Music and Identity

Adorno and the Promise of Popular Culture

Hans-Herbert Kögler

What is the function of music? What is music's value? To ask about the *function* of music might suggest that we want some objective, 'functionalist' account of what music does or is good for. One might think of the social function of music to create communal bonds, but psychological functions such as the taming and cultivating of impulses or cognitive functions such as aesthetic relief may also come to mind. With this third-personal approach contrasts the first-personal, intentional connotation of the *value* of music, where value—a major Neo-Kantian concept—suggests some intrinsic experiential capacity of music, one that is accomplished alongside with or regardless of empirical-social functions. This intrinsic value of music, as emphasized by classical aesthetics, would accordingly consist in some kind of self-sufficient validity independent from empirical or causal effects.

Our aim in thus juxtaposing the function *and* value of music consists in setting up a particular project for the analysis of music. The basic idea is that in order to understand and analyze music in its full complexity, we need to be able to address both its experiential value and its social function. We need to be able to reconstruct the empirical-social conditions of music so as to understand how it can possibly fulfill higher cognitive functions, those that accomplish intentional values. The project attempts to ground the cultural phenomenon of music in social reality in a non-reductionistic manner, so that intentional and experiential value-dimensions can be seen as emerging from this ground, rather than being dismissed as idealistic or illusionary.

More specifically, we will treat music neither merely as a social fact nor will we approach it solely from the perspective of some intrinsic normative value. Instead, we look at music as a phenomenon that has the capacity to realize certain values or experiences *by being a cultural practice*. But since the intentional value is experienced by situated subjects, we shall focus on the role that music plays in *the constitution of subjectivity*. In other words, instead of simply combining a sociological perspective with a value-oriented normative approach, we thematize music with regard to its subject-

constituting power. Put differently, the extent to which music is capable of providing grounds for the development of a critical and reflexive subjectivity will be the concern here. If music can indeed be granted a subject-constituting function, and if this emergent subjectivity entails the capabilities for intentional and reflexive experiences, we have taken an essential step toward overcoming the dualism between social and normative considerations.

In order to flesh out this project, we will enter into a theoretical dialogue with Adorno's reflections on the state of music in society. Adorno's theory of the socio-cognitive functions of music, including popular and classical forms, provides an ideal context within which to advance our claims. This is so since for Adorno, the effect that music has on the mind of its listeners is central. By reconstructing how standardized music 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 forms, 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 undermine 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 exists, 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 cultural potential. For Adorno, subjects 'who long ceased to be such' face a music industry's quasi-totalitarian power of standardizing products and practices, whose hopelessly helpless victims they as masses have become. Yet the very features of the musical medium, or so I shall try to show, can be understood to not just undermine, but rather to productively build up critical and reflexive subjectivities. Indeed, the schematizing structures that inhere especially in so-called popular music provide a psychologically crucial function in constituting a background context against which critical intentionality can exercise its acts. Even if, as Adorno suggests, the musical subjects do not bring their own internal super-ego (which would make them strong and self-determined subjects) to the musical reception, the medium of music, rather than sucking weak egos into its doomed domain of endless fun, can offer such a mediating structure.

If this claim can be substantiated, our understanding of the critical function of music in society would shift from the way Adorno saw it. We would come to see a new potential of music for critical agency. To make good on this claim, I will first address the frame that Adorno opened up for a critical theory of music (1), to focus second on the changes in social theory that are necessary to better understand the relations between contemporary society, music, and subjective identity (2), to finally reconstruct the role that popular music can play in building up a subject's critical capabilities (3). My ultimate aim is to show how a social theory of the psychological function of music can help construct a critical theory of contemporary culture, one that can locate the resources for critical reflexivity and resistance in the contexts of mass culture, in particular in popular music. If we look, as I suggest, at music as a social language, one that provides a world-constituting function for the subjects immersed in its performances and practices, the potential of music will appear in a new light. Music's social function will be understood to consist in an *aesthetic synthesis* that provides a socially produced background scheme for intentional agency, one that can make possible a *critical self-identity* capable of exercising the values of reflexivity and open-mindedness.

1.   The Erasure of Subjectivity: Art 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 (Horkheimer/Adorno 2002). 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 in the millions of dollars they earn in their first weekend of release, 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 would 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 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 (Adorno 1991). The advantage of putting it this way is that we can both save Adorno's positive contribution and similarly prepare our critical challenge. Clearly important is Adorno's emphasis on the effect of capitalistic modes on contemporary life and culture, including the construction of subjectivity-types. But by defining the social space of subjectivity-formation basically in a Freudian manner, in which the construction of self is seen primarily as a family-based affair, Adorno shuts off the full potential opened up by his analytic frame. According to the well-known official version of their theory, Adorno and other critical theorists hold that capitalistic modes of production have weakened or even undermined the traditional family roles occupied by a (strong) father and a (loving)

mother, thus undercutting the social-psychological grounds for developing a strong ego.[1] To simplify dramatically, in this story the psychologically relevant role-distribution of father and mother is a *sine qua non* for the development of a reflexive and autonomous self, since the internalization of a strong role model (exemplified by the father) alone allows for the internalization of an authority that is necessary to dominate one's desires. At the same time, a loving and caring mother tampers and mediates this suppression of emotional attitudes and enables the development of an emotionally rich, empathetic and affectively mature individual. If these are the 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, as it regards the development of a self-controlled yet emotionally developed self, has been undermined by capitalist society (Horkheimer/Adorno 2002). 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. In turn, the extent to which cultural products and practices can be determined as influencing and shaping self-identity can be presented as evidence for the lack of internalized and internally directed self-control (Adorno 1991b).

Yet even in Adorno, the relation between culture and self is somewhat more complex. Certainly, the subjects are here seen as quasi-defenseless when it comes to their encounter with mass culture. Yet at the same time, mass culture itself becomes a force that creates subjects who are 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 culture* the results are specifically shaped types of subjectivity. What Adorno introduces as a kind of social phenomenology of *listening types* indicates how agents have become subject to capitalism in the formation of their aesthetic capabilities (Adorno 1991a). In this context, we can identify the *emotional listener*, for whom the approach to music serves as a 'safe haven of irrationality.' Music here has a compensating function, albeit of course a futile one, to compensate for emotional experiences that real life is lacking.

---

[1] 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.

Equally, we can observe 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 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.[2] Equally, the discussion of the resentment attitude involves a critique of all nostalgic forms of art and music, where music is conceived in terms of the total artwork (Gesamtkunstwerk, as in Wagner). To rebuilt or even replace totality that has been lost in real social life within aesthetic experience is either totalitarian or bound to become kitsch, as it either forces the self to subject itself to a fully determined unity which is so overwhelming that the subject's reflexive capacities are undermined, or else it creates a false sense of wholeness and mediation that establishes the unity only in the medium of its aesthetic shining, but without any acknowledgment of its lack in real social relations.

In the discussion 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 competence (compare also Adorno 1881a). 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 multi-various lines of the development of a theme, to ascertain the polyphonic layers of melodic and harmonic

---

[2] 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 Bowman 1998, chapters 3-5.

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 (Adorno 1981b). The structural listener thus regains her identity by losing herself, by handing herself over to the aesthetic unity and coherence of the composed work through which she is enabled to return to herself through a reflexive process. The alertness creates a sense of 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 make sure that the subject does not 'feel good,' that music will not be fun. What is achieved by structural listening, instead, is the cognitive value 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.

Regressive listening is radically opposed to this, as here the current social impossibility of unity and reconciliation is not taken up as an inner-aesthetic problem, but simply ignored and 'aesthetically transcended.' In contrast, in modern experimental music, harmony and reconciliation are dialectically negated, and yet aesthetic coherence is invoked by locating disharmony and atonality within the bounds of a unified artwork (Adorno 1991a; see also Adorno 1881a). Thus the coherent musical composition is maintained as object and goal. 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 missing in Schoenberg and beyond. In contrast to this, the continued classical production of inner-aesthetic harmony and unity (as in Wagner or Stravinsky) under conditions of late capitalism must produce either totalitarian music or nostalgic kitsch.

Now, according to Adorno, popular culture and the establishment of its regressive listening type respond to this dilemma by entirely dispensing 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 is negatively defined by 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 its 'guaranteed satisfaction.' And it is positively 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 (Adorno 2002a, 2002b, also 1881a).

In order to define the pop-cultural mode of musical reception, Adorno thus 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 by in their diversionary function." (1991a, 32, 33)

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 become a mere functional commodity. Adorno sees the widespread,

capitalistically controlled production of popular music and art as evidence for his claim, and conjures that the type of regressive listening serves as the adequate and required mode of reception for this new mode of cultural production.

Popular music and regressive listening thus form a kind of cultural syndrome, of which Adorno paints a gloomy picture indeed.[3] Most important is the *simplification of musical patterns*, which has the multiple function and effect of making an effortless *habitual reception* of music possible, of structuring all musical experience according to similar standardized codes, and to thus produce a *schematizing experience* for all agents alike. Instead of producing unique and challenging works, the musical products are created to please, they are produced for a mass market. This involves easily recognizable structures that do not require much effort at aesthetic discernment, and thus function well as 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 pop music, continued in many contemporary forms of its expression, is a pervasive *aesthetico-psychological scheme.* In the spirit of Adorno, one can say that the unity of the artwork is indeed obsolete, since the different segments of the musical work—rhythm, harmony, and melody—are less unified in the particular work and appear 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 identification of a singular piece is mostly impossible. And 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 be a unique hit, each singer and star must be one of a kind. What we are faced with thus is a kind a pre-schematized pseudo-individuality, in which surface effects take the place of real individual uniqueness, and

---

[3] 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 self's social identity, far from providing a shared unity of different subjects in a common world, is rather the token-similarity of products wrought from the same mold.

One can thus talk about the *fetish-character of music* both with regard to the aesthetic experience and with regard to the social attitudes toward pop music (Adorno 1991a). 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 effect 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 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.[4] The fetishization of pop music 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. Almost all music has thus become entertainment.

We follow Adorno so closely in his assessment of the structure of pop music not because we endorse his overall interpretation of its role and function in society. It is rather because his 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 music in the first place. Adorno's perspective ties together reception attitudes, musical structure, and the social function that music fulfills. The cultural syndrome of regressive listening and standardized music is fully understood only if seen in the context of the social totality within which it fulfills the function of adjustment and habitualization

---

[4] What is wrong with this, to be sure, is not to situate musical production and reception within wider cultural contexts; 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 pop 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 aesthetic experience. 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.

of situated subjects. Subjects are 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 as they are crucial for the social recognition required for existence. 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 pop music as a standardized cultural product, is explained by the *social function* of adjustment that pervades all walks of cultural life. But if the use—and abuse—of music has thus become an issue related to the question of power (or how the individual fits into hierarchical social contexts), we have to ask whether these very modes of musical production and reception must necessarily have the function that Adorno attributes to them. Given that our analysis of the aesthetic structure of modern 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?

2.   Reconceptualizing Popular Culture: Toward a Critical Theory of Music as Identity

Our use of the term 'popular culture' involves connotations both to mass culture as well as folk culture without being identical with either of them. Popular culture is not mass culture in Adorno's sense since we are defining here a realm of social expression and practices in which a complex interplay of objectifying forces and subjective identities takes place. The term thus designates the rejection of identifying this whole sphere with a capitalistically dominated realm of power, as in early critical theory. Yet since this cultural formation is indeed mass produced, it destroys and transforms any autonomous enclaves of national and ethnically defined cultural expression. We thus do not intend to reconstruct or rediscover a pure realm of cultural authenticity, as in some forms of multicultural theory. Accordingly, the term popular culture indicates a theoretical program, namely to reconstruct a space of cultural expression which is situated in functionally shaped contexts and yet capable of producing valuable aesthetic attitudes. It is seen as a source of subjectivities capable of critical reflexivity and cultural openness. What we have to inquire is the extent to which mass-produced music and culture is a

cultural location where subject-formation and reflexive resistance to oppressive social mechanisms can take place. In order to analyze that, we have to reconceptualize our theoretical tools so that such a possibility can become visible, which means that we have first to redefine the theoretical grounds for our analysis to subsequently show how music entails aesthetic features that can explain its identity-forming power.

1. A Social-Pragmatic Perspective on Culture, Identity, and Music

In a first move, we have to replace the Neo-Marxist perspective on capitalistic society by a theory of society as a *set of symbolic and practical fields*. These fields are understood as contexts in which human agents interact according to intentional projects, symbolic beliefs and assumptions, and sets of background rules and practices that together coalesce into the identity of distinct social spaces (Kögler 1999). The fields are thus an intermediary realm between individual agents and general social structures, and as such capture the concrete social realization of value-orientations such as truth (scientific field), efficient production (economic field), government and administration (political field), education and knowledge dissemination (educational field), etc. The idea of realizing basic values in real social structures is also the target of social systems theory (Luhmann 1995). Yet while systems theory provides useful distinctions for analyzing a functionally differentiated society, we have to emphasize that 'systems' only become social reality by networking and connecting the intentional actions of human subjects. The real networking effects that are continuously produced and reproduced make up the reality of social fields.

The importance of the field category for our analysis is that it allows analyzing the influence of capitalistic economy on culture without invoking the specter of an overall determinative economic order. Adorno's talk of the 'totalitarian character of contemporary society,' while mediated by psycho-analytic categories to explain such power, is in danger of transforming an empirical thesis—namely that capitalistic economy influences cultural production—into an socio-ontological thesis of contemporary social life. If we rather conceive economy and popular culture as relatively autonomous fields, situated among other fields, we remain open for the detection of

processes and structures within popular culture that are not dominated by the capitalistic logic.[5]

This move sets the stage for a second change, now with regard to the social-psychological dimension of agency. We saw that the Frankfurt School realized the need to complement Marx with this dimension, and their answer was the Freudian model of family-socialization (Horkheimer/Adorno 2002). We also saw how the demise of the strong ego was blamed for making totalitarian mass culture possible. Yet in order to theorize critical agency and resistance, and to reconstruct the resources for a strong and reflexive self, the turn to Freud was as flawed as it was unnecessary. It was flawed since the Freudian model suggests the internalization of external authority in terms of the law, which can only lead to a self-oppressive relation vis-à-vis one's desires and emotions. The constitution of a self-mastering subject, one that would be capable of resistance, is here seen as grounded in the internalization of an external power, the law of the father, that itself constitutes repression.[6] But it was also unnecessary because it relates the construction of an inner source of mediation and self-control—one that indeed is important for the constitution of a self-mastering subject—to a historically contingent and, as we just saw, highly questionable institution: the family. In other words, the construction of an inner-mediating structure that enables the self to guide itself without being externally dominated must not be confused with the family structure as its only or even desirable enabling condition.

This sets the stage for our argument since this mediating structure can now be provided by other institutions. What we need is

---

[5] We can also argue that new and different fields emerge, contexts that are structuring the lives of agents according to a set of projects, assumptions, and practices different from orientations at profit and exchange value. Methodologically, we thus opt for a social phenomenology that reconstructs the internal and intentional value-orientations, conceptual assumptions and social practices of each particular social field of interacting agents, rather than assuming a macro-perspective of an economically dominated society.

[6] The tampering mother role only emphasizes this unhappy pseudo-solution of establishing a subjective-psychological condition for resistance and critical subjectivity. While Adorno laments the demise of the traditional family structure that allegedly made resistance possible, the fixation of the family with rigid gender roles in fact cement social power in the inner domains of the self-controlled subject, and is for that reason alone misguided.

(a) a form of cultural mediation that enables the subject to develop a strong identity, one that it can rely on with regard to external influences as well as internal pressures, but

(b) one that does not internalize external power and oppression by becoming its own rigid ruler, but that allows for a flexible, non-repressive and yet self-guided attitude toward one's intentions, desires, and emotions.

Accordingly, we need a conception of agency that accounts for the constitution of an *internalized scheme of understanding* that can provide a certain ground for one's own identity and *on that basis* allows for reflexive openness toward oneself and others. This basis is required since social-pragmatic considerations suggest that an essentially undefined, open-ended human subject is in need of developing a more or less determined identity (Mead 1934, Gehlen 1988). The developing subject needs a certain base which reduces its inherent insecurity with regard to the world and others, and which thus provides for a stable self-relation and self-confidence. According to Mead, such a self-identity develops by internalizing the perspective of the other, crystallizes into a habitual background scheme of understanding and perception, and generally serves as 'sense of self' on the basis of which the self can identify with—or reject—beliefs, values, and practices. Important for our context is that we preserve the idea that a strong ego requires some kind of internalized structure, yet instead of conceiving this structure as the internalization of a Kantian ruler that dominates desires and emotions, we conceive of it as a socially constructed amalgam that consists of a scheme based on cognitive, emotional, and practical dimensions. And instead of identifying the construction of this internalized scheme with the family, we are now in a position to conceive of historically new and culturally diverse ways in which the construction of a mediating self-scheme can exist.

With this reconceptualization of the relation between culture and self-identity in place, we can now ask whether the field of popular music can provide the resources for critical and reflexive agency. The challenge for a cultural analysis of music is to show that the social function of creating a subject-structure capable of valuable normative attitudes, such as critical reflexivity and openness, can emerge from pop culture and its

particular aesthetic expressions and social practices. Put in aesthetic terms, at stake is whether the subjective condition of possibility for a reflexive and critical attitude can be established through aesthetic practices found in popular culture. What we aim at here is an aesthetics of the whole person, grounded in a socialization process that constructs the reflexive self through the cultural and aesthetics practices that come to form the subject's self-identity.[7] Popular culture, we claim, could be a source of such an aesthetics of the experiential subject; it could be a cultural space within which a whole existential perspective on being and understanding is constructed. We have now to take a look at the phenomenological features that would allow popular music to play such an identity-forming role. And it is for this purpose that we have to turn to the issue of music as language.

2. A Critical-Hermeneutic Analysis of Music as Language

The idea of music as language is probably as old as the philosophical reflection of music itself (Bowman 1988). It seems undeniable that music shares essential features with language, as it comprises a distinct set of rules and 'norms,' creates a shared and somewhat meaningful bond among humans, and expresses a distinctly communicative aspect as when musicians address an audience (Langer 1942). Yet it is also clear that this metaphor entails obvious limitations, as there is no semantic code that can construct identifiable meanings or references through music, and the value of notation, and equally the whole dimension of codification and clear distinct meanings in music, seems farfetched and misguided (Davies 1994). At the same time, however, the force and generality with which so-called masterworks impress themselves on the listener, and in general the extreme effect that music has on listeners, propelled many to give an account of such objectivity or validity of music as expressing meanings and experiences, and to do so by drawing on the analogy of music with language.

The lack of the codifiability of music might then not be a limit of music's analogy with language, but rather an invitation to change our views of music and language alike. Instead of debating the pros and cons of music as language in terms of representation

---

[7] Those practices would thus build up what the pre-Kantian philosophy in Baumgarten and Leibniz called the aesthetic domain in a much fuller sense than understood today, as it does not concern a separate sphere of the 'autonomous' arts, but rather the sensuous-holistic space of our complete experience.

versus expression, the music-as-language metaphor should rather be applied to the holistic and world-constituting function of music. In other words, we should not look at musical language in terms of what the singular musical acts (as quasi-speech acts) are about, that is, whether musical expressions represent, express, exemplify, or state something, be it a concept (the will in Schopenhauer, the idea of freedom and subjectivity in Hegel, the conceptual essence of emotions in Langer) or an emotional state per se (as in Peter Kivy's and Nelson Goodman's theories of music) (for an overview, see Bowman 1998). We should rather thematize music as a language that creates a whole sense of reality and world, as a medium that constitutes meaning through its overall semiotic frame of experience that discloses in advance how and what can come to be experienced in a particular way. In order to make this plausible, we will have to reconstruct how the experience of music can draw the listener into a holistic world structure that itself sets a frame (instead of picking out something, be it a concept, emotion, or idea, on the basis of an existing world-frame). Music is here understood a holistic world-disclosure where a world as such is constituted through the aesthetic experience. Accordingly, music is seen as the very medium in which individual intentions can be built up since it forms an identity within which they can be anchored and understood. But why should the music-as-language analogy be fruitfully reinterpreted in terms of a holistic identity constitution? What features of musical experience suggest such a move? We will argue for this claim through the phenomenological explication of three such features of musical experience.

(1) There is first the *holistic nature of musical experience*, which we can bring out by comparison to other art forms. Classical aesthetics, which emphasizes a contemplative and distanced stance toward the aesthetic object, finds its best exemplification in painting. Here, we have a fixed structured object, opposite from the viewer, defined by certain features that lend itself to repeated analysis and reconstruction. It is a classic subject-object situation. With regard to sculpture, there is more space involved, we can walk around it, we sense to be in a common space, perhaps, but it remains as a distinct object opposite of us. Even in architecture, which we can view as a distinct object (being outside) or as a space within which we exist (being inside a building), the distinctive otherness of an objective entity is maintained. Yet with music, we find ourselves 'within its space,' wrapped in by the sound, located within the experience that is never adequately

captured by locating an outside object, as an entity that exists apart from us in experience. Hegel saw clearly that this feature of musical experience makes it the unique medium of subjectivity, in a sense even more so than poetry whose meaning also leaves the location of the page and creates a symbolic space within which reader and text coexist (Hegel 1970). Yet music, by means of a non-referential, expressive language, constitutes a uniquely non-objectifying, holistically inclosing experience that locates the listener in its medium, instead of keeping the object at a distance. This is why we close our eyes or darken the room to get closer to the musicalness of the music, whereas in opera and show performance the objective distance is recreated through the visual identification of the performers or actors. Adorno's claim for structural listening, which can even (or perhaps better) be accomplished by reading music, is indeed an attempt to counteract this de-subjectifying and deterritorrializing (Deleuze/Guattari 1987) dimension of music by re-objectifying its structure.

(2) Second, the musical experience within which we find ourselves overcomes another Cartesian subject-object dualism, namely that of mind and body. Musical experience involves essentially a bodily dimension, but surely not in the sense of a body-object that is experienced as being attached to a distinct mind, but as an experience that draws on the *experienced body as a musical medium* through which its effects and articulation is accomplished (see Bowman on Merlau-Ponty 1998, pp. 259ff.). Music can only be performed by bringing bodies in motion, including the musical instruments and our organs of musical perception. But only an impoverished view would identify here the ears only, as musical experience locates the whole body in a sonoric territory of articulated sounds and structures. The intrinsic relation between music and dance, for which no complement exists in any other art form, can testify to this. Dance articulates, pursues further, expresses what is involved in the musical structure and re-objectifies it by means of a bodily recreation—one that uses the body as a moving pictorial form of what is non-objectified in the musical experience. Perhaps the most subtle form, the highest challenge of classic aesthetics and sublimation of art is the contemplative experience of dance and ballet, as here the body expresses what is intimately related to music, and yet one does not join in: one remains seated and distanced. Yet the bodily participation of oneself through dance in the musical performance at the moment of its

actualization—which is more common in popular forms of music—can create a social body, a fusion of mind and body that transcends classic aesthetic categories, it challenges traditional western dichotomies so to speak with the feet. The bodily dimension of musical experience expresses thus, either in this collective endeavor or within the solitude of one's listening experience at home (which always retains a connection to a larger more meaningful space) an experiential dimension that through the bodily medium connects us more directly to our sensuously embodied being. Thus the intrinsic connection between music and emotions, the capability of music as touching our inner psycho-physiological states like no other art (Kivy 1989).

(3) The third unique phenomenological feature can now be easily introduced, as it already came up with regard to the bodily dimension. Music is in a particular manner a *social medium of shared experience*. As it wraps in the listener who is catapulted into a sonoric space not in front, but rather around her, including the bodily-felt presence of such temporally articulated sound, this space is always larger than one individual, it is a social space within which others just as oneself are situated. Music is a shared medium per se because the 'object' is not visually disclosed from different locations, but creates, not fully, but approximately, the same shared listening experience for all in a concert. It is interesting that this peculiar social nature of musical experience has been largely neglected by classic aesthetics. It is crucial for a world-constituting discussion because the social character of this experience can built up an internalized structure that grounds the individual self in a structure which it knows as social, as its articulation stems from the social contexts of experience.[8]

3.   Popular Music and the Construction of Critical Agency

We can now try to make good on our claim that our new theoretical framework helps us understand popular music differently than Adorno's approach. But it is important to see

---

[8] Further evidence for the unique power of language in creating a socially shared space of experience is the use to which music is put for occasions that are functional for creation social bonds. It is likely that the earliest ritualistic forms of totem admiration were undertaken together with musical performances, as those actualize the social as an aesthetically shared space vis-à-vis the picture or totem post that symbolizes as an object the shared nature of the group. From military music to morning marches, from the national anthem to the rock concert, the constitution of a *shared feeling structure* through the social performance of music makes for a crucial aesthetic feature of that cultural expression.

that we are not interested in a defense of Jazz or a rejection of Adorno's presumed elitist position; rather, what is at stake is a reformulation of possible resources of reflexive resistance, those ones that are located within a power-effected social space. And we will set out to do so by integrating Adorno's insights dialectically into our vision, not by simply rejecting its overall orientation both regarding the function of mass culture or the value of autonomous subjectivity. It is here where our position defines perhaps a new mediated location between the Frankfurt School's radical rejection of mass culture on the one hand, and cultural studies' overall affirmative position toward pop culture on the other hand, which even in sophisticated representatives endorses Rock 'n Roll as an 'affective machine' (Grossberg 1997; see also Deleuze/Guattari 1987). Such an affirmative position neglects the need for critical reflexivity, and thus overlooks the role that pop music can play in the social production of the conditions of its possibility. In other words, both the negative (Adorno) and the positive (Cultural Studies) approach toward mass-consumed pop music conceptually discards the subjectivity-building function that this form of music can exercise, and that can support the construction of a strong ego, of a critical self capable of opposing its ever-same submission. While we introduced the theoretical moves necessary that for better understanding of the complex phenomenon of music, the reconstruction of popular music in particular will serve as evidence for the fruitfulness of the framework suggested.

We can make our phenomenological reflection on music work for our thesis by looking more closely at the structure of music itself. Reconstructing the phenomenon of music as holistic, embodied, and social can thus be complemented by analyzing the internal structure of music, which of course must always be understood as a phenomenon, as an object-structure that exists fully only in experience. Here, we can distinguish the metric dimension or rhythm, the harmonic structure, and the level of melody (Bowman 1998; already Hegel 1970). The *rhythm* of a piece creates an underlying background, a structuration of the time used and an articulated background for anything else that happens in the thus accentuated musical space. The *harmonic dimension* sets the tone, discloses what Heidegger called the mood. Here, a certain general emotional-experiential coloring, as through the major or minor key, is introduced and set up, which supports the idea that music defines a holistic world-structure in which the mood-dimension discloses

what particular sentiment or emotional state is expressed. Finally, the 'highest' level of the *melody* complements this aesthetic world by singular, dialogical or polyphonic voices that can be taken to express the possibility of the individuality of expression (Hegel 1970). What we thus have here is a musical microcosm of the structure of situated agency, as agency is always engaged in an embodied everyday rhythm of practices and routines (the metric-rhythmic level), always understands its existence in a certain emotionally colored symbolic frame (the harmony-level), and is similarly always expressing a uniquely situated concrete agency, articulating specific acts, projects, and intentional attitudes (Heidegger 1962).

If we now bring the holistic nature of musical experience, its uniquely wrapping and enclosing experience of subjectivity, together with music's internal structure, which exemplifies a world structured through a rhythmic background, a symbolic-conceptual perspective, and individual voices, we can see how popular music can take over the function of socializing the self by creating within the self a structure that enables agency and individuality. The idea behind this thesis is that the individual agent is always dependent on some social-symbolic background, which is here represented by the rhythmic-harmonic level. In other words, an absolute individual is a bad abstraction, since the subject is capable of critical reflection and distance only on the basis of a taken-for-granted background that gives it the holistic frame to engage in its critical and distancing activity (Heidegger 1962; Mead 1934). Full agency requires, of course, the capability to articulate and express oneself individually, and is expressed in music as the melodic dimension of leading voices and improvisations. Agency requires a background for an intentional and reflexive self. In Mead's terms, the reflexive-creative 'I' is based on a social 'Me,' which grounds acts of the I, while the I as such is never fully identical with its social identity, the Me. The dialectical relation between holistic background and intentional foreground is necessary to make critical agency possible (Mead 1934).

It is this structure that rock in its happiest moments provides for its listeners. In particular, we are thinking of Rock's classic phase in the sixties and early seventies, preceded by Presley-Chuck Berry style Rock and Roll and followed by a host of styles that dissolve this cultural paradigm into many diverse musical forms and attitudes. The analytical perspective that I propose might, however, be applied to other versions or

phases of pop and Rock music, as its crucial point is the potential function of its general aesthetic form.[9] This aesthetic function, and here we return to our dialogue with Adorno, includes some of the elements of 'Jazz' that Adorno emphasizes, yet now reinterpreted in a constructive sense. To begin with, pop music has a positive function in that it socially produces an internalized scheme of understanding and experience, a social Me, supporting and grounding intentional acts of the self. But we similarly keep open the perspective of a normatively positive function, as critical reflexivity requires such an internalized schematism (which Rock provides). Adorno overlooks the universal scope of the internalization process involving habitual-experiential schemes, as when he suggests that Jazz or Pop 'directly' shape the desiring levels of agents. Or else he suggests that Jazz and Pop are so schematized, standardized, made rigid and cliché that any related scheme that would emerge from them could only lead to conformism (compare Cook 1996). But to equate the internal structure of Rock, Jazz, or Pop music as such with the conformist adjustment is as barbaric as Adorno claims Jazz to be, since it identifies a necessary component of critical agency—the background scheme—with the whole structure and potential of the situated self. The lack of distance created by the experience of Rock, the simplicity of its underlying drum-bass rhythm sections, the predictability of its harmonic frame, and its superseding, often not 'fully composed' voice-lines and instrumental soli—all those features are indeed essential for Rock, but they do have an important and constructive function.

According to our social-pragmatic perspective, Rock socializes subjects into agents capable of self-guided behavior by establishing in the first place an internalized scheme that allows for a situated subjectivity. The construction of a schematic aesthetic structure—simple, non-distanced, quasi-immediate—fulfills this function. Precisely those features that Adorno laments as a destruction of subjectivity help in fact built it up. Adorno cannot see this because he already possesses a highly self-secure subjectivity that is filled with precisely this tradition which Schoenberg, 12-tone techniques, and other modern experiments are allowed to question. Rightly and perceptively, Adorno realizes that it is not the technique that allows Schoenberg's success, but the modern master's

---

[9] This function might thus be detected in a variety of other styles and genres, including Hip Hop, Reggae, Rap, Blues, etc. The extent to which the background-forming function is present in a genre, piece, or style is an empirical question.

groundedness in tradition against which he creatively invokes new methods—methods that in the hands of later followers can easily turn into the un-dialectical replacement of tradition with a new, equally dogmatically asserted authority (Adorno 1981b). Thus, the dialectic that is crucial for aesthetic success is destroyed here. Yet for many subjects (such as those in need of Rock and Pop), this groundedness in tradition, this secure background that requires dialectical preservation through creative destruction, does not as yet exist. The social context either does not provide for the social Me that they need in order to establish agency, or else such social contexts are with good reasons rejected. For the Rock generation, the word that Adorno coined for Schoenberg does equally apply: "Music has taking over the role of the parents." (Adorno 1981b) The Rock paradigm, comprising a distinct profile of rhythm, harmony, and voice, expresses an aesthetic physiognomy of identity that answers to the social-psychological need of agents for whom this medium creates a chance to establish their own situated identities.

To be sure, even if one agrees that the new theoretical frame will provide a better understanding of the potential of Rock and Pop, one might still accept Adorno's judgment that the predominant mode of such cultural socialization is one of conformist adjustment. To inquire into this issue, we must now take a closer look into the concrete phenomenon of pop music. Analyzing the aesthetic mediation of Rock and Pop must involve two perspectives, including looking at the structure of the 'music' itself (1) as well as at the social contexts within which the experience of music is located (2).

(1) What we need to establish is first how Rock might allow for a reflexive subjectivity through its musical structure, that is, whether it entails sufficient complexity for a complex and reflexive self. And while we do emphasize the simple and schematic structure of Rock and Pop, we can show through examples that this musical form entails a host of practices and mechanisms through which the rigid structure is opened up, and through which a playful, reflexive, and interpretive distance to the song's scheme is created. Take, for instance, Jimi Hendrick's interpretation of the *Star Spangled Banner* at Woodstook (1969). The theme of the American national anthem is here rendered in the electronic estrangement of a radical solo guitar passage, overlong 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 (see also Chambers 1997). 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. title piece 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.[10] 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.

(2) With regard to the social and cultural contexts, our claim that we need to take into account both the standardizing schemes as well as the individualizing features of Rock and Pop can be equally well defended. Those contexts are generally the object of social-scientific studies of popular music. Yet, as Simon Frith suggests, these studies have been pursued by two differing and competing approaches: "For the anthropologists [popular music] is a particularly *ordered* kind of social and symbolic structure; for culture studies it is a particularly *disruptive* kind of myth, a myth of resistance through rituals, the politics of style, etc., etc." (Frith 1992). Accordingly, the approach defined by 'social anthropology' emphasizes how Rock forms a micro-culture much like the mainstream, including a huge number of individuals involved, a clear set of rules, norms, and practices defining boundaries, and a discourse of quality judgments that shape the symbolic construction of its musical identity. While there are obvious differences to classical music (such as the length of instrument practice it takes for an individual to be able to assume the public role of musician), there are many similarities, including a

---

[10] 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.

shared understanding of the crucial bands (master composers), essential capacities (instrument mastery), and the social recognition of the musician through audience and performance. In contrast, cultural studies reconstruct the 'sub-culture' of Rock and Pop as a hotbed of subversive, deconstructive, and challenging attitudes and practices. Here, the expressions and practices of Rock and Pop are filled with far-reaching cultural meanings regarding identity, sexuality, and existing power structures in general. Frith goes on to suggest that the social-anthropological account, focused on the actual musicians and backed by traditional empirical methods, is the accurate one, but he grants that the cultural studies myth of Rock-as-rebellion has affected the self-understanding of Rock itself, thus redefining to some extent what Rock (and Pop, Punk, Reggae, etc.) means for the agents themselves.

While Frith's account leaves open how this effect could be explained (i.e. whether it might not suggest that the agents identify with the cultural studies approach because they recognize this discourse as the reflexive articulation of their culture), our approach can bring the two perspectives together. That the cultural practices of Rock form a symbolically and socially ordered space is part of our explanation why they attract such a large following among the Youth. Our theoretical frame suggests that the *rhythmically ordered space* of Rock enables the formation of a surrogate identity, an alternative to the established modes and practices of self-understandings precisely through its aesthetically organized and organizing nature. *Subjects in search for a structure of self-identity* can find such in this cultural space with rules and norms, including the enabling of self-confidence through practical mastery and the socially supportive dimension of public recognition. In addition, the attraction to Rock and Pop can be explained by the aesthetic qualities of music, because music's experiential features, including its holistic, embodied, and social reception, are particularly channeled by Rock so as to fulfill a socializing function (see part 2, 2.) The schematic rhythms and recognizable guitar riffs, the repetitive and standardized nature of its song structure, and the social-cultural construction of an identifiable world of classic songs, master performers, and crucial events coalesce into a cultural form in which a disoriented individual can find symbolic refuge. The ordered nature of Rock and Pop thus makes possible an internalized identity-formation that then can function as the ground for a subversive, challenging, or critical

attitude. It can enable such a critical attitude since critique, as we have shown before, always requires a background identity from which to launch its intentional rebellion. Since the field of Rock is capable of sustaining, as the social-anthropological approach has shown, a cultural field with its own rules, it can provide the individuals with a relatively distinct scheme and background understanding, one that is not reducible to capitalistic and profit-oriented modes of exchange.

Conclusion: Reflexive Agency and the Critical Study of Popular Music

That such an attitude is possible, and indeed prepared and grounded by Rock and Pop, we suggested through the examples and the discussion given, which define Rock as a much more dialectical and versatile aesthetic medium than Adorno acknowledged. Adorno took certain features of 'Jazz' or Rock for the whole, such as the repetitive and schematic structure of its background rhythm, while we integrate those identity-forming aspects into an overall definition of Jazz, Rock, and Pop music. Yet this is not to say, one must emphasize, the Rock or Pop are now rendered simply as a haven for critical resistance or reflexive agency. What we intend instead is to set up a framework that allows us to discover and detect the possible production of such critical agency, to see reflexive agency in and through Rock if and where it happens. Along those lines, I would like to conclude by indicating five areas that might serve as problem foci for the future critical analysis of popular music.

(1) *The differences between the different modes and styles of popular music*, including Jazz, Rock, and Pop music, need to be acknowledged. Indeed, the cultural analyst is forced to use a much more fine-grained classificatory system than 'Rock and Pop' if she is to do justice to the phenomenological constitution of non-classical music. Yet the differences between the different genres can now be analyzed with regard to how they solve the question of mediating a sustaining background scheme with a space for individual expression, and do so with a more constructive orientation toward the function and effects of popular music. Important in our approach is the unique connection between an aesthetic analysis of the internal complexity of the aesthetic execution, that is, how the scheme and rhythm is integrated, played with, transformed, formally challenged, interpreted, etc., by the overall piece and performance. That we have an open view for

this with regard to Jazz and Rock, besides Schoenberg and new experimental music, remains crucial, while particular differences in dialectical mediation, creativity, and quality can and must be assessed.

(2)   The aesthetic dimension of the internally constituted artwork, which we reconstructed through our phenomenological analysis of music applied to Rock, serves as productive bridge between the *two different spheres of music producers and music receivers, or musicians and fans*. Indeed, while our discussion of Adorno's approach as well as our own phenomenological approach emphasized the listening capabilities and effects, the sociologist's approach focuses mainly on the music production. The aesthetic nature of the musical experience is, I believe, the common ground that unifies both, that is, the musician's just as much as the consumers of Rock desire and appreciate the identity-forming effects that Rock and popular music provides. The attractiveness of this music for musicians includes the recognition of instrument mastery and star status, and in the case of regional band a local following that recognizes the band and their music. Like bands that lack performance opportunities or success, the mass of fans and consumers identifies within the music-as-culture itself—the medium is the message here. This cultural message, the cultural form of Rock and its particular aesthetic structure, is what drives this cultural practice, and it can be explained by the aesthetic identity-forming features of this medium.

(3)   *The difference between the rejection or affirmation of Rock* can be overcome by a new theoretical approach that defines the Rock culture as a social field distinct from other social realms. Currently, we are still caught in the opposition between Adorno's overall dismissal of any agency in Jazz or Rock and Cultural Studies' celebration of its subversive, hedonistic, and disruptive qualities. To be sure, the attractiveness that the whole field of popular music has for the cultural analyst is based on the potential of its subversive cultural message, on the hope that this musical form entails some difference to the mainstream consumer culture. Thus it is important to see that our point is not to save Rock as a subversive haven, but rather to analyze the extent to which reflexive agency can emerge from a field that is clearly shaped by capitalistic interests. In this vein, our analysis includes how capitalistic effects and mechanisms operate within Rock music and its local cultures, and how and to what extent those

cultures get transformed ('defused and diffused,' D. Hebdige) through their contact with such profit-based interests. Furthermore, the reconstruction of the subversive potential, which would include the music-based development of attitudes of critical reflexivity and cultural openness, must always be accompanied by Adorno's perspective. Whether we take Britney Spear's stage performance of sexual pseudo-liberation, the widespread use of musical/visual clichés for cheap stimulation in Rap videos, or the deeply ideological structure of Country music as produced and received in the US—the analysis of power structures that mask as culture, of the aesthetic betrayal that Rock and Pop potentially always present, must by part of the program.

(4)   Yet the major step that has been taken by executing the social-theoretical moves suggested here is that we can now analyze how the issue of power and profit-oriented attitudes are played and fought out *within the field of popular culture itself*. A major requirement of all social analysis, namely that the intentional self-understanding of the agents can now be taken into account, is thus met. But more importantly, it is met on the basis that the agents themselves can be seen as aware of the processes of capitalistic exploitation and social power, while such power is still acknowledged and analyzed as a structurally influential force. Agents are never seen as entirely produced by the schemes of the culture-industry, but are always understood as co-constructing and co-defining the practices and contents that define what counts as 'the meaning' of their music and culture, especially in light of the industry's power. This can be done as dramatically as when John Lennon and Yoko Ono publically staged their vision of peace and human freedom, or it can happen by sticking to a local language, a local context, or certain self-imposed standards of authenticity and values.[11]

(5)   This leads to the final point: the normative evaluation of popular music. Immediately, a new difference comes to the fore, related to the issue whether popular music should be evaluated according to internal aesthetic criteria (the same as classical music or different ones?), or whether it should be assessed in light of more general, cognitive and ethical value-perspectives. *The difference between internal aesthetic and*

---

[11] Of course, if measured on the level of public economic success, the prospects of such modes of cultural self-assertion may be bleak. Yet if the agent's self-understanding is introduced and recognized as a valuable perspective, then what ultimately counts as success, i.e. what defines our norms of evaluating success, could itself undergo a normative change.

external cognitive or moral criteria, however, poses the wrong alternative. Part of Adorno's continuous relevance is his defense of an internal aesthetic perspective on external grounds, namely that the internal aesthetic synthesis serves as a placeholder and promise of a real aesthetico-ethical synthesis in future social life. We in turn suggest that the difference between internal and external criteria can be overcome by understanding that the cultural production of aesthetic identity-schemes can be grounds for critical and reflexive agency, in which case popular culture would provide practical resources for cognitive and ethical attitudes. The narrow aesthetic value-dimension must be seen in its general social function, as art and music must be analyzed as social through and through. Yet the essential question, the one that drives all critical study of culture, then becomes the extent to which participation in and socialization through Jazz, Rock, and Pop can foster and sustain subjective identities that are capable of public criticism, resistance, and ethical attitudes. That such a potential is possible we have shown by reconstructing the identity-forming grounds of popular music. Whether this promise is ever to be realized will have to be decided by culture itself.[12]

Bibliography

Adorno, Theodor W. (2002) Essays on Music, Berkeley, L.A., London: University of California Press

--, (2002a) "On Popular Music," in: Adorno 2002

--, (2002b) "On Jazz," in: Adorno 2002

-- (1991), The Culture Industry, London and New York: Routledge

--, (1991a) "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," in Adorno 1991

---

[12] As these lines are written, the global concert initiative *Live Aid for Africa* just took place, in which Rock and Pop performers from different countries engaged in a simultaneous performance in order to symbolically influence the impeding G-8 meeting of 2005. Two millions agents attended, over two billion watched the event on TV, including concerts in London, Paris, Philadelphia, Tokyo, Berlin, Johannesburg, Toronto, and Rome. Not a union of all religious leaders, not a global organization of unions or socialist parties, but the allegedly hedonistic, apolitical, market-driven culture of Rock and Pop pulled this event together! The possibility to stamp, out of thin air, such a mass audience, united and reflexively focused on large-scale world problems as much as with a concrete political schedule in mind, can perhaps suggest that agents related to and socialized through Rock entail indeed, in whatever schematic and implicit form, a critical potential that some day might lead to more than a one-day Super-Party.

--, (1991b) "Culture Industry Reconsidered," in Adorno 1991

--, (1981), Prisms, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press

--, (1981a) "Perennial Fashion—Jazz," in Adorno 1981

--, (1981b) „Arnold Schoenberg, 1874-1951," in Adorno 1981

--, (1973) Philosophy of Modern Music, Seabury Press

Adorno, Theodore W./Horkheimer, Max (2002), Dialectic of Enlightenment, Stanford: Stanford University Press

Bowman, Wayne (1998), Philosophical Perspectives on Music, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Budd, Malcolm, (1992) Music and the Emotions: The Philosophical Theories, Routledge

Chambers, Ian (1997) "A Voice in the Dark, A Map of Memory, in Culture After Humanism," London/New York: Routledge

Cook, Deborah (1996), The Culture Industry Revisited, London: Routledge.

Davies, Stephen (1994) "Music and Language," in: Musical Meaning and Expression, Ithaca: Cornell U. P.

Deleuze, Gilles/Guattari, Felix (1987) A Thousand Plateaus, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

Frith, Simon (1992) "The Cultural Study of Popular Music" in Grossberg, Lawrence/Nelson, Cary/Treichler, Paula (eds.) Cultural Studies, New York, London: Routledge

Gehlen, Arnold (1988) Man: His Nature and Place in the World, New York: Columbia University Press

Goodman, Nelson (1976) Languages of Art, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company

Grossberg, Lawrence (1997) "Rock and Roll, Pleasure and Power" in Dancing in Spite of Myself, Duke University Press

Hegel, G.W.F. (1970) „Die Musik," in: Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik, Werke 15, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp

Heidegger, Martin (1962), Being and Time, New York: Harper & Row

Kahn, Ashley (2000) Kind of Blue, New York: Da Capo Press.

Kivy, Peter (1989) Sound Sentiments: An Essay on the Musical Emotions, Philadelphia: Temple U. P.

Kögler, Hans-Herbert (1999), The Power of Dialogue: Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault, Cambidge, Mass., The MIT Press

--, (1999a) „Kritische Hermeneutik des Subjekts. Cultural Studies als Erbe der Kritischen Theorie," in Hörning, Karl/Winter, Rainer, Widerspenstige Kulturen, Frankfurt am main: Suhrkamp; („A Critical Hermeneutics of Subjectivity: Cultural Studies as Critical Theory.")

Langer, Susanne (1942), Philosophy in a New Key: Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press

Luhmann, Niklas (1995), Social Systems, Stanford: University of Stanford Press

Mead, George Herbert (1934) Mind, Self, and Society, Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Nettle, Bruno/Russell, Melinda (eds.) (1998) In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation, Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Smith, Christopher, "A Sense of the Possible: Miles Davis and the Semiotics of Improvised Performance"

Winter, Rainer (2001) Die Kunst des Eigensinns, Weileswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft

Witkin, Robert (1998) Adorno on Music, London/New York:Routledge