound. It is there in the very language of performance criticism which is riddled with patriarchy, misogyny, homophobia, classism and racism, the essential structural prejudices of white, male, western, capitalist imperialism. If this sounds like an exaggeration one need only look at the metaphors used in record reviews (in recent just as much as in older reviews), where these prejudices are regularly to be found, at best barely concealed beneath the metaphorical surface.[11]

> … Steuerman's way of spreading the notes of his chords, like a doorstep salesman laying out his wares, is mannered and irritating.
>
> (*Gramophone*, May 1988: 1578)

> … she is as tempestuous and temperamental as the music demands: some might even say more than it demands. But she never loses her head …
>
> (Dec. 2018: 94)

> Faultless in matters of intonation and blessedly free of mannerism … she can come across as something of a 'Stepford wife'…
>
> (April 2013: 105)

> … emasculated within a haze of pastel-shaded rumination. No other recording makes it sound so alluring …
>
> (June 2018: 109)

> … his mincing, droopy and impossibly vulgar reading of *Für Elise* makes Liberace look like Artur Schnabel …
>
> (Awards issue 2018: 128)

… abounded with mannered *rubatos* and coy phrasings

(March 2015: 65)

As a heartless fingerfest and note-perfect delineation of the score, Sun-woo's account is hard to beat and he joins the now long list of brilliant Asian-born American-trained pianists undistinguishable one from another in character and sound.

(Dec. 2017: 93)

I've never heard the insistent left-hand chords … more perfectly equal … or quite so devoid of meaning. … Suzuki remains imperturbable throughout. … Even the tiniest hint of personality would no doubt do wonders.

(May 2018: 73)

My colleagues and I are always impressed at how quickly Chinese students respond to the styles and fashions thrown at them when they come to a sophisticated European city, and how quickly their personalities emerge.

(April 2019: 21)

Musical tastes are markers of belonging: sharing them helps one feel and show that one belongs to a group.[12] On the more specialised level considered here, the same applies to beliefs about performance. One belongs to classical music culture, and feels it represents one, by believing, and when necessary (to bring or keep others within the fold) asserting beliefs which make very little sense outside a quasi-religious, patriarchal and imperialist culture. For example: composers are godlike in their genius; their instructions must be faithfully followed; performers are the composer's loyal servants; the composer's intended performance is the ideal model for all and for ever; those who fully know and understand the tradition will be able to glean this ideal performance from the instructions in the composer's score; and so on. Performers and performances that differ from these principles are Other, they do not belong; they are out of place, unwelcome, intrusive, self-indulgent, unhealthy, unnatural, degenerate (all these metaphors taken from recent record reviews, Leech-Wilkinson 2020b). They can only appeal to listeners who lack knowledge and understanding of the tradition. People who play or sing differently are unsuitable to be employed as performers, they cannot be respected members of the professional community. True understanding requires upbringing within western culture, whose particularly virtuous ability to feel deeply yet privately, without public display, is most perfectly expressed by and within its classical music practice. You would be hard pressed, I think, to find a closer analogue among the creative arts to the conceptual world of white supremacy and colonialism.

Needless to say, one has to learn all these beliefs. Growing up within the system one acquires them so fully that they come to seem natural. The norm is thus the natural: everything else goes against the very nature of music and

musicality. Yet the intensity with which challenges to these beliefs are opposed points to insecurity, to a lack of confidence in their artistic necessity, to anxiety about the ease with which the norm may be contaminated by the other. Together with this goes anxiety about the minor place of classical music within contemporary western culture, as against the belief that it should be celebrated as one of its highest manifestations. The superiority and exclusivity of its norms becomes another defence against external others, which in turn increases classical music's irrelevance to everyone else.

Western classical music is thus a culture in which the stereotypical dead, white, high-class, protestant, male really does encapsulate the values promoted as ideal. The sanctified composer, the authoritative master-teacher and master-performer, the adjudicator, the manager, the programmer and the critic are all in the business of constraining, forbidding or excluding the other, of keeping classical music pure. It is at this level, I am sorry to say, that music, in Adorno's formulation, understands us better than we do ourselves.[13]

Are there solutions through which we can escape this still deeply prejudiced culture? Of course, there are. It follows inevitably from the extent to which performance style has already changed, over the short period documented by recordings (which are assumed, I think correctly, to have promoted standardisation, implying that style may have been still more variable before the twentieth century), that there are innumerable other ways of making these scores into engaging musical experiences. But they depend on throwing off the ideology; and when the whole music business has been trained to a set of beliefs from childhood instrumental lessons onward, beliefs reinforced every time a performer or a gatekeeper acts, then throwing off the ideology is hard. The solutions are solutions Adorno would have hated, because, as well as deep scepticism about essences, they involve refusing policing, refusing worship of the dead, and refusing the authoritarianism that seeks to define the wishes of the dead for its own ends, political, social and financial. Instead, we have to ask of scores, 'what else can these notes do, unpoliced, measured only by the extent to which they engage us as musical rather than predominantly ideological experiences?'

Ideology, needless to say, is never missing. I do not for a moment suggest that we can experience music innocent of preconceptions about how it might sound or without bringing ourselves and our other beliefs to the way we think about and make music. But I do suggest that if we can set aside the ways in which we damn performers for playing or singing at all differently, if we can resist coming to a performance as listeners having decided in advance how a piece *ought* to go, then we are making space to focus instead on the dynamics of musical sound and the ways in which – in relation to musical syntax and to any kinds of associations *we* (as consciously as we can) choose to bring to the table – the changing dynamics of sound generate musico-dramatic experiences. These are the experiences we go to concerts for, experiences made as – in relation to processes such as entrainment and empathy[14] – *we* map sequences of feelings onto sequences of sounds.[15] It is at this level, I suggest,

where shapes of speech, of gesture and of feeling are modelled in sound, a level concerned more with performance than with composition,[16] that art and society speak of one another in the ways Adorno hoped to illuminate.

This introduces a very different set of considerations for judging musical performance and a different set of assumptions about what classical music is there to do and for whom. For modern gatekeepers, the questions to be asked in assessing the worth of a performance are essentially these: is it normative (does this performer belong?), is it correct (do they agree with us about appropriate style?), and is it persuasive (does it strengthen our conviction about what is normative and correct?) in the use it makes of the composition? These are essentially Adorno's questions differently arranged. Adorno's analysis, despite the interactivity it admirably affords between its different components, overlooks the role of performance style in determining the nature of what is believed to be the neumic and the idiomatic, as do the questions gatekeepers ask today. Performance style is now more explicitly discussed, albeit in terms of historical correctness, and it of course has a role to play for Adorno too in relation to the idiomatic and the neumic in that what he hears performers do is assessed in relation to his preconceptions about normativity in their realisation. My suggestion, however, is that we simply strike out the first two questions (is it normative, is it correct?) and that the third (is it persuasive?) becomes a question focused around the dynamic qualities of the performance in relation to the score, rather than a question about the performance's normativity, particularly the normativity of the relationship it makes between compositional and performance style, which has been the obsession of so much performance criticism and teaching over the past half century.

I see it as essential that a performance responds to the composition, particularly at its moment-to-moment (surface) level. (I am at best agnostic about the perceptual reality of large-scale structure.[17]) But while combinations and sequences of notes may engage a sense of forward-motion and expectation – for reasons elucidated by music psychology as persuasively as music theory[18] – that is not to say that the composition has particular needs. The piece is not a person. It needs nothing from us and suffers in no way from our interaction with it. This is arguably the greatest of the many sins of the work concept, that it elevates an imagined state of the piece into something more valuable than anyone's experience of it. There is nothing there to value or to damage. A score is simply materials for interpretation, a starting point for making art to generate experiences.

Composition style, of course, changes; but – as Adorno noted,[19] and much against the assumptions of historically informed performance – it is far from clear that a composition style requires a particular performance style for its persuasive realisation in sound. Performance style also changes, noticeably over decades, and presumably it changes with some kind of relation to composition style-change in that both reflect broad cultural-stylistic trends. Both presumably have a relationship through a shared cultural context (which

could in principle be demonstrated) when a score is new. But I am not convinced that there is any advantage in keeping them together indefinitely. Highly persuasive performances of the same score across different performance-stylistic periods are evidently commonly achieved. I have written about a number of examples in which one may reasonably say that while the notes may be the same the music is different; yet all are persuasive (Leech-Wilkinson 2007; 2009; 2013). Now I would go further, and argue – drawing on the evidence of recent developments in what one might loosely call post-historical performance where elements of past performance styles have been extended (an example is discussed below) – that it is also possible to make productive new styles. Historically Informed Performance is the outstanding example: a manner of performance that is constantly changing, and that while it purports to be recovered from the past is in fact quite new.[20] It follows that one may use current performance style, a past style, or make a new one, and still make fresh and engaging sense of a score from any place and time. It is the 'fresh and engaging' that matters.

What does that mean? I suggested above that we 'focus instead on the dynamics of musical sound'. The sense that a performance is expressive and engaging – the test for which is perhaps that more than anything else one might be doing one wishes to continue to listen, to hear what happens next – is generated above all, I suggest, through fluctuating intensities in sonic fields such as density, texture, harmonicity, tessitura, range, inter-onset length, loudness, all changing individually but interrelatedly at the microsecond level and interacting with harmony, line and counterpoint in ways that seem to give those parameters dynamics of their own and that seem inherent to them as 'purely musical', although in fact all are brought to the score by performers and in ways that must reflect the dynamics of other kinds of social communication. All this sonic interactivity (musical and not) may be contained in and summarised by the concept of musical dynamics, using the word not in the sense of loudness only but rather in the broader sense of forces producing (a sense of) movement: the motion that music simulates.[21] A persuasive performance should be not a normatively 'proper' performance but one whose dynamics are so engaging that one wishes only to continue to listen. Dynamics in this sense have a more fundamental truth to them than ideologies of the musically proper; and they gain that truth through the powerful use they make of bodily feeling responses.

Rather than ask whether a performance is correct, then, we need to try to ask whether it constructs for us (individually) an enthralling sequence of feeling-experiences, their sense determined at least to a degree by their familiarity from other kinds of psychological and social experience, bearing in mind that music happens in real time and in the minds of listeners who make their own sense of it. The job of the critic then is not to comment on the historical correctness or faithfulness of a performance but rather on the effectiveness with which it engages the critic-as-frequent-listener in its dynamic processes. This is, in any case, an important part of what listeners

and critics already do all the time: the difference comes in being aware of it more consciously, addressing it more explicitly, and in valuing it most highly.

Over and above the engagingness of its dynamic properties, a performer may very well in her singing or playing seek to persuade her listeners of an ideological position. But let that position be considered, designed in sound, and discussed, explicitly part of the performance, not blindly adopted from normative convention or from the manipulation by the culture industry against which Adorno rightly warned,[22] nor enforced by gatekeepers on penalty of losing work.

To summarise, what I have outlined are some (I think necessary) ingredients in a changed theory and practice of classical music performance, which would no longer be a theory or a practice of reproduction. It needs first a view of what is wrong with current beliefs, practices and policing, and of the failures of insight, and the prejudices, on which beliefs, practices and policing depend. Secondly, it needs a view of performers' rights in relation to those of composers (particularly dead composers) and (living) listeners. Thirdly, it needs a view of what is required for a persuasive performance. (These requirements I have attempted to meet informally in my recent online book for performers, Leech-Wilkinson 2020a.) And fourthly, it needs a view of what we want music to do for us emotionally, socially, and perhaps (though if so, then within a very strong ethical framework and more explicitly than at the moment) what we want it to do for us politically. On classical music's emotional and social affordances a great deal of fine work has been done recently by music psychologists and sociologists; but much less, far too little, has been done on the politics, largely because of the ideology's resistance to admitting that it is a factor (the resistance, of course, reflecting how illiberal its political work is at the moment).

Such a theory, in my view, has no purpose other than to encourage a practice; therefore there must also be examples.[23] From that I should like to single out here a few performances illustrating different uses of performance style.

Ji Liu's performance of the notes of Beethoven's piano sonata op. 27, no. 2, the *Moonlight* sonata,[24] adopts characters for each movement as nearly opposite as possible to those of a normative performance. Some listeners will loathe this, some it may make quite angry; but if it does then I respectfully suggest that it is beliefs that are creating that anger, beliefs about what is 'proper' to this score and what is owed to the long-dead composer. It is not the sounds themselves that are the problem, because as a sequence of musical shapes I suspect that this performance can be every bit as plausible as a conventional one, perhaps even more so given the tedium of so many at the glacial speeds we have learned to expect. At the very least it reveals just how different can be the alternatives that normative ideology suppresses.

Ji Liu uses a completely normative performance style here. It is only the character (created by changed dynamic profiles through changing speeds, loudness, timings, and timbres) that is different, or transgressive if you prefer.

In Anna Scott's reading of Brahms's *Intermezzo* op. 119, no. 1,[25] however, there is a substantially non-normative performance style, one based closely on that of pupils of Clara Schumann whose playing was known to Brahms and his to them. Scott, however, takes aspects of their practice and extends them beyond their late-nineteenth century limits. She uses more radical rubato and hand-separation, rushing through phrases and, as a result, concatenating the score further than her models already do, to the extent of losing some notes in order to get the hands back together at key expressive moments. And yet the performance still makes good dynamic sense, albeit a rather different sense than usual. Overall it seems no less beautiful and persuasive than a normative modern performance, perhaps more so for its ability to succeed so improperly. Taking a different route, Diana Gilchrist's performances of Schubert's *Erlkönig*[26] and *Ave Maria*[27] subvert current performance style by incorporating a much wider range of vocal expression than is currently acceptable in polite recitals. But in doing so she opens up the possibility of these scores speaking of contemporary concerns in ways that classical concerts normally, and deliberately, seek to exclude.

In a healthy musical culture, when we judge that a performance 'works' it is not because it has a specific end result;[28] but rather because, during the experience of the performance, its dynamics seem well-formed (not correctly, or ideally, or ultimately formed but well-formed in relation to current or known or persuasively new performance styles). It is not a requirement that sees a performance as the end product of a chain of correct translations originating in the composer's intentions, or in tradition, or in respect, or in obedience. Well-formed musical dynamics are a requirement for an enriching experience, obedience to a particular model is not. Possible workable performances may be numberless, but they are not infinite. They are limited by the range of responses of brains to sounds *in cultural contexts*: only certain readings may be workable at a particular place and time. How and why they work may reveal much about contemporary behaviour and experience. Nonetheless, performers, like actors, can, and perhaps should, be constantly pushing at the edges of what seems workable in order to find out what else, and how else, a score can mean. We may discover much about our own culture by discovering what such performances reveal.

As to validation by the community, Clare Birchall has some useful comments on Lyotard's challenge to the Habermasian notion of '"community consensus" as a check upon interpretation' (Birchall 2004: 81 ff). For Lyotard 'consensus "is only a particular state of discussion, not its end" (*The Postmodern Condition*, 65)' (Birchall 2004: 82). Lyotard observes how the system manipulates consensus to maintain its power (*The Postmodern Condition*, 60–61) and argues that the exclusion of new approaches that threaten the system is terrorist, 'The decision makers' arrogance … consists in the exercise of terror. It says, 'Adapt your aspirations to our ends – or else' (Lyotard 1984: 64). How much of an accommodation with a repressive, intolerant system do we want? Do we opt for true anarchy, in which each musician decides freely

for themselves (in discussion) how to read a score? Or some kind of compromise in which a greater variety of readings is accepted as worth approving and supporting within a more liberal but still constrained system? On the face of it we may prefer the idea of staying within a system circling around norms. But we have to ask ourselves how benevolent in relation to norms the music business has been, or is likely to be, or can be. Does it make musicians happy? Does it welcome creativity or difference? Or are the boundaries set by commerce ruthlessly minimising its costs by minimising paid rehearsal? By contrast, rather as Adorno viewed the development of atonality, I am looking for a performance practice that disturbs the comfortable certainties of commodified artistic life and that allows scores from the past to shed fresh light on current concerns, perhaps thereby bringing classical music back into the cultural mainstream.

Lyotard, at the end of *The Postmodern Condition*, seeks 'a politics that would respect both the desire for justice and the desire for the unknown' (Lyotard 1984: 67), which is reasonable in this case too: justice for performers first of all, allowing them to make artistic decisions over a much wider field of possibilities. We need a practice in which debate is continuous and never completed, resisting the notion that there is an interpretation of a score on which we can mostly agree, and sustaining an environment in which musicians can continue to read texts, or change texts, or ignore them, in creative and challenging ways.

Notes

1 Adorno was making a slightly different though related point, in his critique of Toscanini, that, in its technical perfection and discipline, 'The performance sounds like its own phonograph record' (Adorno 2002a: 301).
2 Adorno's preference, repeatedly evident, is encapsulated in his observation (from 1956 or 1957) that 'the nuance determines the entire sense' (2006: 139).
3 Drawing on work from music psychology. From music philosophy see Levinson 1997.
4 For an exception see Taruskin 2020a.
5 Max Paddison's definition of ideology applies exactly here: 'vested socio-cultural interests masquerading as objective or disinterested attitudes … Ideology … serves to legitimize as natural, universal and unchanging something which is … cultural and historical in origin, and thus subject to change' (Paddison 1993: 53).
6 I have examined this in more depth, drawing on the psychologies of infant and religious attachment, in Leech-Wilkinson 2021.
7 Cf. Bruno Nettl, studying behaviour in conservatoire: 'What is it about Western culture that makes this great music so representative of aspects of our cultural system with which many denizens of the music school would not wish to be identified?' (Nettl 1995: 144–5)
8 Among many other studies Altenmüller and Jasusch 2010, Hodapp 2018, and Fernández-Morante 2018.
9 On these see, for example, Patston 2014, and Perkins et al. 2017.
10 For more on this see Leech-Wilkinson 2021: section 4, 'The Musical State and Mental Health'; and Leech-Wilkinson 2020a: chapter 14, https://challengingperformance.com/the-book-14/.
11 These examples are taken from Leech-Wilkinson 2020a: chapter 9.2, 'The Metaphorical Language of Record Reviews'. Names of authors are deliberately

withheld, as explained there. For a fuller and more formal study, using different examples (though without examples of racism) see Leech-Wilkinson 2020b.

12   For two very different angles on this see DeNora 2000 and Waltham-Smith 2017.

13   For Adorno's view of this as a property of composition, see Adorno 2002b. Adorno here has plenty to say there about freedom in reproduction (esp. 412–7), some of it pertinent here.

14   A useful overview is Cox 2016.

15   For more on this mapping, and the cross-modality that enables it, see Leech-Wilkinson 2018. For discussion of earlier thinking along such lines see Doğantan-Dack 2013 and Kim 2013. For related views from another perspective see the discussion of Berger 1999 in Taruskin 2020a. And, emphasising again the frequent resurfacing of these ideas, now much in need of a new synthesis, see (on William James and John Dewey) Shusterman 2011.

16   Here I respond particularly to the valuable discussion of Adorno's composition-focused perspective in DeNora 2003, esp. p. 10ff. Much of the discussion of feeling shapes in her chapter 3 is germane.

17   For reasons set out in Leech-Wilkinson 2012.

18   See, for example, Huron 2006.

19   'No pre-stabilized harmony between composition and the historically available means of interpretation' (Adorno 2006: 23).

20   Richard Taruskin, of course, has been arguing this powerfully for decades. See especially the essays collected in Taruskin 1995.

21   On this, using the common metaphor of shape, see Leech-Wilkinson 2018.

22   As Richard Taruskin 2020b: 143 (citing Adorno 1973) points out, this was one factor encouraging Adorno to privilege the 'structural' over the 'emotional' listener, as if the expert was any less in thrall to industry normativity.

23   I have provided some of these, in order to stimulate discussion and further experimentation, at the website which also hosts my recent book on some of these issues, https://challengingperformance.com.

24   Whether or not this is a performance of Beethoven's sonata seems beside the point, depending on obsolete notions of works and their identity. The performance is what it is, the product of a collaboration between Beethoven's notes, myself whose ideas it sounds, Andrew Hallifax who engineered and edited the recording, and above all Ji Liu, the pianist. What it becomes for the listener is (and must be) up to her. Adorno comments on the relative freedom of Beethoven's performances in Adorno 2002b: 415.

25   https://challengingperformance.com/interviews-recordings/anna-scott/

26   https://challengingperformance.com/the-book-23-1/

27   https://challengingperformance.com/the-book-23-2/

28   For an informal discussion of what it means to say that a performance works, see Leech-Wilkinson 2020a, chapter 22.1: https://challengingperformance.com/the-book-22-1/

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7   Exploring the text-performance continuum in music

Reflections on immediate mediation

Alessandro Cecchi

Setting the tone: music as text versus music as performance

In a recent strand of musicological discourse the common-sense distinction between text and performance has turned into a dichotomy precisely as a result of the determined effort to overcome the 'split' that is attributed to historical musicology as a discipline (Cook 2013: 16). Yet the argument that places 'music as text' and 'music as performance' in opposition seems to be quite a recent development. Even as late as the mid-1990s, the leading 'new' musicologist Jonathan Kramer did not have any impression of such a split: when he proposed the idea of a 'post-modern music' which 'locates meaning and even structure in listeners, more than in scores, performances, or composers' (Kramer 1996: 22), he placed 'scores' and 'composers' on the same side as 'performances', with 'listeners' at the other end of the continuum. Nicholas Cook cautiously proposed that argument in his seminal article 'Between Process and Product: Music and/as Performance' (Cook 2001) and subsequently refined it over time until his influential book *Beyond the Score: Music as Performance* (Cook 2013). Cook himself made it clear that 'early' new musicologists 'did less than might have been expected to place performance … at the heart of the discipline' (Cook 2009: 777). Among the reasons why they considered 'social meaning … encoded in the musical text' rather than created 'in the interpersonal and social transactions which those texts prompted … through the act of musical performance', he mentioned only one: 'the influence of Adorno' (Cook 2009: 777).

The conclusion of Cook's earlier article describes the need 'to understand music as both reflection and generator of social meaning' as 'most ambitiously expressed in Adorno's claim that music "presents social problems through its own material and according to its own formal laws – problems which music contains within itself in the innermost cells of its technique"' (Cook 2001: §31). Despite the 'frustration' that Adorno's analyses caused him, due to the opacity of 'his concept of the interface between music and society', Cook concludes: 'the problem disappears if instead of seeing musical works as texts within which social structures are encoded we see them as scripts in response to which social relationships are enacted' (Cook 2001: §31). At this

point Cook still regards Adorno's contribution as attuned to the objectives of a 'culturally-oriented musicology' (Cook 2001: §31) but inadequate to their implementation. In Cook's later reflection, however, Adorno is burdened with increasing responsibility, to the point that he comes to epitomise at the same time 'musicology's traditional orientation' (Cook 2013: 16), seen as based on 'textualist models of reproduction' (Cook 2013: 273), and 'modernism', viewed as 'the yardstick against which other epistemes, mentalities, periods, or cultures were measured' (Cook 2013: 130). Adorno is thus perceived by Cook as dictating the disciplinary agenda of musicology long after his death (Cook 2013: 250–1).

In this context, Adorno hovers like a scapegoat: being influential, he is charged with faults for which others were responsible; in addition, his theory is considered tainted by his 'mentality' outlined by Cook on account of a limited set of quotations extracted from Adorno's scattered notes published posthumously as *Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction* (Adorno 2006).

It is not my aim to come to the defence of Adorno, whose outlook is, of course, of his own time, laden with traits that are unacceptable today (Cook 2013: 8–9, 15, 17–9). But for this same reason one should recognise that Adorno's 'textualist' orientation is largely established by or measured against the 'music as performance' paradigm, for he lacked an alternative against which to argue and defend his alleged position. Moreover, a less incomplete account of Adorno's theory of reproduction, one capable of building a better understanding of his often changing positions in the context of his private notes, would be desirable, and it is for this reason that I shall dwell on Adorno a little longer.

Considered in its context, Adorno's idea of musical 'reproduction' is connected neither with a textualist orientation nor with the modernist mentality of his own culture but rather it is linked to an 'idiosyncratic use of the concept of "mimesis"' (Gritten 2014: 97). I have discussed elsewhere how complex, and also contradictory, Adorno's attempt to consider the text-performance relation in terms of imitation is, including the role his notation theory – based on Hugo Riemann's remarks on early notation – plays in this context (Cecchi 2017). To illustrate this complexity, in the following paragraphs I will introduce some arguments (along with selected quotations from his own writings) which will give a rather different picture of Adorno's theory.

First, Adorno himself explicitly defined the musical text 'as a memorial trace of the ephemeral sound, not as a fixing of its lasting meaning', to which he added that the musical text 'signifies the ideal of sound, not its meaning' (Adorno 2006: 4). With such a definition he is not that far from Cook's position on musical meaning.

Second, for Adorno the object of imitation is not simply 'the text' but something underlying the musical text, which remains 'hidden' (Adorno 2006: 4) and is at times compared to an image – hence the definition of musical performance as the 'x-ray image of the work' (Adorno 2006: 1). Though he later discarded this metaphor, from the beginning his idea of 'reproduction' is

less straightforward than has been claimed. With respect to Adorno's identi-
fication of three aspects of notation in performance, the object of imitation is
neither the 'mensural' (i.e., the symbolic level of the score) nor the 'idiomatic'
(i.e., the paralinguistic aspects of music in performance), but the 'neumic'
element (Adorno 2006: 67), remnant of the ancient neumes. In Riemann's
hypothesis, these rely on 'cheironomic' musical practices (i.e., based on hand
gestures), for which – according to Adorno – modern notation would have
developed 'substitute functions', identified in 'phrase marks' for articulation
and punctuation (Adorno 2006: 94), dynamics, tempo and performance indi-
cations, and everything related to the 'mimic', 'mimetic' and 'gestural' aspects
of music (Adorno 2006: 67) inherent in musical practice. Viewed in this light,
the 'neumic' element converges with Cook's idea of 'social script' more than it
diverges.

Third, since in Adorno's theory of musical performance 'imitation' takes
over 'interpretation' – the hermeneutic act, traditionally related to the reading
of a text – I would rather define his attempt as 'anti-textualist', which reveals
how little he was interested in developing a coherently textualist perspective.

These observations demonstrate how current musicological discourse pro-
poses simplified visions of the theoretical efforts of past scholars and con-
siders them hostage to the limits of their mentalities, rather than exploring the
theoretical implications of their work, which could prove useful within a dif-
ferent context. On my part, I prefer to consider Adorno and Cook, together
with many others, as travelling companions in a common effort to clarify a
complex matter – one which will hardly find a final word, for any perspective,
not only Adorno's, is limited by the set of assumptions which define it.

Adorno's idiosyncratic attempt to define the text-performance relation in
terms of mimesis was doomed to fail, for imitation requires a high degree of
similarity. Musicians can and do imitate the performances of other musicians,
and their recordings or record productions, but the transition from the score
to the 'acoustic result' implies a 'change of medium' (Borio 2007: 71) which
makes the application of the similarity criterion problematic. Yet most of
Adorno's theoretical problems depend on such philosophical assumptions as
the principles of the 'autonomy' of art, the 'non-intentionality' of musical
texts, and the 'non-similarity' of music to language – assumptions he did not
want to put aside (Cecchi 2017: 134).

Cook's 'music as performance' paradigm also has its inconsistencies, espe-
cially when compared to other disciplines. When Cook proposed seeing scores
as 'scripts' he wrote: 'Whereas to think of a Mozart quartet as a "text" is to
construe it as a half-sonic, half-ideal object reproduced in performance, to
think of it as a "script" is to see it as choreographing a series of real-time,
social interactions between players' (Cook 2001: §15). For him, 'the shift from
seeing performance as the reproduction of texts to seeing it a cultural practice
prompted by scripts' was sufficient to dissolve the 'stable distinction between
work and performance' (Cook 2001: §16). And yet, this seminal article in the
performative turn in musicology has met with pertinent criticism at the hand

of performance scholar Philip Auslander. In commenting on Cook's example, he declares that he is 'not persuaded that his renaming of the work as script really makes much difference', not only because 'the musical script as choreographing a set of social interactions maintains the idea that the musical work provides the design that underlies and thus determines the performance', but especially because 'when the question is framed in terms of work and performance … the important relationships are between abstractions'; meaning that both 'the composer's agency as the one who created the script, and the performers' agency as those who embody it through actions and gestures … are left out of the picture' (Auslander 2006: 101).

Such criticism would have required amending the model, yet Cook's position does not change: in *Beyond the Score* the concept of the score as 'social script' is still there, though it is used only sparingly within the confines of a single chapter (Cook 2013: 260, 273 and 275), and the only response to Auslander's criticism is the incorporation of his concepts, starting from 'musical persona' (Cook 2013: 325), into a system in which 'to focus on persona or on work is to take up a different perspective on … the inherently multidimensional phenomenon of musical performance' (Cook 2013: 336). Yet, if this is the point, it is not clear why the same argument is not used to frame 'music as text' and 'music as performance' as different perspectives on equally constitutive dimensions of music.

Building the framework: media studies and performance studies

In search of a model capable of holding musical text and performance together in a productive way, I shall invoke disciplinary perspectives that are more removed from musicological controversies, and therefore more able to break out of the impasse.

A first way towards overcoming the dichotomies that pervade the discourse of musicology is through media studies, as this research field ignores any hierarchies between the media. In Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), manuscripts, films, television and typewritten scripts are equally considered media connected to their social performance; in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), a wide range of media is presented in which text and performance are coexisting dimensions; and in Marshall and Eric McLuhan's *Laws of Media*, it is made explicit that 'the structures of media dynamics are inseparable from performance' (McLuhan and McLuhan 1988: 116). A far more recent line of research delves into McLuhan's thesis that 'the medium is the message' (McLuhan 1994: 7) with the corollary that 'the "content" of any medium is always another medium' (McLuhan 1994: 8) moving towards the elaboration of a new theory of mediation. In *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999), media scholars Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin discuss the 'double logic of remediation' (Bolter and Grusin 1999: 3–15), relying on 'our culture's contradictory imperatives for immediacy and hypermediacy', that is, its efforts 'to multiply

its media and to erase all traces of mediation', and possibly 'erase its media in the very act of multiplying them' (Bolter and Grusin 1999: 5). This logic can function in the sense of 'mediation of mediation', or as a claim of the 'inseparability of mediation and reality', or in the sense of media 'reform' (Bolter and Grusin 1999: 55), and can be extended to past media environments and to music considered as text, as performance, and as media production.

In his recent article 'Radical Mediation', Grusin undertakes a philosophical generalisation of this theory which leads to the concept of the immediacy of mediation. In so doing he confronts both William James's 'radical empiricism' (Grusin 2015: 127) and Hegel's concept of mediation, of which Adorno offers his own radical version, with 'the insistence that there is no such thing as immediacy' (Grusin 2015: 135). Grusin uses James's extension of the system of empiricism to the experience of 'relations' to establish that 'mediations' are no less 'immediate' than any other aspect of the 'real' (Grusin 2015: 126–8). He comes to the same conclusion by altering Adorno's claim: 'where Adorno cites Hegel as arguing that there is nothing … that is not *mediated* … I argue that there is nothing that is not *mediation* and that *mediation itself is immediate*' (Grusin 2015: 135).

These conclusions have relevant epistemological implications since the dichotomy between 'mediation' as process and the 'mediated' as the content of experience is, in a way, suspended, and this makes explicit what in the concept of 'remediation' was only implicit. What Grusin suggests is that the mediated 'content' (in McLuhan's terms) is never experienced separately from its mediation; that the 'content' of experience is so embedded in experience that even to think of such content as being 'mediated' by it is problematic, for the 'content' eventually experienced as 'mediated' by mediation would turn out to be another form of 'mediation', as is already implied by the concept of 'remediation'.

Grusin's concept of mediation is counterintuitive but not contradictory. In clarifying it, the first step is to recognise that the idea of a mediated content independent of its mediations relies on a largely arbitrary act of inference, not experience – this 'content' is an abstraction from experiences which never provide the mediated content 'per se'. The second step is to note that we can experience mediations only as material content of experience: they materially 'incorporate', instead of presenting or displaying, the mediated as an aspect of their mediation. In other words, it is the dichotomy of 'mediation' as frame and 'mediated' as content which prevents one from thinking about the reality of mediations, and sets the stage for establishing a primacy of the mediated (deduced by inference) over mediation (as experience). In a sense, Grusin's approach to mediation overcomes the impasse by applying the 'indiscernibility claim', originally invoked by Adorno against the concept/object dichotomy (Joll 2009: 239), to the mediation/mediated dichotomy, that is, against Adorno (O'Connor 1999).

Radical mediation can offer the epistemological ground for an understanding of musical experience beyond any hierarchical views. According to

radical mediation, the forms of musical experience can be seen as phenom-enologically different but ontologically equal, for they are all immediate mediations, excluded from a criterion of greater or lesser proximity to music's true essence. Relations between them can be reconsidered as well, for in Grusin's model 'all connections involve modulation, translation, or transfor-mation', and 'Mediation does not stand between a preexistent subject and object, or prevent immediate experience or relations, but … transduces or generates immediate experience or relations' (Grusin 2015: 138).

Radical mediation thus implies on one hand the immediacy of mediation and, on the other, the interposition of intermediate instances and mediating processes. In this perspective, musical texts and musical performances are neither hierarchical nor oppositional terms: as radical mediations they offer immediate musical mediations, whose relation generates a continuum of musical experience.

Performance studies offers a second, effective way to get rid of ontolo-gical claims concerning musical works as well as essentialist views and dichotomic thinking. As Auslander recently claims, 'there is … no onto-logical or epistemological gap between music and performance that needs bridging. Music "is" what musicians "do"' (Auslander 2015: 539–40). At first sight, this drastic identification of music and performance excludes the dimension of text. Actually, that of performance studies is 'a way of looking at performance that does not particularly privilege its textual ele-ments but treats performances as texts in themselves' (Auslander in Cecchi 2021: 257), which proves consistent with the assumptions of performance scholars. And yet the tendency to exclude texts from performance is a symptom of a foreclosure that is not entirely justifiable, and potentially harmful for a theory of performance that aims to be all-encompassing as much as possible.

Fortunately, here the concept of 'performance' is so inclusive that it allows us to recover the pragmatic dimension of musical text as an aspect of perfor-mance in general, which includes the performance of the 'musical persona', as it has been quite recently reconsidered (Auslander 2020) and expanded (Aus-lander 2021). In this regard, I shall put forth two arguments. The first is that even composers who do not publicly perform the music they have conceived, composed and written out in notation, do actually 'do' something as musi-cians. They 'make music', and their activity is part and parcel of the general practice that has been termed as 'musicking' (Small 1998). In other words, composers 'perform' as musicians too, not least because their activity is a significant aspect of their 'musical personae'. The second is that texts (as scores, parts, lead sheets, tablatures etc.) are present and consulted by musi-cians on stage in different contexts that are in no way limited to the field of 'classical' or 'art' music.

Musical texts, then, express their performativity directly on stage and in live performances. I refer not only to the function of texts with respect to musi-cians, who frequently rely on a text in front of them to perform music in

rehearsal and in actual performance, to the extent that their absence in performance depends on memorisation skills which constitute an added value to their mastery, but also to the performativity of texts with respect to the audience. People attending concerts are influenced by the more or less apparent presence of musical texts on stage, where these are present. Thus, while it is certainly useful to put the 'page to stage' approach under scrutiny (Cook 2009: 781; Cook 2013: 37), the 'page on stage' argument challenges the exclusion of musical texts from theoretical consideration, insofar as that page, in its materiality, is more or less intensively, but nevertheless visibly used by musicians in performance. This pragmatic idea of musical texts experienced in their multifarious phenomenology reconciles with a performance studies perspective, not least as it is a question of 'performativity'. Auslander himself is far from arguing against the presence and performativity of musical texts on stage, including their effects on the audience (Auslander in Cecchi 2021: 257).

Auslander's concept of 'reactivation', based on Walter Benjamin's idea that the reproduction 'reactivates' the experience of the reproduced object in the particular situation of the 'beholder' (Auslander 2018: 45–7) as spectator or listener, is more suited to reconsidering musical texts as performances in themselves. Even if scores are not 'documents' of a musical performance in the strict sense – they do not fall under the concept of 'performance documentation' – there is a sense in which notational texts can be seen as sites on which a performance takes place via the beholder's reactivation from them. I refer in particular to the apparently paradoxical possibility of reactivating 'the experience of a performance that never took place' (Auslander 2018: 10), especially since documentation is also presented as 'a set of instructions, with illustrations, for executing the performance' (Auslander 2018: 12).

The combination of media studies and performance studies in an interdisciplinary perspective suggests rethinking musical texts as effective places of mediation. According to radical mediation, this form of musical mediation is no less immediate than any other musical experience. As media, musical texts are not only editorial products resulting from a collective performance, but they also demonstrate their performative potential when used in performance. Moreover, musical texts can even be considered as performances themselves, and as places of reactivation of possible performances. This interdisciplinary framework encourages further exploration of the text-performance relationship as a continuum of experience.

Outlining the model: 'script' between text and performance

Understanding musical texts as media and, at the same time, as performances is crucial to my discourse. Yet radical mediation suggests that musical texts are only experienced as material instances, which I will term 'editions' – the clarification being that texts are not just 'mediated' (i.e., 'displayed', 'presented') by them but directly and materially embedded in editions as 'immediate mediations'. Not in themselves, but only as 'editions' can texts be

considered results of the collective performance involved in the act of publication. In a short unnumbered note at the end of a journal article, Ronald Broude proposes what I consider to be the most pragmatic and clear definition of the relations between 'text', 'edition' and 'work': within an 'edition', which usually involves 'various agents' (editors, publishers etc.), the 'text' is the 'unique arrangement of symbols by which a work is represented' and is 'established by an agent … for some specific public purpose' and 'class of users' (Broude 2012). As for the concept of 'work' he adds: 'pragmatically what unites all forms of a work is that people competent in the repertoire to which it belongs can identify them as instantiations of the same entity' (Broude 2012). The relevant implication here is that a text, as 'content' (in McLuhan's sense) of a material edition, is in a relation of 'representation' with the work, whose pertinence is traced back to a negotiation between experts, which I would define as an act of collective or social inference. Consequently, editions are the result of social mediation involving performance even in their 'indexical' relation to the works 'represented', which can only be grasped by inference. The function of remediation is clear in that the work is a mediation which is the content of a text (another mediation), which is the content of an edition.

Musical performances as precise 'venues' also take place in a specific medium (the theatre, the stadium, the specific site, the television studio, the recording studio, the live concert in general) and can easily be brought back to the concept of 'edition' (a concert tour, a director's staging, a theatre's production, a musician's recital, a film genre, a TV format). As both 'venues' and 'editions', performances, too, result from sets of pragmatic constraints involving a number of agents and mediators, and may be considered as 'productions' in their own right. As productions they can be repeated in, and adapted to, different venues and take place in different contexts with a high degree of recognition. In this sense, they are in no way 'determined' by texts or scores, for a text (e.g., a theatrical script) or a musical score is clearly just one 'ingredient' of performance (Hamilton 2007: 31–2). And yet texts, theatrical scripts, editions, scores, even represented works with the reference to their authors, contribute highly to such 'determination'. While on the one hand texts are not seen as privileged elements of performance, on the other hand they share a constituent role with the other ingredients, even as 'part of the expressive equipment musicians employ in the production of personae' (Auslander 2006: 188). Yet, although scores can take the place of theatrical scripts, they need not be renamed 'scripts' – as Cook proposes – to regain their social meaning: they are socially meaningful already as texts established by editions to represent works.

I propose to reintroduce the concept of 'script' in a different place as a mediating and intermediate instance between text and performance. In outlining an operative definition of the concept, that I will name 'performance script' for the sake of clarity, I will discuss it alongside a range of approaches and similar concepts that converge on the mediating agency of the performer.

Thus, whereas a text is just a precondition of possible performances, the 'performance script' is the process towards actual performances.

In taking up the concept of 'script' I will not follow Cook, not only because I take Auslander's criticisms seriously, but also because Cook's proposal keeps the gap between text and performance open, whereas my aim is to fill it. My 'performance script' both implies and presupposes the text-performance continuum. In this respect, I find similarities between my model and John Rink's emphasis on the 'score-sound continuum' in piano performance (Rink 2018: 97). There are two main differences in my perspective: that I refer to text as medium, which encompasses the score as one possible form; and that I want neither to reduce the performance of music to a matter of sound – as in Rink's older 'sound alone' model (Rink 1999: 218) or in his more recent pursuit of a 'music-as-sound' perspective – nor merely to demonstrate that a musical performance is 'more than "the music" alone' (Rink 2018: 95). As performance scholars convincingly suggest, 'Music is not sound disengaged from the physical being of the person who makes it', and 'the sounds I hear result directly from all aspects of the person's physical engagement with the act of music making – all of the sounds and gestures that constitute the performance – not just the limited range of actions conventionally included under the word "technique"' (Auslander 2015: 539).

A more clear convergence with Rink's proposals relates to his concept of 'performance "program"', which 'is never entirely fixed, although … it may remain largely stable over time', especially as it 'involves rehearsal and actual performance in a durative and recursive process' (Rink 2018: 97). Once again, in this case 'performance script' may be a preferable term, since it relates to schemas of behaviour in general and provides (or combines) 'programs' for action, thus encompassing the concept of 'program' as well as the sense of the performers' inscriptions within the score. Moreover, the programs provided by 'performance scripts' need not be exclusively 'narrative', as Rink seems to privilege by insisting on the metaphor of 'story-telling' (Rink 2018: 92–5), perhaps because this is more in line with the restrained expressiveness one expects from 'classical' piano recitals or 'program' music. I would also include 'rhetorical' and 'structural' programs (Cook's privileged terms); 'mensural', 'idiomatic' and 'neumic' ones (to take Adorno's terms as descriptive categories); and even 'dramaturgical' ones, for there is an aspect of staging and mise-en-scène in all musical performances, which is also the reason why I do not want to entirely discard the theatrical sense of the term 'script'.

In terms of 'reactivation' theory (Auslander 2018), my 'performance script' is a place for 'reactivation'. If the score stands for the 'document', the 'performance script' takes the place of a cognitive schema through which the performers, as the agents of actual performances, reactivate the performance from a musical text. In this respect, the actual performance would represent a 'reperformance'. This last term is interesting in relation to 'reproduction'. Auslander's theory relies on a passage from Benjamin in which 'reproduction' is presented as involving a sense of 'new' production or 'continuing'

production – a sense which Adorno could have drawn from Benjamin, but also from Hegel, or from the tradition of German music theory up until Riemann (von Loesch 2018). As a process of (re)production through reactivation, but also of (re)mediation, a 'performance script' does not merely 'stand' between text and performance, but it is an expression of the text-performance continuum which emerges and is perfected in rehearsal and in performance.

Terminologically, 'script' connects to 'prescription', which I intend to include in my operational definition. Yet, since a 'performance script' involves the agency of the performer, prescription cannot effectively refer to the musical text directly – a score by itself cannot actually prescribe anything to anyone. In a sense, it must take the form of a 'self-prescription' which relies on a set of preconditions including the performers' idea of the score and its relation to performance, their imagination, education and training. The consequence is that the 'norm' or the 'rule' is not in the text but only in the performer, who actively transduces the score's indications into a set of regulated behaviours perfected in rehearsal and in performance, the main places of planning, testing, repetition and habituation.

Such a perspective provides a framework to redefine the 'neumic' as the superimposition of a performance script over the score by placing emphasis on Adorno's idea of the 'interpolation of sense in the text' (Adorno 2006: 94), which points to the active contribution of the performer. In this respect, the 'performance script' is the place where a score's instructions are transformed by the performer into a set of 'self-instructions'. Even in collective performances, 'self-prescriptions' refer mainly to the individual performer and the personal 'script' is still in the foreground: a performer's agency is no less involved when prescriptions are negotiated with other performers, conductors or composers, or obedience to their prescriptions is decided. Moreover, the 'performance script' cannot be replaced by the addition of detailed instructions in the score, as is the case with 'enabling editions' (Broude 2012). These are still 'texts', and the application of the rules proposed by the edition in performance is the domain of the performer: neither detailed descriptions nor additional inscriptions in themselves can contain the rules for their application.

Viewed from another perspective, 'performance scripts' are not written, although in the context of performances relying on scores a performance script can include inscriptions, or annotations, by the hand of the performer in and around the score. However, in this same context, 'oral scripts' are far more present and frequent: in addition to being present in music teaching and training, oral negotiations take place during rehearsal, especially when some kind of coordination is required, and they include aural, gestural, and even tactile suggestions, which generally complement written annotations. This does not change the concept: 'performance scripts' exist in a medium, but the medium is not predetermined.

In this regard, my concept recalls 'script' as used in cognitive theory (Mandler 1984), psychological therapy (Byng-Hall 1996), music education

(Borthwick and Davidson 2002) – where 'script' is 'a set of beliefs and beha-
viors that regulate the social roles played by each individual' within a social
context (Davidson 2004: 64) – and cultural pragmatics (Goddard and Wierz-
bicka 2004). In cultural pragmatics, unwritten 'cultural norms' and rules of
conduct can be written down as 'scripts' and discussed in an intercultural
perspective, and the sense that a 'performance script' can be derived from an
actual performance is included in my model.

Implementing the model: 'schema' beyond text and performance

The concept of a 'performance script' that is not linked to a written form
requires the implementation of the framework in such a way as to include
'oral' performances in the model. The entry point is the concept of 'entex-
tualisation', introduced in linguistic anthropology by Richard Bauman and
Charles Briggs (1990), as used by scholar of African oral poetry Karin
Barber, who considers text and performance in this context as 'two sides of a
coin, inseparable and mutually constitutive' (Barber 2007: 79). She distin-
guishes 'performance theory', which 'stressed the emergent moment', from
'"entextualisation" theory', which is more 'focused on the way in which fluid
discourse is fixed, and made available for repetition, recreation or "copy-
ing" … for transmission over space and perpetuation over time' (Barber 2007:
71). This implies that 'text' as a concept is far from unrelated to 'oral'
performances.

   The presence and use of texts in the strict sense is well known in this same
context. Elsewhere, Barber admits that 'Written texts can be cues, scripts or
stimulants to oral performance' (Barber 2003: 324), which she does not seem
to see as a contradiction. Now, I would consider it quite legitimate to ask
what it is that makes a tradition a 'written' tradition, if not the presence and
use of written texts with the functions mentioned by Barber – and, similarly,
what makes a tradition an 'oral' tradition, if not the absence of written texts.
Yet, answering these questions would solve the contradiction only in terms of
what I envision as a mere preconception. To make this contradiction pro-
ductive and useful for my model, it is safer to move towards a redefinition of
the boundaries between 'oral' and 'written' traditions in relation to
performance.

   Ethnomusicologists are familiar with processes of 'entextualisation', as well
as with the regular presence and use of written texts in 'oral' performances,
including improvisations (Furniss 2008). A convincing way to consider these
two aspects is by applying cognitive schema theory to musical performance.
In his research into North Indian classical music, Richard Widdess proposes
what I consider to be the most convincing model for the study of an impro-
vised musical performance. It is seen as 'composed by a large variety of spe-
cialised schemas', not necessarily 'formalised as music theory' but inclusive of
'relatively fixed patterns ("scripts", "formulae" or "riffs")' and highly flexible
structures ("plans", "templates")' (Widdess 2013: 200). In clarifying his

approach he proposes this example: 'a jazz performance … might combine a harmonic schema (chord sequence) with a melodic script (the song tune), a temporal schema (metre), pitch schemas (key, scale, mode), a verbal script (lyrics), a formal template (song–solos–song) and a stylistic schema including aspects of sound, playing/singing techniques, ornamentation, rhythm, melodic conventions etc. that are typical of jazz' (Widdess 2013: 200–1). I would add that in jazz performances a number of the specialised schemas involved are pre-combined and fixed (i.e., memorised) in rehearsal as the main place of refinement, repetition and habituation; that written music (e.g., lead sheets) is often used in rehearsal and actual performances; and that notation (e.g., for orchestral parts) is necessary for some performances which are no less typical of jazz. From a performance studies perspective, one could continue by saying that most of these aspects are further schematised through the habits of individual performers and collective performances for the creation and implementation of individual and collective 'musical personae'.

Following this approach, the 'performance script' can be defined as the cognitive place of the 'combination' – through repetition and habituation, in rehearsal and in performance – of a number of specialised 'schemas'. In this respect, 'text' can be defined, in turn, as a cognitive dimension which is independent of the medium involved. Ultimately, both material texts (editions) and entextualisation processes provide pre-formed combinations of just some of the possible schemas to be used in performance. To see a score as a written, notational combination of some schemas involved in performance implies that the presence and use of a score should not significantly alter the approach to musical performance, but at the same time the score serves as one of the components that provides indications about how the performance actually works.

In terms of performance, written and oral traditions are not as divergent as they have generally been depicted, especially since 'exclusively' written musical traditions are both historically unlikely and culturally unthinkable. To revive what has been framed as a 'written' tradition through actual performances means to (re)invent a social practice, to (re)establish contexts which legitimate and support it, and to supply an effective 'oral' (i.e., living and lively) tradition: written music has only existed and can only exist within oral practices, as much as oral practices are often inclusive of written texts, used in different ways.

Widdess concludes his application of cognitive schema theory to improvised performance in 'orally composed and transmitted music' with a very significant – though apparently incidental – statement: 'we need not assume that those performers who rely more on memorised material are any less reliant on schemas' (Widdess 2013: 208). I propose to extend this statement to performers who rely more on scores – whether memorised or not. When used in performance, the score becomes so radically embedded in the actual (re) mediation – not only as 'memorised material', 'specialised schema' (Widdess 2013), or in terms of 'embodied cognition' (Leman 2007; Leman and Maes

2014; Geeves and Sutton 2014), but also as text which is actually consulted in and for performance – that it becomes the performers' cognition of their own performances, as expressed by Rink through the concept of 'impersonating the music' (Rink 2017).

To draw from my ongoing research,[1] Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli's piano performance is clearly 'oriented' by scores in the usual meaning of editions of notational texts representing musical works, yet it would be extremely reductive to frame it as being 'determined' by scores. His performance results from the combination of many heterogeneous aspects: not only are 'setting' (e.g., the meticulous preparation of the piano under his supervision) and 'personal front', which in Erving Goffman's terms includes 'appearance' and 'manner' (Auslander 2006: 108), as significant here as they are in any other performance, but the score, in itself a combination of specialised schemas, patterns and templates (harmonic process, melodic conduct, metre, formal outline and so on), needs to be processed by a 'performance script', which results in a combination of a set of other significant schemas of behaviour and habits. In the case of Michelangeli I might name: an idiosyncratic schema for 'Nachklappen' (i.e., the anticipation of the bass in the left hand with respect to the melodic pitch or the chord in the right hand); a personal idea of 'portamento' applied to the piano, which inspires a schema according to which larger intervals may require a delay in time; a very personal emphasis on phrase marks to identify the important meaningful – rather than simply structural – units by means of annotations in the scores, used as reference points in both performance and teaching, corresponding to his personal approach to the score. The latter aspect explains why I would define Michelangeli's performance 'style' as predominantly 'neumic' (my use of Adorno's term in the frame of Cook's emphasis on style is intentional), that is, oriented by a selection of instructions from the score, 'interpolated' by his musical and sonic imagination, as well as by his whole thinking about music, which already orients the choice of the music to be performed, according to the definition of music as 'an expressive resource musicians use to perform their personae' (Auslander 2015: 531). This interacts with a number of other factors, including a personal evaluation of how the actual instrument, in its actual state, should play in the space of the performance, also considered in terms of the actual conditions (air humidity was Michelangeli's main concern) which could influence last minute decisions about important sonic aspects (dynamic excursion, pedalling, touch) but which also led him, as quite often happened, to make the decision not to play, and to cancel the concert. Even these aspects were involved in the construction of the 'musical persona', that is, they were useful for his self-presentation and authentication with respect to the audience.

Michelangeli's decisions about the works and the editions used for performance are no less significant in this regard: his preference for some 'Urtext'-style editions (sometimes declared in the liner notes of his studio recordings) is relevant; he often felt the need of a text established in accordance with the

intentions of the author (which was a crucial aspect of his mentality as well as his discourse) without intrusive 'encrustations' often found in 'enabling' editions curated by performers. Nevertheless, his sense that a work was particularly suitable for his musical persona, or simply attractive relative to his performance style, could lead him to include spurious works in his otherwise extremely selective repertoire, or to opt for texts established and significantly reworked by curators (including performers) worthy of his trust. All these aspects confirm that, also in this context, what is written, the score as edition which establishes a text which represents a work, is an 'ingredient' of performance which does not in any way 'determine' it, and yet it contributes greatly to the overall performance – not only of the music, but also of the performer's 'persona'. Michelangeli's oral and aural 'scripts' (some are available either as unauthorised or authorised recordings) in his dialogues with orchestral players, especially in relation to piano concertos, where he provided examples at the piano, are even more significant and indicative than the annotations in his pupils' or his own scores. The latter only make sense within the frame of a performance practice, to which recordings can testify far more effectively.

The concept of the 'performance script', then, is helpful to bring different perspectives into play and keep them together within a nuanced frame of reference for an all-encompassing theory of musical performance that includes both 'texts' as material editions and 'text' as a cognitive element relying on entextualisation processes – processes which are actively involved even in performances of written music. Entextualisation theory and performance theory ultimately converge in saying that musicians always perform something, including the improvisation they are negotiating in real time; something which is not necessary to define further when it is evident that it could be reperformed or reproduced, especially as it receives a title, that is, a label which identifies it; something which performs the same cultural function ascribed to texts, editions and works.

Encouraging dialogue

The combination of radical mediation and performance theory provides the epistemological basis to escape the impasse in which the musicological discourse on text and performance has become stuck on account of the recent emphasis on music 'as performance'. The exit strategy – on one hand a reflection on the complexity of the textual dimension, and on the other an operational (re)definition of 'performance script' as a mediating and intermediate instance between text and performance – provides a theoretical model for an exploration of the text–performance continuum. The implementation of the interdisciplinary framework by means of entextualisation theory and schema theory as applied to oral performance in ethnomusicology uncovers a cognitive space that makes it possible to go beyond the separation of text and performance, and at the same time to recognise the effectiveness of the textual dimension in performance. The model also brings forth

arguments for a reconsideration of the gap between 'oral' and 'written' traditions where musical performance is concerned, which has a number of methodological implications. In this respect, the 'performance script' is redefined as the effective combination of a number of cognitive schemas in performance, whether they are oriented by notational texts as scores or not. Whichever the case, the 'performance script' is oriented by processes of entextualisation that either transform the selection of some indications of the score into cognitive schemas for performance, in combination with many others, or directly provide cognitive schemas that orient the performance. In the latter case it is possible to 'extract' the text from performance as a cognitive schema in order to make it reproducible and recognisable for possible reperformance. There is, therefore, no decisive difference whether a musical performance relies more on memorised material, on written scores (which are often memorised), or on other, unwritten schemas combined in real time during performance; and there is no real cognitive discontinuity between text and performance in this regard.

This chapter is the result of an interdisciplinary dialogue as an epistemological instrument useful to overcome the unavoidable limits of disciplinary thinking – limits which emerge perhaps more clearly at moments of promised disciplinary turns and new paradigms, for these end up creating or enhancing cultural dichotomies and controversies that reside internally within the assumptions of a single discipline. The comparison with different disciplinary perspectives is all the more vital in the case of performance, which is the main field of research in the discipline of performance studies, as well as a main concern of ethnomusicology for many decades now. This is the reason why I have favoured dialogue with the disciplines that I consider to be natural extensions of musicology, increasingly oriented to the study of music in performance and media productions. I have tried to reconsider the contribution of past perspectives, in addition to the diverging assumptions of other disciplinary fields, not only relative to performance but also to the concept of text, in order not to risk getting caught up in problems which often disappear as soon as the perspective changes.

Note

1 Some of the topics briefly mentioned in this paragraph are more extensively addressed in a previous chapter of mine (Cecchi 2016).

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Part III

Music on Screen

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8 Instrumentalizing Music for the Movies
Comedy, Portability, Labor, Critique

Lydia Goehr

'Two strings to a bow are better than one'

<div align="right">Proverb</div>

'The instrument becomes the main thing'

<div align="right">Max Horkheimer</div>

Part 1

This chapter investigates musical instruments in early film comedies where there is a striking element of outsider status, a not-belonging, a not-fitting of means to ends, or a refusal to take on a social role or task in an expected way. To take on something suggests a carrying of what cannot be carried, a portability of the non-portable in a modern society on the move. The idea of arriving at a port without a passport makes portability an urgent theme for us still today.

Portability has long carried a contrary suggestion of a back-breaking labor, and, with this, the challenge of doing something that feels impossible for us to do. One strain of critical theory is to seek the possible in the impossible. One tries to rescue something of which humanity might still be capable: to comport oneself, say, as a human and not as a machine. One might ask whether the term *musical* can still accompany the term *instrument* if the musical instrument is used under the condition of *industrialization* or *administration* to yield nothing by way of a genuinely *cultural* product. Or one might ask what values have *Kultur* or *Kunst* when conditions of social labor mirror only alienation on the part of producers and receivers? Or, what does it mean to address the *popularization* of music for a *public* of allegedly stilled sensibility? These are familiar questions for society and culture analysed from two sides, high and low, as we hear from Theodor W. Adorno in his *Theses on Need*:

> The Beethoven symphony conducted by Toscanini is no better than the next popular film to come along, and anything with Bette Davis is on its

own a synthesis [of this process]. It is precisely this synthesis that is
deserving of the most extreme suspicion.

(Adorno et al. 2017: 103)

The first point is not to be misled by Adorno's questions. He described the
loss of dialectical movement in the synthetic culture, a leveling of its modes of
production. But he did not then leave his diagnosis, or the figure of Bette
Davis, in place. He did not reduce his social critique merely to a complaint of
loss or to a nostalgia for a world long gone. If the world long gone had led to
the present world, why would one argue for its return?

Looking back, Adorno's diagnosis of a world in crisis was readymade by a
Marxist critique of capitalist labor. For this chapter, a single *thesis of need*
asserts itself. In early film-comedy, the portability of musical instruments that
were strikingly not portable – namely, pianos and harps – made portability a
critical issue, and long before *the mobile turn* that scholars investigate as part
of *mobility studies* today (Bennett & Healy 2015; Gopinath & Stanyek 2014).
As the history of portable technologies has been written, things once burden-
ing our backs came to fit in our pockets. The pocket wireless and Walkman
gave way to things to get under our skin, to a technology designed as the apple of
our eye: the I-phone, I-pod, and I-pad. The ego of the capitalized I is intentional.
Soon, no more electric cords, no more pains of pairing with Bluetooth, but
instead, an unrestricted ease and lightness of a technology approaching the vir-
tuality that has long been feared for deflating our claim to be free-standing sub-
jects. Our portable instruments carry the I of identity, not us. Recent work in
mobility studies focuses on the distribution of *products* or *streams* across worlds
or spheres marked less by cosmopolitanism than by globalization. *All the world*
is less a *stage* than *on the move.* Urgency is felt in a moving world that seems to
have suspended all desirable differentiation and distinction. Contemporary the-
orists take on travel, technology, and telecommunication to a point of exhaus-
tion. There is celebration and there is complaint in equal measure. There is
laughter, while tears flow for the contradictions of a world we have made for
ourselves. In critical theory, the point is to draw out the contradictions without
taking an easy side one way or another.

The title for my chapter draws from Adorno and Hanns Eisler's *Composing
for the Films* (1947). Most pertinent are their remarks pertaining to a music
connected to itinerant lives lived by wandering or journeying. *Being on the
move* was part and parcel of the baggage that accompanied their thoughts
about the formal movement in the material that made a new sort of *music for
the movies* – for an art that was for them a new technology of *moving pictures*.
I have long thought about the aesthetic and political, formal and material
dimensions of movement – *Bewegung* (Goehr 2008): about how much it has
meant for thoughts and things to be in movement contra a world that has
been claimed to have reached a standstill in crisis or catastrophe. Obviously,
not all movement is good and not all stillness is to be condemned. We must
always pursue our terms and judgments *in situ*.

What contribution, now, did *instruments for* the movies make to critical thoughts of *composing* music *for* the film? My answer offers a distinction. While one sort of composition offered music-making as a visible display, the other offered a well-formed product for the listening ear. What we see in early film falls under the rubric of what I have recently been writing about as another (Benjaminian) *Passagen-Werk* (Goehr 2021). It addresses the use of musical instruments in passages of often persecuted peoples. Unsafe in their homes, they traveled with what they could carry, often musical instruments, which, in thoughts of a social labor on the move, enabled them to pay their passage or earn their way. Whether solo or in ensemble, their musical labor or music-making, often construed as entertainment, was a survival strategy, often demeaning in the eyes of others, while also identity-preserving as when playing together keeps a family together. Investigating this sort of music-making on display, one thought emerges: that, with musical instruments in hand, the social labor of persons on foot could carry enlightenment's dialectical movement between the weighty and the weightless, the portable and unportable, and all with an existential heaviness that we know today, from Milan Kundera, as 'the unbearable lightness of being'.

The early film comedies often played on a coming to America, a journeying West, construed as a liberating passage that displaced the theological promise made at the parting of the Red Sea by a secular opportunity. The passage was feared (as still today) for its carrying something foreign (like a plague) entering a New land; but then, contra this, the passage tells the entire history of troubadours or wandering minstrels arriving at port with hopeful harps slung on their backs. One might hear a chorus of slaves or the chorus from Offenbach's 1866 operetta *La vie Parisienne,* when with pride for their diverse identities – *Italiens, Brésiliens, Japonais, Hollandais, Espagnols, Romagnols, Égyptiens, Péruvien* – they all sung out for the promise of freedom. A keystone to the early film comedy as a sort of operetta finds musical instruments carried as the baggage of immigration and displacement. The port of arrival was a hopeful gate for a divine judgment much profaned by modern conditions of persecution and prohibition.

In *Aesthetic Theory* ('Situation'), Adorno addressed art's form as a secularization of the theological model of the world as an image made in God's likeness. It was not an act of creation but a re-objectification that imitated the first creation ex nihilo: a remake from the get-go. The metaphorical expression is irresistible, he argued, that form in artworks is everything on which the hand *leaves its trace*, everything over which it passes. Its form is – or should be – a sign of doing something fundamentally *different* from the everyday processes of labor. In the comedies of portability, the difference *made* in music-making was the *remaking* of peoples and persons in the image of a new land. With the touch of the hand, good intentions were expressed, yet with the light foot of parody, the result was left strategically unsettled.

The present chapter pursues theoretical thoughts before it turns to the material of the early comedies. It begins with Adorno and Eisler's dialectical

moment construed both as a beginning and as an ending ([1947]1994: 57–59). The 'motion picture,' so called, marked for them a break in cultural production, a moment of *possibility* or *opportunity* not to be *missed* by false or regressive moves. Regression would be the name of the game if it was assumed that music *of the tradition*, with its *traditional* instruments, could simply be carried over from the concert hall into the new art of film. That so many of the first *silent* movies took music and musicians for their subject matter gave an urgency to their issue. We know the issue as asking after the relation of film, conceived as the most progressed *Gesamtkunstwerk*, to high opera, and then to the more popular operetta. But we know it less well as posing a question of fit, whether the use of music in film ought to draw more on the fiddle than the violin, more on the guitar than on the piano, assuming a social divide that pitted the claims of culture and its instruments between the high and the low. How, then, did the history of music as so divided or classified write itself into the new grooves and grain of the newly moving pictures? The answer again separates what is seen from what is heard. While Adorno and Eisler asked after the suitability of a music conceived as a sound track for the film, a music that could absorb the most avant-garde developments into its form, they were also acutely aware of the role of instruments as tools of social labor, how a music-making rendered visible could expose a falseness in the modern social situation.

Consider a recent PBS documentary by Ken Burns, *Country Music.* It chronicles a music on the move in America.[1] Being on the move, we are told, fed the very idea of *country music.* Musicians either carried their instruments or picked them up as *need* be and *wherever* they happened to be. When, however, the technology of radio and phonograph began to dominate the music's distribution, *country music* as a now abstracted or objectified product was separated from its live performance. One early listener recalls feeling no need to learn the piano because she could hear all the music on the radio. Country music became a music for the ear separated from the sight of musicians making music. Entering everyone's living room, the distinction between public and private spheres was all but obliterated, and, with this apparently, all distinctions of gender, class, and race. But not really of course. For even under a condition of abstraction or invisibility, rank division and divisive prejudice persisted in the industrialization of the culture. One might not see the color of the musician making the music, but one could still hear color in the rhythm or the beat. We know this divisive history all too well. But watching the documentary, I found nothing particular about *country music.* So many musics have claimed a country, a home, and a mobility to draw prejudice away from the eye into the ear.

The more that music was composed as integral to film as a sound track, the more the art became an unseen medium for the ear. Yet, when instruments or musicians were seen on screen nevertheless, the visible music-making could be, and often was, at odds or out of sync with what was heard. The lack of fit offered a breakage, often a comic strike, against the claim of film to result in a

perfectly unified form. With strategic ruptures offered between ear and eye, another distinction suggests itself between *concrete and abstract portability*. When instruments were carried on the back so as never to be bolted in place, a concrete portability carried one host of associations, while a music transmitted abstractly as a sound track everywhere or anywhere carried another. Yet the two crisscrossed each other. Migrating peoples carried instruments as they did memories of a world receding into the past. Letting go of the weight of the past gestured then toward the abstract and lightened portability in a New World where *all* were allegedly welcome. The point here was to grasp the allegory that had long allowed instruments to stand for constructions of the self, that instruments being carried tallied with carried thoughts, perspectives, and moods. Place a person before a mirror, and the face looking back could challenge one's thoughts about one's self. Place a musician before a mirror, and their instruments could turn into something else, given also a change of mood, melody, or rhythm. Extending the allegory, if a piano could become a harp, a harp a double bass, or a wind pipe a new instrument of strings, then persons likewise could remake themselves as strangers at home in a new land.

In his *Current of Music*, Adorno described the *accordion* as a primitive instrument of use in Germany, where *primitive* captured a sense of being *popular*, something that did not reach or was excluded from *domesticating* classrooms or homes of *discipline* (Adorno 2006: 97). With its outsider status, the instrument was primed for a sociological consideration of a collective wandering or of the *gypsy* camp life of music-making, dance, and song. Shifting then from the accordion to the *sailor's piano* (*Schifferklavier*), Adorno turned his thought from Germany to America. What, he asked, was the fate of the *primitive* on the streets of a capital paved with gold far away – over there in the land of promise? He asked the same of the associated ideas of *spontaneity* and *improvisation*. If all three terms carried the sense of a *ready-to-go* music, what happened when such a music was turned into the *ready-made* music of technological distribution? What difference was there between the improvised touch of a piano key from the automation associated with the mechanical turn of the radio dial? He saw, as in the diagnosis of *country music* above, live music becoming always already digested, a distribution of a popular music mechanically pre-programmed into the jukebox. Still, it was one thing to object to the development, another to note the false advertising. It was the appropriation of the terms that bothered Adorno the most: when music made for mechanical reproduction sold itself as popular, primitive, spontaneous, and improvised. For a music newly distributed, one told a lie if one simply imported terms fitting to an earlier or traditional mode of music making.

Adorno often borrowed from the diagnoses that Paul Valéry (1960) and Walter Benjamin (1969) were offering of the modern 'conquest of ubiquity'. Both were asking after the promise of film or photography under the new technological condition of art's reproducibility. Adorno stressed the dangers of the promise every time the claim of the new art smoothed over the on-

going contradictions of the culture industry. One way to break through the smooth cover up was to seek in the new art its formal and material breaking points, the ways the art did not submit to the *ubiquity* of distribution but, instead, submitted the very claim of ubiquity's conquest to a critical or comic display.

To repeat: producing a one-sided *complaint* without finding something worth thinking contradicted the dialectical movement of *critique*. To rescue something from the extreme expression of the diagnosis was to have another look inside the social situation for the contradiction, via the *technique*, of the *tendency* that seemed to dominate as a victory of modern *technology*. By proceeding in this way, the critique could offer a moving picture or dialectical image of antagonistic tendencies: of submission and resistance, of capitulation and catapulting. Toward this end, Adorno sought the hand- and foot-prints of a virtuosity, spontaneity, and improvisation to rescue such characteristics from the main currents of a popular music falsely advertised. With Eisler, he assessed the risks and chances of something surviving, something they wanted to survive, given the hardening of the social currents and conventions. Mostly, Adorno spoke of the rescue of something through a protective concealment, withdrawal, retreat, or silence. But what, then, of the rescue through the comedy of overt display? This is my purpose here: to look in the early film comedies for what was put on view to interrupt and break up the main plot, to stop all movement in its tracks, to subvert the industry of every means–end relation of social production. Could the tactics survive the conquest of culture's industrial complex, or were the *tactics* merely *antics*?

In working through 'the contemporary relationship of philosophy and music', Adorno addressed the antics (*Filmpossen*) that dismantled the pomposity of design around the singing of antiquated tragic arias (Adorno 2002: 136). But to what end was the dismantling? Simply to equalize the social space or to alert everyone on and off the stage to a labor so leveled, because to no part of it did anyone feel attached? To be sure, the strings of the instruments snapped as easily as the ropes that allowed the scenery and curtains to rise and fall on the stage. But did the snapping indicate a freedom to do not as one was told to do, or an equality in the alienation of all involved in the production? In the antics, were we seeing something more than a copycat *massacre* and *mutilation* befitting a bad mannerism of material, monotonously repeated as *empty* gestures for *mere* effects?

Another of Adorno's critical thoughts drew from an impulse for the very idea of the aesthetic to counter the social situation: to turn use, function, and interests to uselessness. His point was to halt the commerce or traffic (*Verkehr*) of a means-end logic in favor of an opening-up of the expressive potential of the imagination in the very name of re-patterning the social processes. But every suspension of use also risked a uselessness praised for its own sake, a uselessness that too easily capitulated to a new stream of marketability where an easy consumption of thought and art ruled the roost. Not all risks shattered the mirrors of expected inputs and outputs. Imagination

was a risky business and offered no guarantees. Uselessness was falsely condemned as a not-doing when idleness was simply made to be the flip side of a picture of a labor or work produced under conditions of capitalist exploitation. In *Theses on Need* Adorno duly explained the critical model:

> The classless society, which will abolish the irrationality of the entanglement of production and profit, will satisfy needs and likewise abolish the practical spirit that still asserts itself in the aimlessness [*Zweckferne*] of the bourgeois notion of *l'art pour l'art* [art for art's sake]. It will sublate [*aufheben*] not only the bourgeois antagonism between production and consumption, but also their bourgeois unity. To be useless [*unnütz*] will then no longer be shameful. Conformity will lose its sense. Productivity in its genuine, undisfigured sense will, for the first time, have a real effect on need: not by assuaging unsatisfied need with useless things, but rather because satisfied need will make it possible to relate to the world without knocking it into shape through universal usefulness [*Nützlichkeit*]. If classless society promises the end of art by sublating the tension between the actual and the possible, then at the same time it also promises the beginning of art, the useless [*das Unnütze*], whose intuition tends towards reconciliation with nature because it is no longer in the service of usefulness [*Nutzen*] to the exploiters.
>
> (Adorno 2017: 104)

In *Theses*, we read further how the rallying cry that 'man shall not live by bread alone' was emptied of significance when the bread delivered was as small as the delivery of a record of a song by Gershwin (Adorno 2017: 104). But was Gershwin's song being condemned here per se, or only the form of its delivery as a popular song? Could the question even be split in this way?

True to its title, Adorno's essay '*Filmtransparente*' further conveyed the antagonism between film's technology and technique: to reveal and conceal a truthfulness in the visible movement of surface appearances (Adorno 1981). But could we then say the same about the films made from slaps and gags that were acted out with great visible display to produce a canned laughter? Would anything spill over from the can or would the laughter be simply wasted? How did comedy turn waste to reflection? How could the new art melt the grooves and grain so hardened by the mechanical factory lines of industrial ready-mades?

Adorno and Eisler insisted that it was *no accident* that the *greatest inroads* in film were in cartoons or comedies, where the music in a formal self-negation produced a self-parody. In the self-parody, audiences were forced to face themselves, as their anxiety was twisted into an uneasy laughter. Adorno and Eisler further noted the *suspension of a seriousness* or *weight,* associated with the old satirical figure of Till Eulenspiegel, when characters assumed a task or labor so literally that all sight of real labor was displaced by the immediacy of the improvised task (Adorno & Eisler 1994: 126–130). But how, then, should

one read the immediacy when the surface appearance of the fun being had was seemingly at everybody's expense, including the actors?

In his essay on the fetish character in music, as it was allied to regression in modern patterns of listening (*die Regression des Hörens*), Adorno described the problem of the comic potentialities of music as inseparable from the larger problem of constructing meaning in the motion picture itself.

> Th[e] experience was caught with great force in a film by the Marx Brothers, who demolish an opera set as if to clothe in allegory the insight of the philosophy of history on the decay of the operatic form, or in a most estimable piece of refined entertainment, break up a grand piano in order to take possession of its strings in their frame as the true harp of the future, on which to play a prelude. Music has become comic in the present phase primarily because something so completely useless is carried on with all the visible signs of the strain of serious work. By being alien to solid/able [*tüchtigen*] people, music reveals their alienation from one another, and the consciousness of alienation vents itself in laughter.
>
> (Adorno 2002: 314)

This passage supports what, in many philosophical, sociological, and musical writings, Adorno promoted as a *speculative ear* capable of listening and thinking untimely thoughts in ways that were *out of sync* with contemporary currents and displays. How did this thinking through the ear work with and against the liberating potential of the visual unconscious? How did the ear play to the dialectic between the absorption and distraction of the eye in the new art of film? And how, through a display for the eye, did early comedy in film offer a *time-out* for the ear (as it were) from the main plot?

We know from the history of the visual arts, as in early silent film, that hearing and seeing music did not always go together; and, from antiquity on, that their agonism could be as productive as it was destructive. We also know that the modern technologies that turned music into a distributed stream of products for the ear repeated older separations of music's invisibility and ideality from its mechanical production. Traditionally, as in painting, when music was seen but not heard, cues were necessary: open mouths shown for singers; instruments or sheet music carried, held, or played; identificatory forms of dress; situating the activity where one expected to see music-making, in a church, cafe, salon, or living room, in a concert hall or on a stage. In all such cuing, the sight of musicians in action mattered just as much as the music regarded as an abstracted pattern of tones for the ear. Accordingly, when composing *for* film, it mattered what the cinema goers were made not only to hear but also to see: to come to an understanding of what people did when they made something with musical instruments. For the critical question was always whether by making and remaking music, one could make and remake oneself or, indeed, anyone else.

From this came the keystone question for the film comedies: were persons looking like musicians comedically making music or were their actions with

instruments more a fragmentation, a way for anyone to break out of the social situation? Moving now to the comedies themselves, we will see both thoughts at work. We will focus on portability, labor, and critique in the unmaking and remaking of art through broken mirrors of persons on the move across land and sea. Most striking is the manifest consciousness of a *borrowing* of material between the different films, where interrupting scenes of acute comprehension were repeated over and over again. Far from affirming the monotony of an alienated labor and industry, the repetition became a productive mirroring, a mimetic string of leitmotifs and one-liners for subversion (as the *intermedi* once brought serious *opera* to its knees). Along with *portability*, the *borrowing* carried the sense of carrying all the malleable materials of the history.

The foregoing thoughts have suggested that in the critical social analysis of music *for* film, the music composed drew one sort of thought while the social conditions of making music drew the other. Again, this does not mean focusing on the early films made *about* musicians, of which there were many, including the eight hour 'silent' film of the life of Richard Wagner. It means, instead, watching people playing the part or assuming the role of a musician as a commentary on the transport and commerce of displaced lives. Often, in the comedies, the engagement of the music subverted the great (Wagnerian) 'deeds of music made visible' – every time, as we will now see, something was made to go awry in the social situation.

Part 2

The Big Pond is the telling title of a film from 1930 starring Claudette Colbert, although the diva is the Frenchman or European, Maurice Chevalier: a man of noble qualities working in disguise as a travel guide in Venice. He woos and wins the woman in Europe, after which he must woo her father, a wealthy industrialist in America. Deeply in love, he sings to avoid the torment of the deliberately hard labor to which he is subjected by the father who suspects the foreigner of wanting to marry only for mercenary reasons. Agreeing to work in the father's chewing-gum factory, he does the work of ten men with a smile anticipating Chevalier as Lubitsch's *laughing lieutenant* (1931). His smile signals his ingenuity to produce a jingle to sell the gum beyond all expectations. The American jingle tries but fails to supplant the European song of love, *You Brought a New Kind of Love to Me*, because the new kind of love is not supposed to be a trade-in. The first couplet of the love song: 'If the nightingales could sing like you they'd sing much sweeter than they do', is subtly detached from the later couplet about the lover's fate, about the *slave* who comes to the *queen* having worked *the whole day through*. For, working the whole day, the slave (Chevalier), too tired even to sing, fails to make it to the evening meal where the queen (Colbert) awaits him.

The Big Pond quickly becomes the Marx Brothers' *Big Store* (1941), where money and music is the double currency on display. The symphonic song,

Tenement symphony in four flats, pitches the social situation in the rhyme of its words; when Schubert's *unfinished* symphony finds its new expression in Gershwin's *diminishment* to a chord in G, which lets then the *Irish Kellys* meet the *Italian Vermicellis*, so that *Cohen's pianola* can warm the *victrola*, all in the *confusion* of a grand *illusion*.

Chevalier's nightingale song became a standard in modern popular music, in a version produced by Paul Whiteman's orchestra (a prime target of Adorno's critique of a new whiteness in popular music). The Marx Brothers then unstandardized the song in their early film *Monkey Business* (1931) to get through US passport control. As *stowaways* without *passports*, each brother tries to leave the boat claiming a likeness to Chevalier's face and signature hat. No one is taken in, and certainly not when Harpo mimics the song with a portable record player on his back, which duly loses pitch the more he winds up the passport controllers. Winding and rewinding people sustains the wit. At first, hiding in fish barrels of kippers and herrings, the foursome sing *Sweet Adeline* before slipping away from the authorities. Disguised as a swinging jazz band, they eventually reach New York to find a music school built on a street paved less with gold than with a flood of fear toward all that is foreign. In an aside to the camera, Chico quips: 'There's my argument! Restrict immigration!'

The Yiddish film from 1936, *Yiddle with her Fiddle* opens with Yiddle returning home from having played her fiddle in the marketplace, realizing that it is time for her and her father to leave the shtetl. In their luggage, they carry their livelihood: Yiddle's fiddle and her father's far-less portable double-bass. The fiddle's lightness signals the success of her move to and adaptability in America, a forgetfulness and shedding of skin of which youth is capable, contra the burden of memory that the aged father cannot and does not want to give up. The same metaphors carry the theological discourse of conversion, the weight of a history that looks forward or backward between what has been divined and profaned. Critique demands that we keep both perspectives in view. In the film's later remake, *Yentl* (1983), the instrument of the girl who is becoming a woman is a singing voice. The voice cannot be gendered if her necessary disguise, to travel as a boy, is to work. Her then falling in love with her male companion, as he with him/he, complicates thoughts less about biblical love bonds than about the constant redressing and redress of identity under conditions of displacement.

Disguise, as the suspension and re-patterning of identity, is an aged motif in the history of wandering peoples. Here, it brings attention to the fact that, in many early film-comedies, what is done by the musicians is not done by professional musicians but by those in disguise. In reality, the actors are brilliant musicians of one sort or another, but, in the films, they walk about as musicians to play a part (as once Till Eulenspiegel) to expose the contradictions in the social situations in which they find themselves: on the boat or train, at a party, in a hotel or a store. In every social situation, the wit is compounded by the fact that in live performance on an instrument or by voice, one can't

fake it – yet the musicians-in-disguise must fake it. Their acts of musicianship combined with destruction reveals them as designated imposters carrying a secrecy of understanding about everyone they meet on their way. Their disruption is a parody of the promise of safety that comes to musicians who, in many social situations, move around unnoticed. As such, they can be appreciated without any cost to the normative structure from which they are excluded. The parody remakes the musicians into the main fare when they play and when they interrupt their play. Not heard, they make themselves seen; not seen, they make themselves heard. The wit of the split between eye and ear puts the comic musician at center stage strategically regardless of the main plot.

Chaplin's 1917 silent film *The Immigrant* finds the traveler catching a slithery fish on a boat on the big pond, after which he enacts a sliding choreography of corporeal movements on troubled waters. Following some questionable acts of betting, pickpocketing, and, of course, meeting a girl to love, he arrives at shore, gets through customs, and ends up in a cafe wondering how to pay for his meal. In the main scene on land, a piano player joined by a violinist sits in the back of the cafe. Despite the periodic episodes of mayhem, the players seem forever unfazed. They are part of the furniture that Adorno analyzed as music in the background (Adorno 2002: 506–10). Unseen and unheard, something is nevertheless conveyed when the continuity of conversation breaks. They play almost as ghosts.

Woody Allen brings the ghosts into his 1971 film, *Bananas* (the main fare for a monkey business). As an imposter dignitary invited to a dinner party in Cuba, his character approaches a string quartet of aged players who are going through the motions of making music without any instruments in their hands. Is this a parody of a Communist ban on bourgeois music or a sleight of hand against a shortage of goods parading as a new wealth? Following a dream sequence earlier in the film, Woody Allen's character finds a harpist, recalling Harpo, hiding in a cupboard looking for somewhere safe to practice.

The Marx Brothers films are exemplary for the split between the real identity of the brothers as brilliant musicians and the fictional brotherhood that renders them both brothers and musicians in a highly constructed sense. How rarely they acknowledge their brotherhood within their films. In *The Big Store*, when playing a duet with Harpo at the piano, Chico recalls his youth 'when I gave you lessons'. In one of the famous mirror scenes, Groucho, when looking for himself, sees a brother smiling back with an unsettling smirk. Conveying a sense of shared parentage, yet without sharing exactly the same parents, the foursome most often meet at the film's start with a familial sense of recognition. In *Monkey Business*, well-titled as M-B for their brotherhood, they speak of leaving the beards of their ancestors behind, only then to steal the beards of three aviators to prove themselves far wittier, and speedier travelers of wit, on a boat than the staid lookalike brothers of the air.

In *Filmtransparente*, Adorno found the mark not of Cain but of Abel delivering what can no longer be promised. Enabling Abel as Able let the Marx

Brothers play at being temporary musicians to survive, deceive, or mock every sort of insider. Brothered as immigrants, they formed alliances with other outsiders, as when sharing the song of democratic inclusion with the African-American singer Ivie Anderson: *All god's chillun got rhythm*. When Stanley Cavell (1994) took up the matter, he focused less on the musical antics of the Marx Brothers than on their language games. He recalled Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* to note the *immigrancy* felt in the 'inability to speak when one's language is foreign'. How does one speak or act in a world 'deadened' by prohibitions? He found in Harpo's muteness a wit pitted to an extreme, met by Chico and Groucho's ceaseless spills of words when the native became foreign and vice versa.

On the boat in *Monkey Business*, the spillage of wit is compressed in the cabin containing all and nothing. Cavell found in the *tiny* space a mockery of the upper deck fantasies of luxury on the tempestuous sea of changes: the *big pond*. A comparable challenge to ideas of storage and stowage allows Groucho in *The Big Store* never to forget after the great crash of 1929 'that the stockholder of yesteryear is the stowaway of today'. The commerce of an unlimited stock, from beds to lipsticks, is recounted and re-countered by the song and dance that moves the modern lift and elevator between higher and lower floors. 'Sing while you sell.' Nothing is left in place: no person and no thing.

Some critics note the democratic gesture in Harpo's skirt-chasing: *if it has legs, he chases* – but in Paul Zimmerman's insight, he chases and cheats everyone (like Mozart's Don) equally, just as Groucho swindles everyone 'regardless of class' (Zimmerman, 1968: 23). Class warfare for insiders and outsiders is comparably mocked in *At the Circus* (1939) when the Wagnerian orchestra is made to float off across the water while the replacement entertainers dismantle instruments before a party of snobs. On the train, when Groucho brings Lydia to her encyclopedic knowledge so as to stamp everything with a tattoo, she is made to carry the wit of ages along and across every social track.

The wit of the ages for the brothers-in-arms mocks the *quid pro quo* of easily administered justice. With immigration challenging the new democracy, the four brothers must remain indeterminate, chameleon-like, assimilationist. They are suggestively Jewish, accented as Italian, and of a poor class, seeking status or at least money, which Groucho does more or mostly less well as the runner of any and all institutions. His charge is mocking, as when, in military references or engagements, he uses his brothers in arms to take up musical instruments always for a good cause. In *Duck Soup* (1933), he picks up a Stradivarius because the gun is ineffective: 'This is the last straw. Where's my Stradivarius? … I'll show 'em they can't fiddle with old Firefly.' The fiddlings are deliberately suspect while the good intentions to rectify the situation remain intact. With labor-saving moves and shortcuts, the brothers refuse the easy contrast of goodies and baddies while putting the same contrast on

display. The happy end is made out of the last straw, as Cavell noted, when the brothers break the last camel's back.

The breakage in the aged wit is remade as an endless and repetitive punning between the literal and the metaphorical. Here, more broadly, that *Yiddle* rhymes with *fiddle* plays to the long history of praising and denigrating instruments by name: a violin speaks a thousand different words from a fiddle, which carries the fingers of a thief. To *harp on* or to *string someone along* suggests a roguishness amongst roaming minstrels. To be *hammered* or *winded* carries a host of twisted meanings associated with the *noodling* on strings, *macaroni-ing* on a piano, or *pizzicato-ing* with sardines that we learn about from Ravelli/Chico in the last Marx Brothers film of 1949, *Love Happy*. When the fiddler plays the gypsy music impressively well, Chico interrupts from his place at the piano: 'I know you want to make a good impression, but please don't play better than me.' Since when was playing together meant to be a contest – or when not?

When Harpo scurries around, he is a veritable Jack of all trades. He carries everything he will ever need in the lining, seams, and pockets of his coat, including many a useful instrument or tool, musical or otherwise. The harp with its strings works as his umbilical cord. Highly unportable, it is always ready to hand wherever Harpo happens to be. Like Chico's piano, the harp must always be available: on a boat, in a barn, or in *Casablanca*'s attic of old treasures (1946). To be anywhere and everywhere is the claim of the popular pitted against the aged confinements of a musealized high art. Still, old instruments are approached as having long been unplayed, but when then played, they are always up to date, in tune or easy to tune, to create a *ready-to-handedness,* which is then again defamiliarized when the instrument is mishandled, broken, unwound, or played in unexpected ways. In the famous wreckage scene from *A Day at the Races* (1937), Harpo puts his fingers to the piano keys (impressively well), only then to use one of them to test and then clean his ear when the Rachmaninov prelude sounds not quite as it should. He then singlehandedly dismantles the piano to release its strings as a newly made harp. The film instruction reads: 'He pulls the harp out of the rubble'. One is reminded of Apollo's ancient remaking of Marsyas' soul in the redesign of his body.

With an edge against a form of fascism on display, Adorno told the other side of the story under the rubric of the *jargon of authenticity*:

> The ideology of readiness to hand, and its counterpart, strips itself bare in the practice of those devotees of the musical youth movement, who swear to it that a proper fiddle is one that a fiddler has rigged up for himself. Since the artisan forms of production have been overtaken by technology, and are superfluous, the intimacy which adhered to them has become as worthless as the do-it-yourself movement.
>
> (Adorno 2013: 88)

The worthless 'do-it-yourself' gesture is potentially turned to a worthiness, however, in every telling change of expression, for example, when Harpo's face turns from the ridiculous to the sublime or from the comic to the serious. Harpo recalled in 1961:

> If you've ever seen a Marx Brothers picture, you know the difference between him [the character on screen] and me. When he's chasing a girl across the screen it's Him. When he sits down to play the harp, it's Me. Wherever I touched the strings of the harp, I stopped being an actor.
>
> (Colvin 2009)

Harpo was telling a half truth: sometimes his touch was reenacted to produce no music. Adorno was certainly not sold on the change if the redemption of seriousness discarded the lightness. But in the movement in between, the ludic play turned the seemingly ludicrous into the most lucid and sublime of thoughts in order to contradict the only forms of lucidity presently allowed. Beyond this, there was something so very American, *improvised*, in the contrast of being taught and self-taught. Between Harpo being a trained musician and one whose constant retraining allowed him to adapt to any and all situations, he made a music as malleable as the instruments he played, in mirrors that could no longer be fixed according to the *instrumental typology* of social identities. In *The Big Store*, Harpo enacts a dream fantasy produced by an old music box on sale. Redressed to play an eighteenth-century Viennese music, his changes of gesture and expression are reflected in the ornate mirrors to alter both the instruments and the music: from Beethoven to a modern hot jazz. Nothing remains as it was; everything and everyone can be turned into something and someone else. Is this an end or a new beginning? In the antagonistic neither-nor, something is there to be rescued: the touch or footprint – a telling detail in the subtle transport of a piano or a harp into any and all situations.

Gertrud Koch (2009) reads the comedic mirror scenes as a terror of self-recognition and non-recognition akin to the incomprehensibility experienced when what is confronted is all too correctly understood. She sees the film (as also Samuel Beckett's 1965 *Film* with an aged Keaton looking at the wall for a consciousness of the self) throwing modern fetishism and narcissism in the face of spectators. Viewers are made to feel contempt at what they most desire to see. A failure of identification or a split into contrary personalities plays to a residual presence of consciousness: not obliterated but dimly perceived. Personhood is not restored by the film of mirrors, but nor is it stored as pure commodity.

In early films now of a literally back-breaking labor, there are no better examples than Charlie Chaplin's 1914 film, *My Musical Career*; Luis Buñuel's 1929, *Un Chien Andalou*; and Laurel and Hardy's 1932, *The Music Box*. With a topsy-turvy logic on display, carts are put before horses, while pianos are carried, pulled, and dragged to stress both their heaviness and their lightness.

Chaplin's musical career has little to do with music or a career: the wrangling in the piano store shows the protagonist in need of a bed to lay his head, and something to eat. Chaplin carries a piano on his back, having first gotten it up a staircase of too many steps – (a mockery of any stairway to heaven). The fact that the piano is delivered to the wrong address suggests a play of mistaken identities. Laurel and Hardy repeat the stairs, having first let the strings of the piano cry out in pain when landing heavily on the piano mover's back. The Transfer Company for which these piano movers work offers a policy that insures no instrument or laborer against suffering. The instruction for the piano to be lifted with *ease* onto the back carries all the weight of a Sisyphean task, an uphill grind of endless routine and drudgery. 'The burden of labor', wrote Walter Benjamin by quoting Engels in the *Arcades Project,* is 'like the rock [that] always keeps falling back on the worn-out laborer' (Benjamin 1999: 106). James Buhler suggested to me a subtle commentary on the staircase as part of the modern architecture of the high-rise, while Koch notes the transfer of a demolition work into a French art for the 'artistes demoliteurs'. Turned to art, the piano allows chords to clash when it is reduced to a *music box*. The hard labor becomes the physical comedy that turns labor into its antithesis in an aesthetic illusion.

The turn and transfer of the pattern are embodied and enacted again by Chaplin in the factory scene in *Modern Times* (1936). The less the laborer is able to stay in sync with the sped-up production of the conveyor belt, the greater is the demand for him to enter the production machine itself, to be remade and reprocessed through the cogs of the wheels, to come out as a perfectly harmonious product and worker. The music changes, becoming slower, as his body now dances his contentment. Is this a redemption or a capitulation to capital? It is always both in the unresolved ambivalence that sustains the very idea of the comic set up. In speeding up and slowing down, one sees the form by which the machine and human body move between impossibility and possibility, prohibition and allowance, powerlessness and empowerment, on par with fantasies or dream sequences of escape. Nevertheless, the comic immediacy proves illusory or merely deceptive if it is only technologically produced or too-perfectly manufactured.

Buster Keaton's 1921 silent film, *Playhouse* borrows from the *minstrels* of music theatre and vaudeville. Keaton takes on every part, every role. The caption reads 'This fellow Keaton seems to be the whole show' as we are shown a cast of *one* player standing for *the many*. Something goes awry when each musical instrument falls to pieces upon being played. Chewed or sawed, the instruments are rendered comically useless and threateningly redundant. There is commentary here on the waste and exhaustion of labor (under the theatrical stage) as well as commentary on alienation in the ease of substituting a part or a role.

The fantasy of being released from the entire set up becomes then a dream sequence in the later film *An American in Paris* (1951). We see Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* performed by the pianist Oscar Levant as Adam Cook who,

already in Lloyd Bacon's 1948 *You Were Meant for Me*, complains of having been demoted to playing the part of a player in a film about winning love by the lottery given the stock market crash of 1929: 'To think that I gave up the concert to work for this'. In Paris, he is still complaining to the other American in Paris, played by Gene Kelly, of having to live by the wrong sort of chance, that being a 'concert pianist' today is synonymous with being 'unemployed'. Without work, he can only dream of being the conductor, the orchestral musicians, and the audience, so as to perform all roles at once to universal applause. The fantasy plays to the America-Paris antagonism drawn from *The Big Pond*. When the painter (Kelly) quips: 'Brother, if you can't paint in Paris, you'd better give up and marry the boss's daughter', he is inspired to add: 'Back home, everyone said I didn't have any talent. They might be saying the same thing over here, but it sounds better in French'. With Chevalier again, everything sounds better in French (see Goehr 2017).

To compose *for* the film was to pit a new use and function against the staid aesthetic claims of autonomy. The comedy took on both to leave nothing in place. Adorno and Eisler sought the technological opportunity, while questioning every apparent loss of music's tradition, its orchestration and its instruments, in every literal and metaphorical sense. What, they asked, remained of harps and pianos in an age of technological reproducibility? In *Composing for the Films* (chapter 6), they described the harp and the piano as *never absent*, as contributing a *sugary coloration, mechanical distinctness, and spurious fullness* when placed in large and small orchestral settings. But what happened when the instruments were isolated and lightened up as objects for comedy? Was the meaning for the film thereby changed?

Chaplin's *Limelight* (1952), replete with nostalgia, offers a scene that goes on far too long for the aged Chaplin and the aged Keaton to share the staged destruction of a piano and a violin. A violin, a harp, a piano: so long as the strings can be broken, who cares for the difference? The music we hear for the scene fits the breakage and unplayability while also contradicting it. One hears a violin when the violin is not played. The instruments become objects or things for sight and reflection, subtly severed from the music for the ear.

The new technology challenged the instrument for its sound and its body as it challenged the dancer and the singer. Adorno stressed the necessity of pain in the comedy of back-breaking labor, an expression of and against sado-masochism and violence, akin to Siegfried Kracauer's analysis of the foot-breaking labor of the Tiller Girls. Displayed with perfect skin, uniformity of costume and movement, the Girls became all surface with no agency in the construction of the *mass ornament* for the *salaried masses* (*die Angestellten*) (1995). Yet their kaleidoscopic display and commodification suggested something more, something to rescue the feet from the pain of dancing to order in pointed shoes. We see something comparable in *Singing in the Rain* (1952), as well as in a less well-known film *Two Sisters from Boston* (1946), when Lauritz Melchior records the Prize Song from Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* under the label of *His Master's Voice*. One feels the lag and the dust of time

condemned by a culture industry that demands that we be always up to date. No wrinkles in a cosmetic trade. Yet in every suggestion of a wrinkle, the film suspends control of its every gesture to give off *a liberating quality*. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, we are given our conclusion:

> It is no more than the mustache, the French accent, the deep voice of the woman of the world, the Lubitsch touch: finger prints on identity cards which are otherwise exactly the same, and into which the lives and faces of every single person are transformed by the power of the generality.
>
> (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002: 125)

What was diagnosed as a broken selfhood became through the critique of comedy a chance for persons to remake themselves when the touch was not forgotten. Displacement became a possibility of replacement. Here was the hope invested in the early critique that assessed the art of film for its weight and its lightness. Here, for us today, is the point of engaging the early film through a music-making for the eye and not just for the ear, for what it still might tell us about portability and labor.[2]

Notes

1 https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/country-music/
2 Many thanks to Daniel Herwitz, Gertrud Koch, Jim Buhler, and Mark Slobin.

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9 *Composing for the Films* in the Age of Digital Media

James Buhler

In the production of music for media such as film, television, and video games, the centralization endemic to corporate organization of the mid-20th century has given way to strongly decentralizing tendencies today.[1] With respect to both music and media the capital resources and infrastructure of a commercial studio are no longer required for production to the same extent as was the case in the Hollywood studio era. This is especially true of music production, where aside from recording and mixing spaces, the equipment required to put together music and sound effects can comfortably fit into a spare bedroom. And the cost of this equipment is relatively cheap as well. This decentralization of production is countered by firm corporate control of distribution, a massive surplus of artistic production, and the use of film, music, and other products of the culture industry as loss leaders to drive traffic to specific internet and streaming platforms. A return to vertical integration of the corporate structure similar in some respects to the Hollywood studio system has retained a more or less decentralized form for much production, and this has different consequences than those that Hanns Eisler and Theodor W. Adorno analyzed in *Composing for the Films* (Adorno & Eisler 1994).[2]

At the same time, the digital age has greatly increased precarity of work for those involved with music. The turn to a freelance structure of production as the studios reorganized after the Paramount consent decree in 1948 had already destabilized working conditions for everyone but the top-level talent (Faulkner 1983). The digital era has made precarity increasingly acute so that its effects are felt even among the top-flight composers. The new order of production and the composer's status as a freelancer yields certain additional freedoms and responsibilities in production, however this comes at the expense of composers assuming more risk (and often less pay) for their work. This freelance situation has continued into the digital era and indeed intensified for most, as composers' fees have been renegotiated so the composer often bears much of the cost of the music production (hiring musicians, recording, and initial mixing and conforming of cues to changes in picture editing) (McDonald 2002). In this respect the role of the composer today is more akin to a department head of music for the film, and the composer's

traditional work of writing notes is often just a small part of the composer's duties of managing the full production of the score.[3]

Then, too, the domain of media composition has changed quite markedly. Cinema has increasingly adopted television production methods for managing its franchises, and this has impacted music in many important respects. Similarly television has become more cinematic in its use of music. Video games have also borrowed heavily from traditional film music. The most profound change, however, is the convergence of music production for these media: there is no longer much specialization in the areas of media composition. Composers today routinely move from scoring films to scoring television to scoring games, whereas as recently as the 1990s and even into the first decade of the 2000s these were very separate domains.

In this chapter I will offer something of a sketch of what *Composing for the Films* might look like if its basic approach was taken up and revised for this age of digital media. *Composing for the Films* is a collaboration of Adorno and Eisler that drew on Eisler's experience as a film composer and Adorno's work of applying critical theory to an analysis of the culture industry. The sociological framework of the book, which focuses on the role of music in the commercial production of recorded audiovisual entertainment, remains pertinent even if many of the details require substantial revision. Like Adorno and Eisler, I question whether there is a way to create socially meaningful art outside the industry, since meaningful circulation still very much requires the distribution channels controlled by large corporations. I am also interested more broadly in examining some of the sociological implications of the digital tools used for music production. There is indeed a tendency in the industry to think about music instrumentally, as a tool that should be used within the bounds of its affordances as a neutral technology to be exploited for communicative ends, rather than something with its own ideological biases and proclivities.

This is one thing that *Composing for the Films* does get right: tools are never ideologically neutral. They have affordances, and these affordances are themselves shaped by ideological forces. And the broad acceptance of a tool to perform a specific social task is also ideologically loaded. This is the whole point of Jean-Louis Comolli's analysis of rectilinear perspective that is at the heart of apparatus theory's critique of the cinematic subject (Comolli 1990 and 1986). Similarly, when an activist filmmaker working outside the industry uses a cell phone camera to collect footage and selects music according to the current codes of commercial film production, as though these codes are natural properties of the music rather than historically conditioned through and through, that is also ideology at work. The same goes for someone streaming on YouTube as a side hustle using conventional media music to raise production values. At the same time, critique that simply points out such ideological complicity does no one favors and is of dubious political value. The activist filmmaker is invested in conveying meaning, getting a point across, persuading the audience to engage. If the musical codes of commercial film

production are enlisted to aid in that cause, then it is not clear why they should be rejected on the basis of inherent bias any more than, for instance, the camera itself should be, simply because it is constructed with rectilinear perspective and bears whatever ideological bias that might entail. Use of the tools may lead to certain political frictions, and critique can aid in diagnosing such frictions and understanding and working around the inherent biases. But critique must tread lightly on this ground. Critiquing the tool frequently erodes the effectiveness of political engagement. Radical thought struggles with what to do with a devastating critique that ends not in engagement and political action but in disaffection. Organizing that results in engagement often requires what seems to be magic, a way to traverse the fantasy, and if not magic at least myth: belief that political engagement will indeed yield a changed world.

By contrast, the critique of Adorno and Eisler is often simply fatalistic, and Eisler himself indeed ends up writing genre music for films like *The Spanish Main* (1945). Ultimately, the authors are skeptical that any commercial music can be art, even accidentally, because the forces of the culture industry are too determinative. Though pessimism and critical caution are warranted because the frictions are real, it is hard to know how to take critical orientation from it. If one is doomed to fail, resistance is futile but so also is critique. We can at best tip our hats to those tragic heroes who struggle against a certain fate. In any event, critical pessimism seems to cede too much. If we can't simply hold up popular art as the promise of the proletarian revolution on the one side, we also can't extol the virtues of elite art against commercial degradation on the other. Adorno is surely aware that the dialectic is not that simple, that in a world where something is provided to all that none may escape, elite art also does not escape the fate of commercial degradation; and at the same time, even the basest commodity entertainment necessarily contains something of the promise of art. And just as surely Eisler knows that he can't help but compose for Hollywood for reasons other than money, even when producing conventional genre music. He could hardly have conceived a project like *Composing for the Films* if his engagement with film composition was merely so that he could eat. The authors may decry the state of film music – really any form of corporate music making – as hopeless, as having been conquered by enlightened industry functionaries who exclude experiments for the well-tread path of the tried and true and who mine the cultural heritage for meaningful nuggets that can be sold and resold to the public indefinitely, but the authors end their text with a simple observation, that music in cinema generally goes unheard when it should command attention and 'sparkle and glisten' (Adorno & Eisler 1994: 133). That is a potential that should not be written off or neglected.

The Problem of Media Music

The problem of film composition is at root the culture industry. But the problem of music composition, even at the time when Adorno and Eisler were writing, was also fundamentally the culture industry, and the erosion of the

distinction between art and entertainment that it presupposes. 'All art, as a means of filling out leisure time, has become entertainment' (Adorno & Eisler 1994: lii). During this period, mass or popular culture was still peripheral to elite culture, and the aesthetic commitments of even the ardent socialist Eisler remained in accordance with elite culture. Under that rubric, art is indeed what resists the popular inasmuch as the popular is simply entertainment, commerciality, determined by the market. But popular culture is also the ground on which social subjects come to be represented as ideological figures.

Besides a distraction from the dreary life of exploitive work, popular entertainment offers a kind of social pedagogy; above all it serves socially as a ground on which to establish and negotiate identity. And with identity comes ownership. What is not yet evident in Adorno and Eisler's formulation is the extent to which the fruits of artistic production turn into a form of intellectual property (IP). Today under the terms of contemporary corporate capitalism, there are artistic practices perhaps that cannot be reduced to commerce, and the terms of IP can be refused; but commerce is a decisive factor in all forms of art and music that people encounter every day. And this is because commercial circulation is about the only way anyone creates an audience worth noting. 'Art that does not yield is completely shut off from consumption and driven into isolation' (Adorno & Eisler 1994: lii). Attempts to outrun commercial determination through 'viral' social media, especially when successful, usually end up succumbing to the pressure to monetize, to redeem art as IP, and so also the quick insertion into the circuit of commercial exploitation. Perhaps the best we can say about the situation is that the constant pursuit of new media platforms and forms of virality reveals a real desire to escape such determinations, even when we recognize the ways virality serves a market function as well.

At the same time the low relative cost of digital production tools has made possible a form of hobbyist production that might become transformative if it could be organized as a coherent alternative practice, but its likely fate is that of all amateur production. Any organization that threatens the existing structure will be absorbed by being transformed into a semiprofessional side hustle ('prosumer') focused on potential for monetization, or regulated and legally challenged to the point where it does not threaten existing commercial interests. In any case, the transformation of art into IP for the culture industry is characteristic of the age and reveals the ideological character. And IP and its terms of licensing permeates everything from the large franchises to the details of every sample that goes into a modest commercial virtual musical instrument. This leads to complexity and to a confusing situation of overlapping rights, but only the corporation that controls the master right is able to exploit the IP for fundamentally new or serially generated production. The individual producers lose rights or find the value of their rights so diminished that they sell out to those who can pool rights into collectives. Art as entertainment means that artistic production is fundamentally mediated by the law, and in digital production the terms of the end user license agreement

(EULA) limit the use of digital tools on the one hand, and the contracts with the production companies limit the use of the contracted IP assets once delivered on the other.

What are the problems of composing for digital media? How do these problems bear on making interventions on the contested ground of popular culture? For Adorno and Eisler this notion of 'problem' hardly gets articulated as they have instead chosen to inventory bad habits and focus on the sociology, dramaturgy, and aesthetics of composing for the films. I also want to compile an inventory of sorts to assess the problem of media music, but in place of a psychologism of 'prejudices and bad habits', I would like to propose a set of coping strategies for providing compositional labor under the contemporary working conditions of media production. I will then assess these coping strategies as ideological figures to be interpreted for social significance.

Making Sense

'Bad habits' is a curious turn of phrase that suggests moral failing on the part of film composers, and it has the unfortunate effect of shifting the focus of the critique from sociology to individual psychology. If bad habits are indeed present, these are not formed by deficient individuals engaged in the work, but they belong to the very structure and organization of the work in the industry. Today we might speak of such habits as coping mechanisms to survive in bad working conditions. They persist because the conditions persist, not because individuals do not have the moral fiber to properly resist them. And they persist because they answer – to be sure, incompletely – the immediate demands of the bad working conditions.

But we can retain this from the critique: bad working conditions stem fundamentally from a lack of time combined with a utilitarian imperative to make sense, which turns the work of composing for media away from experimentation, research, and development, and toward whatever happens to lie close at hand, the result being a congealing of clichés into the standardization of common sense. This tendency persists today, albeit in transformed ways. And the clichés do not in fact congeal to the extent that Adorno and Eisler's critique supposes. Action music is a topic that extends back to at least the eighteenth century, but the musical execution of the topic changes historically, as does the structure, function, and dramatic significance of the action scene (Shapiro 1984 and Buhler 2013). Action music today is as topically determined and clichéd as it ever was. But today's epically inflected action music with ostinato strings, insistent cinematic drums, and portent brass stingers is stylistically distant from hurrys of the studio era, just as studio era hurrys and agitatos were distinguished from predecessors in nineteenth-century melodrama and opera (Buhler & Durrand 2021). Action music today is recognizably of today differing substantially in form from action music of the nineteenth century, and indeed of cinema music from the 1940s.

So clichés remain prevalent in the age of digital media, but they are largely not the clichés of the studio era. And clichés are related to the utilitarian imperative of media to be communicative and the time pressure of production more than laziness or lack of skill on the part of the composers who traffic in them.[4] If the figure of action persists, that fact too makes it worthy of critical attention to understand its function and appeal more than dismissing it as a cliché.

The conventions of film and media scoring today derive from the practice of media scoring itself – other media music, especially film – rather than from compositional practice outside of media. The new music aged more or less to extinction more than half a century ago, and what came to replace it in the concert hall – perhaps with the example of minimalism, which film music quickly absorbed into its basic set of techniques, as an exception – differed little from what film and media composers were already doing. Media music has become increasingly self-referential or its sources of outside influence have come from domains – especially popular and the so-called 'world' music – other than the concert hall. And increasingly it takes inspiration from the sound design of the media product, going so far as to incorporate those sounds directly into the score, as in Dario Marinelli's music for *Atonement* (2007).

Time and the Form of the DAW

Beyond the imperative to make sense, the bad working conditions also stem from a lack of time, from the fact that the industry organizes time for economic efficiency rather than for artistic quality. This is especially true of television production, but it affects film and video games as well, all of which require large amounts of music in a very limited amount of time. It is not surprising that much of the technology has developed to fill and reproduce time on demand. The principal tool of the media composer is the digital audio workstation (DAW), software such as Cubase, Logic, Digital Performer, Ableton Live, or ProTools. DAWs are essentially GUIs (graphical user interfaces) for accessing musical databases of MIDI (musical instrument digital interface) data such as notes and automation files, audio samples, and settings for sound generators and processors. Upon opening a new project in its most basic form, the DAW presents a timeline stretching from the beginning of the piece to some indefinite endpoint. And whoever works in the DAW then begins to fill music into the timeline, which follows a metric scheme and divides the beat down to whatever arbitrary level the composer chooses. The notes are contained in 'regions' – little files of MIDI instructions – and the regions populate tracks holding the virtual instruments that the MIDI data will trigger, and the routing that the audio signal will follow. The region is the basic unit of the DAW, and almost all DAWs make it simple to turn regions into loops and to copy regions so other instruments can play the same notes. The basic compositional work is oriented around the

production of region types: ostinati, riffs, stabs, pads, and so forth, all sorted into two basic forms of loops and one shots, and these forms can consist of either MIDI data or recorded audio.[5]

The representational scheme of the DAW is highly spatialized, with time presented linearly, and it bears a strong resemblance to the score, on which the DAW is loosely modeled. But the score has line and page breaks, whereas the DAW extends indefinitely without break, so it feels more like a two dimensional cartesian grid, with time presented on the horizontal axis and various instruments on the vertical one. Musical notes are not typically represented on a staff (though some DAWs offer the option of staff notation) but on what is called a piano roll, because it resembles the notational practice of the mechanical piano. Notes last for a duration marked by the MIDI note-on and note-off events. And those notes can be modified through automation of various parameters, which can be modulated over time. Finally, along with the music in MIDI form, audio files can also be added directly to the project, and those fill in the timeline according to the length of the file. All of this very much partakes of the reified order of time, a time laid out for musical calculation as befits the DAW's historical connections to the spreadsheet.

Aside from the lack of adequate time and the imperative to make sense, another anxiety media composers confront today is the need to make music with the machine, or more precisely, according to the logic of the computer. Writing music on the computer means writing to a grid in the DAW, where the grid is an explicit property of the piano roll. Those working in a DAW talk about aligning the music to this grid through a process of quantization on the one hand, and the need to 'humanize' the music by moving it off the grid on the other. Most DAWs do indeed have a 'humanize' function, which introduces randomness within defined bounds to avoid the 'machine-like' effect of music that is aligned too precisely with the metrical grid. The 'human-like' quality appears by way of injecting noise, a measure of indeterminacy and tolerance, into the system.

On the surface this presents little new aside from the idea that the measure provides grounds for humanness as a formal calculation of indeterminacy. Bar lines had long marked out the score as an indefinite expanse of empty time, much like the abstractions of the cartesian grid. In writing about how conducting informed Richard Wagner's compositional technique, Adorno notes that the basic gesture of beating time likewise becomes a means of abstraction, the order of time given by the empty measures. 'The measure to which [Wagner] subjects time does not derive from the musical content, but from the reified order of time itself' (Adorno 1984: 33).

If Wagner's practice is guided by the idea of a relentless and potentially endless beating of time, this is even more true of the DAW. Setting tempo and meter is fundamental to the idea; but unlike meter, which can be almost arbitrary in how it is changed, varying tempo usually requires a special intervention, since DAWs and virtual instruments often struggle when the tempo changes too frequently or continuously. This is in part because of how

virtual instruments are designed to match tempo through the stretching and contracting of samples, which requires calculations that are made more complicated when tempo fluctuates. But it affects even music that does not require such calculations. Indeed, nothing about the machine requires the kind of musical quantization that nevertheless occurs. And it is more than possible to make beats fatter and thinner, to de-quantize the MIDI under the sign of 'humanization'. And all sorts of control over performance can be obtained that would be most difficult to notate and then recreate accurately in performance. Yet the implementation of nonstandard measures and the use of subdivisions other than two or three in DAWs are such that this possibility is hard to realize, and tempo changes which in theory should be trivial are instead often difficult to execute in practice. DAWs have gotten better at accurately recording MIDI performances, but they are still not designed with tempo flexibility in mind.

Hitting the Mark: On Synchronization

For media music, it is not so much the computer's digital basis that forces composition to the grid but rather the need for synchronization, and no longer just to picture or narrative sequence, but also for production. Synchronization has long been a notable concern of media music, and early accounts of composing for the films or fitting music to them in the silent era made frequent reference to literal measurement, timing footage to calculate musical matches.[6] The click track was developed for this task early in the sound era, allowing conductors and players to simplify the task of hitting the tempo that brought picture and music into line. Click tracks remain common for this use to this day. The practice of playing to click tracks then opened up another use: creating a recording through layers in a process called 'striping'.[7] In this method, the various sections of the orchestra all lay down their parts to a click track, often playing along with mockups of the other sections of the orchestra so players have a musical context for how their part fits with the whole. In this way the full performance is built through recording, and the players are often only all in the same room for the photographs of the session (a session where the full orchestra plays together never actually happens with striping). Click tracks by definition do not allow for musical flexibility, and this can result in stiff performances, but striping offers the advantage of being cost effective, because only the players needed for each section are required for the session, and the fact that the sections are recorded separately on completely isolated stems makes it possible to remix a recording from the ground up in postproduction if needed. So flexibility lost in performance is regained in mixing.

As noted, Adorno sees the position of conductor as fundamental to Wagner's conception of composition. 'His music is conceived in terms of the gesture of striking a blow and … the whole idea of beating is fundamental to it' (Adorno 1984: 30). In current media music, the inaudible click track

assumes the place of the conductor (though the conductor has not, for whatever reason, been eliminated, and the conductor is still as often as not also the composer). The beating now has its audible correlate in the percussion track, which quite literally strikes the musical blows that accompany the violence of the action. Adorno continues his analysis of the conductor: 'An advocate of the effect, the conductor is the advocate of the public in the work. As the striker of blows, however, the composer-conductor gives the claims of the public a terrorist emphasis' (Adorno 1984: 31). The point isn't just that the beat is a form of the hit then, but that as an effect, the beat is implicitly violent, a hit designed musically to serve as the fist of order (this in turn suggests that a metric regime is a social compact, but also has implications for social theories of syncopation and metric irregularity that will get Adorno into so much difficulty when he ponders jazz) (Buhler 2006). 'Democratic considerateness towards the listener is transformed into connivance with the powers of discipline: in the name of the listener, anyone whose feelings accord with a yardstick other than the beat of the music is silenced' (Adorno 1984: 31). In cinema especially, big percussion hits are engineered, prepared musically through side-chain compression and dynamic EQ to make room in the audio spectrum for the hit, sometimes even delivering a brief moment of silence just before the hit, so that its impact can be that much more punishing. On a modern cinema sound system, such hits feel like body blows; and the audience takes masochistic pleasure in subjecting themselves to them.

The big percussion hit itself is built in layers of audio to ensure a wide sonic spectrum is covered; it is also treated with compression and various forms of distortion to increase its punch, and engulfed in reverb to ensure that the impact resonates power. The hit is an effect made possible by reification and alienation, the ability of the composer to step outside the effect in order to prepare it for maximum effect.[8] Adorno notes that the calculus of musical effects like hits requires a distance between composer and audience.

> From the outset the estrangement from the public is inseparable from the calculation of the effect on the public; only an audience whose social and aesthetic assumptions are so far removed from those of the artist as in the case under high capitalism can become the reified object of calculation by the artist.
>
> (Adorno 1984: 31)

Where Adorno locates the calculation of the effect in Wagner's position as conductor, in the contemporary music studio such calculations are performed by composer-producers like Hans Zimmer. The scoring stage is used to record musicians playing, but they are only furnishing audio as a kind of raw material to be worked on by the composer-producer. In contemporary media music, it is at the mixing board and even more in the DAW that material is transformed into score, into music. And the effect of the production is even more the result of treating the audience like the reified object of calculation.[9]

The Fetish Character of Legato and the Regression of Performance

Making music in the box entails working with virtual instruments. These come in two basic types, synthesizers and samplers. Synthesizers use oscillators and various recorded wave forms as sound generators, which are then run through a series of processing units to shape the sound. Synthesizers can imitate acoustic instruments like flutes or drums, sometimes quite credibly, but more characteristically they are used to design new sounds with no direct acoustic analogue. Samplers, by contrast, record performances of real acoustic instruments, and these samples are then stitched together to create credible imitations of those instruments.

In the case of a solo violin, for example, a soft sustain of the instrument's low G might be recorded piano for the length of one down bow. Then the Ab above that might be recorded, and the Bb above that, and then continuing in whole steps all the way to the top of the range. These recordings would then be edited and put into a sample player, with start point, end point, and loop points located for each of the recordings and the audio levels of the recordings matched so they all sound at the same volume. This is now a basic patch of soft violin sustains, and you can play the notes on a MIDI keyboard or enter the notes into the DAW to construct a performance. The performance might sound very credible while playing one note or another individually, but in this rudimentary form the sampled instrument is lacking in two important dimensions.

First, while you can increase the volume (as in a crescendo), outside a narrow volume range this does not sound like a violin crescendo because the timbre does not change the way the violin timbre does as the volume increases. To remedy this issue, manufacturers of sampled virtual instruments record several dynamic layers, usually at least two and often as many as five for string instruments. Some instruments, like percussion, require more. With an instrument constructed of various dynamic layers, the performance of a crescendo consists of crossfades from the sample of one dynamic layer to the sample of another as volume increases. But there is an issue that occurs with these crossfades that is especially pronounced in solo instruments. If the phases of the two samples do not align – and two recordings even of the same player playing the same pitch at different dynamic layers typically will not – you will hear what sounds like two instruments during the crossfade. There are ways to manipulate the recorded audio files to align the phases, but doing that is somewhat destructive to the tone quality of the recording. Likewise you can record a player making the crescendo, but then the recording will need to be stretched to fit the timing of the musical context, and this is also somewhat destructive to the tone quality. So instrument design often requires a tradeoff between phase alignment, sample stretching, and tone in solo instruments.

Second, when a violinist plays a melody, in most cases a period of transition occurs moving from one note to the next. There might be a slight silence

if the notes are played détaché. Or the player may continue on the same bow and simply change or move a finger. This is called fingered legato. If the finger is moved while the note continues, this will produce portamento. Or the player may change notes while changing the direction of the bow. This is called a bow change legato. There are other transitions between notes on a violin but this basic typology will suffice. The point is that to make a credibly realistic violin line, we need to hear not only the note and the note that follows, but also the transition between the notes, that is, the release of the note and the decay into the room in the case of détaché, and the legato or portamento in the case of the others. So to play, say, middle C to the E above it on the same bow and string, the virtual instrument would need to play first a recording of a sustained C and then a recording of the fingered legato transition between C and E, and then finally a recording of a sustained E. The combination of those three little recordings, each connected with a crossfade, produces the performance of the rising third from C to E.

The point of this description is to illustrate that what sounds like a recording of a singular performance of the rising major third is actually stitched together from at least three recordings. Adding a dynamic swell and fall to the performance might require as many as eight or nine recordings, each stitched together with crossfades, to render that two note performance. Moreover what the virtual instrument produces would not be a performance that was ever delivered by the performer while being recorded; the performer would have only furnished the various recordings of the sustains and the legato interval. So the C to E we hear from the virtual instrument is a performance that is fabricated, very much created in the machine.

The constructed nature of these virtual instrument performances is a source of much consternation for composers, who worry samples yield Frankenstein monsters rather than truly living performances. Some embrace the situation and work toward what can be made compelling and expressive in the performances, not worrying much how real the instruments sound so long as they can find a way to make the instruments musical. But most composers are much more concerned with the 'realism' of the sampled instrument, with what I have been calling its credibility. And credibility is measured not in terms of musicality – the musical expression that can be won from an instrument – but in terms of the legato, how realistically and smoothly the individual recorded bits connect to producing a convincing illusion of a real violin performance. What comes to matter is capturing legato, the tissue that is supposed to connect the samples and restore the unity of the performance, the soul of the sound, the swell of the individual. Legato, then, names the point of suture, and its fetish character stems from the way 'true' legato – legato that is recorded rather than scripted and synthesized – effaces marks of production and so assumes the figure of a performance that is made by the composer in the machine but that is also never quite recognized as such.

My critical framework here follows Adorno's trenchant analysis of the fetish character in music, and the insight that

the consumer is really worshipping the money that he himself has paid for the ticket to a Toscanini concert. He has literally "made" the success which he reifies and accepts as an objective criterion, without recognizing himself in it. But he has not 'made' it by liking the concert, but rather by buying the ticket.

(Adorno 1982: 278–279)

Legato, like the Toscanini concert, is detached from a function that would endow it with actual musical significance, since legato itself, not the musical expression legato ostensibly serves, comes to secure the quality of the music. If one argues with users of virtual instruments that often legato – 'true' legato or otherwise – is being deployed indifferently to the musical needs of the expression, or that it is perfectly possible to make compelling music with imperfect legato transitions (or no legato transitions at all), one confronts the sort of overzealous resistance common when core cultural contradictions are exposed. That the quality of the 'true' legato has become a key point in the advertising of virtual instruments is evidence of its relation to the exchange-value of the market. In this advertising scenario, 'true' legato is what makes possible 'true' music, and composer-consumers in turn congratulate themselves on their good taste, when it is the purchase of the library, not the appeal of the legato, that has registered the value.

This social substitution extends into the engineering of legato as gesture. Legato is the transition between notes, and for strings the favored legato for media composers is not, as one might expect, a relatively transparent connection between notes that is in fact the most common legato of orchestral strings, but rather a legato that transitions frictionlessly into a gentle swell on the note of arrival along with progressive vibrato to emphasize the swell. I am going to call this gesture 'arc as breath', and it connects to the suturing work of legato at the level of the subject. It is the swell of the individual, and it contains in microcosm the basic gesture of expansion, the build to a high point, that guides the shaping of much media music.

In his essay 'The Grain of the Voice', Roland Barthes takes aim at singer Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and the fetishization of breath as soul. 'The breath is the *pneuma*, the soul swelling or breaking, and any exclusive art of breathing is likely to be a secretly mystical art' (Barthes 1977: 183). Legato, understood in terms of arc as breath, very much occupies this place of the soul, and the swelling breath reinforces the swell of the individual, which thereby assumes representation in the composition. Legato is fetishized because the arc as breath is a figure that allows belief that soul and spirit infuse the line, and that a representation of soul and spirit, rather than the articulation of musical expression, is the aim. Barthes contrasts this emphasis on breath and soul to the work of mouth and body. 'With [Fischer-Dieskau], I seem only to hear the lungs, never the tongue, the glottis, the teeth, the mucous membranes, the nose' (Barthes 1977: 183). And so too with legato: arc as breath substitutes for other potential conceptions of legato, such as springboard to

various longs not bound so rigidly to the figure of the swell of the individual. These other legatos are perhaps less smooth; they introduce more friction into the transition from note to note; but they can also surface a fragile materiality to the sound and avoid the 'expressive reduction' that Barthes locates in Fischer-Dieskau's approach to singing.

The fetish character of legato is the flip-side of a general expressive reduction due to the standardization of performance enforced by composing with samples. Adorno and Eisler had complained about the standardization of performance already in the Hollywood era (Adorno & Eisler 1994: 18–19), and standardization is a coping mechanism to the bad working conditions of too limited time. But the way music is composed today with samples accelerates the tendency and introduces a notable regression of expressive potential. If sampled legato reduces all transitions to the figure of the arc as breath, something similar happens with all articulations. Although libraries proliferate, companies focus on so-called 'core' articulations, those that manufacturers of virtual instruments assure us cover 90% of the uses. That number is greatly inflated, but it hardly matters. Sample libraries can in fact cover many cases, but the samples as recordings also have baked-in performances, and these same performances get triggered every time that note is played with that articulation, not just by one composer, but by every composer who uses that library. Inevitably, composers also end up writing for the samples that are available and what those samples do well. The composition is therefore closely guided, if not fully determined, by the samples. Even when samples are replaced by recordings of live musicians, the players must conform to the basic parameters of the original sampled mock-up, and since approval of cues depends on the effectiveness of the mock-up, composers are less likely to use musical gestures that have not been sampled or do not lend themselves well to sampling.

The result is media music that tends to work with a vastly simplified palette of instrumental articulations compared to those available in the studio era. Indeed, even thinking of the composition in this fashion – in terms of available articulations rather than say the full idiomatic potential of the instrument – results in a markedly different approach to scoring.

Leitmotif Redux

The leitmotif remains common today, as it was in the studio era, but it is not universal, and it wasn't even when Adorno and Eisler were writing (Adorno & Eisler 1994: 4–6). The leitmotif is, however, basic to how media music is understood as connecting to narrative on the side of the particular. (Musical topics connect to narrative on the side of the general.) Leitmotifs associate music with particular characters, things, ideas, and so forth, and so help to invest those elements with narrative significance, as being worthy of musical signification. Vice versa those elements not endowed with leitmotifs recede in significance. Much like synchronization, where important figures are

synchronized and secondary ones are not so the latter can fade to ground (Buhler 2019: 143), so too the leitmotif serves to designate significance, to create a hierarchy between the essential (that which is marked by leitmotifs) and the inessential (that which is not) (Buhler 2010). The leitmotif also fixes identity (the leitmotif tells us who this character is) and registers change (the leitmotif variant reflects changes in setting). The leitmotif is thus one important way music can underscore narrative, draw out elements, and mark them for attention. Because the leitmotif identifies, it necessarily presumes to know (this gives it the quality of foreboding that Wagner associated with the leitmotif), and because the leitmotif is musical, this knowledge appears nondiscursive, belonging to the stratum of being, especially when the leitmotif has a definitive musical form (that is, we recognize the leitmotif as primary on the one hand and its variants as derivative on the other). This thoroughly hierarchical conception generally accords with the conventions and structures of commercial filmmaking and related forms of media, likely one reason it has persisted as a common, if not default, mode of accompanying narrative media forms from the silent era through today.

Withering of Theme

The contemporary situation, which has embraced a style for media music where theme and leitmotif are highly attenuated, differs in significant respects from the studio era, but even in the studio era, melody was not as prevalent as Adorno and Eisler imply (Adorno & Eisler 1994: 6–9). Aaron Copland credits Max Steiner, for instance, with an adeptness with 'neutral music', which is music that sounds unobjectionable as music but that lacks the articulated gestures that would allow it to coalesce into something like a melody warranting attention (Copland 2010: 91). Adorno in fact had already identified this tendency toward thematic erosion in Wagner's leitmotif, which, he argues, does not lend itself to thematic development but only sequential restatement (Adorno 1984: 36).

In any event, the critical issue with melody was never the inflexibility of the song-like structure presupposed by *Composing for the Films* (Adorno & Eisler 1994: 6–9). Film composers knew perfectly well how to cut such structures down to usable fragments that dissolved commitments to regular cadence. But a melodic basis to theme did make the definitive version of the leitmotif into a melody, and this form as melody invested it with identity. The melodic structure of Hollywood themes was indeed one of their least Wagnerian qualities. That investment in stable thematic identity created a certain sense of character as immutable. Characters didn't change, and the musical themes secured the identity. Themes were treated to variation, but variation recognized the force of the situation on the character, not that the character had changed or would change. Indeed, our recognition of the theme's identity across the variants is what assured us of the identity of the character in the face of the new situation. In this sense the theme insists that the character is simply who he or she always already was.

The withering of the theme in recent media music calls this traditional formulation into question (Halfyard 2013) and changes the focus from being and identity to becoming and transformation (Buhler 2020). At the same time the lack of articulate thematic formation calls identity into question. Zimmer says that Batman/Bruce Wayne of *Batman Begins* (2005) does not have a fully articulated theme because he has not yet earned one (Goldwasser 2006). The theme is withheld because that identity is not yet. And the musical process falls on becoming Batman rather than being Batman (Buhler 2021). A similar analysis could be applied to *Casino Royale* (2006), where composer David Arnold withholds the signature Bond theme until the final scene when the Bond identity evidently fully emerges (Buhler & Neumeyer 2016: 488). In any event, it is only here at the conclusion of the final scene that we hear the theme even though the score for the film has been preparing it all along. Identity still structures the conception as a whole to be sure, but the music sacrifices the old prescience in order to mark and sanctify the transformation as a primal baptism (London 2000: 87), and to claim once more the value of the theme as a property.

This recent approach differs from the studio-era conception where the theme calls the hero to be who we know he always already is, and this conception will persist as a dominant line of commercial filmmaking. It is the musical correlate to what film historians call the classical style. The character we meet at the beginning of the film may not yet fill the role of hero and there may be missteps along the way that make us doubt a character's adequacy for the role, but the theme as identity proclaims the destiny of the hero, so we have various more or less entertaining adventures as the character learns to accept their destiny; but being is never in doubt, and the character is not transformed through a process of becoming but only revealed.

If the theme as melody is still fetishized because it can be usefully exploited as intellectual property, the contemporary situation also shows a deep aversion to melody, and Zimmer and many composers associated with him are frequently criticized, much as Wagner was, for lacking strong melodic writing. Themes are present in contemporary media music, but they are under-articulated; and what drives scores today is attention to forging gestures that conjure affective states more than identity (Buhler & Neumeyer 2016: 464–468 and Reyland 2015). Here again, Adorno identifies a precursor in Wagner and the gestures of incidental music (Adorno 1984: 33). If Zimmer is writing neither Steiner's neutral music nor Wagner's incidental music, Zimmer's music separates the affective state from the marks of the individual. The ambient atmosphere is charged with potential, the character feels and is perhaps moved to action on feeling, but the feeling is not a property of identity.

Divesting of Dissonance

The shift from identity to gesture and affect in contemporary media composition also reworks its harmonic practice. Adorno and Eisler had pointed to

the 'euphony' of music in the Hollywood studio era (Adorno & Eisler 1994: 6), but contemporary media composition is often even more triadic. These triads are frequently deployed non-diatonically, but the chord formations often also lack the harmonic richness of the studio era, which had a predilection for sevenths, added sixths and ninths borrowed from impressionism and jazz as well as late nineteenth-century chromatic practice. So the harmonic opulence of the music of the studio era has in many respects given way to the musical austerity if not outright impoverishment of simple triads. According to traditional tonal theory of functional harmony, characteristic dissonances help define harmonic function: the seventh presents the dominant function, the added sixth the subdominant function. Within functional harmony, dissonance creates tension that yields feeling as movement, that is, resolution, but so also the sense of chords progressing, moving from one to the next. Non-dissonant triadic structure distinctly lessens the functional identity of a harmony. All of this is consistent with a shift away from identity. Action belongs to the individual, dissonance tenses for release, and articulate thematic structure calls the individual to an identity.

Affect, by comparison, offers a pre-individuated or at least nascent state that indexes potential and power not action, 'a motor tendency on a sensitive nerve' to use Gilles Deleuze's definition of the Bergsonian conception (Deleuze 1986: 87). The compensating value of divesting of dissonance is the representation of quality. The functional character of harmony, its drive toward movement and resolution, is attenuated in favor of revealing its affective face. Frank Lehman has noted that film music has increasingly favored chord sequences that follow a neo-Riemannian harmonic logic rather than a functional harmonic logic (Lehman 2018: 166). The three basic neo-Riemannian operators are within Riemannian functional theory proper functional substitutes: the relative (R), the parallel (P), and the leading tone exchange (L) transformation; each yields new affective qualities – an opposite mode – compared to the original, not a change in harmonic function or progression. That is, in the key of C major, A minor (R), C minor (P), and E minor (L) are considered functional substitutes for the tonic chord of C major, so moving from a C major chord to any of them is not considered a functional change, a harmonic progression.

Affect need not be presented in triads – sonority is its dissonant face – but its expression is as potential rather than as kinetic energy. Triads connected by the R, P, and L transformations present bare if distinct affective faces – major and minor – but they are not functionally disposed toward the release into action; they do not congeal into expressions of emotion that move a character to action as identity but rather capture the subtle fluctuations that mark a state of becoming.

Conclusion

This tendency in composition towards non-functional triads but away from articulate themes coincides with changes in the technology of musical production but also with a change in the films themselves, and it is hard to say

for certain whether the music was a response to the new films that seemed adapted to the new technological capabilities of music production, or indeed that the films found inspiration in the new musical technology that made composition more fluid and responsive to changes in editorial direction but also to the play of affective states.

Whatever the case, media music today is increasingly seeking an encounter with sound design, where old lines separating sound effects and music have all but vanished. In this new regime of sound and music production, things – objects of the world – hum and sing, sparkle and glisten, in a way they haven't since experiments in synchronization of the early sound era. This is a correlate of the turn to affect: things, too, present a face and the soundtrack resonates affect in their presence; and, in something of a return to a world of silent film, the basic anthropocentrism of the talkie dissolves, as the boundary between people and things but also the hierarchies of foreground and background diminish (see Arnheim 1933: 264 and Balázs 2010: 23). Music loses some of the old formative powers of articulate themes, functional harmony, and a cogent handling of dissonance that impels movement, but it gains a deeper integration with the rest of the soundtrack and indeed draws power from and finds new qualities in an encounter with film's internal forces rather than importing them from other musical domains.

Composing for the Films famously declared that film music was without history (Adorno & Eisler 1994: 45). And its authors placed a strange bet on new musical resources: that the use of such resources, instead of the well-worn clichés of the standard musical practice, could change the cinema and so also remake the world. But even had that happened it would not have given film music a history under the terms they proposed. Film music can develop a history only when it works on problems that derive from and belong integrally to the cinema. And the same is true of the broader media domain.

The problem of media music is the culture industry, and the problem of music composition writ large is also the culture industry. The culture industry demands IP that sells, that moves product at an ever increasing pace, and composers of media music must cope with that demand. The market indeed favors IP that works as a series of substitutions, as exchanges: this sound for that sound, this idea for that. This is the secret of its insistence on meaning and making sense, but also its penchant to grab for clichés and to recycle its products. The cycle of exchange seeps into and permeates the deepest levels of technique. In cinema, in television, in video games, one sound substitutes for another, music substitutes for sound and sound for music, virtual instruments substitute for real instruments and then real instruments for virtual ones. The narrative regulates this exchange and reduces friction of exchange by atomizing the units into ever finer, ever more indistinct atmospheric particles of affect. As exchange thus grows more fluid, the fine grains lose their distinct identity as IP, much as granular synthesis erases identifying marks of ownership from the samples it processes and mangles. Media music in this way also taps a contrary power and quality. The soundtrack, but especially the musical

sounds, asserts its affective pose, like the spectacle of the close-up, against being determined by narrative or by a form of marketable IP. Perhaps in the age of digital media, media music has a history after all.

Notes

1　I would like to thank Hannah Lewis, Ian McDonald, Michael Morse, and Temme Sekemma for their feedback on this essay.
2　This is a reprint of the original edition with a new introduction published by Oxford University Press in 1947 under Eisler's name alone.
3　Composer Christian Henson, co-founder of Spitfire Audio (a maker of virtual instruments) and the owner of a popular YouTube channel on music production for media (https://www.youtube.com/c/ChristianHensonMusic), frequently makes the point that composers of media music are functionally heads of music departments for the production.
4　For a critique of cinematic use of musical topics, see Buhler 2019: 189–198.
5　Some DAWs (Ableton Live, Logic, etc.) allow regions to be arranged into 'scenes', where the regions can be brought in and layered together combinatorially to produce different levels of intensity. One scene passes into another scene through cutting or crossfade, and those two operations have largely displaced modulation and development as the primary means of making joins in the material.
6　See, for instance, Milhaud 1930.
7　A good brief overview of striping is provided in a YouTube video by media composer Anne-Kathrin Dern. See 'Sweetening and Striping', YouTube, Jan. 14, 2020, https://youtu.be/m6gyheFCbpc
8　The production technique for these hits is often trial and error, as production effects are dialed in or dialed back on the hit and the impact assessed for how the hit sits in the mix and how it will affect the audience.
9　Interestingly, though, for all the assaultive language of production (punishing, twisting, distortion, mangling, etc.) the actual method remains conceived more basically as pushing virtual buttons, moving virtual sliders, and turning virtual knobs. This is a curious gestural transformation, from beating time to manipulating gear.

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Part IV

Recorded Sound in Changing Environments

10 Adorno and Jazz

A Dialogue with the Philosopher from an Audiotactile Perspective

Vincenzo Caporaletti

Immanent and Sociological Critique

Adorno, among philosophers of music, appears to intransigently deny jazz any possibility of gaining access to the domain of art (not to mention aesthetic authenticity).[1] This severe censure clashes against the image and the artistic role that jazz has acquired in contemporary culture as a preeminent arena for spontaneous creative expression, whose symbolic form is improvisational freedom itself. Since the 1950s, a debate aimed at polemicising against, or at least contextualising, or downsizing, Adorno's judgments has been raging.[2] In many cases, Adorno's critique of jazz has suffered a hasty and a priori liquidation, with peaks of factiousness, in some cases by authoritative historians and critics of jazz. Thus, a more balanced view of this *querelle* seems necessary, in order to understand more than to polemicise; and to identify the conceptual cores, the noetic plexus intrinsic to Adorno's philosophy which led to such a radically negative position.

In Adorno's critique of jazz, three main lines or layers emerge: a technical-musical one, concerning the immanent level; a sociological one, inherent in the critique of mass culture, related to the production and distribution of jazz as a commodity; and a third, situated deep in the speculative core of Adorno's philosophy. This chapter will not deal with the first two levels, widely dissected by meta-criticism, and instead focuses on the third.

Summarising briefly, we can say that the corpus of elements to which Adorno addresses his criticism at the immanent level is roughly made up of:

- the 'false bar' (*Scheintakt*) (Adorno 2002b: 470)[3]
- the mere impression of an illusory rhythmic variety (since the pulse is actually fixed) (Adorno 2002b: 471)
- instrumental pseudo-vocalisation (Adorno 2002b: 471)
- the deception of only seemingly unpredictable harmonisations (Adorno 2002b: 483–84)
- the simulation of counterpoint (Adorno 2002b: 477)
- the pseudo-inventiveness of improvisation (Adorno 2002b: 473)
- the military character of the jazz orchestra (Adorno 2002b: 475)

To give at least one technical-musical example of an issue that emblematically marks the insurmountable distance between Adorno's vision and the aesthetics of jazz, we might refer to a central passage in Adorno's comments on Winthrop Sargeant's conception of temporality in jazz. Dealing with the formal element constituted by the *break* in jazz, which sees the interruption of pulse continuity in the accompanying instruments when the soloist improvises a cadence, the American critic affirms:

> In this process the fundamental rhythm is not really destroyed. The perceptive listener holds in his mind a continuation of its regular pulse even though the orchestra has stopped marking it. And when the orchestra resumes its rhythmic function, it continues the series of mentally sustained pulses, its entrance coinciding precisely with one of them. The situation during the silent pulses is one that challenges the listener to hold his bearings. *If he has any sort of rhythmic sense he will not be content to lose himself.* If he does not feel the challenge, or is perfectly content to lose himself, then he is one of those who will never understand the appeal of jazz. [my italics]
>
> (Sargeant 1946: 239)

Adorno's biting reply is unequivocal:

> To comprehend this appeal of jazz means only to be ready to find the gesture of freedom while actually there is no freedom. The achievement of the expert listener is limited to his not being confused by any subjective temptation while obeying the rhythmical law.
>
> (Adorno 1941: 177)

Adorno identifies the strict 'pulse continuity' of jazz as an authoritarian 'norm' to follow, an imperative whose ideological foundation lies in the firm metric rule found in music theory. He does not investigate it, therefore, as a phenomenological dimension, as the result of a rhythmic vital bodily disposition, or as a horizon or background against which to instantiate psychomotor attitudes and to articulate rhythmic–melodic–harmonic figurations from an existential perspective. Above all, he does not consider these processes to be an articulation of a complex *cognitio sensitiva*, which is acquired and refined only after many years of study. Consequently, it is only a short step from this premise to interpreting a musician's fine, skilful control over temporality as a masochistic inclination to submit to an authoritarian and coercive norm, along the lines of a military march.

In the 'visual' and allographic[4] ontology of music within which Adorno operates, there is no room for the concreteness of a *Dasein*, of an existing Subject who through an *audiotactile principle*,[5] autographically, and with a *leiblich* approach, imposes itself as part of the aesthetic process, reformulating the paradigm of representation. Adorno, interpreting the aesthetic dimension

of jazz through an allogeneic ontology,[6] distorts the axiological perspective and the very meaning of his analytical approach. All the contingent criticisms that Adorno addresses to jazz on a technical, formal, melodic, harmonic, formulaic, and ultimately, aesthetic level descend from this theoretical premise.

On the one hand, we have Adorno's 'classical' sociological approach to jazz and popular music (Adorno 1990b: 301–14) linked to the stigmatisation of the cultural industry, and whose conclusions, in addition to the false and reified experience deriving from the social totality of the phenomenon, are the famous issues of standardisation and pseudo-individualisation (Adorno 1990b: 305 ff.). According to Adorno, jazz is affected *ab ovo* by the inauthenticity of industrial production, which, with its economic goals and support of social antagonism, inexorably prejudices any claim to aesthetic emancipation. The intra-musical factors, therefore, are only epiphenomena consequent to this original aberration; and, even though they can assume various and differentiated surface characteristics, they remain referable to a single inauthentic *proton pseudos*, original fault. Moreover, one cannot overlook his psychoanalytic perspective, a characteristic of his speculative style, with the concepts of masochism of the masses, fetishisation, symbolic castration, instinctual mutilation and many others (used in critical passages considered particularly odious by the world of jazz) (Adorno 2002b: 478).[7]

On the other hand, these different approaches allow Adorno to put a deeper paradigm to the test, one which is inherent in his philosophical vision, and which, for him, affects the whole history of jazz. In this sense, the meta-criticisms that accused him of having a limited knowledge of jazz (see Gracyk 1992) or mistaking Weimer's popular music, or even popular music tout court, for legitimate jazz (Bradford Robinson 1994), would lose their value. In fact, as we will see, both the worst (Weimar or American) popular music and the most 'authentic' jazz share the 'audiotactile phenomenology' which I believe to be the real object of Adorno's criticism. Adorno himself suggests this reading to us, in a statement referring to the rhythmic conception in jazz, which in the light of the Theory of Audiotactile Music acquires its clarifying sense.

> The controversial point is rather the difference between 'authentic' jazz and commercial jazz, a difference that Berendt believes is 'fundamental for anyone involved in jazz'. He is convinced that I was unaware of this, but I dealt with it in essay, therefore Berendt's request is unacceptable. *In fact, the principle, the rhythmic procedure, is identical in the most refined jazz and the most banal popular music. … The difference in the types of jazz … concerns the façon and not the structure of the musical process.* [my italics]
>
> (Adorno 2003g: 805; 806)

This is a sign of a profound intuition of the shared structural processes and phenomenological principles that underlie these different musical languages, and of the real focus of Adorno's critical orientation. Read in this way,

Adorno seems to relate to jazz with a perspective of inquiry similar to that of the Theory of Audiotactile Music (TAM); and this coplanar heuristic perspective allows us, in turn, to set up a discussion based on compatible concepts and convergent approaches.

Visual ontology vs. audiotactile phenomenology: here lies Adorno's problem in terms of TAM, regardless of incidental and contingent arguments on styles and forms, and especially distinctions between popular, 'legitimate jazz', 'sweet jazz', etc. The real problem is to understand *why* Adorno does not dialectically connect the two poles within a realm of aesthetic legitimacy. In summary, I intend to show that the core of Adorno's criticism of jazz did not specifically focus on popular music in Weimar or American swing bands, or bebop, Tin Pan Alley songs, or even free jazz, but that the object of his censorship actually involved all these manifestations understood as functions of an *audiotactile principle*. My second aim is to show how this awareness can finally offer a speculative re-orientation for a dialectical reversal of his aesthetic denial, starting from the positive elements offered by Adorno's reflection.

The Dominant Discourse on Jazz and the Perspective of the Theory of Audiotactile Music

The title of a famous book by Amiri Baraka, *Black Music* (LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) 2010) is indicative in showing how the criterion of *blackness* is a founding factor of jazz in its dominant discourse. An element for understanding this paradigm comes from the mythography of the *storyteller* – reminiscent of the *griot* of Central West Africa – with which Okiji describes the operativeness of jazz (Okiji 2017) in terms of *oral culture* (Okiji 2018: pos. 1563). This oral dimension, in turn, is conjugated with the need for some form of *subjectivity*, in the expression of Self (Okiji 2018: pos. 1607). Subjectivity, in turn, induces a series of related values.

> Jazz is often presented as music of the individual. Its improvisational character is given as evidence of the independence of its musicians. It is also hailed as the bearer of a democratic spirit that is manifest in its inclusiveness, its musical miscegenation, and its rejection of the composer-performer division of labor we find in the modern European tradition. Moreover, its spirit of spontaneity, and what appears as an unadulterated expression of life, acts as an antidote to the self-alienation experienced in most other areas of modern existence.
>
> (Okiji 2018: pos. Kindle 344)

The culture of oral tradition, by its intrinsic anthropological logic, in addition to its particular phenomenological and communicative devices, implies a specific factor that is inherent in the conception of identity. Indeed, from an anthropological point of view, the oral tradition has been – is, and

has every right to be – socially and 'communally' exclusivist. This essentialist paradigm has been transferred to the interpretation of jazz as black music, as an African-American music coming from oral tradition. Can we be sure that jazz is the music of oral tradition?

From a cognitive anthropological perspective, oral-tradition music and contemporary jazz, rock and world music (mass-mediated expressions that I define as *audiotactile music*) are certainly both based on the cognitive, formative and receptive functions defined by the *audiotactile principle* (ATP), as phenomenologically *leiblich*, embodied. This principle marks the emergence of the phenomenal Subject within the system of music theory (Caporaletti 2018a: 2 ff), from which it was expelled and relegated to the conceptual margin of non-identity (Adorno 1983) by virtue of the epistemological criteria on which the Western *ratio* was structured (Adorno & Horkheimer 2007).

These cognitive functions are distinct from the Cartesian mechanical-causal, logical-deductive rationalisation of the psychosomatic plexus, geometrised by the notational and theoretical-musical coding of the written tradition in the tonal and Modernist era, and consigned to the history of performance in Western art music (see Caporaletti 2019a: 101 ff.). (This argument somehow develops the idea contained in George Lewis' *eurological* category in a philosophical–anthropological direction) (Lewis 1996). However, according to the TAM, on the phenomenological level, what distinguishes accepted forms of audiotactile music (jazz, rock, etc.) from oral traditions are not, therefore, their formative and receptive processes – which, we repeat, in both cultural dimensions are based on audiotactile principles – but their respective *anthropology of the text* (the text understood as the expressive artefact that results from the formative action of the performer, via the audiotactile principle: in Nattiez–Molino's terms, the trace) (Nattiez 1987; Molino 1990).

Turning to Hjelmslev's semiotic model (Hjelmslev 1969), which distinguishes between the 'substance of expression' and the 'substance of content', we might indicate, on the one hand, a fluctuating, evanescent and not-objective textual constitution, typical of orality; and, on the other, in audiotactile music, a phono-fixed constitution (disc, file, etc., or even just the awareness of the possibility of a phono-fixation, in a symbolic-interactionist perspective). Thus, an opposition is recognised between durable and evanescent (as regards the 'substance of expression') and crystallised and floating (as regards the 'substance of content') (see Caporaletti 2019a: 63). In this sense, sound recordings have aesthetic effects similar to those generated by writing. In audiotactile phono-fixed music, this creates the cognitive/aesthetic effects that I associate with *neo-auratic encoding* (Caporaletti 2019a: 62 ff.), which, in this music, conveys the aesthetic values of Western modernity (and therefore a 'mediological' type of writing): authorship, originality, artistic awareness, aesthetic autonomy, 'disinterested' contemplation (values we do not find in traditional music, considered in its historicised development, and crystallised as a cultural heritage at the time of its first phonographic documentation in the 20th century).

What folk and traditional oralistic music share with audiotactile music is the cognitive model based on the bodily rationality that I call *audiotactile cognition*. The TAM identifies (Caporaletti 2005; 2018a; 2019a) a noetic precipitate in the anthropological-descriptive category of 'orality'; an epistemic attribution that acts as an operating system, an internal cognitive logic of oral attestations, which is also active in the formativity of audiotactile music, properly speaking, just as jazz is. In this sense, the concept of orality, considered 'confused' by many commentators, for example Molino,[8] is deepened, explained in its cognitive and formative constituents. An epistemic advantage is that audiotactile cognition, like that of jazzmen, can also be implemented in a writing environment such as literature, given a writer such as James Joyce – thus it need not only be considered in an oral dimension.

In the experience of oral traditions, during their historical development, and up until the cultural patrimonialisation provided by ethnomusicology in the 20th century, there were no *neo-auratic encoding* processes, when *audiotactile* cognitivity was in use. Key concepts such as *audiotactile principle* and *neo-auratic encoding* allow us to precisely distinguish on a taxonomic and phenomenological level, folk music cultures from the audiotactile ones (jazz, rock, contemporary world music), and also from tonal and modernistic music. They allow us to precisely define the taxonomic identity of spirituals, written in notation, in comparison with the oral tradition of *field holler*s and the original blues; and to define their respective difference from jazz, which I intend as audiotactile music and not as coming from an oral tradition (see Caporaletti 2019a: 74 ff.).

Adorno's Philosophical Perspective

The inescapable existential, aesthetic, political and social representativeness of African-American culture in jazz, which we connect to the concept of *blackness*, would be for Adorno a particular case of a more all-encompassing paradigm. This concerns Adorno's distrust of an immediate relationship between the work of art and society (Adorno 2002a: 394), and his disbelief in the immediate adaptation of art to class consciousness. This mistrust derives, in turn, from the monadological conception of the artistic fact (see Adorno 1997 and Adorno 2002a: 396) intended to preserve its autonomous character (Adorno 2002a: 393), and thus preventing a mere mechanistic (mimetic?) mirroring of social situations (Adorno 2002a: 393). From this perspective, Blackness, as an existential and anthropological condition of African Americans, is, like the proletariat, a social category and a product of capitalist society, bearing all its contradictions and mutilations (Adorno 2002a: 394).

In Adorno's writings there is not a single occurrence of the adjective 'oral'. Adorno does not use the category of orality, let alone the explanatory structure based on the binary opposition between orality and writing. There are historical reasons for this: research on these conceptual tools, and their application to jazz, was still in progress.[9] We must therefore identify the

categories which, for the philosopher, represented what is meant by orality in the current debate. Adorno refers to the 'prehistoric'[10] and mythical dimension, also identifying a characterising noetic factor, which can refer to – even if it does not totally coincide with – the operating system, the internal cognitive logic of the anthropological dimension that during the second half of the 20th century was defined as oral tradition and mentality (see Ong 1982; Lord 2003; Parry 1971; Zumthor 1990).

The concept which I consider central in Adorno's negative judgement on jazz is the *mimetic impulse*. This faculty is an ancestral and prehistoric heritage, probably pre-linguistic, that humans share with other species. For example, a dog that wants to invite us to play or to follow it, *imitates* the action of 'going somewhere', illustrating a case of primordial intentional pre-verbal communication. Mimetism appears not only in the research of Roger Caillois mentioned in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Adorno & Horkheimer 2007) but was also the specific subject of two essays by Walter Benjamin in 1933 (See Benjamin 1978b and 2005) in which he transposed this mimetic faculty into the cognitive sphere by introducing the notion of 'nonsensuous similarity' (Benjamin 2005: 721), which proved to be central in Adorno's philosophy. One aspect of this whole issue is that this mimetic impulse – after it had access to the rational human sphere, and thus had transformed itself – was perpetuated in language connected to the motivated or 'analog' sign (see Benjamin 1978a). Today we can interpret this issue as being in connection with the anthropological dimension of mythical archaic cultures, which in the literature is defined as 'orality'. In an oral culture, where there is no possibility of a written codification of information, the accent lies in interactive communication based on body language, in the imitation of content expressed *in exemplo* via body language and, in an intrapsychic process, in the body's imitation of a mental image. When a word imitates nature in language, it becomes analogous to a vital energy, anthropologically connected to animism, and therefore, the mimesis of the spirit during possession or the imitation of the sorcerer dressed as an animal.

Adorno, who defines mimetism as a 'non conceptual affinity of the subjectively produced with its unposited other' (Adorno 1997: 54), finds an internal logic in the mythical and prehistoric dimension, as an ancestral mode of interaction with the world prior to the definition of the Self in shamanic culture, and in what cognitive anthropology would identify as 'concrete thought'.[11] The Theory of Audiotactile Music detects an internal cognitive articulation within the notion of orality, calling it *audiotactile cognition* and *formativity*. Where does Adorno find this cognitive articulation of mimetism in the music from the written tradition? Quite correctly, in the context of this tradition, he refers to mimetism as those aspects of bodily subsumption implied in the *neumisch* (neumic) level, underpinned by the vehicle of 'significative' notational, semiotic and mensural infrastructure. Interestingly, there are numerous passages in his *Theory of Musical Reproduction* (Adorno 2006) in which he compares it to x-rays: imitating what is hidden (Benjamin's

concept of 'nonsensuous similarity'); which is to say that the transient ges-
tural factor that dissolved into written composition is resurrected by the
'neumic' criterion. At this point, it can be assumed that in jazz what is hidden
is expressed on the surface, skipping a level: there is a 'collapse' of the
'neumic' level onto the 'mensural'/significative element. However, Adorno
does not essentially legitimise mimetism aesthetically, as the TAM does.
Adorno challenges the aesthetic autonomy of audiotactile mimetism, whether
implemented in archaic music or modern jazz, avant-garde jazz or rock or
pop, and probably would contest it even if jazz were not under the yoke of the
cultural industry. Adorno denies this profound structure aesthetic legitimacy
based on the mimetic impulse, not due to a genre or a stylistic current.

   What is, then, the kernel of Adorno's philosophy that generates the aes-
thetic impossibility of a redemption of mimetism? If this were highlighted, the
speculative foundation of Adorno's rejection of jazz and the audiotactile
principle would be revealed, and maybe the axiological dystonia could be
resolved. As we have noted, for the philosopher, mimetism represents an
archaic polarity with respect to the historical establishment of rationalisation,
with the opposition *ratio* vs *mimesis*. The entire *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is
centred on this cornerstone, as is his *Aesthetic Theory* (Adorno 1997).
Rationality promotes self-identification and control over nature. This posi-
tion, whereby in mimetism the identification of the Self would be lacking, in
the light of the subsequent acquisitions of cognitive anthropology, phenom-
enological philosophy and cognitive science, with the concept of enactive
embodiment (see Varela, Thompson, Rosch 1993; Hutto & Myin 2013), can
be dialecticised.

   In addition to the distinction between writing and mimetism, what is at
stake is the non-exhaustive distinction made by Adorno between concrete
thought and mechanical-causal noesis; a logical-abstractive, Platonic-Carte-
sian and systematic modality of cognition.[12] If 'myth becomes Enlightenment
and nature mere objectivity' (Adorno and Horkheimer 2007: 6), if myth is
already reason and therefore not only irrational otherness, this is all the more
true of the type of embodied rationality (*leiblich* in Husserl's terms) which in
the TAM's framework is called *audiotactile*, and which leads back to the
archaic form of context-oriented Greek rationality called *mêtis*. This heuristic
issue is reflected in the ambiguity of the concept of 'mimetic rationality'. For
Adorno, this control of nature cannot exist without the central infrastructure
provided by writing. Mimetism, as Benjamin reminds us, was lost in language
with the signifier/meaning split (Benjamin 1978a). Therefore, we can assume
that with the establishment of the cognitive operating system of alphabetical
writing, it has remained only as a legacy of the archaic, motivated, pre-
dualistic and non-arbitrary aspects of the linguistic sign. It is a form of pre-
written/alphabetical rationality.

   In this mediological perspective, we could reinterpret the apologue of
Polyphemus in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in a new key, which would
highlight the role of mimetism in relation to the specific cognition which

derives from writing technology. This episode cannot, therefore, be viewed only as an apologue on the pure affirmation of the Self, of the rationalisation of domination as understood in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, but also as a clash between the mode of cognition induced by alphabetical writing and mimetic, undifferentiated pre-dualism. Thus, the episode of Polyphemus can be interpreted as the antithesis between the ancient *oral* pastoral culture, characterised by concrete thought, and the 'new' Western rationalisation that was established via abstract thought mediated by writing. The fulcrum of this opposition, the symbolic Gestalt, lies in the use of the name Nobody (*Útis*): the still concrete thought of the Cyclops, characterised by tactile perception, who – with a single eye – without the 'complete' sense of sight (i.e. the visual matrix, i.e. the *Ratio*) fail to unravel the link that binds an unmotivated *non-mimetic* sense – in the same symbolic process that regulates writing which is unknown to them – to its signifier.[13]

In aesthetic terms, this translates into the centrality of writing. Adorno asserts: 'musical writing is the organon of musical control over nature, and it was precisely here that musical subjectivity came about as a separation from the unconscious collective. The reification and independence of the musical text is the precondition for aesthetic freedom' (Adorno 2006: pos. 1661).[14] Therefore, we have the establishment of notation and the production of a *text*, which identifies the 'author' and promotes the control of the (natural) musical matter through a rational infrastructure that Benjamin, with reference to language, defines as a 'semiotic bearer' (Benjamin 2005: 722). Adorno claims: 'notation belongs to the geometrical-musical category: it is anti-mimetic and anti-expressive already in its *origin*' (Adorno 2006: pos. 1662). At this level, the dialectic between matter and material, and between the mimetic and the mensural, is implemented in the mediated transposition of compositional (notational) experience.

Thus, the mimetic impulse belongs to the cognitive realm of orality: as a function of what I call the 'audiotactile operating system'. At this point, a profound motivation appears, which illustrates the sense of Adorno's censorship of jazz. In Western art music, mimetism is identified at the 'neumic' level, as tempered, precisely, in the dialectics of the material by the infrastructure of semiotic bearing provided by the 'mensural' level. Here the relationship of mimesis and rationality is clearly outlined. In jazz, as in any popular music, according to Adorno, the processes connected to mimetism are instead autonomous. They become the formative material of what I define as audio-tactile music, and are considered by Adorno to be undialecticised. As mentioned above, they can become an aesthetic material only with a central cognitive and formal infrastructure providing semiotic-linear support (the visual matrix of the compositional process on paper, with the relevant notation and cognitive processes), as is the case in Western art music.

The 'visual ontology' that Adorno adheres to is rooted in the utopian trust in the *ratio* as opposed to the mythical manifestations of the mimetic. In improvisation and extemporisation[15] Adorno simply considers the rhythmic-

diastematic and harmonic level, which only saturates the 'mensural' dimension, the visual matrix. However, this level is an auxiliary factor in audiotactile ontology, in which the values emanating from audiotactile formativity – from the presence of a *living body* – are pre-eminent. Adorno does not consider the sensitive faculties jazz renders into practice in the process of becoming, in a cognitive and existential dimension different from the *mensural* and significative level ('significative' as 'all that is unambiguously given by symbols') (Adorno 2006: pos. 1984). In the objectified imagination of the *ex tempore* construction of measured phrasing, in the embodied 'measurement' of ontological time (understood as the complex and articulated faculty jazzmen have of using the senses to weigh ontological time, opposing its formal constraints)[16] the resistance of the 'material' is constitutively given, in whose dialectics the constructive principle is properly instantiated.

Within his dyadic scheme, in the aesthetic process hinged on allographic ontology, Adorno is perfectly coherent. On the other hand, this ontological position prevents Adorno from seeing the intrinsic value of improvisation and extemporisation as a preeminent implementation of the mimetic faculty. It is not possible to highlight the aesthetic sense of action in context, located in an existentially connoted *hic et nunc*, nor are the reactive and dialogic traits of improvisational creation highlighted. All this takes shape on a speculative level because Adorno does not consider the 'mimetic' phenomenon to be objectifiable – i.e. capable of producing aesthetic *immanence* – and rationalisable, if it is not mediated by writing. Adorno claims: 'the development of music as an autonomous art has increasingly marginalized its mimic aspect – and, faithful to that aspect's own principle, in permanent opposition to objectification' (Adorno 2006: pos. 5371). As a consequence, setting aside the autographic option, the values I define as audiotactile do not take on an axiological relevance (nor an ontological, and perhaps perceptive, significance) for Adorno; and neither does the 'aesthetic reversal' of the relationship between 'mensural' and 'neumic' traits between the infrastructure of Benjamin's *semiotic bearer* – the 'significative' level – and the mimetic elements. Instead, in audiotactile works, in an aesthetic chiasm with regards to visual ontology, fragments of the visual matrix cling to the epiphany of the mimetic, like *disjecta membra*. In this sense, from an allographic perspective, these elements appear to be disorganically arranged, and, as such, they inevitably become objects of Adorno's scorn (precisely because they are not perceived in the light of the 'aesthetic reversal').

If Adorno's immanent critique suffers from this unresolved relation as an ideological conditioning, his superordinate aesthetic critique preserves intact themes and motifs that have an unquestionable truthful significance. This is certainly applicable, in a positive sense, to audiotactile works, and, even more so, in a negative sense, to the poorest and most miserable products of the music industry, as well as the examples of jazz that are aesthetically lacking (of course, 'lacking' in the sense of being standardised and 'homologated' in their audiotactile values, and not according to the criteria of the visual paradigm).

An Aesthetic Recovery

Adorno's position can be dialectically turned upside down. Neo-auratic encoding, the cognitive and symbolic mediation that presides over the awareness of the fixation of sound through phonography in music, which originated in the 20th century – and that sets this music phenomenologically apart from the practices of oral traditions – allows the mimetic to emerge in autography without the need for a semiotic-linear support. Such an infrastructure is surrogated by audio-visual technology, which has freed traditional artistic media from the burden of formalised aesthetic mediation, thus working mimetically in a cultural process. In the 1960s, this cultural process propitiated the paradigm of the 'abandonment of painting' for the visual arts, giving rise to body art and environmental art; having long before triggered the formal problems of swing and groove for jazz, through the thematisation of a kind of behavioural disposition[17] that became an aesthetic criterion. In this sense, in jazz, the elaboration of the material has an opposite pertinence with respect to Western art music, moving from the mimetic (central) towards linear/formal structures (external). In jazz, whose historical development was manifested entirely within phonographical mediation, it is the mimetic that aesthetically bears and sustains. in a "notational" sense, the semiotic element (or visual matrix), the significative through electronic technology.

Adorno's conception of the 'material' remains valid in the audiotactile context, even though it changes its content, substantiating itself with the transition to autography. Changing, from an objectivistic conception of the material (inherent in the essence and nature of notation) to a dynamic-relational conception of musical material, implies an inclusion of the performative behaviour.[18] It is no longer a question of solving formal, abstract puzzles that are by their very nature visual, but of identifying new and aesthetically pregnant ways of creative behaviour *in praesentia*, within an extemporaneous and contextual *poiesis*. The Subject has become part of the dialectics of the material. This has been the message of audiotactile music, at least since the appearance of ragtime and the Brazilian *choro* at the end of the 19th century. Social mediation can be implemented and allegorised in this process-oriented and autographically individualising dimension, interwoven with audiotactile values, maintaining the gnoseological function of music, and dialectically setting the conditions for a subversion of pseudo-individualisation, as attested by the potential enhancement of singularity – that can be both critical and antagonistic – with the new information media.

Interestingly, the speculative coordinates of this process of mimetic recovery have been given to us by Adorno himself. In a 1934 article, *The Form of Phonograph Record* (Adorno 1990c), he indicates at least two cornerstones:

1   a positive reification of temporal transience, unfolding in the sound recording,
2   that is

3   textualised as writing (today we would say 'inscription' in the Derridian sense).
4   Let us examine these concepts in detail.

Referring to phonographic recording, Adorno claims:

> There is no doubt that, as music is removed by the phonograph record from the realm of live production and from the imperative of artistic activity and becomes petrified, it absorbs into itself, in this process of petrification, the very life that would otherwise vanish. The dead art rescues the ephemeral and perishing one as the only one alive.
>
> (Adorno 1990c: 59)

This *reification* of the recording, that, according to Adorno, was implied by the phonographic process, takes on – unlike the negative dynamic of the dissolution of the aura in technological reproduction – a positive character, precisely in subtracting the phonospheric *Lebenswelt* from evanescence and transience (*Vergängnis*).[19] 'The truth-content of art only arises to the extent that the appearance of liveliness has abandoned it; that artworks only become "true" fragments of the true language, once life has left them' (Adorno 1990c: 60). This is a fundamental intuition – that noetically collimates with the idea of the recovery of the auratic dimension in the theorisation of *neo-auratic encoding* in Theory of Audiotactile Music – which allows the constitutive audiotactile creative processes to be technologically recovered. In our perspective, this conceptual articulation, not developed by Adorno in his critique of jazz, could open the possibility to theorise a formalisation of the mimetic on new grounds.

Adorno understood this positive reification as a *form of writing*, removing phonography from the domain and transience of orality (the latter being a notion, one should recall, not used by Adorno). Indeed, he affirms:

> this justification re-establishes by the very means of reification an age-old, submerged and yet warranted relationship: that between music and writing … If, however, notes were still the mere signs for music, then, through the curves of the needle on the phonograph record, music approaches decisively its true character as writing.
>
> (Adorno 1990c: 60)

And thus, when 'music as performance' gains access to objectual ontology, it acquires a 'textual character', prefiguring and pre-constituting the *functional* traits of the *neo-auratic encoding* related to the aesthetic criteria of artistic identity, authorship, aesthetic autonomy, disinterested contemplation, and, ultimately, of work. This premise can help, in our view, reformulate the relationship between mimetic aspects and rationalisation, which is crucial in Adorno's philosophy, and pre-constitute the traits of the mimetic rationality

that are present and active in jazz.[20] This theoretical framework coincides with the premises of the Theory of Audiotactile Music, and neo-auratic encoding in particular. The possibility of coding (a residue) of the mimetic, as a component of audiotactile formativity, can be therefore assured not only by the visual matrix – by the semiotic bearer, as Adorno believed following Benjamin, as was the case with musical notation – but, in the phenomenological wholeness of the mimetic itself, by the technological mediation that takes on the function of an *a priori* form.

Conclusion

We can say that the possibility of fixing sound and movement with phonography and videography has historically and anthropologically set up the possibility of an epistemic thematisation of 'vertical' audiotactile sub-syntactic/existential values, through their objectification and reformulation as pre-eminent artistic materials. All this casts new light on the specific function, within Adorno's speculative horizon, of the conception of the dialectics between material and matter. This conception, in fact, is tied to a criterion of notational Weberian rationalisation (pre-technological/pre-electronic craftsmanship) (Weber 2002).

It is exactly here that Benjamin's intuition is illuminating: 'the mimetic element in language can – like a flame – manifest itself only through a kind of bearer. This bearer is the semiotic element' (Benjamin 2005: 722), a syntagmatic concept that Adorno interprets in his *Theory of Musical Reproduction* (Adorno 2006) as the *mensural* and *significative* level provided by the *rationalisation* of musical notation. We can add that the relict,[21] or 'minimal residues' (Benjamin 2005: 721), of the mimetic faculty ('neumic' layer for Adorno) have been historically absorbed into the cognitive framework, which the TAM calls the 'visual matrix' once oralistic primordiality has been dismissed. As a symbolic structure, this visual matrix – the infrastructure that serves as a bearer for mimetic aspects, such as *logos* versus *mimesis* – has taken many forms in Western art: the narrative plot in the novel; figurativism in painting, and particularly drawing with respect to the colour parameter; in music, compositional techniques; motivic-thematic elaboration or voice leading in counterpoint, which develops variation; and, in general, the linear articulation of the 'mensural' level in Adorno's *Theory of Musical Reproduction*.

This function as a *semiotic bearer* is not, on the contrary, posited or necessary in the mediological instantaneousness of electronic media, which substantially allows the mimetic level to emerge or materialize, based on the phenomenological support of audio-visual reproduction technology. Adorno clearly states this by talking about the 'writing' of the disc: 'this writing can be recognized as true language … inseparably committed to the sound that inhabits this and no other acoustic groove' (Adorno 1990c: 59).

This process has real implications in the affirmation of audiotactile formativity and its aesthetic values. In audiotactile aesthetics, 'vertical' sub-

symbolic values are pre-eminent compared to the linear horizontal-syntagmatic levels given by Benjamin's *semiotic bearer* (in audiotactile cognition, the gesture has an axiological priority over the text, understood in its instantiation through the visual matrix). Here, then, is the speculative locus in which a 'groove-based' (Caporaletti 2018a) aesthetics can come into being.[22] It is clear, at this point, how Adorno's aesthetic discourse inevitably and exclusively hinges on the artistic elaboration implemented at the level of the 'semiotic bearer' of the visual matrix,[23] in the various arts, in an aesthetic process identified by the 'mediation of the material'.

This discourse, however, leads us to a more articulated dialectisation of the very notion of *Ratio*. As is well known, Adorno (with Horkheimer, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*) opposes the rational identification of the Self – with all it entails in terms of mediation of the *Ratio, in primis* writing (and notation) – to primordial and animistic mimetic 'irrationality'. In this speculative dimension, the very dialectics of the material, in the aesthetic domain – which is implemented by transcending raw empirical factors into historical experience – is seen within the perimeter defined by the epistemic attributions of this *Ratio*. [24]

This dualism, however, does not take into account the anthropological possibility of another type of *Ratio*, which differs from the logical-deductive, mechanical-causal, abstractive and systemic faculty of the 'canonic' metaphysical type.[25] This alternative type of rationality, which is objectively distinguished, on the one hand, from the totally mimetic prehistoric 'blindness' (which I believe is symbolised by Polyphemus' and the Cyclops' single eye) and, on the other, from the clarity dazzled by the overly intense light of the Enlightenment's *ratio* – which abstractly sacrifices the singularity, the 'non-identical' to the concept (Adorno 1983) – can be identified precisely with the archaic faculty of *mêtis* (Detienne & Vernant 1991: 3–4). This is a type of practical and contextual, aim-oriented intelligence – the ancient Greek 'cunning intelligence' – of which I have elsewhere highlighted the relationship with what I call audiotactile rationality (see Caporaletti 2019b: 104), and with the related mimetic prerogatives.[26] This type of context-oriented intelligence presupposes a rational individuation implemented in the impact with reality, promoting an affirmation in 'doing' – and not on a conceptual-metaphysical or logical-deductive level. Platonic *ratio* will strive to deny this archaic form of rationality in the *mêtis*, [27] precisely because it is attached to the particular situation, free from abstract-categorising functions, those very specificities that, more than any others, Adorno and Horkheimer attribute to Western rationality, which recognises 'only what can be encompassed by unity … its ideal is the system' (Adorno & Horkheimer 2007: 4).

Under this perspective, it is vain and fruitless to set up a discourse on jazz based on the values of the *visual matrix* and *semiotic bearer*: in other words, to turn to the factors of immanent criticism as set out by Adorno – and as used even more deceptively in complementary meta-criticism – simply because they are not relevant to, or at least not prioritised by, the audiotactile

ontology of jazz. They are like subatomic particles that move as soon as they are caught by the rays of an electronic microscope: they are not apprehensible by visual ontology because the real substance is elsewhere, in the mimetic values that are finally redeemed.

In turn, this speculative approach posits a firm distinction between alternative musical phenomenologies based on the *visual matrix* or *audiotactile experience*, irreducible to each other in their constituent principles, and respective musical ontologies, and axiological frameworks; while dialectically interconnected, in different degrees and ways, within the formative pragmatics of living musical experience. It is in this reformulated perspective that I believe we can recover Adorno's magisterium, and use the tetragonal legacy of his thought in the context of an aesthetic recognition of jazz, and as a reference for the critical analysis of its diversified stylistic and historical implementations.

Notes

1 Adorno expressly dedicated seven essays to jazz: 'Abschied von Jazz' [Adorno 2003a]; 'Über Jazz' [Adorno 2003b]; 'Oxforder Nachträge' [Adorno 2003c]; 'Reviews of *American Jazz Music* by Wilder Hobson and *Jazz: Hot and Hybrid* by Winthrop Sargeant' [Adorno 2003d]; 'Jazz' [Adorno 2003e]; 'Zeitlose Mode' [Adorno 2003f]; 'Replik zu einer Kritik der "Zeitlosen Mode"' [Adorno 2003g].
2 The bibliography on the meta-criticism of Adorno's critique of jazz is abundant. See, for a non-exhaustive list, Berendt 1953; Sandner 1979; Paddison 1982; Schaal 1983; Townsend 1988; Nye 1988; Rifkin 1989; Baugh 1990; Schönherr 1991, 1992; Brown 1992; Gracyk 1992. Harding 1995; Cooper 1996; Lewandowski 1996; Quinn 1996; Wilcock 1996; Nesbitt 1999; Witkin 2000; Béthune 2003; Steinert 2003; Diederichsen 2003; Buhler 2006; Turnheim 2008; Amoruso 2008; Thompson 2010; Bertram 2014; Kemper 2016; Wipplinger 2017; Okiji 2018.
3 In jazz jargon, the *Scheintakt* corresponds to *secondary rag*; in music-theoretical terms, a Type A metrical dissonance (see Krebs 1987; 1999).
4 For the concepts of 'autographic' and 'allographic', see Goodman 1968. For audiotactile music as autographic art, see Caporaletti 2019a: 59 ff.
5 For the notion of *audiotactile formativity* and, in general, the *Theory of Audiotactile Music* (TAM), see at least Caporaletti 2005, 2018a, 2019a.
6 For a discussion of the 'local ontology' of jazz, see Caporaletti 2018b, 2019b.
7 See the caustic judgement of Eric Hobsbawm, who considers Adorno's essays 'some of the most stupid pages ever written about jazz' (Hobsbawm 1993: 300).
8 '… orality is a confused notion' (Molino 2005: 368).
9 The line of research within jazz studies that expressly refers to the formulaic nature of oral tradition includes several illustrious studies: Owens 1974; Kernfeld 1981; Smith 1983, just to name a few.
10 Prehistoric' – as a Marxian category – as oral and egalitarian cultures; History, indeed, begins with writing and the affirmation of the domination.
11 On 'concrete' thought, see the seminal works of Piaget as well as Vygotsky 2012. For non-Western thought, cf. Lévi-Strauss 1962; for an application of Piaget's tenets in a cross-cultural approach, see Hallpike 1979, and, for an alternative perspective, Shweder 1991.
12 Jürgen Habermas raises a similar objection when he opposes the theorisation of *ratio* in Horkheimer and Adorno (2016) with its '*most recent manifestations*' (Habermas 1982: 17) (italics in original), i.e. science, morality and modern art.

13 Consider also the symbolic value of the number of Ulysses' companions who entered the cave of Polyphemus: twelve, and its value in identifying the rational affirmation of knowledge in ancient culture.

14 On the ineludibility of notation see also Adorno 2003d: 383, and Adorno 2003g: 806.

15 For the systematic concept of extemporisation, see Caporaletti 2005.

16 This observation refers to Sargeant's claim: 'If he has any sort of rhythmic sense he will not be content to lose himself', discussed above.

17 ndré Hodeir defined these 'behavioral dispositions', that we have conceptualised as the 'audiotactile principle', as *relaxation* and *élan vital*. Cf. Hodeir 2018.

18 In this sense, as far as the experiences of post-serial and aleatoric music are concerned, the discourse assumes aspects that cannot be traced back to the tonal culture of *Texttreue*.

19 In this sense, as far as the experiences of post-serial and aleatoric music are concerned, the discourse assumes aspects that cannot be traced back to the tonal culture of *Texttreue*.

20 This is an issue that dramatically reformulates some epistemological assumptions of ethnomusicology, anchored to oralistic conceptions of the processes of technological and mass-mediated transformation of traditional music.

21 The image of the 'relict' is in the Italian translation by Renato Solmi: cf. Benjamin 1962: 72.

22 Note the *nonsensuous similarity* between 'groove' as a jazz ethno-theoric representation of the sensory-motor energy conveyed by [recorded] music and the literal meaning of 'groove' on a record.

23 It is worth pointing out that this matrix cannot be empirically or materially identified with notational writing as such, but rather with the 'operating system' of notation, with its internal logic: 'its language', as Benjamin would say.

24 I have referred to this form of rationality in terms of a Platonic-Cartesian *visual matrix*. See Caporaletti 2019a: 112 ff.

25 'For the Enlightenment, only what can be encompassed by unity has the status of an existent or event; its ideal is the system from which everything follows' (Adorno and Horkheimer 2007: 4).

26 The mimetic impulse is intrinsic to many aspects of audiotactile cognition, perception and operativity (cf. Caporaletti 2019a: 138ff.).

27 In this sense, Plato's negation of *metis* is similar to Adorno's negation of the audiotactile principle and mimetism (and therefore of jazz). See Caporaletti 2019a: 106 ff.

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11 Adorno, the jitterbug and the becoming-insect of music

Makis Solomos

Jitterbug

Adorno's article 'On popular music' (Adorno 1941) is one of his most critical essays about what he calls 'popular music', which is sometimes and quite deliberately presented from a caricatured perspective. The article is interesting for Adorno specialists, because it gives several musical references and thus allows a detailed study of what Adorno knew about popular music – it quotes standards like *Deep Purple* or *Sunrise Serenade*, musicians like Benny Goodman or Guy Lombardo, the lyrics of songs such as *Goody, Goody, A Tisket a Tasket, London Bridge is Falling Down, Cry, Baby, Cry*, etc. The article starts by stating that there are 'two spheres of music', popular music, which is 'usually characterized by its difference from serious music' (Adorno 1941: 17). It then goes on to harshly criticise the characteristics he attributes to popular music: first, standardisation and the fact that the relationship between the global form and the detail is such that 'the listener becomes prone to evince stronger reactions to the part than to the whole' (Adorno 1941: 18); then 'pseudo-individualization', which gives the listener the illusion of being able to choose; then 'plugging', whose original meaning is the ceaseless repetition of a hit to make it successful; then 'glamour', which can be seen in the richness and 'roundness of sound' (Adorno 1941: 28); and lastly, 'regression' and 'infantilization', a symptom of which for Adorno is the fact that popular music uses genuine and pseudo-nursery rhythms.

The third part of the article proposes a 'theory about the listener', that has to be read in relation to articles such as 'Types of Musical Conduct'[1] (Adorno 1976: 1–20) and of course the 1938 article 'On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening'[2] (Adorno 2002b). After the development of two long sections titled 'Recognition and acceptance' (for Adorno, popular music is focused on habituation, and thanks to plugging, the listener's principal task is to recognise a standard where such recognition means acceptance) and 'Popular music and "leisure time"' (popular music is what it is because it is intended for alienated listeners who search in their spare time to find 'relief from both boredom and effort simultaneously': Adorno 1941: 36), we come to the expected part on the social content of popular music. The part is titled

'The social cement', and Adorno develops the idea that, in popular music, there is no longer any autonomy of music. Music has a mere socio-psychological function: 'Music today is largely a social cement' (Adorno 1941: 39). That means that music has become a means to force the individual to accept social order. Music is used to get a 'psychical adjustment', which can be reached either by the 'rhythmically obedient' type, or by the 'emotional type' (Adorno 1941: 40).

This third part concludes with a critique of what Adorno calls 'Ambivalence, spite, fury'. Starting from the observation that this 'adjustment' is not obvious, that the auditors are not uniformly submitted and that they need a great effort of will to accept submission, he maintains that they develop 'spite':

> the disproportion between the strength of any individual and the concentrated social structure brought to bear upon him destroys his resistance and at the same time adds a bad conscience for his will to resist at all … For this resistance does not wholly disappear in yielding to external forces, but remains alive within the individual and still survives even at the very moment of acceptance. Here spite becomes drastically active.
>
> (Adorno 1941: 43)

Adorno's development leads to a passage that begins as follows: 'Spite is most apparent in the case of extreme adherents of popular music-jitterbugs' (Adorno 1941: 45). The genre of *jitterbug* is thus used during the final pages of the article as the culmination of Adornian analysis. In this genre where, according to Adorno, spite turns into rage, the listener loses his autonomy and freedom, and behaves like an insect that flies to its death, attracted by the light. To quote him again:

> the subjects are deprived of any residues of free will with relation to popular music and tend to produce passive reactions to what is given them and to become mere centers of socially conditioned reflexes. The entomological term jitterbug underscores this. It refers to an insect who has the jitters, who is attracted passively by some given stimulus, such as light. The comparison of men with insects betokens the recognition that they have been deprived of autonomous will.
>
> (Adorno 1941: 45)

The analysis is developed over several pages and is fairly regularly quoted,[3] because the reference to entomology is obviously striking. For those who do not know what the *jitterbug* is: it is a dance genre which appeared in the United States in the early 20th century and it is associated with various types of swing dances. Popular in the 1930s and 1940s, it spread internationally with the growing fame of the U.S. armed forces during World War II. It is an exuberant ballroom dance and its original freewheeling acrobatic swings and

lifts were modified for more conservative ballroom versions. Specialists do not seem to share the etymology of the word proposed by Adorno; in fact,

> there are many theories as to the origin of the name of the dance. One theory is that it meant a man and a woman suffering from alcoholic nerves while some theories suggested that it was coined from how the dancers moved on the floor because of their exaggerated movements, hopped, jumped, and bounced making them look like bugs.
>
> (Misachi 2017)

It is said that it was popularised by Cab Calloway's recording *Call of the Jitter Bug* (1934) and the film *Jitterbug Party* (1935), which features a performance of the song by Calloway and his orchestra, while giving a very soft, sanitised, commercial version.

Having reached this point, what remains to be said? We can like or dislike this music and dance, but it is difficult today to share Adorno's judgment: it is certainly entertainment *but not only*, and it is hard to see spite, fury, etc. It would be tempting to close the debate by saying that Adorno was too obsessed with the notion of cultural industry to understand that even with this commercial version, *jitterbug* is the complete opposite of submission: in fact, it is a real challenge of *empowerment* for black people. Indeed, the commercial version of the *jitterbug* presented in this film does not totally eliminate what the popular practice of *jitterbug* was, as can be seen from the following photo (see Figure 11.1). And it should be said that Adorno, who, with the Frankfurt School, had freed himself from orthodox Marxism to emphasise the autonomy of the 'superstructure', becomes an ultra-orthodox Marxist when he analyses the cultural industry.

Figure 11.1 Dancing the jitterbug, Los Angeles, 1939.
Source: *Los Angeles Times* photographic archive, UCLA Library.

Finally, he should be portrayed as the defender of an elitist culture, German and White, unable to enjoy a nice dance and nice music…

A will to realize the language of what is not human

However, in his analysis, Adorno insists that *jitterbug* fans, as we have seen, are not passive and submissive, that it takes a considerable effort of will to submit to an external power. Even while speaking about fury, he adds something else in the final words of 'On popular music':

> We cannot content ourselves with merely stating that spontaneity has been replaced by blind acceptance of the enforced material. Even the belief that people today react like insects and are degenerating into mere centers of socially conditioned reflexes, still belongs to the façade. … Rather, spontaneity is consumed by the tremendous effort which each individual has to make in order to accept what is enforced upon him. … To become transformed into an insect, man needs that energy which might possibly achieve his transformation into a man.
>
> (Adorno 1941: 47–48)[4]

Thus, the metaphor of the insect does not go in the direction of the Cartesian animal-machine: it is not to say that the listeners have turned into automatons or passive elements of a hysterical crowd.[5] Certainly, Adorno, like a large part of the 'enlightened' political left, is incapable of grasping the empowerment dimension of this music and dance – empowerment in the sense that, during these chosen moments of 'fury', people do not only engage in 'entertainment', but they also affirm their own culture, they affirm another world different to the world of the alienated social work they experience, thus culture and world give one the courage to fight for social progress within capitalism or even to rebel against it. Nevertheless, what interests him in the entomological metaphor is the *suffering* of the insect whose fascination for the light costs it his life.

   In the 'Notes and Sketches' that end the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, there is a text entitled *Man and Beast*. Adorno and Horkheimer note that the antithesis between man and animal has been so characteristic in the history of the Western world, that it is fundamental for Western anthropology; but today this difference tends to be reversed when, in laboratory experiments, men,

> by mistreating animals, they announce that they, and only they in the whole of creation, function voluntarily in the same mechanical, blind, automatic way as the twitching movements of the bound victims made use of by the expert. The professor at the dissection table defines such movements scientifically as reflexes … Humans possess reason, which pitilessly follows its path; the animals from which they draw their bloody

conclusions have only unreasoning terror, the impulse to take flight on a path which is cut off.

(Adorno & Horkheimer 2002: 204)

It is clear that, for Adorno and Horkheimer, the sufferings inflicted on the animal are the measure of the transformation of Reason into instrumental rationality and of disenchantment with the world. If we follow Alison Stone, Adorno shows how constellations and artworks generate an alternative form of re-enchantment which is critical of modernity and its domination of nature: 'This form of re-enchantment finds natural beings to be mysteriously meaningful because they embody histories of immeasurable suffering. This experience engenders guilt and antipathy to human domination over nature' (Stone 2006: 231).

In recent years, we have indeed witnessed a new interest for Adorno (through *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, but also *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*), which emphasises his criticism of instrumental rationality and domination of nature. To quote just one passage from the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

> Myth becomes enlightenment and nature mere objectivity. Human beings purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted. Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings. He knows them to the extent that he can manipulate them. … In their transformation the essence of things is revealed as always the same, a substrate of domination. … Nature, stripped of qualities, becomes the chaotic stuff of mere classification, and the all-powerful self becomes a mere having, an abstract identity.
>
> (Adorno & Horkheimer 2002: 6)

In a sense, Adorno could be thought of as a pre-ecological thinker: he is one of the first philosophers (along with Horkheimer) to have shown that the logic of the Enlightenment does not only lead to liberation, but also to the domination of nature which is of the same kind as the domination of man over man. Deborah Cook (2014: 13) has shown that 'decades before the environmental movement emerged in the 1960s, Adorno [and Horkheimer] condemned our destructive and self-destructive relationship to the natural world, warning of the catastrophe that may result if we continue to treat nature as an object that exists exclusively for our own benefit'. Thus, in her book *Adorno on Nature*, she presents a detailed examination of the pivotal role of the idea of natural history in Adorno's work. A comparison of Adorno's concerns with those of key ecological theorists – she quotes the social ecologist Murray Bookchin, the ecofeminist Carolyn Merchant, and the deep ecologist Arne Naess – reveals how Adorno directly addresses many of today's most pressing environmental issues.

To return to art, one of the highlights of *Aesthetic Theory* is the assertion that 'through its progressive spiritualization, through its division from nature, art wants to revoke this division from which it suffers and which inspires it' (Adorno 2002a: 92). As regards music, Webern would be exemplary for Adorno. As we know, for him, the idea of nature is central. It is also a practice. Like many of his contemporaries at the turn of the century, he was fascinated by the mountains and passionate about mountaineering; his letters evoke the happiness of being alone in the face of the immensity of the mountains (see Webern 1967a). We can suggest that this relationship between musical thought and lived experience is not anecdotal: with Webern, modernity and abstraction, far from constituting immersion in an autonomy of art which would turn into self-referentiality, introduce powerful links to nature. Thus, the Viennese composer liked to take up the Goethean metaphor of the plant: in the plant, 'everything is the same; root, talk, blossom. And in Gœthe's view the same holds good for the bones of the human body. … And it's Gœthe's idea that one could invent plants ad infinitum. And that's also the significance of our style of composition' (Webern 1967b: 40–41). This comparison of music with a living organism establishes a link with the Classical-Romantic era in which organicism was born: it would indeed be possible to apprehend the use of the series in certain works – notably its last ones – as a 'chromosomal material' (HL Matter, 1981: 78). Furthermore, Julian Johnson (1999), who engages in an archaeology of the notion of nature in Webern, suggests that his last works, famous for their almost mathematical precision and refinement, can sometimes be related to natural landscapes. This is the case of the first movement of the *Symphony op. 21* (see four-part reduction of the first part: Figure 11.2). In his sketches for November-December 1927, Webern gives two plans for the entire symphony: I. Rondo ('animated-sun'), II. Variations ('moderate'), III. Free form: 'very calm-moon'; I. Variations, II. Rondo ('scherzo, like a step'), III. Slowly. The final form consists of only two movements, the variations, which have become its second, and the initial third movement which is now its first. It is interesting to construct the genetics of the latter: while it is just named *Ruhig schreitend* in the final composition (already simply 'Slowly' in the second sketches), it constituted a 'free form' in relation to the moon in the first sketches. Without going so far as to hypostatise the lunar character of this movement, it is undeniable that,

> of all Webern's pieces this one embodies most clearly his musical concern with the qualities that he had always sought in mountain landscapes: the stilling of time and the corresponding sense of spaciousness created by the absence of directed motion, and the simultaneous presentation of simple forms in an unchanging space, bounded only by the horizon.
>
> (Johnson 1999: 203)

I have analysed the musical characteristics of this movement elsewhere (Solomos 2020: 139–148) by showing that, beyond its very esoteric compositional

Figure 11.2 Anton Webern, *Symphony, Op. 21*, first movement ('*Ruhig schreitend*'), first part: four-part reduction.

character (a double canon or even, for some analysts, a sonata form), we are already faced with a sound-composed music: the arrangements of notes, while forming what is traditionally called melodic, harmonic or contrapuntal structures, work almost like global textures, like sound 'atmospheres'. This character of music-as-sound coincides perfectly with inspiration from nature: if we dare to

be anachronistic, we could say that Webern makes us hear 'soundscapes'. Thus this movement is a marvellous illustration of Adorno's statement:

> The transition from natural beauty to art beauty is dialectical as a transition in the form of domination. Art beauty is what is objectively mastered in an image and which by virtue of its objectivity transcends domination. Art-works wrest themselves from domination by transforming the aesthetic attitude, shaped by the experience of natural beauty, into a type of productive labor modeled on material labor. As a human language that is both organizing as well as reconciled, art wants once again to attain what has become opaque to humans in the language of nature. … The more strictly artworks abstain from rank natural growth and the replication of nature, the more the successful ones approach nature … With human means art wants to realize the language of what is not human. The pure expression of art-works, freed from every thing-like interference, even from everything so-called natural, converges with nature just as in Webern's most authentic works the pure tone, to which they are reduced by the strength of subjective sensibility, reverses dialectically into a natural sound: that of an eloquent nature, certainly, its language, not the portrayal of a part of nature.
>
> (Adorno 2002a: 77–78)

Becoming-insect

To summarise, one could say that, for Adorno, art took it upon itself to talk about nature and non-human beings, about being dominated, and about their suffering. And this is not done by *mimesis*, because imitation is, in the sphere of art, the equivalent of the domination of nature or at least of its residue – let us just think about Olivier Messiaen's 'birds' who are caged birds, and who, after their capture, are subjected to compositional dissection operations while still alive.[6] Art took it upon itself to talk about nature and non-human beings through its own work, which, developed to the end, gives it the character of a living organism: the *complexity* – in the strong sense of the term – of a musical piece testifies to this character, Adorno would say.

This allows a Deleuzian–Guattarian reading of Adorno and lets us talk about the 'becoming-insect' of music. We know that, for Deleuze and Guattari, in *Thousand Plateaus*, 'becoming is never imitating' (Deleuze & Guattari 1980: 305) and that:

> What does music deal with, what is the content indissociable from sound expression? It is hard to say, but it is something: a child dies, a child plays, a woman is born, a woman dies, a bird arrives, a bird flies off. … Why a child, a woman, a bird? It is because musical expression is inseparable from a becoming-woman, a becoming-child, a becoming-animal that constitute its content.
>
> (Deleuze & Guattari 1980: 299)

However, in the modern era, where subjects become molecular, 'the reign of birds seems to have been replaced by the age of insects, with its much more molecular vibrations, chirring, rustling, buzzing, clicking, scratching, and scraping' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980: 308). So, 'a becoming-insect has replaced becoming-bird, or forms a block with it. The insect is closer, better able to make audible the truth that all becomings are molecular' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980: 308).

Many artists today, in music or in sound arts, are interested in this becoming-insect. Some of these artists belong to contemporary music. Let us quote Salvatore Sciarrino, who, in an interview with Gianfranco Vinay, says: 'Listening to reality with an insect ear and a giant ear, I try to restore it in a music of stone wind. These are listening experiences that, more than any others, could be defined as ecological' (Sciarrino in Vinay 2005). For contemporary music, let me also quote Agostino Di Scipio, whose work on granular synthesis (and silence) sometimes creates the conditions for the *emergence* – in the sense of cognitive sciences – of virtual birds (see Meric & Solomos 2014). In the field of free improvisation, referring to complex-system theories like Di Scipio's, David Borgo has theorised collective improvisation as 'insect music', comparing it to the 'swarm intelligence' that scientists are studying today. 'There are several ways in which we might wish to locate connections to the swarm. Some improvised music provokes such quick reactions from players and evokes such complicated and dense soundscapes for listeners that a literal analogy to a swarm of insects may seem rather appropriate', he writes. Or:

> The notion that music can be organized in complex ways without a composer or conductor still leaves many scratching their heads in doubt. … But the emerging field of SI [swarm intelligence] demonstrates that complex behaviors and efficient solutions can be arrived at without a leader, organized without an organizer, coordinated without a coordinator.
>
> (Borgo 2006; see also Borgo 2005)

It is of course among composers who refer to ecology that the becoming-insect is sometimes generalised. Here are three references. The work of the American sound artist and environmental activist – inspired by deep ecology – David Dunn is well known. His 2006 CD *The Sound of Light in Trees* makes us hear sounds produced within the inside of one species of conifer tree, the common two-needle pinyon of the southwestern United States, *Pinus edulis*.

> While the majority of these sounds are made by one species of small insect (about the size of a grain of rice) known as the pinyon Engraver Beetle, *Ips confuses*, there are possibly others such as bark beetles of the Dendroctonus genus, other species of the Ips genus, and the larvae of several species of miscellaneous invertebrates.
>
> (Dunn 2006)

All of these recordings were made with a custom-built vibration transducer inserted between the outer bark and the interior phloem where the bark beetles attack and colonise. 'Even though these sounds are extremely low in amplitude, they are transmitted as vibration across the interior surface of the bark structures for quite a distance' (Dunn 2006). In most cases these sounds are not audible to the human ear or conventional air microphones. David Dunn adds:

> I first began to focus my attention on these trees and their principal invaders (Ips beetles) as the demise of the pinyons where I live in northern New Mexico became quite evident … In recent years, whether due to local drought conditions, global climate change or other factors, bark beetles have outstripped the capacity of the trees to defend themselves and we are witnessing an extraordinary level of infestation.
>
> (Dunn 2006)

The work of the Norwegian artist Jana Winderen, who focuses on audio environments and ecosystems which are hard for humans to access, both physically and aurally, is beginning to be known. *The Listener* (2016; see Figure 11.3) is a sound composition created from hydrophone recordings made in the River Orne in Normandy and part of a three-year investigation into the health of the river:

> Freshwater biologists count underwater insects and use this data as an indicator of the water's health. If one identifies the sound of specific underwater insects with their varying ability to survive forms of pollution, one can possibly, through focused listening, reach an understanding of the health of the river. Underwater insects use stridulation to produce sound, such as Corixa, the lesser water boatman, which lives its whole life underwater. It also uses an air bubble carried on its abdomen as a physical lung, where oxygen flows from the water into the bubble. This bubble might also be amplifying the sound they make
>
> (Winderen 2016)

Finally, I will quote the well-known German-Canadian soundscape composer Hildegard Westerkamp. A pioneer of acoustic ecology, composer and self-described *soundmaker*, Westerkamp is known for numerous works using environmental sounds, and for her ecologically minded considerations. In her music and writings, she develops the idea that music can activate an awareness of sound in which sound is approached as a decisive dimension of the world. In this view, music becomes dialectical, allowing us to construct a subjectivity that would care for the world. Westerkamp's approach belongs to a larger effort to build awareness of our sound environments and their acoustic qualities, aiming to understand our own listening relationships and interactions with these environments. It is a question of proposing points of

Figure 11.3 Jana Winderen, *The Listener*.
Source: Illustration by Jana Winderen.

reference to listeners to make them aware of the sense and impact of sounds, which are often perceived unconsciously, so as to appropriate them. Her tape work *Cricket Voice* (1987) is a nice illustration of what could be another becoming-insect (and plant) of music:

> *Cricket Voice* is a musical exploration of a cricket, whose song I recorded in the stillness of a Mexican desert region called the 'Zone of Silence'. The quiet of the desert allowed for such acoustic clarity that this cricket's night song– sung coincidentally very near my microphone – became the ideal 'sound object' for this tape composition. Slowed down, it sounds like the heartbeat of the desert, in its original speed it sings of the stars. The quiet of the desert also encouraged soundmaking. The percussive sounds in *Cricket Voice* were created by 'playing' on desert plants: on the spikes of various cacti, on dried up roots and palm leaves, and by exploring the resonances in the ruins of an old water reservoir.
>
> (Westerkamp 1987)

For audiences loyal to the classical notion of music, what is fascinating about Westerkamp's work is that while working with field recordings ('soundscapes' in the terminology of the *soundscape composition* to which her practice belongs), it 'musicalizes', as I have said elsewhere (cf. Duhautpas and Solomos 2015), the final result. This, first of all thanks to the mixing, which is extremely refined and reminiscent of the goldsmith-like work of the orchestrator. Then, it 'musicalizes'

thanks to the musical form, which follows 'musical' formats, that is to say with 'expositions', 'developments', 'transitions', etc. And finally, by the sound transformations of her recordings. This last point is important. Westerkamp, like all musicians of acoustic ecology, rejects the work of sound transformation initiated by *musique concrète* – which also mainly works with recordings, but, if we follow the Schaefferian orthodoxy (cf. Schaeffer 2017), aims to radically transform them so that we do not recognise the source – since without the recognition of soundscapes, we depart from acoustic ecology. However, she sometimes allows herself radical sound transformations. This is the case of the song of the cricket on *Cricket Voice*, which, when strongly slowed down, gives a low pulsation – a process also used in *Beneath the Forest Floor* where, at the beginning of the piece, a raven sound is transformed into a sort of a *basso ostinato*. However, this transformation, which gives us sound pleasure and goes in the direction of the morphological work of *musique concrète*, remains in connection with the spirit of the soundscape composition: as she says in the note for the piece, 'it sounds like the heartbeat of the desert'. From an environmentalist's point of view, these transformations pose ethical problems: what right do we have to transform a natural sound? This is what the composer has to say on the matter:

> I do feel that sounds have their own integrity and feel that they need to be treated with a great deal of care. Why would I slow down the cricket's voice but not my daughter's? If the cricket had come from my own garden, had a name and would talk to me every day, would I still be able to slow it down? Would I need to? It did take me two years to dare to compose with that cricket's recording, as it had been such a magical moment of recording, such a gift. I could not just 'manipulate' it. It had to be a new sonic discovery journey to retain the level of magic for me. And I remember a moment at which I said 'Stop.' The journey was beginning to turn into electronic experimentation and the cricket was being obliterated.
>
> (Westerkamp, in McCartney 1999: 141–142)

What is also interesting for our subject is that the artists just mentioned do not belong to either popular (or commercial) music, or to art music. They develop an artist model that is anchored sometimes locally, apparently renewed with a tradition of art as crafts. However, these artists take up ecological (and often social and political) issues, developing a critical thought that, unfortunately, the so-called art composers – in any case, today, in what we call contemporary music – do not have (anymore). Moreover, thanks to social and other networks, they obtain a relatively important diffusion, which is not commercial.

Notes

1 'Typen musikalischen Verhaltens'.
2 'Über den Fetischcharakter in der Musik und die Regression des Hörens'.

3 I only quote Jussi Parikka (2010), who refers to this metaphor without its negative charge.
4 The final paragraph of 'On popular music' is the same as the final paragraph of 'Warenmusikalische Analysen' (Adorno 1978, but written in 1934–1940). I wish to thank Gianmario Borio, who sent me the reference to the *jitterbug* in 'Warenmusikalische Analysen'.
5 This remark invalidates the reasoning of P. Murray Dineen (1999–2000) who, paradoxically, tries to assimilate Adorno's 'adequate listener' to the jitterbug listener: Adorno 'reduces this adequate listener to a structural-hearing automaton remarkably like his popular music jitterbug. […] In essence, although the two listeners would seem the very antipodes, they are identical, for neither embodies the kind of consciousness – the conscious resistance to tyranny – that Adorno exemplifies in his writings. Instead his adequate listener is as much the automaton – the insect – as its jitterbugging counterpart' (Dineen 1999–2000: 57).
6 For a critique of the discourse on Messiaen and birds, see Solomos (forthcoming).

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