

Philosophy of New Jazz: Reconstructing Adorno

by

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Note to the Reader



The two primary innovators of bebop, Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, posed for the above photograph in 1950. This moment in time was a decade after their successful revolutionizing of the jazz establishment. Behind them to the right, however, stands a baby-faced John Coltrane who would go on to pioneer the avant-garde jazz aesthetic a decade later, in turn completely transfiguring the state of jazz once again. Both revolutions in jazz took place during the career of German musicologist Theodor W. Adorno, in the course of his time spent in America.

Dedication

This treatise is dedicated to the first generation of avant-garde jazz innovators. During the late 1950's and throughout the 1960's, these individuals totally revolutionized the jazz genre. I deeply admire each of their efforts toward creating a new and durable aesthetic in American society, one that was subsequently embraced by global culture.

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ABSTRACT

Theodor W. Adorno, the towering twentieth century German intellectual figure and distinctive musical thinker, was legendary for being over-critical of jazz music. Through a consideration of his admiration for avant-garde chamber and symphonic music, I plan to develop a position that, surprisingly, points towards a theory of unacknowledged acceptance of jazz. The style of jazz that will be the newly constructed musical idiom of admiration for Adorno will be of the heterodox variety. My method of reconstruction will be to interrogate the inconsistencies in Adorno's critical musical writings, and negate such negations with factual evidence of affirmation found in the avant-garde jazz community. This Hegelian approach to musical scholarship has not been as common in the field's published literature as it should be. A linear motive that will be initiated by this treatise's unfolding will be to restore the integrity to jazz culture which Adorno ravished in the realm of critical theory from the 1930's through the middle part of the twentieth century.

Adorno's two primary interests will undergo a type synthesis in this study that will render justice to both music and philosophy. Early in the study, Adorno's youth experiences with Simmel and Kracauer (as well as his later apprenticeship with Walter Benjamin) will be discussed and an effort will be made to determine how such studies

altered Adorno's aesthetic values. I am particularly interested in mapping the development of the theory of aura from Benjamin to Adorno, and how auratic art differs from aura-exuding music. Next, an avant-garde jazz composer will be looked at. This will be done to enforce the point that the next generation of jazz musicians who Adorno disliked so much had firmly committed aesthetic values of their own. The modern social philosophical thought that informed these values, which include Kant's Third *Critique* up to Anthony Giddens' concept of a double hermeneutic, intersect with Adorno's intellectual background. Thus the scholarly aesthetic distance between the 'new jazz' musician and Adorno, I will show not really that wide.

I. Introduction: Historical Context and Summary of Adorno's Writings on Jazz

Theodor W. Adorno, the German philosopher, musicologist, and writer (1903-1969), started to publish on issues concerning modern music in regional periodicals early in his career¹, circa 1925. One must consider the philosophical movement of ontology when evaluating Adorno's appreciation for chamber and orchestral music. More specifically, the production of new sounds by an artist had tremendous implications for shaping the particular artist's individual subjectivity. A loyal avant-gardist in Germany and Vienna's musical circles, Adorno gained the reputation as one of the harshest critics of popular jazz sounds emanating from America in the 1930's through the 1950's. Jazz embodied mass culture for him, which in turn was antithetical to the realm of subjectivity and the unmediated ontological notion of the staunch individualist². This persona, in theory, is supposed to be hailed by avant-gardism. My treatise examines avant-gardism in relation to the jazz enterprise, and therefore considers the Adornoian consequences of mass culture colliding with such staunch individualism.

In 1933, Adorno wrote his first significant essay on jazz, which he titled "Farewell to Jazz". During the year of 1936, he produced a longer article on the genre which was given the name "On Jazz". In 1953, Adorno generated his fullest and most mature statement on the new American music in "Perennial Fashion-Jazz". It should be

¹ Muller-Doohm, Stefan (2004): *Adorno: An Intellectual Biography* (pgs. 32-68)

² "Free at Last", *Village Voice Jazz Supplement*, June 5th 2007. African-American jazz musician David S. Ware is described as a "staunch individualist" by avant-garde pianist Matthew Shipp in the supplement authored by Phil Freeman.

noted that this last essay was his only writing strictly on jazz to be penned in the United States, and was done so during one of his last visits to the country.

Adorno authored the cynical “On Jazz” using a pen name, in part to dissociate himself from a German public audience who believed that jazz represented individualistic freedom rather than homogenized market forces mediated through mass culture.³ Later, in 1953, the scholar was essentially doing critical qualitative fieldwork in America. This particular methodology produced social and cultural commentary during his previous (extended) refuge in America (1938-1949⁴). The banality of American cultural works culminated in jazz for Adorno, who (as Michael Spitzer⁵ notes) considered “music as philosophy”. Adornoian philosophizing about jazz reflected the idea that jazz represented a commitment to a lifestyle marked by instrumental manipulation, in contrast to the German countercultural belief that jazz music marked aesthetic autonomy of expression and feelings.

In Chapter IV of this treatise, Adorno’s three critical jazz essays are carefully examined, in reverse chronological order, in effort to point towards historical incongruence with what the American jazz community (including its scholars) feels the music entails. Dialectically, I challenge such historically documented criticism of Adorno as an anti-jazz thinker. This is done by presenting African-American Charles Gayle’s jazz aesthetics of dissent, and aligning it with Adorno’s overarching critique of modern music as a product of mass culture. I show that such an overarching critique involved a commitment to resisting commodification in theory and practice (which is

³ Paddison, Max (1997): *Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music* (pgs. 207-217)

⁴ As documented by Claus Offe in *Reflections on America: Tocqueville, Weber and Adorno in the United States* (2005), pg. 69.

⁵ *Music as Philosophy: Adorno and Beethoven’s Late Style* (2006)

archetypical of Adorno's musical thought). By reconstructing Adorno's musical mantra in such a fashion, I demonstrate that the German scholar would have had at least some tolerance for the seminal jazz produced by U.S. artists in the twentieth century.

In the first essay analyzed, ("Perennial Fashion-Jazz"), Adorno writes about the various styles of jazz music and dismisses them as similar at the core. In the critique "On Jazz" which follows, the German musicologist holds jazz accountable for linking improvisations⁶ with frills or embellishments that have not any significant auratic content. 'Aura' was coined in the context of cultural theory by Adorno's teacher Walter Benjamin. The Jewish mystic Benjamin had a much more romantic intent for the theoretical term, whereas Adorno felt that there were exploitative and insipid misappropriations of the theory initiated by the modern music industry. A work of art had uncompromising beauty for Benjamin, no matter if displayed in a prestigious museum or on an inexpensive postcard. Adorno thought beauty and prestige could be compromised in the realm of music, and that there existed kitschy music such as jazz.

The very fact that jazz was accessible music generated a pejorative stance in Adorno's modern music analyses. The auratic content of any visual or performing art was at risk for him once it became standardized. This may be a prime reason for the linkage of Adorno with high-modernity, or a more developed critical theory of society than put forth by Benjamin (the latter was, after all, more of a literary critic than a social philosopher). *Musical* dissonance is in part a critical *social* statement, one that strikes in discord with instrumental interests, whose aim is homogenization and classification. I find that Adorno would have admired any musician, no matter if trained in the

⁶ Musical improvisation existed far before the birth of American jazz. Hofstadter writes that, "no one disputed Bach's ability to improvise on the organ" (1979, pg. 3).

symphonic, chamber or jazz traditions, if they voiced such resistance through their compositions and improvisations.

DeVeaux (1997) makes the claim that ‘bebop’ was social protest, but this is a commentator’s claim, and Adorno was dismissive of ‘bebop’ in the three jazz essays analyzed in this treatise. However, Black Nationalist movements channeled through avant-garde jazz music towards the end of Adorno’s life contain voices of dissent by musicians themselves. Given Adorno’s context of a child brought up in a nascent totalitarian regime, I move to make the argument that Adorno would have had respect for such ‘new jazz’ musicians of the 1960’s. Their practicing of opposition toward administered American society was so resembling of the National Socialist threat Germany had to painfully endure, hence my need to make a connection of ideologies at the level of a socio-philosophical treatise on music. Such artistic practicing of dissent in the context of this administered irrationalism would have generated a true notion of aura and authenticity in the domain of modern music for Adorno.

In Adorno’s “Farewell to Jazz”, I evaluate issues concerning the accuracy of a genealogical approach to jazz music. The primary dispute involves the earlier Adornoian idea (from “On Jazz”) that jazz evolved from rigid military marches. The three themes of inauthentic styles, excessive frills, and rigidity at origin, contrast to one another quite a bit and are mixed throughout the three essays, rather than one theme being confined to a single essay. All three ideas are discussed throughout the four sections of “Perennial Fashion-Jazz” independently of the other two jazz essays. Adorno saw mass reproduction in the industrial sphere as a certain parasitic model or blueprint for creating modern popular music. The rigid beats of jazz, although in part ancestrally linked to

militaristic music, were representative of nineteenth century industrialism. Conveyer-belt permanence and urgency employed by the archetypical jazz drummer created a sense of time for the rest of the band. Adorno felt this diminished the creative license of the jazz improviser. Such performance did not contain authentic or genuine musical statements. The type of thematic improvisation emerging from the jazz musician was subject to the characteristically rigid grid set by the band's drummer.

Adorno starts the first section of "Perennial Fashion" by linking twentieth century jazz ancestrally with White American popular hymns from 1800 to 1850. The key point Adorno makes is that jazz finds its origins in 'light' and entertaining informalities of the American lifestyle, rather than 'serious' formalized orchestral and chamber music of Continental Europe. In Section 2 of "Perennial Fashion", Adorno gets fairly technical in regards to music theory terminology, and describes jazz as simplistic despite its multitudes of rhythms (i.e., ballads, 'hot house' music, and swing). Although its rhythms made a distinct break from classical composition, Adorno ignored melodic engagement, juxtaposition or 'syncopation' within the music. Rather, jazz melodies were just "clichés" scripted by composers and mindlessly performed by artists.

In Section 3 of "Perennial Fashion", Adorno examines the lowbrow/highbrow distinction in jazz, and claims that organizing a cultural phenomenon into levels or classes is a mistake. In this section Adorno alludes to the barbarism of the 'Culture Industry', a theme he and Horkheimer⁷ had taken up during 1944 for *Dialectic of*

⁷ It should be noted that Adorno and Horkheimer did not see eye-to-eye on all things cultural. For instance, their stance on the philosophical anthropology of Heidegger varied, according to Hauke Brunkhorst's *Adorno and Critical Theory* (see the chapter "Adorno, Heidegger and Post-Analytic Philosophy" 1999, pgs. 78-113).

*Enlightenment*⁸. During Section 4 of the essay, Adorno reinforces the point that jazz is mass art, and that it could never attain the status of 'serious music'. He ends the essay by referring to jazz as the "false liquidation of art" (1990, pg. 132). Such a statement registers with the canonical Frankfurt School cultural analytic of Marxian 'false consciousness'. We are given the illusion in the culture of the administered sphere that we have freedom of choice at the marketplace, yet in reality it is the very 'system of commodities' themselves which bind and dictate our behavior.

Adorno begins "On Jazz" by creating dichotomies; he feels the new American music is either "mechanical", rigid, and lacking aura-generating expressiveness or overbearing in terms of its embellishing nature. The context for this divide is in fact the rhythmic component in jazz. He is particularly interested in analyzing the bass drum, and then moves on to the melodic saxophone. Adorno finds the musician's employment of 'vibrato' on the saxophone to mark over-extended distractive techniques aimed at concealing jazz's melodic and improvisational deficiencies. He returns to the rhythmic component of the music when analyzing 'hot jazz'. As Leppert interprets this part of the essay, Adorno finds rhythm to be the "shiny buttons" on an aesthetic product which is not sophisticated in body (2002, pg. 350). Once again, this serves as a point of departure for Adorno's social critique of music: 'shiny buttons' are representative of administered interests. Improvisation techniques are 'shiny buttons' because they are aimed at distracting the consumer. Adorno sees this as a problem because at some point distraction turns to allurements, and the consumer begins to buy into the commodification

⁸ Adorno considered his *Philosophy of New Music* (1949), according to Berthold Hoeckner's newly edited volume *Apparitions: New Perspectives on Adorno and Twentieth-Century Music* (2006, pg. 5), to be an extended appendix to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

of jazz takings place, by means of both transaction and emotion. For commentator Tia DeNora, there is also a cognitive consequence of such masquerade. I do not want to underestimate the emotional repercussions of buying into standardization, however, since a result of doing so can be modification and unhealthy stabilization of mood, and the entire spirit of improvisational jazz rests upon vicissitudes in mood.

The middle part of “On Jazz” is dedicated to further analyzing the extent to which commodification permeates the jazz enterprise. The Marxian term “alienation” is brought forth by Adorno, and he finds that jazz is ineffective in diminishing the alienation of modern consumer identity in what we today know as an Anthony Giddens postulated ‘self and society’. Giddens’ concept of a double hermeneutic, or mutual understanding between theorist and audience, will play a pivotal reconstructive role in this treatise when I attempt to carry over the concept from the context of the natural and social sciences to the fine and performing arts. For after all, if a particular American jazz musician’s aesthetics of dissent mirror some of the dissonant techniques employed by European composers (whom were admired by Adorno), and this jazz musician’s audience is on the same page as him and his improvisational methods, then we have an invitation to reconstruct Adorno’s intolerance towards jazz and give it a more cheerful outlook.

Consumer alienation was indeed an issue for symphonic composition, and a minority of chamber music, according to the body of Adorno’s literature. Therefore, he had little tolerance for some of his fellow country men’s own popular classical music techniques. The disgust for composition and improvisation was first felt in that particular idiom, prior to the mass propagation of jazz. Part of the problem Adorno had with jazz music and American society was that its commodification was totalitarian in the same

nature of the collectively administered threat that forced his emigration from Germany. However, by presenting American jazz musician Charles Gayle later in the treatise, and his unrelenting passion for staying off the administered 'grid', there is a type of romanticism attached to such a narrative that I hope all readers who are *subjects* of the modern consumer society will find alluring and will identify with vicariously.

Adorno thinks new jazz is social phenomena of the upper echelon. The upper-class of American society is claimed to know jazz the best, and here Adorno distances the music from kitsch. The consistency of Adorno's thoughts on jazz within the larger endeavor of a Frankfurt School of Critical Theory is at risk when he makes the eerily neo-classical economic argument that the wealthiest citizens of America are the most up-to-date on jazz's development. The gist of the argument is that since this group has the disposable income to spend on the newest records generated by the Culture Industry, they are also the individuals who know all the trendiest "dance steps" at the concert halls. The enterprise of 'hypercapitalism' colors the duration of the essay⁹.

The later part of "On Jazz" is comparative, using Igor Stravinsky and what Adorno believes to be European 'autonomous' musical arts as a standard which can highlight the light and insubstantial nature of jazz. Once again, the lack of seriousness is thought to be both a product of its industrial assemblage and its flaws in technique or musicality (particularly rigidity in rhythm). Administered forces, proposed by Smith and Marx, respectively, were meant to organize and promote commodities in the 18th and 19th centuries (the era which Eric Hobsbawm calls 'the age of revolution'). Adorno, on other

⁹ In "Frankfurt School Blues" of *Apparitions* (2006), the claim is made that Adorno's elitism is one of the three defining characteristics of his jazz analysis. The other two characteristics are 'Eurocentrism' and incapacity at 'technical' prowess (pg. 104).

hand, finds that by the 20th century (the genesis of jazz culture), the administered market forces had affected certain artistic commodities at the production level, specifically creating an industry known as jazz. My sympathetic Benjaminian perspective on this Adornoian issue is that if the jazz product is unmediated or made with artistically pure spirit and intention, its integrity will maintain and incomparable aura, no matter how it is promoted, distributed, or consumed, will exude from the product. A pure Adornoian perspective, on the other hand, is that once industrial organization permeates the artistic process of crafting composition and improvisation, the jazz musicians' are all 'lost generations' (lost in a web of administered, prepared intentions revolving around the irrationality of the marketplace and its rigid demographic targeting.) This leads Adorno to continue to polarize jazz by referencing 'hot music' or 'hot jazz' and then questioning if the rhythmic exercises employed to complement the instrumentalists in such a genre are not overly excessive, or irrational in the sense that it was crafted by an administered market. Adorno ends "On Jazz" by dismissing the music and regarding it as incapable of being saved.

The short essay "Farewell to Jazz" finds Adorno returning to dismissing jazz on grounds of technical merit. The quintessential jazz technique of the day was the employment of layers of clashing melodies played by 'Big Band' members. Adorno did not find such melodic (and harmonic) dissonance a display of aesthetic ingenuity. Instead, he felt it represented a faulty attempt at the replication of the European symphonic tradition. Therefore we find Adorno attacking jazz from several technical angles. Adorno finds that one of the reasons for jazz winning the attention of the post-World War I audience was its ever-present promotion to the American public by

administered actors. Another reason lies in Adorno's initial belief in the failure of clashing big band melodies and harmonies (the multi-pronged attack on jazz's technical structure). Instead of acoustic dissonance being created, the result was easily accessible (read: danceable) music that encouraged consumer acceptance. Schoenberg, in many ways, was Adorno's model for musical resistance, since the artist employed dissonance in his compositions. Popular jazz reflected none of the compositional techniques pioneered by Schoenberg, and the music's generically resolved melodic structure deeply concerned Adorno, since its acceptance and engagement by the American audience showed they were overlooking totalitarian methods in its production and promotion. Such methodology marked intercontinental totalitarianism for Adorno, the only difference between the culture of late 1930's Germany and America were that the phenomena of totalitarian interference had different ends (genocide vs. docility). By the end of "Farewell to Jazz", Adorno formally connects jazz with kitsch.

II. Critical Theory and its Discontents: Genealogical Perspectives of Analyzing Musical (Re)Production

Here lies one who is capable of turning nothing into something.
Method Man, *In the Mode*

... the paradox of the tour de force in Beethoven's work could be presented: that out of nothing something develops...
Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*

The portrait painted by Robert Heilbroner in *The Worldly Philosophers* is that classical political economy and its exponents are concerned with three social functions: production, distribution, and consumption. On the other hand, the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School (Benjamin and Adorno in particular) placed considerable emphasis on a fourth industrial function- that of mediation and reproduction¹⁰. Adorno's idea of mediation entailed administered forces impeding in the production of public goods and creating a Culture Industry out of them (rather than them existing as civil society proper). Although in contemporary cultural theory, Colonialism, Post-Colonialism, Race, and Ethnic Studies all occupy a critical place in the canon, Adorno's idea of mediation in the cultural realm involves aesthetics and the production of artistic commodities. His pessimistically-informed theory of semblance marked the beginnings of a distinct period in German philosophical thought known as 'high-modernity'.

¹⁰ The last of the great classical political economists, Karl Marx, may have written about reproduction in addition to production, which of course predates the Frankfurt School by almost a century. In *A Critical Rewriting of the Global Political Economy* (London: Routledge, 2003), V. Spike Peterson acknowledges the traditional Marxian concept of reproduction referred to an "informal sector" (xii). The centerpiece of Marx's ideological critique was not industrial reproductivity. However, the highlight of Adorno's cultural critique was very much the inner and outer workings of this formalized version of reproductive activity.

In a study of new musical aesthetics, the literature of the Frankfurt School's Adorno is justifiably appropriate for use at 'bedrock'. The reason is because it is the most comprehensive inquiry into reproduction within the aesthetic dimension which relies on industry before it reaches media pursuits. Media studies is an admirable scholarly field, though it is concerned more with the visual arts than the performing arts, hence the need to approach it only indirectly. The negations found in Adornoian literature have their foundation in nineteenth century Hegelian Dialectics, which ultimately leads the reader toward hyper-critical French and American media studies (in the indirect fashion I intended to approach it). Therefore Adorno provides the most extensive account available of an aesthetic phenomenon by a single one theorist, without getting deep into the jam of highly-contested visual theorizing and reproduction.

Focusing on the performing arts, music has historically served as an aesthetic narrative of critical aspects of society. Yet the modern jazz idiom, with its musical output propelled by the harsh flatted fifth interval, sums up cultural tensions that existed throughout the entirety of modernity. The tri-tone has been employed throughout the entire history of Western music, and was referred to as 'the devil's interval' for many centuries. However, the emergence of jazz represents the mass propagation of such historically corrupt sounds, and therefore represents a modern culture built upon mass transgression, which toddles down a wicked path toward irrationalism and Medea's inherited insanity¹¹. It is only fitting, therefore, to pair jazz's tension-ridden artistic output with the writings of the single most negative minded modern musical intellectual from its century of origin. As far as oversight is concerned, I want to make a contribution

¹¹ Medea, after all, is the etymology of our collective term 'media'.

to the one subgenre of jazz Adorno was remiss about during his accomplished career as a modern music critic. Nothing was ever mentioned about the avant-garde jazz that was in full force in the music industry during the last decade of Adorno's life. We know that he hated the early bastardized jazz of Weimar Germany. However, with the critical innovations made on jazz's homeland by musicians such as current avant-garde heir Charles Gayle, Adorno's idea of cultural critique will be radically reconstructed to fit both the historical message and current status of what is called 'new jazz'¹². The aim of my later chapters will, in part, be to examine Adorno's early admiration for modernist European symphonic, orchestral, and chamber music. This entails looking at Adorno's context, and at the intellectuals on the Continent who supported and philosophized about such music.

¹² Historically, 'new jazz' was the music of avant-garde jazz musicians from the late 1950's through the 1960's. This music relied heavily on free-form improvisation. Its founding figures were John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor. In contemporary music, the sub-genre 'nu jazz' is a commercialized appropriation of acid jazz, or jazz fusion from the late 1970's forward. Integrated in 'nu jazz' is club music, and we find 'nu jazz' danceable and light while 'new jazz' reflective and serious. Obviously, my aim is to focus on 'new jazz' as a context for reconstructing Adorno's thoughts on popular music, and therefore I will eschew 'nu jazz' altogether, dismissing it on terms of inauthentic grounds. If this treatise were considering 'nu jazz', the title would have been "Philosophy of Nu Jazz: Reconstructing Adorno", and would be indebted to postmodern DJ culture more than it would be a product of modernity's jazz idiom.

III. Adorno's Early Encounters with Contemporary Continental Thought (Especially Music Aesthetics)

In his teens and twenties, Adorno made contact with Kracauer and Simmel. For the most part it was the former who guided Adorno's modern philosophical studies. These included the dissemination of texts ranging from Kant and Hegel to Kierkegaard and Heidegger. During his interaction with Simmel¹³, the first edition of *Nietzsche and Schopenhauer* was in the process of revision. Kracauer published *Sociology as Science* during Adorno's apprenticeship. One commonality of Simmel and Kracauer is that, historically, the two individuals are for the most part co-founders of the modern interdisciplinary scholarly field of 'consumer culture'. Adorno and Horkheimer's "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" stands as a second generational text in this academic field. The text is greatly indebted to Simmel and Kracauer (as well as Benjamin), yet also represents Adorno and Horkheimer's reaction against these scholars. Although popular culture is considered dysfunctional by the pair, there is a certain orthodoxy (emanating from the archetypical 'collectivist' Marxian social assessment of ideology critique generators such as Lukacs) that is overcome by deciding to position commentary within popular culture's discontents, and to pursue the quest for individualism and authenticity in such a maddening world.

Muller-Doohm, in his intellectual biography of Adorno, writes about Kracauer's project of *Sociology as Science* as "concerned with his conviction that the dissolution of

¹³ Simmel's antecedent writings on 'Fashion' will be studied in light of Adorno's commentary on jazz styles(s) in Chapter IV- Study 1.

meaning in a chaotic world forces the isolated subject to rely on himself.” (2005, pg. 45)

The concept of individuality subsequently colored Adorno’s writings on music and culture. In addition, if the fact is considered that Adorno spent time studying Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* and Hegel’s *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* under Kracauer; it is not surprising that Adorno applied his continental philosophical training to music studies, for it was Hegel who remarked that music serves as one of the “Romantic Arts” and Kant who questioned the issue of “Aesthetic Tastes” at their most fundamental level.

Therefore, a historic groundwork may have appeared evident to Adorno when his mentor Kracauer released the 1920’s thesis of ‘maintaining individuality in a chaotic world’. It was Adorno who would later slant the thesis toward the direction of popular music-mediated arts, claiming that jazz was an unoriginal aesthetic phenomenon. Considering Simmel, *Nietzsche and Schopenhauer* may have led Adorno directly towards *The Case of Wagner* and the chapters of *The World as Will and Representation, Volume I*, which resonated with music aesthetics’ theoretical core.

As will be shown in the next chapter, Adorno loved to ‘beat up’ on American created jazz. However, the current chapter will show that he had the thorough training in Continental aesthetics of music necessary to ground and to write as an authority in the field. The objection that I will present later rests upon the claim that Adorno focused too much of his intellectual energy towards studying nineteenth century artistic thought and serving as supporter and affiliate of the thought’s early twentieth century exponents, while simply not being well informed later in life about the mid-twentieth century’s newest and most distinct stylistic trends in music. In short, Adorno was a musical reactionary, despite his self-identification as defender of the avant-garde.

Examining Adorno's Admiration for Classical Composers' Use of Atonality

After extensively surveying Adorno's career as a musicologist, Richard Leppert found that Adorno wrote about "six composers" in more detail than any other composers, including to a greater extent those from his days of full maturity (such as "Boulez, Cage, and Stockhausen"). These six composers were, "Beethoven, Wagner, Mahler, Schoenberg, Berg, and Stravinsky." (2001, viii) Leppert concludes that, "Among these six composers Adorno admired four, Beethoven, Mahler, Schoenberg, and Berg, and aggressively critiqued two, Wagner and Stravinsky". (2001, ix) Invariably, Adorno was a fan of avant-garde culture and the classical music from which it originated. The avant-garde concert music of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was characterized chiefly by the use of an atonal musical method. By considering all nine composers referenced above we can deduce from Adorno's writings on classical music that he was indeed a product of modernity's aesthetics' and the culture which surrounded it. The key point the Adornoian project made from these artists' work was that the European concert music composer had authentic artistic identity.

The term avant-garde has historically meant to be at the front or vanguard of something, and many of the above composers were thought to be ahead of their time in sculpting a Continental tradition of aesthetic innovation. Early through mid-twentieth century jazz, on the other hand, found itself lagging behind and following the protocol of industry. Adorno found nothing artistically authentic about this development; he actually found it repelling. I consider avant-garde music historically an idiom independent of other genres, and would like to make the argument in this treatise that jazz-trained musicians who are adventurous enough to make statements in this idiom are just as

innovative as classically-trained composers and instrumentalists in the idiom. This would make the development of atonal music by jazz-trained American artists during the later years of Adorno's life (1958-1969) equally as novel as advancements made by Adorno's classically-trained avant-garde mentors and heroes of the European concert tradition.

Although Beethoven's music did not rest on atonality, Adorno found that this particular composer's 'late style' provided structural and contextual change of the setting in which music was performed. He saw a key transition from large orchestral symphonies to small chamber ensembles. Part of this transition was due to a lack of funding by war-ridden Europe and its major supporters of the arts. Later, the excessive use of chromaticism by Wagnerian orchestras provided the musical content which resulted in further experiments beyond the context of the string quartet and quintets of the post-Beethoven era. Chromaticism served as atonalism's nineteenth century springboard; after Wagner there were composers, such as Adorno's hero Schoenberg and Adorno's private teacher Berg, who found themselves fully abandoning tonality in the post-Beethoven chamber setting.

In jazz's bebop movement, chromaticism involved using plethora of notes, with 'outside' notes from the traditional pentatonic scales playing the role as tension, harmonically, to the notes which preceded them. In effect, the jazz musicians moved diachronically towards rapidity by employing such a method in their improvisations. Jazz musicians were also experimenting with the total abandonment of harmonic key mixed with rapid, dissonant notes during Adorno's lifetime. However, as the next chapter will show, the German musicologist interpreted the majority of these critical

innovations by American musicians as inauthentic distractions resonating with the 'base' of the administered sphere.

IV. Zeroing in on Adorno's Misconceptions of the Jazz Establishment; followed by a Historical Cultural Objection and Reply

Does jazz improvisation represent inauthentic and distractive frills aimed at concealing musical nonsense? Maybe for Adorno it does; the majority of listeners find the improvisational component of jazz to be substantially authentic, hence the music being historically hailed by the global community. Adorno's thoughts on jazz are tinted with social outcry. He believed the American originated music contained banalities as well as inherent dangers. The latter was manifested by administered propagation, the former by standardizing its aesthetics out of market forces. Prior to Adorno, ideology and cultural critiques had been pursued independent of one another, or at least throughout the early history of contemporary German thought. However, Adornoian modernity and critical social theory makes the argument, through neo-Hegelian thought, that cultural critique (the visual) is deceptively of an affirmative nature. Undisguised negation is found to reside in ideology critique using the Marxian 'Base' - 'Superstructure' model (materialistic inclinations as representative of utter negativity; as odd as that may appear philosophically). The danger of Adorno as Critical Theorist is that his negativity felt in the cultural and ideology realms are synthesized and we are presented with an extremely unconstructive social critique of the arts, which includes assaults on contemporary music from multiple angles.

Since critical negation is found throughout Adorno's ideology critique, as well as in his efforts at cultural critique, commentators have pursued studies of Adorno's original

synthesis of two independents from one of the two singulars' negated qualities. For instance, we find Susan Buck-Morss focusing on the condition of pure negativity in *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, while Sherratt moves in the other direction and attempts to develop another dimensional account of the critical theorist's thought in Adorno's *Positive Dialectic*. Where in Hegelian dialectics there is the moment of becoming when a negation is negated¹⁴, in Adorno it may seem that one finds only 'negative dialectics'. One may find him or herself lost in a sea of negativity. Yet the hollow horizon could be broadened¹⁵ if we interpret such remarks under the heading of 'neo-pessimism'. This is a novel alternative to anachronistic Hegelian dialectics. For after all, one of Adorno's legacies may involve the fact that he instilled readers of his critiques with the apt amount of pessimism to, 'at the end of the day'¹⁶, transform each one of them into an educated consumer.

Study 1: 'Perennial Fashion-Jazz'

'Perennial Fashion-Jazz' represents one of Adorno's most stringent attacks on what he believed to be a commercialization of the modern jazz enterprise. He takes a genealogical approach, which finds the historical development of jazz emerging in New Orleans a decade or two after the turn of the twentieth century. In its birthplace of New Orleans, jazz was performed on the city streets, in parades, and during funeral processions, in addition to profit-centered clubs. Subsequently, the music and its performers moved up through Middle America to reach Chicago. Adorno believes this locale is the last modern destination on jazz's itinerary before the art form began to be

¹⁴ As expressed by Miklitsch in *From Hegel to Madonna: Towards a General Economy of "Commodity Fetishism"* (1998). State University of New York Press, Albany, NY.

¹⁵ In a non-Heideggerian fashion

¹⁶ Amon Tobin, *Foley Room Ninja Tune ZenCD-121*

governed by high-industrialism alone. DeNora's study of Adorno's sociology of music focuses in on the cognitive consequences of such an 'ontological ideology'. She finds that, "for Adorno, objectification was *activity* (praxis); it was the subject who, through particular habits of mind, accomplished this work. For Adorno, the subject was thus complicit in her own cognitive alienation." (2003, pg. 5) Adorno thought the emergence of a leviathan of a music industry consequently lead to polished or "toned down" sounds (1990, pg. 121), which DeNora's critical rejoinder suggests, implies that misinformed agents of mass culture were guilty of accepting. Adorno finds there are not any periods of jazz that excelled in performance, no matter how isolated administration was in the music's output.

Despite the purely *societal* implications of such cognitive acceptance, one egregious *cultural* error in Adorno's genealogical approach to the development of jazz is his omission of midland Kansas City jazz and the hyper-administered culture which surrounded the music to such an extent that such propagation described in DeNora's criticism was in status quo. Culture was administered with mechanical efficiency by the 1930's.¹⁷, as we see in Adorno's earliest writings on music as well as in Benjamin's 1936 essay on art in the age of mechanical reproduction. A prime attempt at replication of the Kansas City 'location of culture', and the agents which were definitive of it, was initiated by the late filmmaker Robert Altman through the production of his Hollywood-backed motion picture in the 1990's. In his musical documentary of the Kansas City 'swing' jazz era that supplemented his mass distributed project, one historically correct fact was referenced. The accurate piece of information was that the clubs in which seminal jazz

¹⁷ Kansas City is 'sandwiched' between New Orleans and Chicago by jazz historians concerned with twentieth century origins and development of America's music.

musicians such as Count Basie and his 'Big Band' performed were in fact organizationally the product of intense administrative forces. There are a number of issues that arise from this truth, two of which I would like to confront.

The first issue is the idea of a meta-commentary in which the emergence of a historic 'Hollywoodization'¹⁸ of post-war America reached a point of complete maturity and saturation by the 1990's that it finally visually commercialized America's most original art form (although the argument could be made that it had been pictorially codified as early as *Casablanca*, or possibly even in the inter-war *Jazz Singer*.) It recreated its culture only to make a commodity out of it. Advertisements for the motion picture ran on network television and in entertainment magazines. When finally delivered to the masses, the event was ticketed and consumed alongside other more tangible commodities such as candy bars and soda¹⁹. This type of thinking is very much in line with the Adorno commentary we find in his 1944 project with Horkheimer.

However, in such a situation we have a Hollywood project which informs the audience that America's music became subject to profit. Whereas in New Orleans' parades, marches, and funeral processions, music served as a public good and a civil practice containing Marxian use value (as well as profitable arts and crafts), during the Kansas City period of jazz development, revenues were generated to much more of an extent (increasing exploitation). This phenomenon was indicative of Benjaminian

¹⁸ This phrase is an extension and reconsideration of Ritzer's 'McDonaldization' of America. (Ritzer, George: *The McDonaldization of Society* (2004, Fourth Edition), New York: Pine Forge Press.)

¹⁹ This situation has an uncanny resemblance to Baudrillard's postmodern story of a 'system of commodities'. I would add that we have a 'layering' of commodities in such a situation, which is musically similar to what critic Ira Gitler labeled 'sheets of sounds' - a term to describe the notes played by John Coltrane in a jazz improvisation. The only weakness with this metaphorical style of thought is that in Baudrillard and my theorizing of commodities there is constant consumer interaction at all levels and all times. On the other hand, once you hear a particular Coltrane sheet of sound / layer of notes, "it's over", as Coltrane's contemporary Eric Dolphy said.

exhibition value. Informing the spectators of the situation in fact runs counterintuitive to Adorno's thought of 'culture as propaganda'²⁰ (leading to 'mass deception'). For instance, instead of presenting the situation from one angle, Altman told the entire story of Kansas City jazz in the 1930's. Today, in a completely administered society we often find the story of non-commercialism ever-so compelling. The inclusion of narratives of profit driven club owners pointed inquiring consumers to the tasks of critically questioning their roles historically in the operating of a capitalistic approach to society and culture.

To dialectically challenge the former and renew at least some faith in the archetypal Adornoian thesis entailing 'mass deception' initiated by the Culture Industry, we see that one had to first purchase the commodity (the Hollywood motion picture on jazz) to gain access to the source of his or her insolvent status in a detached network. One is always complicit in such a scenario, and this leads to a vicious circle. In Adorno's jazz society, there is a 'totalizing' conception of music commodification taking place. In such a web, civic Statehood and citizenship²¹ is semblance while financial assets and liabilities provide true governance.²² The entire process is retroactive: the injustice occurs first, and then the blind individual is eventually informed of the exploitative act by the perpetrators themselves, as in, in this case, Altman. This point challenges DeNora's original notion of complicity inherent in the *Geist* of the Adornoian

²⁰ Such a theme is presented in Adorno's essay "Culture and Administration". While such a title may initially find the reader associating such a concept with 'standardization' in the arts, the idea of molding path-dependent consumers through bureaucratic means is tacitly developed.

²¹ In the international political sphere, civic NGO's actually run the day-to-day operations of such gubernatorial conglomerates such as the United Nations.

²² This is in now back in line with Adornoian criticism. A current trend in the cultural critique Adorno pursued is Anti-Consumerism. Sociologist of culture Sam Binkley will co-present this movement in a special edition of *Cultural Studies* in Summer 2008, which will include the article, "Liquid Consumption: Anti-Consumerism and the Fetishized De-Fetishization of Commodities".

subject. Should complicity really be considered an undisputed theme in such commentary on Adorno's sociology of music?

The next issue that Kansas City-style jazz brings up, and which indeed surfaces as Adorno's 'blind spot' in "Perennial Fashion-Jazz", is that of structural change in the environment which music is performed. The interconnectedness of this point with the last issue should be obvious. Kansas City jazz represented a shift to a total club culture²³. The genesis of jazz has generally been regarded by cultural critics as the start of a popularization of performativity, which would make jazz a product of high-modernity. I most generally get this picture from the jazz historiography done by Stearns (1958). In Kansas City, profit motivated club owners would market tenor saxophone duels (backed by Basie's 'Big Band') between jazz giants Lester Young and Coleman Hawkins. This was done in order to get the locals into the clubs to buy liquor, which was each club's chief revenue generating commodity. In other words, people were making excess money off a cultural phenomenon. I move to make the point that previously the cultural phenomenon coexisted with civil society. Jazz was a social practice and a corporate endeavor.

A linear, more generic narrative is that America's music found its genesis in the Deep South, and underwent transformation during its move up the Mississippi River by commercial river boats (birthing other popular American musical sounds in Memphis and St. Louis during the process). This structural shift in the music's arena of performativity should not have been overlooked by Adorno, especially since he was so concerned about

²³ Contemporary accounts of club culture include Thornton (2000) and Hebdige (1972).

mass commercialization taking place in the aesthetic dimension.²⁴ Throughout “Perennial Fashion” we see any socio-cultural worth of jazz vanish as the history of jazz progresses, and the commodification which was initiated in the music’s homeland takes over entirely. In “Perennial Fashion” we also find Adorno writing on ‘the meaning of style’²⁵ in the context of administration. Such stylistic concerns were of course written as a reaction to the commercialization of jazz that was burgeoning in his day. Once again, Adorno found the entire history of jazz to be commercialized. However, by touching on perception once again, DeNora accounts for the ‘ontological ideology’ by writing that it “was characterized by a taste for certainty, itself a symptom, in Adorno’s view, of lax cognitive functioning.” (ibid, pg 6) Administered interests not only refused to co-exist with civil bonds formed by jazz music’s performance, they in fact infected Adorno’s American public with a new breed of stagnant compliance.

Adorno finds that style is formed to sell product, and from DeNora’s commentary we find that Adorno also felt ‘cognitive dulling’ on behalf of the agent impairs his or her ability to perceive corporatism’s genuinely false, anti-aesthetic, and, pre-conceptualized ‘departmentalization’²⁶ of jazz *via* subgenres. These popular music styles at their core have the same governing musical characteristics, according to Adorno (as explored more closely later in the essay). Referencing the two most popular styles of jazz of his time, Adorno writes that, “‘swing’ or ‘bebop’, inexorably succumb to commercial requirements

²⁴ Race relations should be brought up in relation to the era’s jazz culture. Kansas City’s jazz club owners were White, and were profiting off the culture of African-Americans. This ancillary issue is of concern to racial studies scholars such as Leroi Jones (a.k.a. Amiri Baraka), Cornel West and Stanley Crouch.

²⁵ Once again, postmodern fashion theorists Baudrillard and Hebdige come to mind, as well as the semiotician Eco.

²⁶ This approach to Adorno’s thoughts on jazz is indebted to an antecedently produced study by Lyotard published as *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979).

and lose their sting” (ibid). Part of the fundamental problem in the reader’s case is that Adorno generalizes excessively and lumps these two subgenres together.

Adorno finds himself much indebted to his early mentor Georg Simmel when writing on the style(s) of jazz. Simmel who wrote in “Fashion” (1907) that, “The imitator is the passive individual, who believes in social similarity and adapts himself to existing elements; the teleological individual, on the other hand, is ever experimenting, always restlessly striving, and he relies on his own personal conviction...Fashion is the imitation of a given example and satisfies the demand for social adaptation.” (1967, pg. 543) The influence of this seminal text during Adorno’s formative years birthed canonical Frankfurt School beliefs entailing the quest for Neo-Marxian authenticity during an era of stringent capitalistic hegemony. Simmel believed ‘fashion’ did not exist in classless and primitive societies. Rather the pull toward distinction was an inherent property of culture subsumed by financial markets (a precursor to Critical Theory’s concept of commodification). Adorno chose to focus on the most critical aspects of Simmel’s social thought when writing about the hollowness of jazz subgenres in “Perennial Fashion”. He appeared to have all-out neglected the positive dialectic of Simmel’s thought, leaving the reader of his 1940’s critiques without a plan for acting original when confronted with the superficiality of administered culture.

We should not rely on Altman and other documentary film-makers presentation of jazz culture at the expense of ignoring legitimate music historians’ literature. For example, the more legitimate jazz scholar Krin Gabbard has recently published literature that shows the climatic tenor saxophone duel between Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young in *Kansas City* (played by jazz musicians Craig Handy and Joshua Redman,

respectively), was inaccurately displayed by Altman, and that the event took place in 1933 (not 1934)²⁷.

The essence of Kansas City jazz culture entailed stringently administered activity. This strikes in attunement with the Adornoian thesis that, “jazz has in its essence remained static”. (ibid) If we look at the historical context in which Adorno acted as cultural critic, we find a few errors in treating jazz as a stagnant artistic product. Although correct in pointing out that the administered interests had always penetrated jazz production, Adorno did not acknowledge in writing that there was unprecedented artistic growth in jazz throughout the last three decades of his life. Charlie Parker accelerated improvisational practice in the 1940’s, Miles Davis approached music with a ‘quietest’²⁸ method in the 1950’s, and John Coltrane incorporated multiphonics into jazz performance which resulted in chaotic sounds throughout the majority of the 1960’s. The newness of each of these musicians’ instrumental techniques made a clean break from the ‘Big Band’ or ‘swing’ music that characterized the 1930’s. Even for Parker and Coltrane’s situations, their music, although at some times similar in tempo to the 1920’s ‘Jazz Age’ frenetic music, was phenomenally rich in spontaneity. I do not want to argue that jazz age and swing-era jazz musicians lacked improvisational spirit. My historical framing of the story of jazz is that the artistic output of these generations of American musicians mirrored the hegemony of commercial reality rather than unmediated nature or mind (the very ‘stuff’ aesthetic theory values so greatly).

²⁷ Gabbard, Krin (2004) *Black Magic: White Hollywood and African American Culture*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. See “Robert Altman’s Jazz History Lesson”, pgs. 235-250, which describes how in 1934 Lester ‘Prez’ Young was in Europe, and couldn’t have been in Kansas City during any night of that year for a jam session with Coleman Hawkins and the Basie ‘Big Band’.

²⁸ McDowell holds a quietist approach to Wittgensteinian rule following, and such analytical philosophical thought could be put to music upon consideration of Davis’ style of jazz.

It is possibly safe to say that Adorno did not spend his time in America listening to Parker, Davis or Coltrane (or at least there are not any commentators or documented notes attributing to the fact that he did). Leppert does acknowledge that Adorno listened to and commented on Ellington's jazz orchestra. When focusing on style and fashion, he believed the pop anthems that jazz musicians performed as melodies or "heads"²⁹, (the launchings pads of their improvisations), were in fact "dressed up"³⁰ recurrently. In 'Figure I-A' the popular melody of and harmonic progression to "I Got Rhythm" is shown and juxtaposed in 'Figure I-B' with "Oleo", a reconstructed melody of the former with altered chord changes. The two songs, both performed by jazz musicians during the decades Adorno critiqued music, are similar at core (harmony) and represent the double edged sword of music reconstruction. Jazz scholars³¹ believe that "Oleo" represents a critical adaptation and ingenuity at modification of a popular song ("I Got Rhythm"). On the other hand, Adorno would find that since the core of the compositions are similar, the reconstructed melody and supermodified chord changes of "Oleo" are simply a way of dressing up a chart to sell records to a new generation of jazz listeners. The fault, for Adorno, lies in the easily accessible chord progression of "I Got Rhythm". Like many German nineteenth and twentieth century musicians, Adorno used harmony as his basis of evaluating music. Subsequent generations of jazz musicians may attempt to reconstruct and deconstruct many of the first composition's rhythmic and melodic components; from what we know of Adorno, its internal (harmonic) framework will overshadow ancillary modifications to generate only a slightly altered face on the same

²⁹ Proper jazz culture terminology

³⁰ (1990, pg. 123)

³¹ Gary Giddins in *Visions of Jazz: The First Century* (1998). See "Sonny Rollins: Thematic Improvisation".

body. This attempt at ‘new jazz’ will ultimately fail by Adorno’s grading system of music aesthetics (because of its mass cultural origins/point of departure and unchangeable core.) Beyond compositions, jazz subgenres themselves represented ‘flavors of the month’ for Adorno, and beyond surface material each of these styles regurgitated the same musical themes. Musicians’ improvisations on these themes were simply “frills”³² for Adorno.

³² (ibid)

Figure I-A (two pages)

Melody and Chord Changes of Gershwin’s composition “I Got Rhythm”³³

Figure I-B

“I Got Rhythm”’s ‘post-bop’ reconstructed melody and modified chord changes as exhibited by Sonny Rollins’ composition “Oleo”,³⁴

³³ Score from Alfred Publishing, Van Nuys, CA, (1995). Arranged by John Brimhall.

³⁴ Sheet Music from Jamey Aebersold Jazz, New Albany, IN (1976). Arranged by Jamey Aebersold.

There is an Adornoian environmental presupposition which makes the German theorist's criticism on jazz improvisation subject to revision. Adorno is equating jazz with spectator culture. Yet 'Big Band' jazz was dance music (which demanded activity on behalf of its consumers) and existed alongside the new cerebral 'bebop' and avant-garde approaches towards jazz in Adorno's lifetime. There were still dancehalls in the 1950's, in which Duke Ellington's 'Big Band' performed. The consumer activity initiated by such a musical subgenre rested upon physical endurance rather than intellectual inquiry. Adorno labeled dance music as "light music" (ibid), yet I should still make the point that jazz scholars and connoisseurs have found nothing 'light' about the corpulent tenor saxophone sounds of Ben Webster³⁵. Improvisation was integrated into the 'Big Band' sound, and therefore Adorno sets up false dichotomies in "Perennial Fashion" by writing that music was popular and light, or improvisational and serious³⁶. Later in the essay, types of serious music listeners are distinguished. In addition to putting false environmental constraints to jazz performance, Adorno simply does not account for the fact that jazz styles are rather 'trends' rather than 'fads'. These 'trends' mutually exist along side one another throughout the passage of time, and have intergenerational subscription.

The most upsetting remark Adorno makes in this essay on jazz in fact concerns the nature and intention of the improvisations which musicians of the idiom perform. For Adorno, jazz improvisations are just "frills" (ibid), because his musical values are based

³⁵ Webster was Ellington's lead tenor saxophonist in his 'Big Band' type of Orchestra; a personal favorite, and a prime influence in top-notch thought-provocateurs on today's jazz scene such as David S. Ware and James Carter.

³⁶ In his *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, Adorno actually identifies several types of music qualities and categorizes the listeners of them. (1962)

on harmonic structures. Current music scholars have different criterion altogether and unanimously believe improvisation is the most defining characteristic of jazz. Further, the “new music” of the 1960’s³⁷ which relied almost completely on improvisation, was in fact considered “as serious as your life”³⁸ to the jazz musicians who created it (not simply embellished tones). Being “deaf, dumb, blind”³⁹ to such an evaluative issue is how Adorno ends the most crucial section of “Perennial Fashion-Jazz”.

There have been scads of arguments initiated by both musicians and critics on the jazz scene over the last half century which resonates with the question, “What do you mean by serious music?” A prime example of the musicians’ dispute concerns hard-bop tenor saxophonist Dexter Gordon hearing Ornette Coleman play his avant-garde jazz in New York for the first time in 1959. Gordon, a veteran jazz musician who caught his first big break in Billy Eckstein’s ‘Big Band’ alongside the progenitors of bebop, ‘Bird’ and ‘Diz’, thought that Coleman was “putting-on” the audience with his notions of harmonic dissonance, or that he had no sort of seriousness attached to his music. Whether the music’s output was serious or not really does not matter. The reason why is because the music, whatever the musicians thought of it, instigated serious reactions from

³⁷ Once again, avant-garde jazz was labeled ‘the new music’ or ‘the new jazz’ during this decade, and sometimes referred to amongst musicians as “The New Thing”.

³⁸ *As Serious As Your Life: John Coltrane and Beyond* is considered the authoritative book on 1960’s avant-garde jazz (1992).

³⁹ *Deaf, Dumb, Blind: Summun, Bukmun, Umyun* was a 1970 Pharaoh Sanders album on the MCA ‘Impulse!’ Inprint, which is considered required listening for students of the new music of the 1960’s and beyond. Impulse! Records documented the majority of the avant-garde jazz movement of the 1960’s and early 1970’s. Ashley Kahn’s *The House That ‘Trane Built: The Story of Impulse! Records* provides detailed information on the label.

its audience, leaving the next renegade of jazz, Albert Ayler, to be found dead in the East River of Manhattan⁴⁰.

Study 2: “On Jazz”

My intentions in analyzing Adorno’s three jazz essays in this treatise are to point out various inaccuracies of the Critical Theorist’s approach to understanding jazz. Adorno was not of the jazz *culture*, whereas I was brought up in it (alongside other varieties of contemporary music). My aim, as a product and representative of the culture, is to contribute secondary literature that remedies (in the form of retribution) the damage Adorno has done to the reputation and integrity of jazz. The theme of commodification coexisting with the civil notion of jazz was completely unformed by Adorno in “On Jazz”. The essay was written in 1936, the same year as Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”. Instead of examining jazz for deficiencies in its assemblage through mass reproduction, Adorno focuses more on neo-Kantian aesthetic tastes and how they relate to various segments of contemporary American society. We can find the insight from this essay that Adorno was first interested in surveying the demographics of jazz culture before he bothered to assault its production techniques. I find some of Adorno’s earliest totalitarian impressions of the jazz industry in this essay. He originally conceives jazz as an aesthetic product meant for the upper class of society. Later, he finds the music spreading across “all levels of society, even the proletariat” (2002, pg. 474).

⁴⁰ Ayler was found missing limbs by the New York City Police Department’s Homicide Detectives, hence the name “Die Like a Dog” given to the Peter Brotzmann led avant-garde jazz collective performing in Germany and the U.S today (among many other places).

The overarching connective thematic of this section's analyses is democratic and demographic concerns. Moving towards my aim at pointing out discrepancies in Adorno's research, I can counter such a claim of anti-democratic origins and historically pin-point jazz's aural emergence to working class demographics. To an even greater extent, jazz was the first music of destitute America. If, for instance, we consider the career and fan base of the 1920's jazz and blues singer Bessie Smith, we find this statement valid. Hentoff (2004) finds that her music historically resembled what jazz musicians such as Matthew Shipp today call African-American folk music⁴¹.

Jazz was at its origins a musical phenomenon of African-American culture, and Bessie Smith embodied that culture. We must acknowledge jazz originally found its schematic structure greatly indebted to the blues.⁴² Singer Bessie Smith was one of the first recording artists to sing the blues in a jazz context. Joining her on studio sessions in the 1920's were pianist Fletcher Henderson and trumpeter Louis Armstrong. Both of these musicians are considered architects of what Adorno would call early modern jazz performance, where the public good existed alongside administered interests. The music generated from such sessions was almost entirely consumed by African-Americans, a majority of whom were historically in the bottom socioeconomic quartile of the United States⁴³. The *Empty Bed Blues*⁴⁴ of Bessie Smith was the popular music of Black

⁴¹ Hentoff, Nat (2004). *American Music Is*. New York: De Capo Press. See pg. 209 for the jazz/folk music connection in "Blues Brothers Under the Skin".

⁴² Modern jazz recording artists in the 1940's through 1960's, such as Art Blakey, sought to return to the source of the structural component blues held in jazz at this time. An aural example of this project can be found in Blakey's 1958 Blue Note Records release *Moanin'*, which included a group of musicians he called 'The Jazz Messengers'.

⁴³ Time series analyses could be initiated in another study if one is to consider Kenney's *Recorded Music in American Life* along with DeVeaux's NEA-sponsored project titled *Jazz in America: Who's Listening?* One could then compare and contrast Bessie Smith 1920's jazz-age audience demographics with the social construction of Marsalis-era 1980's and 1990's jazz consumption. In the chapter "Demographic

America during the jazz age, and the argument could be made that such music represented a more authentic jazz sound than the music being consumed by Adorno's original Robber Barons' (or the other members of the upper echelon of society).

There is a genealogical dispute that emerges from Adorno's published work on jazz. The German musicologist thought that jazz's early nineteenth century origins lie in popular songs, "such as "Turkey in the Straw and 'Old Zip Coon'". (1990, pg. 121) On the other hand, American music scholars⁴⁵ have historically attributed jazz's development to African-American 'work songs' and blues hymns. Modern jazz musicians embraced the second approach, and we found alto saxophonist 'Cannonball' Adderley landing on the New York jazz scene in the 1950's with a blues based composition actually titled "Work Song". Witkin states that Adorno was, "careful to distance himself from what he calls 'the mythology of jazz' which sees invention as originating from the uncompromised and unsullied person, the authentic 'soul' of the black man." (1998, pg. 166) Therefore it is probably safe to say that Adorno was not listening to any type of 'soul' or gospel infused jazz. To reinforce and extend the point, this is because (1) he attributes jazz's development in the twentieth century to White America's "light music" of the first half of the nineteenth century, and (2) because he writes in "On Jazz" that the jazz music of his day was rich in "mechanical soullessness" (2002, pg. 470).

If, for Adorno, jazz music was not contrived and without soul, then it had to be flowing with "licentious decadence" (ibid). Initially, it was simply an either/or situation

Characteristics of the Jazz Audience" (pgs. 16-32), DeVaux finds that for every high school dropout who attended a jazz concert in the 1980's and 1990's, there were approximately 25 post-grads in attendance. Once must remember that during Smith 1920's and 1930's era of music production, jazz was the only popular music in America, and therefore its status as mass art confirms that its demographic structure was entirely different than the research yielded from the DeVaux study.

⁴⁴ Bessie Smith, *Empty Bed Blues*, 'Living Era' Hartington Productions AJA 5213-CD

⁴⁵ Stearns, Marshall W. (1958) *The Story of Jazz*. New York: Oxford University Press.

for this German music scholar. Both were false, for as DeNora writes, Adorno considered “art’s link to the mobilisation of emotion and/or action was regressive, symptomatic of the same kind of (authoritarian) communicative relationship he sought to critique.” (2003, pg. 9) Even in the 1930’s (when “On Jazz” was penned), the novice jazz listener could distinguish both ‘Big Band’ and small combo sounds, and register almost all of those sounds somewhere within the giant socio-aural territory that lie between Adorno’s great divide. It becomes obvious in Adorno’s critique of American society that he was allowing upsetting totalitarianistic phenomena impair his stance on, and general perception of, the aesthetics of this particular nation-state’s music.

Further evaluating the way in which Adorno’s social and political thinking distorted archetypical scholarly interpretations of jazz, a blatantly appealing thesis is presented in “On Jazz” that in fact contradicts DeNora’s attempt to pithily label Adorno as an anti-totalitarian thinker. The thesis is that, “The more democratic jazz is, the worse it becomes.” (2002, pg. 479) Is not American aesthetic and political theory supposed to represent freedom at its most fundamental level? Should not there be a ‘leveling off’ in the consumption of artistic public goods? Not for Adorno. The reason for this is because American aesthetics is operated from administered ground (producing what we know in the West as commodification). Furthermore, standardization should not be equated with democratization by Adorno. The former term has materialistic qualities, while the latter is more concerned with codifying ideals.

This raises the question of “How Free *Should* We Be” in American society. Excess is definitely a form of freedom. We should therefore reconsider Adorno’s critique of the excessive nature of jazz music. For instance, Charlie Parker (who was born

seventeen years after Adorno and died well before the German scholar did) improvised for the most part in sixteenth notes over a '4/4' time signature, and was revolutionary because of the slightly dissonant language used in the process (constant tri-tone fixation, etc). However, he was not rhythmically that out of line. This raises the question of what exactly Adorno meant by 'excess' from a rhythmic prospective. His best chance at isolating excess in the jazz scene would have most likely been by analyzing the Kansas City tenor saxophone battles⁴⁶. The competitiveness for the two tenor saxophone players to 'out-play' or "cut"⁴⁷ each other carried over to a type of excess by the account of some commentators. If Adorno would have written about this type of excess in the form of competition as summing-up the spirit of American capitalism, then there would have been a critical statement put forward to which other scholarly jazz writers would have possibly subscribed. A rejoinder to such a claim would be that jazz as an American art form is not like boxing (regardless of what pianist Matthew Shipp thinks⁴⁸). Rather, members of a jazz quintet engage in teamwork during performance which resonates metaphorically with the American sport of basketball and its on-court teams of five agents⁴⁹. All this discussion is a moot point, however, since Adorno never considered Kansas City jazz in the first place (as previously mentioned).

In "On Jazz", the only grey area Adorno allowed for in his jazz polarization resting on rigidity and excess was found when one focused on the music's aggregate function and moved beyond the particular sounds of the saxophone that served to set up

⁴⁶The spectacle of which is discussed in Gabbard (2004).

⁴⁷ Jazz culture terminology for out-performing another musician, particularly of the same instrument.

⁴⁸ "Jazz and Boxing" from Matthew Shipp, *The Flow of X*, 2.13.61 Records thi21326.2-CD

⁴⁹ Once the jazz quintet became one of the archetypical outfits in which to perform jazz, there were still some battles of the instrumentalists (in most cases the duel was between performers of Adorno's saxophone). An example would be the John Coltrane/Sonny Rollins duel called *Tenor Madness* released on Prestige Records in 1957 (in New York) in a quintet setting.

the initial dichotomy. Adorno believed jazz consumers would subsequently “produce inferences between the rigid and the excess” (2002, pg. 471). But “On Jazz” was written in 1936, when the American jazz establishment produced sounds that were still danceable, and Adorno was making a big assumption that there would be an intellectualization on the part of the average jazz listener. It seems that the Benny Goodman-produced music of his day was more of the danceable type than the critical reflective type.

Some Continental thinkers, however, might say that Adorno was predicting the trend of cerebral reflection which started when Miles Davis released his record *Birth of the Cool* in 1949. Davis quieted things down in jazz with the release of this landmark album, and critical reflection followed in the minds of the jazz listener because that music’s structural content was so different from what had come before. Adorno would be quick to distinguish, though, that ‘cool jazz’ is a dressed up label for ‘light music’. Philosophically, however, the cognitive approach to the jazz of Davis, whose muted tones in ballads left listeners struck in a pensive state, was certainly something different than popular ‘light music’⁵⁰. Jazz historian Scott DeVeaux, in *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (1997), makes the racial turn which has proved to be so controversial in jazz scholarship. Although Davis produced ‘cool jazz’, it was ‘authentically’ ‘cool’, since DeVeaux finds a continuation of Davis’ music from Charlie

⁵⁰ Adorno’s 1940’s trip to the West Coast of the US occurred at the time ‘cool jazz’ was being invented in Los Angeles. Davis and Adorno were in fact living in California at the same time, but there is not a record of Adorno listening, or even being aware of, Miles Davis’ music. Davis flocked towards the Continental thinker Sartre when in Paris in 1949 for the first international jazz festival. The two of them spent time in the Left Bank engaging its café society. Continental thinker Adorno in Los Angeles, on the other hand, must not have been Davis’ idea of approachable (if in fact he was even aware of his presence).

Parker's bebop (it was Parker who hired Davis at the age of 19 while he attended Julliard in New York), and bebop was a singularly African-American product.

Adorno could counter such thought-provoking jazz by returning to the source of the great analytic/continental divide in the history of philosophy, primarily Kant. Critical of Hegel and Marx's positive dialectic, Adorno viewed Kant's aesthetics as a pure source of intellectual thought free of normativity directed toward the 'Lifeworld' initially in modern German philosophy. In Kukla's collected essays on Kantian aesthetics and cognition, Pillow touches on Longuenesse's work in the field and states, "for Kant aesthetic reflection does not subsume particulars under determining concepts, the aesthetic again seemingly contributes nothing to our cognitive efforts. Mere aesthetic reflection has merely to do with pleasure..." (2006, pg. 246) For Adorno, this Kantian theme historically renders 'light music' and the cognitive activity stimulated from it as 'shallow'. If Adorno had been listening to the 'quiet' jazz of Miles Davis, he may well have evaluated it as producing 'soft', extraneous cognition that was definitive of the happy dance music from which it proceeded (*via* two generations of jazz subgenres).

Study 3: 'Farewell to Jazz'

In 'Farewell to Jazz', which represents Adorno's earliest and shortest published thoughts on jazz, we find the critical theorist presenting and dismissing the jazz establishment in the context of his home culture. He inquires into the issue of reproductivity in the essay, and basically asks if the leap from original production following World War I to reproduction in the last days of Weimar Germany represented anything other than the appropriation of 'kitsch'. Here we find the origins of Adorno's thought that jazz at its conception was elitist, in terms of the particular class to which it

appealed. Jazz was a structurally weak music at its point of origin according to Adorno. When nascent fascist actors used propaganda to disseminate the music, which was done commercially on the radio and out of disrespect of the proletarians' aesthetic palate, the resulting reproduction represented erroneous "arts and crafts" (2001, pg. 483), or 'kitsch'. These sounds for Adorno represented administered interests trying to replicate artistic authenticity.

As the directly preceding section was critique from democratic ideals and demographic research, this section's theme will be the instrumental effect mass media has historically held in the emergence on jazz in America. Such thoughts will prove once again that Adorno believed jazz appropriation was completely a product of administration. Adorno's misconceptions of the jazz establishment in this essay resonate with inauthentic spatial concerns, and he never gets past these misconceptions. The political architecture of late Weimar Germany and Continental America were worlds apart. In American culture, the aesthetic dimension was freer from the political sphere's influence during the years immediately following the First Great War than it was Post-World War II. Moreover, the political sphere in America was not propagandistic in such a way it is in today's interconnected world of multi-media; whereas the structure of Adorno's Weimar jazz was in essence symbolic of futural regime shifts.

Adorno's error in "Farewell to Jazz" is that he took jazz out of its cultural context and overlooked the governing characteristics thriving at its source. Ironically, these governing characteristics represented artistic freedom. As we saw earlier, Adorno considered source characteristics in his writings later in the 1930's and 1940's, but by that time he believed the fascist epidemic of his homeland had spread to and penetrated

American borders. Even if one is to focus on Adorno's account of jazz itself, as does Witkin, a totalitarian gloss is still obvious. After reflecting upon societal constraints of Adorno's homeland and the American front, Witkin finds that the German scholar believes that, "Jazz, too, was the totally planned construction of effects. Planned production violated the principle of emergence by preventing all that is uncontrollable, unpredictable, incalculable, in advance, and thus deprived life of what is genuinely new..." (1998, pg. 172)

Although Adorno's social commentary on jazz may seem hyper-critical, when focusing on his American jazz critique we should consider the historical objection delivered by Continental thinker Spengler and his *The Decline of the West*. He argumentatively presented the thesis that America was the only culture to go from 'barbarism' to 'decadence' without passing through 'civilization'.⁵¹ If such an idea informed Adorno's cultural critique, possibly filtered through Max Weber, then we find prejudices against American culture ingrained into his thought, prior to approaching the jazz idiom. We can view Adorno's overarching critique of mass U.S. culture as an outgrowth or variant strain of Spengler's earlier historicism.

In fact, in *Prisms* Adorno replies to Spengler out of what may appear as indebtedness. He finds that the citizens of his modern Germany went from reading "Schopenhauer and Nietzsche" (1990 pg. 53), to raving over the stylistically embellished writings of "Heidegger" without passing through Spengler's critique of civilization at-large. Adorno, though at odds with Spengler's politics, could have been heavily indebted to him for the initial assessment of American culture as 'barbarism' in the "Culture

⁵¹ (2006, as indicated by the tone of pgs. 155-158)

Industry” chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which followed the *Decline of the West* by a quarter of a century. At this point, however, we should start to approach the issue of Adorno’s formative Continental influences (represented by Nietzsche and Schopenhauer), whose literature was ever-so accessible in his native Germany during the first quarter of the twentieth century, and conceive of how they prepared for the thesis that ‘Enlightenment’ entailed ‘mass deception’. By focusing on the aesthetics of music from these Continental thinkers, such an investigation could possibly get to the root of Adorno’s prejudices towards the American originated jazz establishment.

Spengler, throughout *The Decline of the West*, sees music as the foreground to which all the other fine arts organize themselves around. For example, he writes that, “Painting can take music no further. Music itself becomes *absolute*: it is music that dominates... painting and architecture in the eighteenth century.” (2006, pg. 118) Such a gravitational attraction towards music’s universals and particulars was ‘unconscious’, if not subliminal, for Oswald Spengler. There was surely a naturalization of the humanistic world taking place in his cultural critique. However, in Adorno’s historical musicology, we find a decentralization of artistic properties. Instead of music being the queen of the fine arts (as, say, sociology is the queen of the social sciences), we find such arts being directly diluted (organizationally) by the administered world, *via* propagation. We begin to historically view composers and musical thinkers in terms of careers and output, which Adorno would have thought to have been the very characteristic of high-industrialism.

Adorno’s aesthetic worldview historically served as the groundwork for contemporary cultural studies movements such as Fordism and Post-Fordism. There were twentieth century American jazz musicians who had similar artistic outlook. For

example, when avant-garde recording artist Sam Rivers was interviewed during Adorno's later years, he remarked about how America's most prestigious music conservatories were generating jazz musicians like industrial factories with conveyer-belt efficiency and uniformity. Therefore, some of the American 'new jazz' artistic thought did strike in attunement with Adorno's European Continental critical theory. The extent of the surprising congruence will now be examined in this treatise's penultimate chapter.

V. Radically Reconstructing Adorno's Thoughts on Jazz: Employing a Critical Theory of Society and Aligning It with a Creative Jazz Artist

As shown in one of the previous chapters, the later Adorno focused his energy on analyzing the music of iconoclastic chamber music composers, Mahler and Berg in particular, and eschewed commentary on the jazz idiom altogether. Adorno had a justifiably genuine respect toward these avant-garde chamber composers. If aware of the developments of America's 'new jazz' musicians, there is warranted belief that Adorno would have accepted its structural developments in content, and possibly could have seen such methods as much needed reactions towards what he thought to be a stagnant and commercial jazz establishment. This is because the tradition these innovators were starting in the United States was so grounded in musical techniques of resistance which Adorno greatly admired when employed by fellow Continental composers.

Adorno was most concerned in his writings on jazz that the musical landscapes jazz musicians created, from 'swing' through 'bebop', were at their core identical to one another. However the sonic environments created by musicians' of 'new jazz' moved towards being completely improvised; no two improvisations were the same (whereas in the days of Lester Young, the pork-pie hat wearing tenor saxophonist would repeat improvisatory themes recurrently for stylistic reasons). Adorno thought that be-boppers such as Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie (who were the *Downbeat* and *Playboy* jazz poll consensus winners when he spent his time studying the jazz scene in New York) were just employing "frills" in their improvisations, as in the same fashion of the 'Big

Band' era which directly preceded them. However, the critical theorist's initial disgust at the standardization of an 'industry' at work would have actually helped the subsequent generation of 'new jazz' composers show individuality and originality. This is because in the 1950's and 1960's the industry had standardized the window of opportunity to present original compositions on record releases, in fact extending it.

As expressed previously in the body of his contemporary music criticism, Adorno thought 'be-boppers' repeated the same shallow improvisational and compositional techniques over and over and again. This was done within the forty-five minutes to an hour of performance that could be recorded and released on vinyl to the mass public. He would have seen the musicians regurgitating the pop anthems which were in effect similar at groundwork, and added jazz embellishments to the anthems in order to satisfy the public's need for some excitement. However, 1960's avant-garde jazz vinyl was completely different from this immediate post-war situation.

For instance, the music presented by the musicians was exuding and entirely a product of 'ectasis' on the part of the performer. There were no longer embellishments, but complete sonic and ecstatic energy throughout from start to finish of the recorded performance (as first documented by Ornette Coleman in a near hour long collective improvisation titled *Free Jazz*). This provided for a structural revolution in jazz production which Adorno could have seen as elevating and crucial in uncovering pure artistic spirit: the re-emergence of musical forms of the notion of *Geist* which he so admired in Hegel. If this represented spirit (the ecstatic) overcoming industry (the "frills"), Adorno's initial concerns about jazz becoming completely commercialized would have been assuaged.

The need for individuality, which Kracauer instilled in Adorno as a youth, would have been satisfied artistically by the band members of ‘new jazz’ recording projects. This is because they were, in essence, each forced to act spontaneous when performing their instruments for a ‘session’. I am equating improvisation with individuality at this moment, and move to make the argument that free-form improvisation allows the artist to explore more of their own voice. In stark opposition is ‘swing’ and ‘bebop’ structured improvisation, where the chord changes dictates the performance of the artist. Free-form improvisation allows the artist to musically ‘stretch out’⁵² and uncover true, original artistic tendencies. This is a type of musical ‘free association’, an attempt to unmask and unlearn societal enforced musical rules or exercises instilled in performers from the conservatory on forward, and renew artistic authenticity⁵³.

Touching on the mass media, Adorno saw the rapid technological advances of his later year (music broadcasted nationally on the radio and television for instance) as hindering the purity and originality of the music produced by composers⁵⁴. Post-Adorno, the jazz community has actually moved towards embracing advancements in the recording of their product, feeling that greater originality in music was a result of such technological revolutions. This is true of all music. However, concerning avant-garde

⁵² Proper jazz culture terminology

⁵³ The Frankfurt School’s appropriation of Freudian psychoanalytic techniques has been noted by many commentators, including Martin Jay (1996). Marcuse used such theory to inform his socio-political critique of mass culture. Fromm approached the theory from a more clinical and self help perspective. It is unclear, however, how Adorno incorporated such theory. Applying Freudian techniques to aesthetics is a novel idea, and Adorno would have been more comfortable in going the artistic route with the theory rather than taking social and political action like in the case of Marcuse. Adorno thought Continental philosophy stands alone, and has its own beauty, but should not be aligned with revolutionary *praxis*.

⁵⁴ He felt this would carry over to the consumer/listener of music who in fact would be presented with trite product. “On the Fetish Characteristic of Music and the Regression of Listening” from *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, J.M. Bernstein (ed.). London: Routledge, 2002. The common listener in this situation would be trapped into sampling (and over time, fixating on) standardized musical product, whose aesthetic content/value had diminishing returns.

jazz, the music production process of a contemporary ‘new jazz’ heir such as Charles Gayle (and his artistic work from the 1990’s) has been remarked upon by Francis Davis, who also writes about more mainstream artists such as James Carter. Davis wrote about Gayle’s process jazz that, “Unless doing the bidding of a Machiavellian producer...the studio is now what the private after-hours session used to be, the place where musicians play for one another, with no crowd exerting to even if so inclined. More important, at least in terms of this particular musician, who seems oblivious to his live audience, the studio is the place where music is made for posterity”. (1993, pg. 5)⁵⁵ Adorno would have seen such structural changes at this particular domain of context as the re-emergence of artistic individuality over the unruly market that at one time homogenized the new music for which he had such passion. Structural political economist Lance Taylor would remark about this development that, “the market” this time is going to finally “meet its match”⁵⁶.

In their preliminary mass culture response to Max Weber’s *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music*, Martindale and Riedel conclude that, “Since the patterns of music production and appreciation may change while the society remains constant and the same music may be received and loved by people of quite different societies, there is no one-to-one casual interdetermination of society and music”. (1958, pg. xi) Even at the purely societal level, Keynes thought that analyzing the eras of Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria of his home country was not simply done through a process of ‘differential calculus’. The component of historical flux on the societal level (which

⁵⁵ Charles Gayle, *Consecration*, Black Saint 120138-2-CD.

⁵⁶ ‘The match’ this time is coming from the market attempting a re-commodification of creative music production altogether, rather than restructure old Soviet bloc economies. The latter was the scope of Taylor’s original project in the 1990’s.

reaches across Kracauer's thesis on modern social historiography) is quicksilver for both Weber's rationalized theories of society and the Adornoian critical realizations of the subjective condition. However, Adorno found his work not so removed and polarized from the Weberian tradition of music analysis.

Adorno wrote in *Sound Figures* that it was first Weber who "identified "rationalization" as the crucial concept for the sociology of music. In so doing, his richly documented argument struck a blow against the irrationalism that prevails in the current view of music". (1999, pg 5) The irrationalism of Adorno's modern 'chamber music' icons did not dilute his affinity for the pre-critical work of Weber. Adorno ambitiously embarked on ontologizing the age old epistemic Subject/Object dualism in the Western Intellectual tradition, using music as his platform for philosophizing. Adorno's contributions, interpreted as unsuccessful efforts at writing contemporary musicology, did at least prove there was a narrow divide in the history of philosophizing about music. Philosophy's epistemic dualism, ontologically appropriated by Adorno, was not effective at splitting musicology-at-large into two argumentative sides. The scholarly field has not a schizophrenic identity, rather many different view points (many of which are still burdened by the act of speculation, leading to a series of smaller feuds).

Incongruence emerges when attempting to incorporate a variety of musical idioms' methods into meta-narratives of society. Subsequent generations of theorists find themselves searching for a 'post-structural hermeneutics of avant-garde music'. Much of the 1970's and 1980's (the two decades following Adorno's death) found contemporary German social thought in upheaval. Encompassing such a dispute was the stark contrast between Gadamer's hermeneutics and Habermas' (neo-Adornoian) ideology critique.

The aesthetics behind experimental free-form approaches to music production more accurately register with a 'Lifeworld' (Habermas) that lacks a single all-encompassing explanatory characteristic. Such a society operates by the 'cultural logic of late capitalism' (as described by Daniel Bell, in addition to post-modern French theorists), finding itself far removed from historical traditions, influences, and practices. There is not a socio-cultural background to start or continue artistically conceptualizing from, as Ornette Coleman contends⁵⁷, but only pure music to be performed. Such a thought registers with Anthony Giddens theory of a 'double hermeneutic'. If one only focuses on the music there will be common aesthetic informalities covered which exist *a priori* to (commercially administered) culture.

One Particular Musician's Case of Resisting Commodification in the Pursuit of Creating 'Auratic' 'New Jazz'

Jazz tenor saxophonist Charles Gayle lived homeless on the streets of New York City for a good part of the 1980's and 1990's, because he decided to resist the commercial turn on the jazz scene. He is considered by some, including writers Francis Davis, Steven Dalachinsky, Ajay Heble, Howard Mandel, and Phil Freeman, to be the heir to the 1960's avant-garde jazz tenor saxophone tradition. Such a tradition in America historically started with John Coltrane and moved forward through Black Nationalism, including figures such as Albert Ayler. Adorno, although dismissive of jazz as a whole, may have seen this turn towards producing avant-garde sounds that resemble very little of jazz's insufficient compositional core, as a welcome innovation similar in

⁵⁷ Such a musical post-structuralism originated by Coleman predates Derrida's literary post-structuralism by eight years (for it was the latter's lecture at Johns Hopkins University titled "Sign, Structure and Play in the Human Sciences" which put the intellectualized form of post-structuralism on the map worldwide (*via* the efforts of transnational academic publishing houses). Richter's commentary verifies this point. (1998, pg. 877)

nature to his teacher Alban Berg's musical methods. The fact that an avant-garde musician such as Charles Gayle resisted the commodification brought about by the marketplace at all expenses (which meant living without shelter), Adorno's social thought on jazz could be reconfigured to hold such an artist as an *authentic* musical presence.

I made the argument earlier in the treatise that jazz can be authentic even if it undergoes a process of commodification. The point I am attempting to make is that as long as Adorno's administered world sees to distributing and making certain creative music projects are consumed by the proper people who would want to enjoy them, while NOT affecting or corrupting the integrity of the sacred, age-old artistic process taking place on the bandstand or in the modern-day studio, 'new jazz' can exist as authentic musical phenomena. We find a rather extreme case of someone who values creative music production in Charles Gayle, and one can still maintain artistic integrity while being signed to a major record label that mass distributes artistic product and live in appropriate shelter, have health insurance, etc. This is evident by Gayle's chief rival David S. Ware, who had a musical career with Sony during 1998 through 2001. I can reveal that Ware is the staunch individualist (in the words of his colleague Matthew Shipp, not mine) who I was hypothetically referring to in the opening of this treatise. Yet, so to speak once again, he is actually ON the 'grid', and takes pleasure in mass consumer activities such as watching network television programming⁵⁸ and watching Hollywood-produced motion pictures. Therefore it is possible for one to take pride and use in one's position within modernity's web or system of commodities (which is at disposal to them), while still existing as an aura-generating artist.

⁵⁸ Personal communication. 2001, Scotch Plains, NJ.

Amplifying Gayle's costly quest for maintaining authenticity, the musicianship behind it strikes attunement with the case for aura in Benjamin's study of reproductive art (1936). As well, it registers with the distinctly iconoclastic European atonal composers methods which Adorno praised in his literature throughout four decades of the twentieth century. Gayle has a loyal fan base in the modern Federal Republic of Germany (where he is considered a contemporary of Peter Brotzmann), as well as in the U.K. (where he is considered a contemporary of Evan Parker). His acceptance by the British public brings forth the issue of applying the isles' contemporary social theory to his musicianship.

Since Gayle relies on pure improvisation when playing the tenor saxophone, Giddens' double hermeneutic is applicable for promoting listener receptivity. Originally, Giddens proposed such a philosophical concept exists in the contemporary social sciences and the natural sciences. I make the move to employ the concept in a third series of discourses: the fine arts. By eschewing the traditional compositional structure of jazz, Gayle's music is more accessible on terms of interaction from, and replication by, the musician without formal training. As well, since the music comes from the soul and not the notated sheet, it should register with its audience on a more primary, visceral, and instinctual level.

There is very little known about Gayle's background, and such a fact adds to the mysteriousness of his *oeuvre*. Although a loner most of his life, he landed teaching positions at SUNY Buffalo and Bennington College in the past. Unlike Adorno, Gayle was regarded rather remarkably favorably by his students. After attending a few of his concerts and purchasing several of his albums, I approached the tenor saxophonist during my freshman year of college in New York, 'telling' this legend of a figure I wanted to

study with him privately. My apprenticeship with Gayle led to a club performance, and I can report first handedly that he is a commanding presence on stage. One feels that they are experiencing utter artistic authenticity, the ‘real deal’, in action whenever Gayle performs on tenor saxophone. The narrative of autonomy exists in his artistic career **because of** his personal history and the choices he decided to make as a musician who subscribes to avant-garde aesthetics firmly enough to remain subaltern and peripheral rather than a subject of Culture Industry puppeteers. There is not any doubt that Gayle remains ‘off the grid’, so to speak. It is ironic that his time at Buffalo was spent teaching saxophonist Jay Beckenstein jazz history; since Beckenstein went on to form the soft jazz group Spyro Gyra, who produced polished sounds that subsequently became trendy enough in the idiom to put the auratic Gayle out of work and on the streets.

As an aspiring jazz tenor saxophonist who valued creativity over commercial standardization, the pursuit of musical authenticity in the life of Gayle became evident to me when he remarked at our initial lesson that “The first time you picked up the saxophone and played a note...that was the most original statement you will ever make as a musician”⁵⁹. This is Adorno’s neo-Marxian fetishistic concept of the regression of listening applied to performance theory. Not only did Adorno posit that there was diminishing marginal utility on the consumer’s behalf when listening to recorded jazz products, he felt these objects of the Culture Industry made the public dumb and docile. Gayle sees repetitive technical exercise on his instrument as suppressing the creative consciousness which should exude from the artist during performance. Developmentally, the music aesthetics of Adorno and Gayle are in alignment. As a devotee of avant-garde

⁵⁹ Personal communication. Jan. 2000, New York, NY.

culture, the artistic and ideological disposition of Adorno is hereby reconstructed to fit ‘new jazz’, and the messages accrued by its performance (i.e. the revolt against administered musical hegemony, etc.).

In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno directly confronts the issue of individuality through philosophical thought. Adorno finds that, “Communication with others crystallizes in the individual for whose existence they serve as media.” (1973, pg. 162) The German scholar reverts from Neo-Kracauerian consumer culture claims of singular *Existenz* characterized by particulars and moves toward the direction of the post-revolutionary moment of Lukacsian informed New-Marxist ideology. This builds on Rosa Luxemburg’s critique of capital *via* a **constellation** of coalesced universals, or a wellspring of thought which aims at a new transfiguration of collectivism (Ayn Rand anachronistically standing in polar opposition).

Giddens historically made the move toward developing metalanguages of the social world. If we account for the individualism in the cultural discourses (Kracauer), and collectivism in ideology pursuits (Lukacs), Adorno stands as a scholar who dabbles in both spheres of influence. I seek to draw the distinction between the young Adorno, who was caught up in making post-Kracauerian statements of retaining authentic presence at any cost (which resembles Charles Gayle’s artistic motives), and the later Adorno, who even as Benjamin’s only protégé finds himself flirting with philosophical syntheses that represent cooperative pursuits (which we can seek alignment with Giddens’ mutualism of a double hermeneutic). For after all, shouldn’t the latter philosophical concept of synthesis represent undisguised pluralistic endeavoring? By coming to agreement or understanding, and eschewing *aporia* in the process, isn’t one

jettisoning at least some authentically intuitive convictions and judgments? Such liquidation or dilution of inherent self or presence is only remedied by the later Adorno through the publication of treatises which aim to redirect agency lost through the dialectic process by a rekindling of other dimension(s) of philosophical thought. Hence the term *Negative Dialectics*. By considering such a reversal of philosophical properties, we can begin a new type of dialogue which seeks to draw a continuation in the whole of Adorno's critical thought, rather than allow one to buy into the historic narrativity of non-cooperative ideals. Such spirit is alive in 'new jazz' musicians' such as Charles Gayle, who by performing chaos bring about alliances, coalitions, and allegiances on the contemporary music scene.

VI. Conclusion: Early Twenty-First Century Dialectics

Any successful effort at radical reconstruction initially involves the process of creative destruction. As post-Adornoian scholars Baudrillard and Zizek have remarked in the opening years of the twenty-first century, this can entail demolishing massive buildings, only so they can be rebuilt with more precision and confidence⁶⁰. In this particular treatise, Adorno's thoughts on jazz were initially ravaged *via* intense scholarly assault. The tendency for one to indulge themselves in 'bullying' or 'breaking down' Adorno the musicologist (something that has been done time after time, starting with the student produced pamphlet distributed throughout the campus of the University of Frankfurt in 1969 which read "Adorno as a institution is dead"⁶¹) is ever so tempting for the critical scholar. However, this treatise's aim was to rebuild after the initial attack and create something productive, or in other words to re-appropriate the Adornoian thesis on popular music during an era which is characterized by constant flux. New interpretations on scholars who may not have certain "now-ness" show in fact that these scholars scrutinized are actually institutions and establishments themselves and need not succumb to or founder from a narrow time horizon.⁶² At some point in time, however, the modern and post-modern approaches to new music will have to be reconciled. Jazz is essentially the first music of popular culture, and since the two approaches on music have different

⁶⁰ Baudrillard, Jean: *The Spirit of Terrorism* and, Zizek, Slavoj *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*. (New York: Verso, 2002.)

⁶¹ Martin Jay (1996) and Max Paddison (1998)

⁶² This may prove that timeless critical theory and the trendy art world are worlds apart at ground level, even though critical theorist's aesthetics have led in the past to applied art movements.

theories on the purpose of popular culture at the social level, the analysis of 'new jazz' is an appropriate starting point.

It is almost undisputed that Adorno holds the position of the twentieth century's foremost philosopher of music; undoubtedly he was one of the most prolific. Of his entire body of literature, which was written on two different continents prior to the National Socialist threat through Cold War global anxiety, about half of his manuscripts dealt with music on some level. Twenty-First century cultural critics have much to learn from Adorno's *oeuvre*, considering that the German was so successful in navigating cooperative and non-cooperative factions of sociological, philosophical, and musical thought with such finesse. The syntheses arrived at by Theodor Adorno are representative of a scholar who is mindful of the critical tradition of path-dependent coalescence while not blind to humanistic principles of isolated singularities.

One question twenty-first scholars should ask of Adorno's body of literary work is if critical theories of society should really be carried over to *praxis*. The inconsistencies of Adorno on such an issue should raise major problems for scholars of interpretive sociologies and philosophies. For instance, in the Preface to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, we need to ask ourselves if it was Adorno who was the dominate actor in writing that critical theory should carry to social action. The historical work of Martin Jay (which carries the blessing of first generation Frankfurt School scholars), on the other hand, points to the idea that Marcuse won the tile of king of 'The New Left' in America because he was the individual who advocated societal and cultural action to follow and complement the rise of critical social thinking. Would these Frankfurt School scholars have interpreted the horrific events of September 11th, 2001 as the symbolic death of

global capitalism? Or would Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse have seen such tragedy as the birth of a new round of cultural and ideological negotiations which sometime in the new century will reach cooperative multilateralism rather than *aporia*?

It is my belief that we will see the births of many new regimes throughout the century, all of which will have the properties of dialectical synthesis built into their groundwork. The real legacy of Adorno and the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory therefore rest upon the fact that they carried on the dialectical tradition (which has origins in Greek antiquity through the multiple directions propagated by nineteenth century Hegelianism) during an ‘age of extremes’⁶³. We therefore can view Adorno and the Institute of Social Research as traditionalists and gatekeepers of the Western Intellectual Tradition rather than philosophical revolutionaries. The artistic movement of ‘new jazz’ can be viewed under similar circumstances, for after all there are deep roots attached to our society’s cultural, aesthetic, and ideological practices. The birth of a new artistic thought, after all, is generative output from the substantive entity known as mind.

⁶³ Hobsbawm, *ibid*

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Appendices

Appendix A: Jazz at the End of the Twentieth Century

At the end of the twentieth century, jazz found itself divided amongst traditionalists and avant-gardists. Adorno constantly preached about the importance of generating new music in his body of literature, while publishing on the difficulty of analyzing the new music⁶⁴. A product of European avant-garde culture, Adorno ultimately found jazz as an inappropriate platform for creating new sounds. Even the ‘new jazz’ analyzed in the treatise, which has its foundational core in Continental aesthetic theory, was eschewed by the German musicologist as it developed during the last ten years of his life (1959-1969).

The continuing influence of the ‘new jazz’ composer Sun Ra, as indicated by Francis Davis in *Bebop and Nothingness* (1996), brought a new dimension to the avant-garde jazz circles thriving in the urban centers on the East Coast through the year 2000. Sun Ra was a musician who had previously formed an Orchestra in which to spread his ‘new jazz’ message. The Orchestra became a common platform for presenting musical statements throughout the traditionalist/avant-gardist divide in jazz. The ‘Big-Band’ theme which Adorno scrutinized in “On Jazz” (1936) was alive again. During this end of the century re-birth, however, the bandleaders chose to call their musical outfits orchestras (not ‘Big-Bands’). For the avant-garde players, this was a take on Sun Ra, while the traditionalists sought to renew faith in Duke Ellington. Either way, the genealogical precursor to the American jazz orchestra was the European symphonic tradition. In the 1930’s, Adorno saw the ancestral link of Duke Ellington’s Orchestra (the traditionalists) to European musical classicism and romanticism to be weak and

⁶⁴ See “On the Problem of Music Analysis” (2002, pgs. 162-178).

inappropriate. During the 1940's, with the publication of such texts as *Philosophy of New Music* (1949), the musicologist preferred chamber and small ensembles as the appropriate setting for the production of new musical sounds (the avant-gardists). One can conclude that Adorno would be negative-minded about the context of which both sides of the traditionalist/avant-gardist divide in jazz were presenting musical sounds from at the end of the twentieth century.

About the Author

Dustin Garlitz holds a B.A. in Liberal Arts from New School University in New York City. While a resident of Manhattan, Garlitz studied extensively with avant-garde jazz tenor saxophonists David S. Ware and Charles Gayle. Garlitz also performed with Cecil Taylor and William Hooker. Additionally, Garlitz was an active promoter of new jazz music, organizing workshops and performances for innovators William Parker and Matthew Shipp. During the last year of his college education, Garlitz traveled abroad to study at Cambridge University, where his curiosity in all things intellectual was sparked. Since his return from the U.K., Garlitz has primarily been concerned with fusing his encyclopedic knowledge of jazz with his newly formed intellectual attraction toward philosophy. It is for the very reason that Adorno attempted to bridge the gap between music and philosophy that Garlitz has chosen to become a scholar of this respected German intellectual figure.