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## 7

## Adorno and the Subversive Potential of Popular Music

Hans-Herbert Kögler

In what follows I am going to enter into a theoretical dialogue with Adorno's reflections on the state of music in society. Adorno's theory of the cognitive functions of music, including popular and classical forms, provides an ideal context within which to advance my claims. This is so since for Adorno, the effect that music has on the mind of its listeners is central. By reconstructing how standardized musical products are utilized in a capitalist economy to produce conformist subjects, and by contrasting this popular mode of music (which includes much of so-called classical music) with new experimental modes such as found in Schoenberg, Adorno opens up a productive horizon for music analysis. The essential focus here is the formation of the *subject's critical cognitive capacities*, which for Adorno are undermined and eliminated by popular music, while they are required and fostered by advanced forms of composition.

More importantly than the thesis itself, however, is the posing of certain issues: What modes of musical production and reception are likely to sustain and support critical subjectivities, and which are prone to under-

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mine and destroy reflexive and open-minded thinking? Moreover, what are the social and cultural background conditions that contribute to the contexts of musical production and reception necessary for a critical subjectivity, and what are the relationships that pertain between the general social contexts and the relevant artistic and musical contexts in particular? Finally, which genres or cultural types of music, if such relationships exist, are functional in producing particular types of musical listening, and in which way are those related to particular types of cultural agency and modes of subjective existence?

The task today is to save Adorno's complex theoretical project from against the master himself, as Adorno's highly pessimistic and ultimately self-defeating assessment of the current state of music's critical function undercuts its true potential. By thinking with Adorno against Adorno, the challenge is to regain a less defeatist, more open-ended stance toward music's current cognitive potential. For Adorno, subjects 'who long ceased to be such' face a music industry's quasi-totalitarian power of standardized products and practices, whose helpless victims they as masses have become. Yet the very features of the musical medium in popular culture, I shall try to show, can be understood to not just undermine, but rather to productively build up critical and reflexive subjectivities. Indeed, I am aiming to show that certain features of popular music entail the potential for a subversive experience vis-à-vis socially established modes of power and oppression. Instead of assuming that the recipients are required to already possess the capabilities for experiencing aesthetically autonomous music, I suggest that we reconceptualize music itself as a mode of aesthetic agency that enables agents to acquire some state of autonomous or at least transgressive existence. The core idea of my project is to treat music, if you wish, as a kind of surrogate medium of socialization that creates for its recipients the conditions which enable them to distance themselves from acquired modes of socialization and power. I argue that music per se allows for a situated transgression, since music as such entails a subversive potential. Even if, as Adorno suggests, the subjects do not bring to the aesthetic encounter an already established super-ego, and thus lack the features of strong and self-determined subjects, the reception of the medium of music, rather than sucking weak egos into its doomed domain of endless fun, can itself

offer a mediating structure that sets agents on a power-transcending and critically transformative path.<sup>1</sup>

If this claim can be substantiated, our understanding of the critical function of music in society would shift from the way Adorno sees it. We would come to see a new potential of music for critical agency. To make good on this claim, I will begin by addressing the frame that Adorno opened up for a critical theory of music, to then focus on a hermeneutic-pragmatic account of music as aesthetic agency, followed by a reconstruction of the uniquely transgressive potentials that my new account of musical experience entails. The new account is partially motivated by the impasse created by Adorno's own philosophy of music, which consists in the (ultimately self-defeating) requirement of advanced cognitive skills to understand autonomous music, while precisely such skills are seen as being made impossible for subjects defined by a totally administered society. Adorno leaves us with a subversive mode of musical listening hardly anyone is still capable of. If we, however, go back to the analysis of the musical medium in order to reconstruct its full aesthetic potential, a whole new range of modes of subjective self-constitutions become visible. My ultimate aim in the following reflections is to show how a hermeneutic-pragmatic theory of music can help construct a critical theory of contemporary culture which can locate the resources for critical reflexivity and resistance in the experiential contexts of popular culture, instead of restricting these to the privileged spheres of a chosen few. If music's social function can be understood to consist in an *aesthetic synthesis* that provides an important mediation for socially situated agents, the experience of music can make possible a *critical self-identity* capable of exercising the values of transgression, open-mindedness, and self-reflexivity.

<sup>1</sup>The wider backdrop of this analysis consists in the overcoming of a Freudian-based conception of autonomous agency, in which autonomy is defined by the restrictive self-control of an internalized super-ego. Instead, sources of autonomous and transgressive agency can be seen as potentials in symbolically mediated social practices as such. For a meta-critique of critical theory inspired by cultural studies, see my "A Critical Hermeneutics of Agency: Cultural Studies as Critical Social Theory", in Babette Babich (ed.), *Hermeneutic Philosophies of Social Science* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 63–88; and my co-edited book *Enigma Agency. Reflexivität, Macht, Widerstand*, Bielefeld: transcript 2019.

## The Erasure of Subjectivity: Music and Autonomy After Adorno

According to Adorno, the capitalistic logic of product exchange has become ubiquitous in contemporary society. Social relations are almost fully determined by an economic attitude that measures everything in terms of its possible profit.<sup>2</sup> Yet while the logic of capitalism often shows itself on the surface of things, as when the success of new movies is entirely accounted for the millions of dollars they earn, its general effect on society is generally more mediated. Instrumental or functionalist reason does not, so to speak, cut through directly into all spheres of social and cultural life, but first and foremost shapes the subjects that exist under its conditions. The instrumentally based formation of 'subjectivities'—if we can still call them that, Adorno may add—produces types of agents that conform, in their overall personality as well as in their cognitive and emotional interests, to the existing structure of social relations. In an almost Foucauldian perspective regarding agency-molding, subjects are seen as the product of social formations that are capitalistically determined.

Yet even if we thus conceive of the overall social logic as one defined by a capitalistic economy, which discloses everything in terms of its possible utilization in light of increased benefits and profits, we still need to distinguish from this the social space or location within which the formation of subjectivities takes place.<sup>3</sup> The advantage of putting it this way is that I can thus prepare to both save Adorno's positive contribution and similarly develop my critical challenge. Adorno's emphasis on the effect of capitalistic modes on contemporary life and culture, including the construction of subjectivity-types, is very important in this regard. Yet by defining the social space of subjectivity-formation in a *Freudian manner*, in which the construction of self is seen primarily as a family-based affair enabling the development of a strong self, Adorno closes off the full potential opened up by such an analytic frame. According to the official version of his theory, Adorno holds that capitalistic modes of production have weakened,

<sup>2</sup>Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup>Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

or even entirely undermined, the traditional family roles occupied by a strong father and a loving mother. The weakening of these roles results in the loss of their developmental function, thus undercutting the social-psychological grounds for developing a strong ego.<sup>4</sup> This has dramatic consequences, since the respective role-distribution of father and mother is in this account a *sine qua non* for the development of a reflexive and autonomous self. The strong role model exemplified by the father ensures the internalization of an authority-level that is necessary to dominate one's desires. At the same time, a loving and caring mother mediates this suppression of emotional attitudes and enables the development of an emotionally rich, empathetic and affectively mature individual. Since these external sources of self-development are necessary conditions for developing a strong and independent self, their destruction must necessarily lead to the impossibility of autonomous agency. And indeed, Adorno and Horkheimer assume that the socializing function of the family with regard to the development of a self-controlled and emotionally developed self has been undermined by capitalist society.<sup>5</sup>

Since the self is now seen as lacking an internally defined authority, culture itself takes up the role of creating the available pool of subjective dispositions and potentials. The extent to which cultural products and practices can be determined as influencing and shaping self-identity can in turn be presented as evidence for the lack of internalized and internally directed self-control.<sup>6</sup> This means, however, that a more complex relationship between culture and self emerges as well. To be sure, subjects are now seen as largely defenseless when it comes to their encounter with mass culture. But mass culture now assumes the status of a socializing force that as it were creates the subjects whose egos seem to be fully dominated by the logic of commodity exchange. Thus, while *on the family level* the lack of adequate role models leads to a failure in the process of internalizing a strong ego with a self-directed control structure, *on the level of mass cul-*

<sup>4</sup>While the full extent to which this thesis is taken to account for the lack of resistance is not always clear, the assumption of 'the weak ego' is certainly central for Adorno's cultural criticism. What is significant for our approach is that the family is turned into the one essential institution for constructing subjectivities, an assumption that I can dispense with in the suggested approach.

<sup>5</sup>See Horkheimer and Adorno (2002).

<sup>6</sup>Theodor W. Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered", in Adorno 1991.

ture the results are specifically shaped types of subjectivity which are the ontologically positive outcome of these cultural practices. However, this new value of culture production can now become, I claim, a source for a reevaluation of Adorno's overly pessimistic stance with regard to popular culture. In order to do so, we have to more closely focus on how the cultural medium of popular music shapes the aesthetic experience of its recipients. Here, Adorno's critique of certain 'listening types' proves highly instructive as a first step.

Adorno introduces a kind of social phenomenology of *listening types* which indicates how agents have become *subject to* capitalism in the formation of their aesthetic capabilities.<sup>7</sup> In this context, he identifies the *emotional listener* for whom the encounter with music serves as a 'safe haven of irrationality.' Music here has a compensating function, albeit of course a futile one, to make up for emotional experiences that real life, from which there is no escape, is lacking. Equally, there is the nostalgic form of the *resentment listener* whose aesthetic attitudes express the longing for a lost world, for a whole that has inevitably passed. With regard to both attitudes, Adorno challenges certain assumptions of the received philosophy of music, since the type of the emotional listener seems to have been a model for influential approaches in the classical aesthetics and its theory of music.<sup>8</sup> Naturally, the discussion of the resentment attitude involves a critique of all nostalgic forms of art and music, as when music is conceived in terms of the total artwork, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (as in Wagner). In order to rebuild or even replace a mode of totality that has been lost in contemporary social life on account of an aesthetic experience amounts to be either totalitarian or bound to become kitsch. In the first place, it would force the self to subject itself to a fully determined unity which is so overwhelming that the subject's reflexive capacities are under-

mined; in the second place, it would create an false and illusionary sense of wholeness which establishes the unity only in the fictional medium of an aesthetic shining, and importantly without any acknowledgement of its lack in current social conditions. For Adorno, the absence of reconciliation in contemporary society—which he claims to be "das total Falsche" (the total untruth)—forces art and music into the inescapable position of radical opposition. Its essential role is being contrary to what exists, thus to avoid affirmation and any false sense of reconciliation at any cost.<sup>9</sup>

In the analysis of *listening types*, the relation of the subject vis-à-vis aesthetic coherence and unity is crucial. This can be demonstrated by turning to the two most important listening attitudes discussed by Adorno, *structural listening*, which stands for the normative ideal of the aesthetic experience of music, and *regressive listening*, which is the most prevalent pop-cultural mode of musical experience. Adorno's aesthetic theory of music coalesces in their opposition like in a burning glass. Being capable of structural listening of music exemplifies the highest mode of aesthetic musical competence. Here, the listener is capable of following the underlying unity of the artwork in fullest attentiveness toward the composition without merely focusing on repeated refrains, catchy melodies, or the rhythmic feel of a piece. Instead, one follows, totally lost to the work itself and yet highly alert with regard to all its internal moves, its *inner logic*. Respect for the inner organization of the artwork, its irreplaceable aesthetic synthesis, and the capacity to see unity in difference, to tie together multivarious lines of the development of a theme, to ascertain the polyphonic layers of melodic and harmonic treatment of themes, are crucial. Adorno explains this attitude most fully with regard to Schoenberg, as here all musical moments become melodies, nothing is repeated, the unity is fully developed by each element which acquires absolute significance through its contribution to the ever-unfolding, fully composed whole.<sup>10</sup> The structural listener thus regains her identity by losing herself, by handing herself over to the aesthetic coherence of the composed work through which she

<sup>7</sup>Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening", in Adorno 1991.

<sup>8</sup>To be sure, in Schopenhauer and Suzanne Langer, the idea is not that emotions are experienced that real life has ceased to provide; rather, music is seen as making possible the reflexive, metaphysical encounter of emotional states that provide an intuitive insight into the order of things, mental or metaphysical. Nonetheless, it remains true that such a detached, pure emotional listening might itself attempt to replace really experienced emotional life, if the reconnection to actual life contexts is not thematized. For a comprehensive discussion, see Wayne Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives on Music* (Oxford University Press, 1998), chapters 3–5.

<sup>9</sup>Since Adorno sees contemporary social life as totally controlled and administered, art's only refuge to truth can be a quasi-utopian one, without any trace of reconciliation. Art needs to invoke the possible state of a reconciled society without providing, through its own medium, relief and escape, since this would functionally support the status quo.

<sup>10</sup>Adorno, "Arnold Schoenberg, 1874–1951", in Theodor W. Adorno (ed.), *Prisms*, 1981.

is enabled to return to herself through a reflexive process. This alertness creates a reflexivity that establishes its own self-identity only in the process, not by keeping a distance to the piece as it is heard, but also not, of course, by losing oneself into emotional or nostalgic mental states. Emotional or nostalgic listening, untrue as they are in a totally administered world within which it can only function as aesthetic escapism, are prevented by compositional techniques that make aesthetic assimilation impossible. Disharmony, abrupt rhythmic changes, and atonality ensure that the subject does not 'feel good,' that music will not be fun. What is achieved by structural listening, instead, is a cognitive disposition of highest reflexive alertness, the only cognitive posture adequate to our contemporary broken existence. For Adorno, only thus can the promise of art—that the good life is possible despite its impossibility in current society—be saved today.<sup>11</sup>

In modern experimental music, which best corresponds to structural listening, harmony and reconciliation are dialectically negated, and yet aesthetic coherence is invoked by locating disharmony and atonality within the bounds of a unified artwork. The coherent musical composition is maintained as object and goal, as much as it is also dialectically negated through an internal organization that does not resolve the inherent tension and conflict by means of a higher reconciled harmony. It is not the least *this* tension that requires the highest cognitive attention by listeners, as the usual guidelines for unity and harmonic structure are absent in Schoenberg and his successors.

Regressive listening is radically opposed to this, as here the current social impossibility of unity and reconciliation is not taken up as an intra-aesthetic problem, but simply ignored and 'aesthetically transcended.' According to Adorno, popular culture and the establishment of its regressive listening type entirely dispense with the requirement of aesthetic synthesis. The work's inner coherence, that is, the aesthetic logic of the internally constructed and composed artwork, is given up in favor of the sensuous-experiential effects that music can provide to its listeners. The 'artwork' is now directly reconnected to its possible sensuous-psychological

function—in other words, it has fully become a consumer good. This type of listening conforms to the incapacity (and unwillingness) of the consumer to follow complicated, difficult, or 'non-intuitive' performances and compositions, as the focus now is on direct pleasure, on the liking of the musical product, on 'satisfaction guaranteed.' It is defined by the listener's occupation with his or her immediate need for gratification and direct sensuous fulfillment, which is accomplished by simple repetitive patterns that are easily recognizable and do not require any consciously directed effort.<sup>12</sup>

In order to define this pop-cultural mode of musical reception, Adorno enlists the concept of *aesthetic unity* as a critical foil:

The delight for the moment and the gay façade become an excuse for absolving the listener from *the thought of the whole, whose claim is compromised in proper listening*. The listener is converted, along his line of least resistance, into the acquiescent purchaser. No longer do the partial moments serve as a critique of that whole; instead, they suspend the critique which the successful aesthetic totality exerts against the flawed one of society. The *unitary synthesis* is sacrificed to them... The isolated moments of enjoyment prove incompatible with the immanent constitution of the work of art, and whatever in the work goes beyond them into an essential perception is sacrificed to them. They are not bad in themselves but in their diversionary function.<sup>13</sup>

It is important to note that Adorno does not defend the artwork's unity on the grounds of an idealistic aesthetics, since here the aesthetic illusion of unity leads to the postulate of a higher truth that falsely transcends social life. Rather, the *dialectical preservation of the artwork's unity* (for instance in Schoenberg) is conceived as a kind of reflexive shield, as a symbolic placeholder for a social reconciliation that does not exist, yet that is somehow, by the fore-shining of an internally composed whole, still kept alive as a value. In contrast, art that dissolves its difference to society and positions itself in the 'here and now' of its social use must

<sup>11</sup>See also Raymond Geuss, "Adorno and Berg", in *Morality, Culture, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 116–139.

<sup>12</sup>Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music* (Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>13</sup>Theodor W. Adorno, "Fetish Character of Music", 1991, pp. 32, 33 (emphasis added).



become a mere functional commodity. Adorno sees the widespread capitalistically controlled production of popular music (and art in general) as evidence for his claim. He conjures that the type of regressive listening serves as the adequate and required mode of reception for this new mode of cultural production. Similarly, the continuation of a classical production of intra-aesthetic harmony and unity (as in Wagner or Stravinsky) under conditions of late capitalism must produce either totalitarian music or nostalgic kitsch, since the social conditions for their realization are missing and their aesthetic shining becomes thereby mere ideological appearance.

Popular music and regressive listening thus form a kind of cultural syndrome, of which Adorno paints a gloomy picture indeed.<sup>14</sup> Most important is the *simplification of musical patterns*, which has the multiple function and effect of making the effortless *habitual reception of music* possible. The structuring of all musical experience according to standardized codes produces a *schematizing experience for all agents alike*. Instead of producing unique and challenging *works*, the musical products, produced for a mass market, are created to please. This requires easily recognizable structures that do not demand any effort towards aesthetic discernment and ensure a mode of identification. The same 4/4 beat dominates through all the songs, the same harmonic progressions are used again and again, and the organization of the 16 and 32 bars are endlessly repeated to pre-structure the musical experience. What is indeed accomplished by the structure of popular music, continued in many contemporary forms of its expression, is a pervasive *aesthetico-psychological scheme*. In the spirit of Adorno, we can see that the unity of the artwork is indeed obsolete, since the different segments of the musical work—rhythm, harmony, and melody—appear less unified in the particular work and more unified across the genre within which each unit exists. The rhythm section could be replaced in most songs by any other one. The harmonic progressions are so generic that on its basis alone, the identification of a singular piece seems to be impossible. And

<sup>14</sup>Adorno targets 'Jazz' as its major representative, but was eager to quickly add that much so-called classical music (a barbaric notion in itself) squarely falls under this label. Adorno means by Jazz the 30's and 40's Big-Band type of dance hall music in the US. The label distracts from an otherwise insightful, even if ultimately limited conceptualization of popular music. The structure of this music itself reflects, as in an ideal equilibrium, the features of regressive listening that both contribute to its pervasive success and define its normative-aesthetic doom.

the melodic lines are often reduced to the repetitive return of the refrain, which inscribes itself into the minds of the listeners as the quasi-trademark of each song. In all this, as Adorno observes, the structural similarity of all songs must equally be covered up by surface-difference: each song, to be marketable, must also appear to be a unique 'hit'; each singer and star must be 'one of a kind.' What we are thus faced with is an endless spiraling of pre-schematized pseudo-individualities, in which surface effects take the place of real individual uniqueness, and the self's social identity, far from being grounded in a shared community of different subjects in a common world, is rather the token-similarity of products wrought from the same mold.

We can thus detect a certain *fetish-character of music* both with regard to the aesthetic experience and with regard to the social attitudes toward popular music.<sup>15</sup> On the experiential level, the *possessive reception* of the musical piece as an object—as fetish—is made most easy. Each new song is produced so as to match the other successful ones, with a little bit of difference, but not so much as to affect a real *listening challenge*. The background rhythm-section carries the distracted listener so that he or she can focus on the special effects, the good lines, the great guitar soli, the unique voice, or the anticipated and much-liked refrain. As for the general social attitude toward such music, the focus is almost never on the musical structure or accomplishment, but rather driven by a star and personality cult, which carries over to the cult of the great works, the great voices, the master violins, the great orchestra. The music itself is marketed like a life-style package; it is constructed around the great personalities, the great bands, and the great orchestras. The fetishization of popular music as identifiable and identifying products thus exemplifies a cultural practice that is based on the repetition of the same, as it transforms art into a commodity used to please and to enjoy. Music has become entertainment.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup>See Adorno, "Fetish Character of Music", 1991.

<sup>16</sup>What is wrong with this attitude of relating the musical work to the composer or performer is not, to be sure, to situate musical production and reception within social or authorial contexts and relations as such. What is rather problematic is that this done in a superficial manner by not reconnecting those contexts with the internal musical and experiential structure, but rather as a marketing tool to reproduce the ever-same sounds, programs, and concert arrangements. It is here more than anywhere else where the line between popular and classical music ceased to exist, as the structure of the recognition of the familiar—that we like because it is familiar, has replaced real

## Adorno's Dilemma and Beyond

I follow Adorno so closely in his assessment of the structure of popular music not because I endorse his overall interpretation of its role and function in society. It is rather because Adorno's clear-headed focus on the schematizing function and effect of modern mass music can help us to pinpoint how a critical theory of *music as a cultural practice* can address the full range of the subversive capacities of music in the first place. Adorno's perspective ties together (1) reception attitudes, (2) musical structure, and (3) the social function that music fulfills. For Adorno, the cultural syndrome of regressive listening (as in 1) and standardized music (as in 2) is fully understood only if seen in the context of the social totality within which it fulfills the function of adjustment and habitualization of situated subjects (as in 3). Subjects are aesthetically made to conform, they are ritualistically induced into a life of the ever-same, into a commodity culture in which the acquirement of the *same schemes of experience* are essential for social survival and acceptance. The destruction of real aesthetic value that we witness in the move *from structural to regressive listening*, and that is substantiated by the object-analysis of popular music as a *standardized cultural product*, is explained by the *social function of adjustment* that pervades all walks of cultural life. The aesthetic medium, which as such provides a potential distancing to the completely controlled society, has been redefined on merely utilitarian grounds as entertainment within the status quo.

Yet if the use, or rather abuse, of music has thus become an issue related to the question of power insofar as the individual fits into existing social contexts, we have to ask whether contemporary modes of musical reception and production do necessarily have the function that Adorno attributes to them. Even if we assume that the previous analysis of the aesthetic structure of popular music does capture some of its essential aspects, does this mean that its 'consumers' are necessarily doomed to a life beyond aesthetic synthesis, to a life without reflexive subjectivity? Are

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aesthetic experience. Andre Rieux is the extreme that exemplifies the tendency. In classical music, the cult of the maestro, the 'greatest hits of Mozart or Beethoven,' and the usual 'master series' by every somewhat respectable symphony orchestra have exactly the same effect and function as the star cult in so-called pop music.

consumers, or generally selves, in contemporary society necessarily by and large incapable of accessing the critical-subversive potentials of musical experience due to their lack of the socio-cognitive capacities of 'structural listening'? Ultimately, are the aesthetic, social, and normative features of Adorno's account of structural listening *necessary preconditions* for a critical reflexivity that is capable of distancing agents from their submission under capitalistic modes of existence?

Adorno's philosophy of modern music, nicely articulated by Wayne Bowman, faces the dilemma that, on the one hand, a cognitively valuable music must radically break with today's reception habits, which, on the other hand, puts it in a position outside of acceptable musical listening, and thereby reduces its social significance. If, however, music would make concessions to the existing aesthetic habits, it would become understandable, but according to Adorno lose its cognitive value. The issue hinges on the autonomy of music: music needs to be radically separated from existing society, needs to enable a radical distancing from existing modes of reception, and yet, in order to reach the subjects whose autonomy music is supposed to raise, it similarly needs to be accessible to them. It requires these subjects to be capable of receiving the message, which seems to be precluded by their ingrained habits of regressive and other cognitively deficient modes of listening:

To exercise its emancipatory potential it (music) must be autonomous. But autonomy leads to isolation and ultimately the inability to reach the very people it must in order to realize its potential. The result is a rupture of the relationship between musical structure and meaning.... The cost of the self-evident structure (autonomous individual integrity) is meaninglessness (absence of social validation). The cost of meaning, on the other hand, would be submission to the very forces modern music exists to subvert... There is no place for modern music to go, no way out.<sup>17</sup>

Note that for Adorno, the contemporary listening habits are *not* merely a contingent choice of ill-advised individuals, but are rather symptomatic for the social pathologies that bewitch our society. Because Adorno believes that the potential for critical reflexivity and autonomous self-

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<sup>17</sup>Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives on Music*, p. 333.

understanding have continuously been diminished, people are now longing for these simplistic modes of musical reception. Normalized selves listen to normalized music, both are two sides of the same equation. Accordingly, it is not just that the individuals 'don't like' to listen to such complicated and non-beautiful music as Schoenberg. Rather, contemporary selves now lack the cognitive capacities to do engage in structural listening, since they generally lack the socio-psychological disposition to control their drives. As we have seen, Adorno believes that contemporary societies produce subjects that are themselves non-autonomous, that are dominated either by consumer society and its habits, or else long for dictatorial forms of government to absolve their own weak selves by projecting their identities into a fascist or totalitarian leader (Führer).<sup>18</sup>

Adorno's dilemma forces us to reconceptualize how we see the relation between music and identity. Clearly the complex threefold conception tying together reception, production, and social function is fruitful, as is the critical orientation that assigns music (and art in general) a dialectical truth-function vis-à-vis the existing status quo. However, what Adorno seems to miss is the possibility that subjects do not require to already be autonomous in his precise understanding when they encounter the musical works. Is it not possible to conceive that the musical medium itself takes on a socializing function such that the aesthetic experience as such produces transgressive, expanding, and reflexive experiences that also affect the involved selves? Is it not possible that even 'weak egos,' those without an internalized authoritarian level of self-control, are transformed and shaped by musical encounters such that a critical space between them and controlling disciplines in society are opened up? Finally, may we not risk to reconceive music as a medium in which agents acquire certain resources that enable them to redefine their own identities and transcend the status quo that has been implanted into their hitherto conforming selves?

I suggest that a new approach vis-à-vis the aesthetic resources of the medium of music would move us in the right direction. In order to develop such an approach to music, we have to revisit the relation between self,

<sup>18</sup>Adorno famously claimed that the rallies of the Nazis, in which the total masses stretch out their hands and unison support the 'charismatic' leader, are similar in structure to the modern Rock concert where an anonymous mass follows the leads of the subject on stage.

society, and music.<sup>19</sup> The task is to safeguard Adorno's complex approach together with its critical intent, without, however, dislodging the potential for subversive agency by means of a dystopia of a 'totally administered society.' An interesting question in this regard is the extent to which music itself, as an aesthetic mode of experience, can contribute towards the development and articulation of cognitive abilities.<sup>20</sup> In what follows I will sketch the outline of a hermeneutic-pragmatic phenomenology of musical experience, with the aim to articulate more comprehensively the experiential dimensions that play into musical reception. The unfolding of these dimensions will allow us to reconstruct music as possessing certain aesthetic features of agency and thus to be capable to serve a mediating function for socially situated selves.<sup>21</sup> The projected approach rejects the illusion of the pure work, just as Adorno does, and conceives the completion of the work in terms of its reception, the listener.<sup>22</sup> The human agent—who as a recipient may 'benefit' from the music in order to unleash her cognitive potential—is a subject defined by his or her cultural and social contexts. This means, in turn, that the concept of autonomy we can rely on—and that also Adorno or anyone else could possibly make this a focal point of analysis—has itself to be one that is reconstructed as being enabled by social conditions. What is needed is a concept of *reflexive agency* that develops the *cultural possibility of the cognitive value of music*

<sup>19</sup>The cultural approach to music poses the question how music relates to the cognitive capabilities of the self. This picks up the very long question about how music educates the self. But our focus is now specifically how music may enhance or undermine the autonomy of culturally situated selves. We have seen this issue at the center of Theodore W. Adorno's work, as he criticizes much of contemporary popular music as undermining advanced cognitive abilities, while designating advanced modern music as enhancing and respecting them.

<sup>20</sup>Similarly, this raises the question about the social conditions which may prepare subjects in such a way that it makes it either possible or rather impossible for them to open themselves to radically advanced musical experiences. Here I focus on capacities of the aesthetic medium as such to unleash such potentials.

<sup>21</sup>Traditional aesthetics conceived of the experience of art in a much too cognitivist and objectivistic fashion. It is not possible to draw on idealistic conceptions of pure musical value in order to safeguard the normative and critical function of music. Instead, a hermeneutic pragmatism reconstructs basic features of the lifeworld and shows how aesthetic features of music 'respond' or 'resonate' with them such that their experience allows for a reflexive sense of heightened self-awareness.

<sup>22</sup>See Hauke Brunkhorst, "Provozierte Kontingenz: Wahrheit, Rezeptionsästhetik, und Gesellschaftskritik in Anschluß an Adornos Theorie der Moderne", unpublished manuscript.



from the bottom up, so to speak, that begins with a *radically situated and practically defined agent*.<sup>23</sup>

Such a conception of situated agency, I now submit, involves three layers of an 'immediate' or intuitive self-understanding in the world, and these layers co-constitute meaning as we naively and intuitively experience it in our everyday existence. To begin with, we are immersed in *social practices*, i.e. we always cope practically with objects and phenomena in our environment. This practical engagement is prior to the cerebral cognitive sense of objects and ourselves. This hermeneutic insight goes back to Aristotle's sense of ethics and politics, but it is also prominently featured in American pragmatism, esp. in John Dewey and George Herbert Mead. Second, we are always in a certain pre-cognitive emotional state, but as a state in which we may not be focused on or consciously aware of an emotion, but rather as a background, as a feeling-state that accompanies what we are focused on as the content or object of our experience. Call this the *Moodedness of our experience*, of being always in some sense 'attuned' to what is going on, of being 'in a certain mood.' Finally, we are always seeing the world in terms of some *interpretive scheme*, which is a linguistically defined worldview entailing basic assumptions about external reality, God, the reality of ourselves, etc. Those schemes, just as the social practices and our mood, are usually in the Background. The Background is a holistic nexus of practices, moods, and schemes.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup>The following hermeneutic reconstruction of situated agency does not already assume a totally administered, totally controlled and dispossessed world, in which the agent is nothing but the functional mirror-image of disciplines, systems, or structures. Rather, the formal reconstruction lays bare certain basic features of worldly existence that are in place no matter what—that can be dramatically transformed by functional and systemic structures—but that nevertheless have to exist to enable functional imperatives of, say, a capitalistic economy, to gain dominance and to sustain themselves.

<sup>24</sup>As Merleau-Ponty understood, the body is a lived body, not the object body of Descartes (where I see my own body as I see an external object, as if it was just another external object). My embodied existence enables me to have experiences, my own lived experience is both embodied and symbolically mediated, it is both situated and yet capable of transcending its place towards a new experience that will create an ecstatic point of view, will allow it to immerse itself into some new whole—as in music experience.

## Towards a Hermeneutic Pragmatism of Music as Aesthetic Agency

Having thus briefly sketched several features of situated agency, we are now in a position to advance our approach towards an account of musical experience. We do so, obviously, against the backdrop of aiming to reconstruct how musical experiences are able to create a critical distance and subversive experience of agents vis-à-vis their own social and cultural situation. I suggest that we introduce the principle of *aesthetic-structural similarity between agency and music*. The core idea is that structural similarities between agency and music allow for an aesthetic experience that enables the situated agent to reflexively engage certain structures and assumptions of his or her own being. The idea of such a similarity has been introduced with regard to emotional states as expressible by music (Peter Kivy), or as a more general analogy vis-à-vis intentional structures of a musical subject (Jerrold Levinson).<sup>25</sup> My suggestion aims to build on the a hermeneutic-phenomenological analysis of situated agency in order to show how diverse aesthetic layers of music somewhat correspond to or exemplify expressive dimensions of agency. If this sensuous-structural similarity bears out, it could explain how music can take over a surrogate socializing function, as agents can become, through the musical medium, quasi reconstructed and re-schematized as agents. This is possible, I argue, if music as a medium entails aesthetic-sensuous forms that are structurally similar to agents, and thus allows for a reproduction of the respective layers in the agent's own aesthetic structure. The process of immersion into the musical medium would thus amount to a transformation, albeit of a temporally limited kind, into another agency-structure. Based on this, we could assume that the transformative aesthetic process can lead to a self-reflexive assessment

<sup>25</sup>See Peter Kivy, *The Corded Shell: Reflections on Musical Expression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Jerrold Levinson, "Musical Expressiveness", in *The Pleasures of Aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 90–125. Levinson states that "a passage of music P is expressive of an emotion E if and only if P, in context, is readily heard, by a listener experienced in the genre in question, as an expression of E" (ibid., p. 193). He adds to the structural similarity the need to project a persona as expressing the emotions in music. My account focuses on the similarity of different features of agency as expressible in the musical medium. For a good account of expressive approaches, see Jenefer Robinson, "Expression Theories", in Theodore Gracyk and Andrew Kania (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music* (London and New York, 2014), pp. 201–211.

by the situated subject as to what and how this experience challenged and perhaps changed its previous habitus and self-understanding.

If this thesis is to bear out, music has to be 'like agency in society and culture' in at least a sense of metaphorical exemplification.<sup>26</sup> It has to resemble features that are also essential for a social and cultural experience that recognizes itself in it. Music thus has to be reconstructed as a complex of human agency *in modus fictionalis*, and the reconstruction of this structural analogy allows for an account of the social force of its aesthetic impact.<sup>27</sup> This relation, as I will now show, is revealed in *three basic layers* that structurally correlate three basic dimension of agency to dimensions of the musical medium. Note that agency, as we have shown in the previous section, is embodied in social practices, understands itself against a background of concepts and assumptions, and articulates itself as a distinct agency vis-à-vis the world against this shared Background. To enable the structural correspondence, we now relate these levels to the musical dimensions of *rhythm, harmony, and melody*. *Rhythm is thus assigned to the bodily dimension*, which here entails that the bodily stratum of experience is, with Merleau-Ponty, not seen as a fixed, external, physical object, but as a flowing, living, animated space that can resemble practical dimensions of the human form of life. *Harmony is seen as providing the notational, symbolic, quasi-conceptual space* within which different individual agents understand one another and are moving when they aim to express themselves. *Melody becomes relatable to concrete individual utterances*, as it unfolds against the backdrop of the symbolic order and the embodied practices that constitute the shared structure of music and culture. With this move, we prepared the heuristics of an analysis of music as aesthetic agency.

<sup>26</sup>For an exemplary account of 'metaphorical exemplification,' see Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1976).

<sup>27</sup>This move provides us with an essential desideratum with regard to the cognitive potential of musical experience: *because music is similarly structured vis-à-vis situated agency, it is able to create a reflexivity with regard to our human agency*. It is able to both deepen and distance us from those embedded meanings, since they are understood as our own nature and yet experienced in an objectified and articulated form, to which the musical listening consciously attends to. Yet music is at the same time more than just an exemplification. Music itself is a cultural and social practice. It is the function of this practice to articulate those features that make it similar to situated agency so as to enhance the agent's aesthetic identity and experience.

## Rhythm as the Embodiment of Social and Cultural Life

The rhythm of a musical work is arguably the most basic, immediate, pre-conceptual level of experience one is able to have with a musical piece. In the context of reconstructing how music embodies social agency, we have to ask: How does the musical dimension of rhythm relate to social and cultural practices? The idea is that the level of embodied practices that agents are engaged in is captured and expressed by the rhythmic forms that musical works articulate. We can say that social practices themselves embody a certain rhythm. The rhythmic structure of social life is expressed in a wide range of organized sequences within which our structured life is performed. This structuration is at times an overlay and 'interpretation' of natural sequences, such as when time is organized in hours (themselves structured by minutes and seconds), by workdays and weekends, by a structuration of each workday, by an annual structure of seasons, both the natural seasons like spring, summer, etc., and the religiously or nationally defined seasons, like Christmas or celebratory days or months, marked by explicit rituals like the celebration of Christmas, Hanukkah, Ramadan, etc., or the inauguration of Presidents as markers of the periods.

The ritual is an expression of the structured nature of social life. It has its meaning and place in social life certainly due to a symbolic order (of work life, religion, national self-understanding), but it also strongly features the body as an expression and marker of the self-realization of social life. Rituals are an organized forms of social behavior, they entail a strong bodily involvement of the agent, and they realize their own reality by means of the structured social performance of its participants: the inauguration of a president *makes* the new president, and the respective subject as well as all the other agents have to follow the script correctly in order to make it so. Similarly, the participation in the communion makes you be part of the body of Christ, and this also entails a whole set of preconditions on the side of those who can perform, and those who can participate, in this act, as well as how and when and with what consequences it has to be performed. The realization of meaning with regard to social agency is thus tied to a structured or 'ritualistic' framework of practices that define and constitute bodily behavior.

The rhythm of a musical work represents a similar structure of socially organized behavior: It consists in an organized pattern of movements in time; it is based on bodily involvement. The musical work often directly 'speaks' to the listener via the bodily expression of the rhythm; before and beyond all harmonious structure the rhythm is able to address and also directly involve the body of the listener. The rhythm is like the organized background structure of social and cultural life—the ritual that entails a certain repetitive and structured, rhythmic character—and it is thus articulated and expressed as such in the feature of musical experience. A well-structured rhythm can thus ground the work, it 'carries the tune,' it creates its own foundation and reality.

### Harmony as the Shared Symbolic Background

The rhythm fulfills its basic function by being a component, a musical moment of the whole work which is disclosed by harmony. The harmony creates the equivalent to a conceptual framework that defines the notational space within which the musical work moves. It situates the work within a symbolic order. The dimension of harmony is thus similar to what we call the conceptual order, the discursive framework or paradigm within which the articulation of the particular musical composition displays itself. The harmony, just like a language and a discourse, predefines what moves are legitimate, what expression can be seen as possible and adequate, and what not.

Harmony thus has the function of symbolic world-disclosure, because it creates a shared symbolic understanding that (1) defines which notes are correct ones and which are not, (2) creates a shared space for all participants to understand (more or less explicitly) that there is a shared framework for all participants (composer, performer, listener), and (3) pre-defines the way in which the understanding of the musical work is undertaken (as when particular harmonies tend to suggest certain emotional moods.)

Harmony in music has this world-disclosing function by displaying two essential functions that are phenomenologically pertinent. First, the harmony creates a specific *mood*, thereby constitutes an emotional pre-understanding about how the tune will affect the listener. In this sense,

major and minor have been perceived to create a different 'attunement' emotionally. Second, the harmony creates a certain *familiarity*, a sense of shared pre-understanding by delineating the framework within which the work moves. This is another crucial function of world-disclosure. By setting up the 12-bar framework of the Blues, the 32-bar framework of the ballade, or the form of the sonata, etc., it creates a recognizable context for the listener that sets up the Background for an attentive listening to the particular features of the musical work.

### Melody as the Voicing of Subjective Agency

The melody builds on the context created by rhythm and harmony, which it utilizes—like the speech act as an utterance that is comprehensible against the background of conceptual assumptions and social practices—to fore-ground and profile a distinct theme.

The melody is like the presentation of the agentive voice, it stands out and articulates an expression that is often, especially when it is articulated by a lead instrument like the violin or guitar, the most similar expression to speech, the most linguistic expression of music. It is, just like speech acts are, embedded in and dependent on a shared and meaning-generating background structure, and it nevertheless stands out and articulates a sequence of interrelated signs that define a unity of their own. In a melody, the single note has meaning by its context, and each note is understood in relation to the other with which it forms a coherent sequence. The melody makes sense. It addresses you most directly as a particular subjective expression.

The melody articulates a distinct theme as the highest expression of musical subjectivity. But as a melody, it is also the expression of this form as a repeatable, identifiable form. It is both a subjective expression and yet, in its particular expression, universal, shared by all. The melody can now become, as such a universal subjectivity, the point of departure of individualized articulation, as when in classical composition the theme is further refined, or, in a much bolder and contemporary form, in Jazz improvisation the (more or less) open-ended interpretation of the performers in a representative dialogue with one another who explore and push fur-

ther the potential of the melodic-thematic form. Here, the melody itself becomes a background against which new utterances are performed, and new meaning are explored, while this process remains anchored within the rhythm/harmony context of the whole.

The melodic expression is perhaps the most explicit example of the viability of seeing the experience of music as a dialogue. The articulation of this distinct feature against a (more or less) shared background of rhythm/harmony, symbolic order and social practices, enables the sense and experience of being directly addressed. Yet as in real social and (inter-) cultural dialogue, the understanding of the voice the addresses you depends to a large extent on the understanding of the background assumptions that are presupposed by the other in conceptual orders and practical contexts.<sup>28</sup>

### Popular Music as Bodily Transgression, Cultural Transcendence, and Individualized Attentiveness

I will now try to expand the previous analysis of the aesthetic phenomenon of music to indicate three dimensions in which a reflexive transgression of social power through musical experience could be accomplished. Recall that the focus—enabled through Adorno's lens—is on the *cognitive experience* of the listening subject vis-à-vis the musical work. To inquire into the *cognitive value* of music is to ask about how the self-understanding of the subject will be affected by the musical experience. With Adorno, we assume that all music (production and reception) is embedded in and defined by cultural and social contexts; furthermore, we define those cultural and social contexts as structured by power and oppression; and we therefore specifically define the desired cognitive value as a critical reflexivity vis-à-vis the entailed power relations. However, *pace* Adorno, we do not narrowly define 'critical reflexivity' as the cerebral decoding of formal features of

<sup>28</sup>Jerrold Levinson thus included aptly into his conception of understanding the musical subject a listener that is 'appropriately backgrounded' (Levinson, "Musical Expressiveness"). It is crucial to understand the different backgrounds, and in this manner the different musical genres, with regard to how they conceptualize and practically situated their own musical project within the social and cultural worlds.

musical works (as a dialectically conflicted yet synthetic unity), but redefine this concept against the backdrop of a hermeneutic-pragmatic analysis of the culturally situated subject. The aesthetic dimensions of an embodied musical listening, including the different experiential layers of the bodily/rhythmic, the symbolic/conceptual, and the melodic/individual dimensions, are therefore fully to be taken into account.

This means concretely that we distinguish three axes of analysis, each of which makes one of the three layers available to a reflexive experience, including *embodied musical experiences* in which the socially inhabited body of the musical listener and his or her habitual modes are challenged and transformed; *symbolically defined musical experiences* in which the musical listener is put face-to-face with her own 'harmonious background' vis-à-vis the experience of differently organized musical forms and worlds; and *individualized musical experiences* in which the subject's distinct musical cognition is articulated vis-à-vis the encounter of reflexively composed and internally organized musical artworks that refuse an intuitive and habitual consumption, and therefore enforce conscious reflection.<sup>29</sup>

We are now finally in a position to see a much wider range of options than Adorno as to how music would enable critical or subversive experiences with regard to social power. While it is beyond this context to fully develop an account of social power and oppression, I suggest that certain musical media may challenge certain habitual and taken-for-granted modes of power. Power is here seen in a Foucauldian and Bourdieusian manner, not as the strategic operations of intentionally acting subjects, but rather as the holistically structured types of subject-formation. Thus, social power is seen to perspicuously work via the inculcation of schemes of understanding, perception, and action, which transform, via the symbolic mediation and bodily inculcation, the *status quo* into the natural and normal condition of reality. Now, since here power works by inducing cer-

<sup>29</sup>The embodied, culturally defined, and consciously reflective forms of musical experience all are meant to be features or aspects of a musical phenomenon that the musical subject as a culturally and socially situated, embedded and embodied *subject is capable of reflexively experiencing*. This is important since I want to emphasize that even the embodied or the culturally defined experience is related to a reflexive subject for which the musical experiences become relevant in a value-laden way. While these experiences are not necessarily understood, or immediately reflected by the listening subjects in the terms that we present here, the fact that they are experienced by the subjects suggests that, upon further reflection, they could come to see their own experiences in their light.

tain habitual forms of self-identity in the subject, the distanciation from and destruction of acquired modes of subjective self-identity represent venues of a transgression, transcendence, or advancement beyond power. Shaking up established modes of identity thus represents a subversive and potentially critical experience vis-à-vis the existing *status quo*.<sup>30</sup> I identify three levels at which such a power-critical stance is realized in certain types of popular music.

### Practically Embodied Transgression

Popular music may actualize itself as a dramatic event in which the individual self merges with a collective body, such as in rock concerts or in techno events. Such an experience can be seen as moving beyond the individual body, of leaving behind established schemes of acting, behaving, and perceiving (feeling). It would thus act against oppressive patterns of socially acceptable self-conduct (that oppress certain forms of self-expression, such as in anonymous sexual encounters on the 'dance floor'), and against certain forms of oppressive behavioral patterns (such as rules of conduct usually prohibited, as in the fighting simulations at punk concerts).

In techno music, the repetitive and pervasive rhythm functions here as an all-integrating medium. The illusion of distinct musical works, which Adorno detected in popular music as the false idea of pseudo-individuality, is here intentionally given up by melting diverse 'songs' into the underlying beat. Melodies of previous 'hits' become citations that as sound patterns integrate into the inescapable flow of the whole. The text is reduced to few lines that structure the event in order to give elusive meanings to a happening that is meant to displace the self, to have the listener dragged into the rhythm rather than to enable any reflective distance.<sup>31</sup> The techno-event creates, by means of the aesthetic form based on the rhythmic patterns and sketchy melodic lines 'above them,' a push towards an ecstatic state beyond

<sup>30</sup>These states would also not merely involve a critical stance on the level of beliefs, but also invoke redefined or reconfigured bodily and perspectival stances.

<sup>31</sup>See for a paradigmatic expression the work by Torsten Fenslau, esp. "The Dream: The Best of Torsten Fenslau;" "Out of the Ordinary;" "Wir schicken dich ins All;" "Die schwarze Zone."

the usual individual boundaries and oriented towards social fusion. The self leaves behind her self-identity to merge into the collective whole.

Adorno's critique that those events are similar in structure to fascist events in which the self merges fully with the collective body represented by the *Führer* can be rejected to the extent that such events are *embedded in agent's reflexive project* of themselves. Agents intentionally employ these events to momentarily realize themselves as beyond themselves. Their hedonistic body-oriented transgression lacks the integration into a national-socialist or otherwise fascist ideology or the orientation to anything or anyone as leading or controlling. Rather, we may see them as therapeutic, as a collective trance to overcome oppressive patterns, not as oriented to envision one's existence in a totalitarian form of life. Worst, they may just be a temporary relief, a momentary escape from reality. But if employed with a reflexive vision to break beyond the artificially imposed boundaries between self and other, they may well represent a bodily enacted and rhythmically induced stance of transgression vis-à-vis inculcated schemes of power.

### Cultural Transcendence

The encounter of *different musical genres and forms* represents a critical moment with regard to the accepted patterns of one's own cultural background. Thus the challenge to confront and come to appreciate different symbolic schemes in music uproots the taken-for-granted aesthetic habits and provoke a new stance. I would suggest that this dimension is especially well realized in musical encounters that go beyond one's usual cultural barriers. The evolution of world music and fusion jazz play an important role in this context. What comes into focus is that all musical understanding is grounded in one's cultural context. The musical experience becomes a fusion of the different cultural horizons (Gadamer), which either leads to a new form, or it enhances the differentiation between the different styles and genres.

A particular function is here assigned to the project of bringing different cultural genres and styles together. This boundary crossing has an important effect with regard to the idea of cultural identity and purity. The idea



of 'hybridity'—i.e. that new hybrid forms of music (and culture) emerge from the bedrock of allegedly non-hybrid, 'monolithic' or natural cultural modes—brings into focus is the extent to which all music represents to a certain degree the confluence of different factors and influences. The development into a new 'classic' or standard form is itself a momentary cultural event in which the flow of different influence and experiences has, for now, found a 'valid' expression. This process exemplifies within the aesthetic medium the constant redefinition of one's own self within the context of diverse roles, influences, and self-understandings. It captures this process as being both grounded in a cultural setting and yet constantly transcending one's own shifting boundaries. The danger in the accomplishment of a new established style or genre is that the fixation into such a classic form can lead also to a certain ossification. It may lead to precisely the kind of consumer-reception that only aims to identify the perfect moves, that reduces the aesthetic experience to the game of a quasi-expertise without any true surprise or challenge, which Adorno so forcefully criticized as destructive of cognitively challenging musical experience. The open-ended process of continuously aiming to transcend one's boundaries would thus be curtailed, instead of enabling via the aesthetic exemplification of music, the experience of self-transformation. However, if this 'fusion of genres' is reflexively acquired, it could lead to a meta-stance of general openness hybridity that continues to search for border/crossings, new experiments, and an ongoing transformation of acquired habits of musical taste.

### Critically Reflective Attentiveness

Musical works that invite and lead the individual subject to not only immerse herself into the musical stream, but to also reflect on the implications of form and content, naturally present a cognitive value. Here, the trick is to combine the aesthetic experience of music as a form that expresses the societal tensions in its aesthetic medium, and to have that experience be one that is accessible to the agent herself. It was the split between the cognitive effect of modern music (as in Schoenberg) and the cognitive capabilities of the average listener that defined a problem for Adorno's approach. But does popular music allow for such an individu-

alized attentiveness to musical form and voice? Does it display sufficient complexity to challenge and advance the listener's cognitive abilities vis-a-vis his or her habitual patterns of receptive consumption?

I would here just like to point to some examples that show how this musical form indeed entails a host of practices and mechanisms through which its rigid structure opens up, and through which a playful, reflexive, and interpretive distance to the work's scheme is created. Take, for instance, Jimi Hendrix's interpretation of the *Star Spangled Banner* at Woodstock (1969). The theme of the American national anthem is here rendered in the electronic estrangement of a radical solo guitar passage, overly long and lacking any background rhythm, to be followed—and saved—by the effectively simplistic introduction to *Purple Haze*, itself a classic rock-styled homage at the experiential potential of chemically altered states of consciousness (LSD). A challenging dialogue, deeply expressed by musical structure, is established between the old fragmented American identity and the new grounds from which to launch, however tentative, however fragile, a new identity.<sup>32</sup> Or take the infusion of everyday noises at the beginnings of many fusion Jazz pieces, effectively pursued by Weather Report on *Black Market* (1976), where the everydayness of sounds is left behind by reaching the musical grounds from which a fast-paced experience is created, one at the same time structured and open for subjective insertions, claims, and opposing voices (esp. well displayed in the title piece 'Black Market' and 'Gibraltar'). Or take Miles Davis unforgettable orchestration of different musical voices in the Wayne Shorter piece *Footprints* (New York, 1966), where the rhythmic lines, almost Schoenbergian, are constituted through an ever precarious, ever open and continuously re-coalescing synthesis of all instruments involved.<sup>33</sup> Thus, both on the level of the composition and in the context of its performance, more complex, reflexive and playful musical structures can be detected in popular music.

<sup>32</sup>See Ian Chambers, "A Voice in the Dark, A Map of Memory", in *Culture After Humanism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>33</sup>To be sure, the last examples involve Jazz, but especially fusion jazz, which constitutes a fusion of horizons between rhythmic rock elements with a Jazz emphasis on instrumental virtuosi and improvisation, pushes beyond the establishment of a secure grounding by creating, as it were, a musical endorsement of reflexivity and openness to change through its complex and hybrid aesthetic form.

It is important that the musical powers to critical reflexivity are experienced by and available to the agents themselves. It is here where popular music can build indispensable bridges between the standardized mode of musical production and consumption, and a critical consciousness that aims to sensitize the listener's cognitive capacities so as to be able to hear differently, to listen critically. Such capabilities cannot be reserved for the critical-theoretical expert who is able to 'hear' the societal tension in highly sophisticated works, whose true meaning, however, would remain beyond the experiential bounds of the average listener, and often also the producer. The critical tensions that are expressed in the aesthetic medium have to be both experienced as aesthetically powerful and as being somewhat expressive of social power relations. The capacity to hear societal tensions within musical works, and to be challenged by the unresolved conflict between a subjectivity which we cannot abandon in a world in which it is not in charge, is perhaps the ultimate legacy of Adorno's decisive effort to reassert the critical truth-value of music in a world defined by power. Only if we keep this legacy in mind can the critical value of music, including popular music, be redeemed. It is the challenge of *music production* to develop works for musical experience that express and thus induce such acritical reflection. It is the task of *music critics* to articulate the existing expressions as exemplifying such tensions to help agents experience them in the medium itself, so that they can be more fully understood by the agents. And it is the task of *music education* to lead agents to develop more sophisticated listening capabilities so that they are, by means of the aesthetic forces of musical medium as such, able to appreciate the complex entailments that musical meanings may have.

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