

**The ‘Speculative Ear’:
Explorations in Adorno and Musical Modernism**

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Abstract

Theodor W. Adorno continues to cut a controversial figure through the discipline of musicology. Against the substantial discourse that has built up around ‘what’s wrong with Adorno’ (in which his thinking tends to be presented as rigid and ossified, inadequate to the demands and complexities of contemporary music scholarship), this thesis presents a ‘speculative’ account of Adorno’s music criticism and philosophy. By both using Adorno’s aesthetic theory in speculative ways, and highlighting the speculative, open-ended qualities within his thinking, this thesis argues for the continued relevance of Adorno’s work for musicology.

The thesis’ early chapters focus on musicology’s ‘Modernist problem.’ These chapters respond critically to the musicological reception of Adorno’s understanding of structural listening and aesthetic autonomy, and consider the place of Modernist music and aesthetics within musicological discourse more generally. Though structural listening and aesthetic autonomy have been widely debated within the literature, many of the nuances of Adorno’s concepts have arguably been lost. I respond to the critiques advanced by thinkers such as Rose Rosengard Subotnik, Susan McClary, Richard Taruskin and others, arguing that Adorno has been straw-manned, and unfairly tarred with a formalist brush.

The thesis’ central theoretical concerns are laid down in the middle chapters. ‘Purely Instrumental’ considers Adorno’s formulation of the dialectic of autonomy and mediation. Noting Adorno’s inheritance of, and departures from, the aesthetics of Kant and Hegel, and by tracing the particular historical developments that surrounded the emergence of the idea of absolute music, the chapter argues that Adorno’s formulation of aesthetic autonomy proves an essential grounding for the modern (and especially Modernist) understanding of the work of art. Two companion ‘Killing Time’ chapters consider the place of time and temporality in Adorno’s aesthetics. Adorno’s reception of the ideas of Kant, Walter Benjamin and Henri Bergson are explored, and Adorno’s prohibition against musical repetition is considered in light of his understanding of the mimetic faculty (arguing that Adorno’s demand for musical non-repetition operates in tension with his understanding of mimesis). Furthermore, the ‘Killing Time’ chapters argue that a coherent critique of musical temporality underpins all of Adorno’s music criticism, with time operating as an important (and under-explored) unifying motif

through which his most negative musical assessments unfold. ‘Adornian Mode’ considers the place of ugliness, dissonance and pleasure in Adornian aesthetics. The chapter argues that Adorno’s concept of (Modernist) ugliness stages a radical reversal of traditional aesthetics, whilst preserving the Kantian desire for universal assent. For Adorno the universalising promise of beauty and harmony have been revealed as states of domination, and he proposes that it is through dissonance that the only remaining domain of universal human agreement finds expression: suffering.

The final chapters illustrate the tangible uses of Adorno’s aesthetics for music analysis and interpretation. These chapters show the flexibility and applicability of Adorno’s aesthetic categories, and offer a riposte to that pervasive criticism that Adorno failed to ‘prove’ his aesthetic theories via concrete analysis. First, the special place of Arnold Schoenberg’s *Erwartung* (1909) in Adorno’s work is considered, and the earlier argument for a reappraisal of structural listening is revisited. Second, Milton Babbitt’s *Philomel* (1964) is considered in light of the theoretical exploration of ugliness and dissonance, and the complex question of the political significance of the depiction of suffering and violence in art is examined. Finally, the possibility for using Adorno’s aesthetics for the interpretation of Postmodernist, non-score based works is explored through via the analysis of Eliane Radigue’s *Transamore/Transomortem* (1973). Time, repetition and the role of the mimetic exchange are considered with reference to the work, demonstrating the enduring relevance of Adorno’s aesthetics.

Declaration

This thesis comprises only my original work towards the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy except where indicated in the Preface.

Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.

This thesis is fewer than 100,00 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

P. Boyd-Hughes

For my parents.

My mother Suzanne, and in memory of my father Mike.

The scientist and storyteller.

Preface

Sections of this thesis have previously been published in a peer-reviewed journal.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.0 Research Problems

Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969) continues to cut a controversial figure through the discipline of musicology. Frequently lauded and quite often decried (but rarely subjected to temperate critique), Adorno's work has generated much polarised debate in the almost half-century since his death. This thesis cannot claim to disrupt the general arc of Adorno-criticism, then, because it contributes an unashamedly partisan offering to the vast extant literature: my work is largely a defence of Adorno's aesthetics, arguing for the ongoing relevance of his thinking to musicology. There are two primary aims for this thesis: the defence of Adornian aesthetics against a number of specific (and recurring) criticisms, and the demonstration of the usefulness of Adorno's aesthetic categories for the purposes of music analysis and interpretation.

My research is structured around three main areas of inquiry: first, a consideration of how Adorno's ideas have been received within musicology, second, my own exegesis and critical reflection upon Adorno's ideas, and finally, the incorporation of Adornian aesthetic categories into the interpretation and analysis of Modernist and Postmodernist musical works. The thesis unfolds from the following framework:

Mapping the field: How have Adorno's aesthetics and his writing on music been received within musicology? Who are the influential voices in the musicological reception of Adorno's ideas? How might the veracity of such interpretations of Adorno be tested? I identify two main concepts which have been the source of much hostile criticism: structural listening and aesthetic autonomy.

Critical reflection: There are three main areas of Adorno's thinking which I found to be under-explored within the musicological literature: his understanding of autonomy and mediation, his conception of time and temporality, and his understanding of Modernist ugliness and dissonance. A chapter is devoted to each of these themes, necessarily

drawing in many other Adornian concepts. These chapters seek to both illuminate and critically examine Adorno's aesthetic theory, demonstrating the tangible ways in which Adorno's thinking provides an important and sophisticated theoretical armoury for musicology.

Exploring the possibilities: How might an Adornian interpretation proceed? How might one listen to modernist works through the prism of Adorno's aesthetic categories? How might Adorno-inspired analysis and interpretation influence our understanding of Modernism in music? And can Adorno's aesthetics be usefully incorporated into the interpretation of Postmodernist works? Via the analysis and interpretation of three musical works – Arnold Schoenberg's *Erwartung* (1909), Milton Babbitt's *Philomel* (1964) and Eliane Radigue's *Transamorem/Transmortem* (1973) – these chapters illustrate the possibility for hearing both Modernist and Postmodernist musical works with the ear attuned to Adorno's aesthetics.

1.1 Method

Adorno borrows the metaphor of the 'speculative ear' from the work of Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard in *Either/Or*: 'Just as the speculative eye sees things together, so the speculative ear hears things together.'¹ The motif of the speculative ear appears in several of Adorno's writings on philosophy, music, aesthetics and literature,² and is used to describe an adequate mode of listening. A 'speculative ear' listens with attention and imagination, not passivity and blind acceptance. The notion 'hearing things together' denotes not only an openness and willingness to listen simultaneously to each different musical parameter, but a commitment to listen through time in order to incorporate both anticipation and reflection. The notion of the 'speculative ear' also captures something of the spontaneity and unpredictability of the moment of mimetic exchange which is so central to Adorno's understanding of aesthetic experience. Adorno describes the mimetic exchange as a non-conceptual incorporation of subject and object (self and other) without domination, and the outcomes cannot be known in advance (a moment of pure speculation). In titling my thesis the 'speculative ear' I have

¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 122 note 98.

² Peter Šajda, "Theodor W. Adorno: Tracing the Trajectory of Kierkegaard's Unintended Triumphs and Defeats," in *Kierkegaard's Influence on Philosophy*, Tome I, *German and Scandinavian Philosophy*, ed. Jon Stewart (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 37.

signalled the spirit of the work done here: open-ended and motivated by curiosity, a desire to know more about Adorno's thinking, and a commitment to use it. In illustrating some of the ways in which Adorno's serves as much-needed theoretical scaffolding for musicology, the thesis hopes to dispel some of the musicological misconceptions surrounding Adorno's work. Within our discipline Adorno's thought is often presented as erudite, but also patrician, rigid and ossified. This thesis seeks to challenge this reception of his ideas, because I have found Adorno to be an enormously speculative thinker, whose thinking can arguably encourage us all to be more open-eared listeners.

The importance of music to Adorno's aesthetics cannot be overstated; as Martin Jay aptly describes, Adorno's is an 'atonal philosophy.'³ Just as philosophical inquiry permeates Adorno's music criticism, so too does music infuse every aspect of his thinking. There are many shared concerns linking Adorno's music criticism and his philosophy. Perhaps the most fundamental, however, is the relationship between the whole and the parts, the dialectic of universal and particular. If a core theme can be identified within Adorno's project, it is surely his search for the possibility of structuring difference (and exchange) without domination.⁴ In Adorno's philosophy this occurs through the figures of the individual and society, in his music criticism through the figures difference and repetition. As this thesis shows, Adorno's thinking across these two domains remains remarkably consistent, with philosophical and musical thinking utterly interdependent.

Adorno's own discursive practice is notoriously obtuse: his writing style is aphoristic and his syntax paratactic,⁵ explicitly rejecting the hierarchical and linear ordering of both thought and language.⁶ The resulting 'constellations' seek to preserve the possibility for particularity and non-identity (which risk being subsumed into identity by conceptual thought), whilst maintaining the element of unity of needed for

³ Martin Jay, 'Atonal Philosophy,' in *Adorno*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 56-81.

⁴ Simon Jarvis notes that the concept of domination remains undefined within Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. See Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1998), 33-37.

⁵ J. M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 356.

⁶ For Adorno 'parataxes are striking – artificial disturbances that evade the logical hierarchy of a subordinating syntax.' T. W. Adorno quoted in Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, 356.

coherence.⁷ Conscious of the fallibility and provisional nature of all thought,⁸ Adorno's method insists upon discontinuity and partiality. Within Adorno's music criticism this leads to the rejection of detailed musical examples; although his work contains a wealth of suggested evidence, it is often left to the reader to infer how his critique might map onto the music in question. This refusal to 'pin down' his ideas with specific musical examples is a common criticism,⁹ often presumed to be a deficiency or oversight rather than a procedure specific to Adorno's method. The very notion of 'applied Adorno' would indeed be an anathema to his entire project, and I have certainly not attempted to narrow his aesthetics into an easily deployed framework. And, needless to say, my task here is not to decree that Adorno's (or any) approach could serve as some universal musicological method. Nonetheless, Adorno's ideas *can* be put to practical use, and this thesis illustrates a number ways in which Adornian aesthetics can be used to close the gap between musicological theory and praxis.

The method employed here emerged from the requirements of the material: a necessarily interdisciplinary approach drawing in musicology, philosophy, aesthetics and music analysis. Each of the thesis chapters seeks to address specific issues relating to the reception and application of Adorno's ideas. This means the thesis draws on a range of resources; naturally, Adorno's primary texts are central to the arguments advanced here, the works of secondary literature considered in detail here are (for the most part) those texts with which the author has found fault. Chapters two and three address some significant misreadings of Adorno's ideas, whilst chapters four, five, six and seven seek to fill gaps encountered within the secondary literature with excurses

⁷ 'The unifying moment [of the concept] survives...because there is no step-by-step progression from the concepts to a more general cover concept. Instead, the concepts enter into a constellation.' Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973) 162.

⁸ This partiality is central to Adorno's celebration of the essay as form 'in which thought's utopia of hitting the bull's eye unites with the consciousness of its own fallibility and provisional nature.' Theodor W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form," trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, *New German Critique* 32 (Spring-Summer, 1984): 164.

⁹ Referring to Heinz-Klaus Metzger's broadcast debates with Adorno, Edward Campbell writes: 'Metzger challenges Adorno's tendency to generalize...and his failure to note a single concrete musical example by way of evidence.' Edward Campbell, *Boulez, Music and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 76. Hans Mayer argues that 'Adorno does not succeed in proving concretely that his examples are anything more than analogies.' Mayer, cited in Giles Hooper, *The Discourse of Musicology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 105. Hooper himself concurs: 'Adorno often makes assertions for which he does not provide adequate evidence or he makes assertion for which it is not clear as to what might even count as adequate evidence.' Hooper, *The Discourse of Musicology*, 119.

on key Adornian concepts. Chapters eight, nine and ten illustrate some possible applications for these ideas, bringing the theory to fruition through analysis.

The thesis' dependence upon English translations of Adorno's texts will undoubtedly leave some readers dissatisfied. So many of Adorno's key terms are contested in their content even before undergoing translation; disagreements over the meaning and content of Adorno's language can only intensify when considering his writing in translation. For the reader who considers Adorno's thought to be so intimately bound up with the German language as to be essentially untranslatable, this thesis will no doubt be regarded as an impossible and flawed exercise. Perhaps, however, reading Adorno in translation can be regarded as a fundamentally different endeavour to reading his original prose; an interpretation of an original, to be sure, but one with its own integrity (Glenn Gould's rendition of Mozart's *Piano Sonata in A K. 331* comes to mind). Likewise, my exclusive focus upon Anglophone scholarship within the secondary literature may frustrate some readers. It is my view, however, that the volume and depth of Adorno-scholarship in English is so substantial that it can rightly be considered a discourse in its own right.

1.2 Structure

The thesis chapters fall under three umbrella categories: the musicological reception of Adorno's ideas (chapters two and three), exegeses upon misunderstood or neglected elements of Adorno's aesthetic theory (chapters four through seven), and musical analyses inspired by Adorno's aesthetics (chapters eight through ten).

The musicological reception of Adorno's thinking is the subject of chapters two and three, which argue that criticism has coalesced around two central ideas: structural listening and aesthetic autonomy. These two chapters assert that important elements of Adorno's aesthetics have been misconstrued within musicology. Also suggested here is that a more fundamental anti-Modernism is in operation within these discourses, with Modernist thinking, Modernist music, and Modernist institutions coming under hostile criticism. Chapter two, 'On the Modernist Problem: Structural Listening,' takes issue with Rose Rosengard Subotnik's rejection of structural listening, offering an alternative approach which I believe constitutes a new contribution towards our understanding of Adorno's theory of listening. Chapter three, 'On the Modernist Problem: Aesthetic

Autonomy,' considers critiques of aesthetic autonomy advanced by Rose Rosengard Subotnik, Susan McClary, Richard Taruskin and others. Chapter three argues that the positioning of aesthetic autonomy in categorical opposition to the socially grounded study of music is erroneous, and has stifled a debate whose relevance is ongoing. These early chapters respond to the anti-Adorno sentiment of (Anglophone, and above all North American) New and Historical Musicology of the 1980s and beyond. Given that, for many, the tide has turned against the New Musicology, evidenced by the contemporary dissatisfaction with the theoretical innovations of the 1980s and 1990s, the time is right for a refreshed view of Adorno.

Chapter four, 'Purely Instrumental: Autonomy and Mediation in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory,' extends upon the arguments made in chapter three, providing an exegesis upon Adorno's formulation of aesthetic autonomy. Noting the historical developments which led to the special status of music within the tradition of Western art, Adorno's understanding of autonomy and his theory of the artwork are considered in detail, providing the theoretical grounding upon which the later chapters depend. The dialectic of autonomy and mediation is considered, tracing the development of Adorno's position through his (critical) reception of the ideas of Kant and Hegel. This chapter considers both Adorno's inheritance of the ideas of Kant and Hegel, *and* the important ways in which his thinking departs from earlier approaches.

Adorno's understanding of time remains a relatively neglected aspect of his music criticism, and so chapters five and six consider Adorno's understanding of musical time and temporality. Chapter five, 'Killing Time I: Key Influences and Concepts,' begins with a theoretical overview of Adorno's concept of time, noting the thinkers who were his main influences: Immanuel Kant, Henri Bergson and Walter Benjamin. Also considered in this chapter are Adorno's formulations of shudder, mimesis and repetition. Chapter six, 'Killing Time II: Time and Temporality in Adorno's Music Criticism,' considers Adorno's most notoriously 'negative' musical assessments (the essay "On Jazz" (1937), his critique of Stravinsky from the *Philosophy of New Music* (1949), and his monograph on Wagner (1952)), showing the extent to which they coalesce around a single critique of time. This chapter shows the centrality of time to Adorno's critical project, and illustrates the continuity of his thinking about time across genres, periods and styles. The objective of the companion 'Killing Time' chapters is twofold; first, the illumination of Adorno's understanding of time in both philosophical

and musicological terms, and second, to trace the notion of ‘regressive’ music through Adorno’s thinking via the category of time.

Chapter seven, ‘Adornian Mode: Ugliness and Dissonance in Twentieth Century Musical Modernism,’ considers dissonance and ugliness in Adorno’s aesthetics. Given the centrality of these concepts to the Modernist musical aesthetic they remain curiously under-theorised in the musicological literature. This chapter explores the philosophical underpinnings that led Adorno to imbue dissonant modernist soundscapes with emancipatory potential. This chapter considers Modernist ugliness (and dissonance in music) in light of traditional aesthetics (in particular, Kant’s concept of beauty) noting the important ways in which Adorno’s aesthetics diverges from traditional approaches. Adorno’s understanding of dissonance and ugliness remain largely unexplored within the musicological literature; by focusing on these themes this chapter contributes towards a sounder theoretical framework for the understanding of musical Modernism.

Arnold Schoenberg’s monodrama *Erwartung* (1909) forms the focus for chapter eight, ‘“Loneliness as Style”: Adorno’s *Erwartung*,’ demonstrating the central importance of the work to Adorno’s understanding of musical Modernism. The chapter then develops an interpretation of the work based on Adorno’s aesthetic categories, noting that his assessment of *Erwartung* provides important evidence for the interpretation of structural listening advanced in chapter two.

Chapter nine, ‘Milton Babbitt *Philomel* (1964),’ considers Milton Babbitt’s serial monodrama *Philomel* (1964) in relation to Adorno’s assertion that ‘there is more joy in dissonance than in consonance.’¹⁰ Instead of hearing ‘difficult’ modernist compositions as purely ascetic gestures, which fetishise the denial of resolution, one might begin to hear *Philomel* in an Adornian mode, alive to the many simultaneous demands of sense and intellect, pleasure and work, thought and feeling. Listening for the musical and social meaning embedded within *Philomel*, this analysis confirms not only the importance of interpretation for the full experience of the work, but also the sensual pull of ugly Modernist works.

Chapter ten, ‘A Mirror to the Mind: Listening to Eliane Radigue,’ considers how Adorno’s aesthetics might be applied to the analysis and interpretation of non-score-

¹⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997), 51.

based, post-tonal works. Through a close listening to Eliane Radigue's *Transamorem/Transmortem* (1973) this analysis considers Adorno's understanding of time and musical repetition. This chapter also brings the thesis full circle: as argued here, to listen closely to this work is to follow the function and meaning of each musical parameter, in other words, to pursue a structural listening.

As detailed above, this research has been motivated by a number of gaps and misreadings within the existing literature, coupled with the desire to demonstrate the tangible uses of Adorno's aesthetics for musicology. My argument for a reappraisal of structural listening is original, and the applicability of my argument is illustrated in each of the three analysis chapters (eight through ten). My chapters on time and temporality provide a critical examination of Adorno's thinking on an important and under-explored area. The thesis' most significant theoretical insights are perhaps to be found in the work detailing Adorno's understanding of dissonance and ugliness, areas of central importance to our understanding of Modernist musical works, but which have gone almost without consideration within the musicological literature. Finally, in approaching music analysis via Adorno's aesthetic categories, this study builds on, and contributes to, existing methodologies. This study's greatest limitation is bound to be its breadth, but it is the aim for the thesis to offer the reader a chance to rethink (and re-hear) the theoretical foundations underpinning musical Modernism (and Postmodernism). Should the study's ambition and speculative approach be simultaneously considered an Achilles' heel, at least these might be considered properly Adornian weaknesses.

Chapter Two

On the Modernist Problem: Structural Listening

2.0 Introduction

It is now generally accepted that the New Musicology¹ substantially changed the questions asked in musicological research. Once the domain of historical or formalist analysis, musicology in the 1980s announced a shift in focus marked by a desire to understand music from within its social context, and a new commitment to the exploration of music's role as a social medium.² It is a strange irony, then, that the New Musicology largely rejected the most important thinker of music and society in the twentieth century, Theodor W. Adorno, in order to claim for itself the 'discovery' that music is a contextual art.³ In their efforts to bring gender, sexuality, class and race into the domain of musicological inquiry, many New Musicologists not only rejected not only the 'old' (American) musicology (of which Heinrich Schenker's hyper-formalism is paradigmatic),⁴ but also the critical theoretical approach taken by Adorno.⁵

¹ 'New Musicology' typically refers to work that emerged out of the United States during the 1980s and 1990s, whilst 'Critical Musicology' refers to its British counterpart. Watershed new musicological texts included Joseph Kerman, *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); Susan McClary "Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition," *Cultural Critique* 12 (1989): 57-81; Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); and Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Stan Hawkins, ed., *Critical Musicological Reflections: Essays in Honour of Derek B. Scott* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012) provides an overview of critical musicology in the UK. Phillip Brett's exploration on homosexuality in Schubert's music is paradigmatic, Phillip Brett, "Piano Four-hands: Schubert and the Performance of Gay Male Desire," *19th Century Music* 21, no. 2 (Autumn, 1997): 149-176. See also, Fred E. Maus, "What Was Critical Musicology?" *Radical Musicology* 5 (2010-11): http://www.radical-musicology.org.uk/special_critmus/maus.htm. Accessed January 20, 2016. Both strands (new and critical musicology) share the primary concern of the deconstruction or dismantling of the canon.

² Tia DeNora, *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 35.

³ Alastair Williams, "Torn Halves: Structure and Subjectivity in Analysis," *Music Analysis* 17 (October 1998): 281.

⁴ Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition*, trans. and ed. Ernst Oster (New York: Longman, 1979).

⁵ See for example, Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Deconstructive Variations: Music and Reason in Western Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). Andrew Dell'Antonio (ed.), *Beyond Structural Listening? Postmodern Modes of Hearing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Lawrence Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). Judy Lochhead and Joseph Auner (eds.), *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought* (New

As this chapter and the next show, musicological criticism of Adorno's thinking coalesces around two central ideas: structural listening (which is taken to be elitist, and a narrowing of subjective listening experience) and aesthetic autonomy (which is taken to be in tension with the socially grounded study of music). As argued here, far from signalling a new openness towards the plurality of musical experience, the rejection of Adorno's thinking within musicology in fact signals a new orthodoxy: at its most polemic, New Musicology can be taken to be a largely anti-Modernist discourse, loaded with its own projection of 'proper' modes of listening to, composing, performing, and writing about, music.⁶ The following two chapters illustrate that much New and historical musicology has a 'Modernist problem,' with both Modernist thinking (exemplified by the work of Adorno), Modernist music (particularly serialism), and even Modernist institutions (such as IRCAM) dismissed in a bluster of hostile criticism. Whilst the works considered here by Subotnik, McClary and Taruskin are not especially recent (and their arguments are certainly not in accord), these thinkers (and their arguments) have been selected as they have codified many of the arguments and ideas with which this thesis engages.⁷ These thinkers by no means exhaust (or necessarily represent) the range and diversity of musicological opinion, but they are emblematic figures whose thinking has shaped musicological discourse. By bringing these various lines of inquiry into a single place, these chapters illustrate (and also challenge) the ways in which musical Modernism has been constructed discursively as an elitist, hegemonic and even tyrannical force.⁸

York: Garland, 2002). Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

⁶ Jürgen Habermas notes this paradox concisely: 'Modernism is dominant but dead.' Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity – An Incomplete Project," in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (London: Pluto Press, 1985), 6.

⁷ Richard Taruskin (with his epic, *Oxford History of Western Music*) is perhaps the most prominent musicologist writing today. The work of Susan McClary has been extremely influential, and has been celebrated in a Festschrift: Steven Baur, Raymond Knapp and Jacqueline C. Warwick, eds., *Musicological Identities: Essays in Honour of Susan McClary* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

⁸ This is not to suggest that musicology is itself a monolithic discourse. There are, of course, a number of musicologists with sympathetic views towards both Adorno's aesthetics, and modernist music and thinking more generally. Some important contributions include Alastair Williams, *New Music and the Claims of Modernity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997); Arved Ashby, ed., *The Pleasure of Modernist Music: Listening, Meaning, Intention, Ideology* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004); Björn Heile, ed., *The Modernist Legacy: Essays on New Music* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009). Similarly, the critiques of Adorno's thinking discussed here (advanced by Subotnik, McClary, Taruskin, Born and Bürger) are not exhaustive: they have been chosen as representative of their field(s). A number of other critics (whose work could not be included here) have expressed similarly strident opposition to Adorno's approach. Leo Treitler, for example, finds Adorno's 'sociological' readings to be 'arbitrary and distorted,' and his approach 'artificial, counterfeit' and 'unconvincing.' Leo Treitler, "Facile Metaphors,

This chapter begins with an account of structural listening for Adorno. The chapter then considers the criticism Adorno's approach received from Rose Rosengard Subotnik, with reference to her important essay "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening: A Critique of Schoenberg, Adorno and Stravinsky" (1988).⁹ By turning to Subotnik's critique of structural listening, the following discussion shows how the musicological reception of Adorno's thinking has (at times) failed to take account of the nuance and open-endedness of his approach. By presenting structural listening as an exclusionary practice, a closing down of interpretive and expressive possibilities, this chapter argues that Subotnik has straw-manned Adorno, unfairly consigning structural listening to the dustbin of conservative formalist dogma.

2.1 Adorno and Structural Listening

As Richard Leppert has noted, 'Adorno's commentaries on the social state of listening are several and oft-cited, among which none has received as much attention, commonly hostile, as his insistence on the importance of what he duly termed "structural listening."' ¹⁰ Since the publication of Rose Rosengard Subotnik's essay, "Toward a Deconstruction of Structural Listening: A Critique of Schoenberg, Adorno and Stravinsky" (first published in 1988 in the *Meyer Festschrift* and later in her book *Deconstructive Variations*),¹¹ the limitations and undisclosed prejudices of Adorno's most valorised listener (one capable of 'structural listening') have been much discussed and debated.¹² Before turning to Subotnik's critique, however, Adorno's own account of structural listening is first considered: what did he mean by structural listening? And why might listening 'structurally' be important? In order to consider these questions, this discussion begins with a contextualisation of Adorno's typology of listening

Hidden Gaps, Short Circuits: *Should We Adore Adorno?* in *Reflections of Musical Meaning and its Representations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 260; 264.

⁹ Rose Rosengard Subotnik, "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening: A Critique of Schoenberg, Adorno and Stravinsky," in *Deconstructive Variations: Music and Reason in Western Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 148-176. It is this version of the essay to which all subsequent short-form citations refer.

¹⁰ Richard Leppert, "Music 'Pushed to the Edge of Existence' Adorno, Listening and the Question of Hope," *Cultural Critique* 60 (Spring, 2005): 115.

¹¹ Rose Rosengard Subotnik, "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening: A Critique of Schoenberg, Adorno and Stravinsky," in *Explorations in Music, the Arts and Ideas: Essays in Honor of Leonard B. Meyer*, ed. Ruth Solie and Eugene Namour, (Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1988), 87-122. It is the version found in Subotnik, *Deconstructive Variations* to which all subsequent short-form citations refer (see note 8 above).

¹² See for example, Dell'Antonio, ed., *Beyond Structural Listening?*

subjects, drawn from the *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* (1962),¹³ and considers why his conclusions (if not his method) have generated so much hostile criticism. As this chapter argues, it is Adorno's valorisation of structural listening that has led many (New) musicologists to tar him with a formalist brush, when his approach is in fact better understood as a *challenge* to the formalist tradition.

2.1.i A Note on Method

Adorno's exile to America (from 1938 until 1949) had important consequences for his work, with a notable shift away from his earlier critical theoretical stance towards an explicitly sociological approach. Initially engaged to work on Paul Lazarsfeld's Princeton Radio Research Project (PRRP) in 1938, Adorno's time in America demanded that he engage in empirical social research, his disdain for which is well documented.¹⁴ Although Adorno had earlier attacked 'the sneering empiricist sabotage'¹⁵ of positivist sociology, he was now dependent upon it for his livelihood during exile. Important projects such as the PRRP (on which Adorno worked from his arrival until 1941), and his later work with the American Jewish Committee on the book on the psychology of fascism, *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950),¹⁶ which Adorno co-authored with a number of exiled and American social scientists, were crucial to Adorno's security. It is from within this context that one should consider his *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, with its classifications of musical 'types.'¹⁷ Whilst much has been said of Adorno's scathing conclusions as to the superficiality of the American culture industry, less criticism has been directed towards the inherent limits of such a positivistic approach, of which Adorno was himself well aware.¹⁸

¹³ Theodor W. Adorno, "Types of Musical Conduct," in *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1976), 1-20.

¹⁴ For an account of Adorno's time in America, and his difficulty in conforming with American methods of sociological research, see David Janemann, *Adorno in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

¹⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, "Messages in a Bottle," *New Left Review* 200 (July-August 1993): 11.

¹⁶ Theodor W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Norton, 1982).

¹⁷ See 2.1.ii 'Types of Musical Conduct' below for an exploration of the nature of Adorno's 'types.'

¹⁸ Such approaches have endured within sociology and have proven extremely influential on both the academy and public policy. Take, for example, Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1986). Adorno would later concede the limitations of elements of his musical sociology: in particular, he conceded the lack of an 'adequate theory of listening.' See Robert Hullot-Kentor, "Second Salvage: Prolegomenon to a Reconstruction of *Current of Music*," in *Things Beyond Resemblance*, preface Lydia Goehr (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 121.

Adorno wrote that ‘Types of Musical Conduct’ was ‘roughly sketched as early as 1939,’¹⁹ and draws on the ‘American papers from the time when the author directed the Princeton Radio Research Project,’²⁰ and thus should be read from within the context of Adorno’s work on the PRRP. Earlier works (such as “On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening (1938)”²¹ and the chapter (with Max Horkheimer) “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1949))²² already contain Adorno’s fundamental argument that serious music (and the act of listening) has regressed under modernity. The supplementation of this aesthetic analysis (of the regression of listening) with a sociological analysis (the classification of musical types) was perhaps professionally necessary at a certain time. Adorno’s stated aim of providing a ‘link between theory and fact-finding,’²³ suggests a tentative step towards bridging the gap between theory and praxis. The uncomfortable proximity of Adorno’s listening-types to the categories of advertising, which ensures that audiences like what they are given, was surely not lost on him. Indeed, Adorno’s catalogue of listening personalities reads like a radicalised piece of market research, as if the inadequacy of categories such as ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’ and in-the-face saturation-advertising could be revealed by polarising to the point of parody the subjectivities upon which such judgements are premised.²⁴ Though Adorno’s classifications are undeniably reductive, blatantly displaying the limitations of a critical theorist’s vexed attempts at empirical sociology, the chapter’s underlying argument about the manufacturing of desire under capitalism, and the regression of musical experience to states of ever less concealed domination, remains a remarkable premonition of the fate of music in the globalised marketplace.

¹⁹ Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, ix.

²⁰ Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, ix.

²¹ Theodor W. Adorno, “On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening,” in *Essays on Music*, selected, with introduction, commentary and notes Richard Leppert, new trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 288-317.

²² See “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997), 120-167.

²³ Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, xi

²⁴ ‘The basis of likes and dislikes, namely free choice, has disappeared: the available products are standardized to such a degree that likes and dislikes are largely superficial and, in a great many cases, the consumer is not even offered a choice among similar commodities, but no choice at all.’ Theodor W. Adorno, “Listening Habits: An Analysis of Likes and Dislikes in Light Popular Music,” in *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory*, ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Frankfurt am Main: Shurcamp, 2006), 405-6.

2.1.ii 'Types of Musical Conduct'

Adorno's clearest (and perhaps most notorious) account of structural listening is to be found in his lecture "Types of Musical Conduct (1961)," delivered during the winter term of 1961–62 at Frankfurt University, and later published in his *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*. "Types of Musical Conduct" begins with a description of the methodological difficulties the sociologist encounters when 'hearing music as a sociological index,'²⁵ namely the inevitable disconnection between the real-life complexities of any particular listening subject, and the discreet categories of analysis. The impossibility of actually making musical experience of any kind available to sociological analysis is summarily acknowledged; Adorno notes that a significant technical vocabulary is required to meaningfully verbalise musical experience for the purposes of typological distinction, and even goes so far as to question the availability of musical experience to verbalisation *per se*, even for those with a degree of technical proficiency.²⁶ Neither the undoubted bluntness of the stereotypes, nor the impossibility for neatly fitting any listener into a single category, entirely negate the validity of Adorno's listening types, however – which at the very least reflect the segmentation and stratification of audiences and listeners under the conditions of high capitalism.

Adorno admits that his eight types, ranging from the 'expert' to the 'anti-musical,' 'do not occur in chemical purity' but neither are they entirely 'arbitrary conceptions.'²⁷ Adorno suggests each of his types are 'points of crystallization,'²⁸ with each idealised type reflecting an inevitably partial truth.²⁹ As Max Paddison has noted, similar typologies are to be found in a number of Adorno's earlier writings : "On the Social Situation of Music (1932)"; "On the Fetish-Character of Music and the Regression of Listening (1938)"; and *Philosophy of New Music* (1949) – and 'all these versions can be reduced to a fundamental oppositional pair of categories: (i) *adequate* forms of listening, and (ii) *regressive* forms of listening.'³⁰

Under the type of the 'expert listener' Adorno writes:

²⁵ Adorno, "Types of Musical Conduct," 2.

²⁶ Adorno, "Types of Musical Conduct," 4.

²⁷ Adorno, "Types of Musical Conduct," 2.

²⁸ Adorno, "Types of Musical Conduct," 2.

²⁹ Adorno writes that 'The typology is thus to be understood as merely one of ideal types – a trait it shares with all typologies. The transitions have been eliminated.' Adorno, "Types of Musical Conduct," 3.

³⁰ Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 210.

The fully adequate mode of conduct might be called ‘structural hearing.’ Its horizon is a concrete musical logic: the listener understands what he perceives as necessary, although the necessity is never literally causal. The location of this logic is technique; to one whose ear thinks along with what he hears, its several elements are promptly present as technical, and it is in technical categories that the context of meaning is essentially revealed.³¹

Adorno’s typology reveals the demands of the ‘adequate’ mode of musical experience: openness towards the aesthetic object upon its own terms (expressed through the ability to follow the work’s inner logic), coupled with the ability to reflect upon and articulate this experience technically. As Paddison explains, Adorno’s typology is motivated by the underlying conviction that ‘musical works are objectively structured and significative, and therefore call for a form of interpretation which is able to follow the inner logic of a work as experience while also being able to reflect upon and account for the experience as understanding.’³² In this typology, structural hearing assumes a degree of technical knowledge in order to complete the experience of the work with understanding (which is expressed through communication, and thus requires a degree of technical know-how in order to be articulated).

Following this description of the ‘expert’ listener comes a catalogue of listening modes of ever-decreasing degrees of commitment and understanding, all the way down to the ‘anti-musical.’ To a certain extent the typology reads like a class analysis, peppered with a few psychological insights, and is undoubtedly in danger of being read as an affirmation of the stratified listening habits it aims to critique. The central insight of Adorno’s typology is the dwindling opportunity for genuine aesthetic experience under the dominance of the exchange relation, and the uneven social distribution of those few opportunities that do remain.³³ This social critique tends to be lost amid the outrage that Adorno promotes a singular mode of ‘proper’ listening, and he is criticised as if he were advocating for the reproduction of the categories he identifies. Whilst I do not wish to

³¹ Adorno, “Types of Musical Conduct,” 5.

³² Paddison, *Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music*, 212-13.

³³ ‘The prevailing condition...arises from the nethermost sociological layers: from the separation of mental and manual labor, or of high and low forms of art; later from the socialized semiculture; ultimately from the fact that the right consciousness in the wrong world is impossible, and that even the modes of social reaction to music are in thrall to the false consciousness.’ Adorno, “Types of Musical Conduct,” 18.

defend the typological method, which is undoubtedly extremely limited,³⁴ Adorno's main argument through the essay – that the contemporary cultural landscape is marked by a narrowing of the possibility for aesthetic experience, coupled with the polarisation of that experience towards its two extremes (fetishized expert knowledge/disdainful disinterest) – has surely been born out. The typology is not intended as an end in itself, nor an affirmation of the types it identifies, but as an allegory of the social system: 'the shortcomings of each type mirror the divided whole; each is more representative of an inwardly antagonistic totality than of a particular social variation.'³⁵ Once exposed in this way, the stratification of listening types, and the social conditions that produce these types, are made visible and thus open to critique.

As can be seen from the foregoing, the account of structural hearing that Adorno presents in "Types of Musical Conduct" hinges on two qualities: (i) the capacity to 'understand' the music technically, and (ii) the capacity to 'think along' with the music. The first requirement, that structural listening depends on technical musical understanding, is arguably at odds with other strands of Adorno's writing, and he makes way for doing away with this requirement in the category of the 'good listener' who has 'unconsciously mastered [the work's] immanent logic' but is unable to articulate these insights.³⁶ The requirement for technical communication found in this description of structural listening stands in tension with much of Adorno's aesthetics, which typically takes the adequate aesthetic disposition to be characterised as an openness towards the aesthetic object, and a willingness to engage with the work on its own terms.³⁷ Certainly, the capacity to articulate one's musical experiences in technical terms confirms the title 'expert' listener, but the absence of technical capacity need not reflect a deficit in terms of experience.³⁸ Given that a significant aspect of musical

³⁴ This theme has been much explored outside of critical theory. See for example, Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant School Master: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. and intro. Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991). Rancière takes aim at the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and others.

³⁵ Adorno, "Types of Musical Conduct," 18.

³⁶ The 'good listener' 'understands music ... the way we understand our own language even though virtually or wholly ignorant of its grammar or syntax.' Adorno, "Types of Musical Conduct," 5.

³⁷ Adorno's understanding of adequate aesthetic experience is explored in greater detail in chapter five "Killing Time I." See in particular 5.4 Shudder and 5.5 Mimesis. Importantly, for Adorno, 'aesthetic experience' entails the 'self-abandonment to artworks.' Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997), 236.

³⁸ Adorno is well aware of the problem in conflating understanding with communication: 'most people who have not mastered the technical terminology will encounter insurmountable obstacles in verbalizing their own musical experiences, quite apart from the fact that the verbal expression itself is already

experience occurs outside the bounds of language,³⁹ the inability to articulate one's experiences need not be a sign that one has failed to hear a work 'structurally,' and may simply be a signal that the codified, technical terms of analysis are as foreign to the listening subject as they are to the object in question.

Technical understanding is indeed an avenue into communication, but it need not be regarded as a singularly privileged avenue into aesthetic experience itself. Technical understanding undoubtedly inflects the listener's experience; the ability to identify and articulate the various musical materials and processes operating within a work might inform the response of the aesthetic subject to a certain extent. This technical capacity, however, is perhaps more important to communication (the subject's capacity to discuss and analyse a work) than to the experience of the work *per se*. In any case, Adorno's profound suspicion of communication is at odds with his valorisation of technical know-how as an avenue to understanding and experience,⁴⁰ and reveals an internal tension within his thinking.

Adorno's second prescription, that structural listening entails 'thinking along with' the music, hints at a more promising line of inquiry; namely the relation between mimesis and aesthetic experience. For Adorno, this 'thinking along with' is profoundly non-conceptual, and thus stands in tension with the rationality of the work, which is expressed through its formal structure. The importance of this opposition between the

prefiltered and its value for a knowledge of primary reactions is thus doubly questionable.' Adorno, "Types of Musical Conduct," 4.

³⁹ This is not to say that art, or the aesthetic subject, can bypass the constitutive power of language. From Freud through Lacan and beyond, the formation of the subject has been understood as an ongoing negotiation between the 'self' and the symbolic order, which precedes all individuals. For Lacan, subjectivity is constructed *through* language, and thus there is no space strictly outside language and discourse. In her discussion of the 'mirror stage,' Jacqueline Rose explains: 'For Lacan the subject is constituted through language – the mirror image represents the moment when the subject is located in an order outside itself to which it will henceforth refer. The subject is the subject *of* speech (Lacan's '*parole-être*'), and subject *to* that order. But if there is division in the image...there is equally loss, and difficulty in the word. Language can only operate by designating an object in its absence.' Jacqueline Rose, "Feminine Sexuality," in *Identity: A Reader*, eds. Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman (London: Sage, 2000), 52. The notion of 'outside' language or conceptual thought here should be understood in a very modest sense, whereby certain modes of thinking, and this is just as applicable to certain experiences of music, are taken to unfold against, or operate in resistance to, language and conceptual thought. The experience of art need not occur explicitly through language, though the presence of language as (one of) art's enabling conditions needs to be acknowledged. The subject's emergence through language is understood and accepted as a condition of experience, but the special place Adorno affords aesthetic experience stems from its capacity to circumvent – if not escape entirely – the confines of conceptual thought.

⁴⁰ 'The advocates of communicability [are] traitors to what they communicate.' For Adorno, communication is an avenue into conformity and thus inherently suspect. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1985), 101.

mimetic desire to assimilate into the aesthetic object (experienced as nature), and the capacity to understand the rationality of the work (its inner logic), is essential to the experience of artworks throughout modernity (all autonomous works, not simply Modernist ones). Thus, all modern works of art demand this mimetic submission ('thinking along with'), *and* an attempt to understand their structure and construction, for their full experience. If one presumes structural listening to be radically available on the grounds of its non-reliance on language or concepts (rather than premised on communicable technical information, as Adorno suggests in his typology), then it need not take on the exclusionary tones which manifest in Adorno's typology as a dependence on communicable technical information.⁴¹ Surely, structural listening, understood as an attentiveness to the particular mode(s) of construction within a work, *is* essential to its full (or 'adequate') experience. Failure to attend to the structure and logic of a musical work arguably hampers the possibility for a socially grounded interpretation, as a non-structural listening remains deaf to the full extent to which a musical work manifests social and historical tensions. Given that Adorno takes aesthetic experience to be resistant to conceptual thought (and this is the source of its radical potential in his eyes), his positioning of technical understanding (which is, after all, a category of communication) as central to the 'logic' of structural listening is illogical, and significantly at odds with his other accounts of adequate aesthetic experience.

2.1.iii *The Faithful Répétiteur*

Importantly (and in support of the argument above), Adorno footnotes the term 'structural hearing' in his typology with the explanation that 'the concept has been specified and unfolded in *Der getreue Korrepetitor*.'⁴² The absence of a published English translation of this text has perhaps stymied (English-speaking) musicological attempts at understanding structural listening for Adorno. Adorno's explanation of structural listening in *Der getreue Korrepetitor* (1963) (*The Faithful Répétiteur*) specifically allows for the possibility that structural listening might not depend upon an understanding of music theory (harmony, counterpoint and, for New Music,

⁴¹ Indeed, Adorno explicitly identifies the non-identity of knowledge and communication when he notes 'the all but universal compulsion to confuse the communication of knowledge with knowledge itself.' Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 41.

⁴² Adorno, 'Types of Musical Conduct,' note 1, 229.

mathematics), and clearly states that technical skill in no way guarantees adequate listening.⁴³ Rather, the ‘ability to apprehend compositions structurally...[is] to mediate their moments with each other such that a context of sense is illuminated.’⁴⁴ This focus on the unfolding of a musical work is marked by the listener’s capacity to experience, and reflect upon, the relationship between the parts and the whole. This openness towards the work’s becoming over time is perhaps a more fruitful way to approach Adorno’s concept of structural listening than his earlier focus (from his “Types of Musical Conduct”) on technical competence.

Being musical...is a becoming, something that has to form itself, something that is open in principle...It means...the ability as sounds unfold to think that unfolding in its necessity with one’s ears. The ideal of structure as of structural listening is the ideal of the necessary unfolding of music from the individual to the whole, without which the individual is indeterminate.⁴⁵

Here Adorno’s central focus is on the relationship between parts and whole; the ability to take in a work’s unfolding over time, not a fleeting grasp of moments in isolation. The reciprocity of the part and the whole (which for Adorno, can only be adequately heard *through* one another) demands a listening that is structural. Adorno’s notion of unfolding need not be taken to contain an implicit demand that music develops in a traditional sense (such as the familiar tension and release afforded by large-scale tonal structures, and the attendant motivic development). Rather, the unfolding Adorno describes, and the structural listening this unfolding demands, is an open-ended process whereby the listener mediates the parts and whole in an ongoing search for meaning.

⁴³ ‘The lay belief that in order to understand music one has to have studied the usual theoretical disciplines, harmony and counterpoint, or even with respect to newer constructions mathematics, is silly...A person can have in their power all of the rules of pure harmonization, all the prescriptions of counterpoint, and nevertheless be incapable of spontaneously following the first movement of the Eroica.’ Theodor W. Adorno, “Adorno on Listening to New Music: an Excerpt from *The Faithful Répétiteur*,” trans. Marc Hiatt, accessed July 7, 2015, <https://uebersetzen.wordpress.com/2008/04/23/adorno-on-listening-to-new-music-an-excerpt-from-the-faithful-repetiteur/>

⁴⁴ Adorno, *The Faithful Répétiteur*.

⁴⁵ Adorno, *The Faithful Répétiteur*. Adorno’s notion of Becoming and unfolding appears to resonate with the work of Giles Deleuze. Adorno, however, would likely have argued against the affirmative role repetition occupies in Deleuze’s work. Giles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2004). Adorno’s understanding of the role of repetition is discussed in greater detail in chapter five. See especially 5.6 Repetition.

In order to understand Adorno's valorisation of the structural listener it is also useful to consider what he finds so wanting with its antithesis, the 'atomistic' listener, for whom the 'unfoldment of a composition does not matter.'⁴⁶ Such 'atomized' listening takes in only fragments of the musical work: 'the type lies in wait for specific elements, for supposedly beautiful melodies, for grandiose moments.'⁴⁷ The important difference between structural and atomistic listening lies in the capacity of the listener to hear the work as both a series of discreet moments with their own specific qualities (particulars) *and* as a singular whole, with a logic of its own (universal). Without 'hearing' the (dialectical) tension between universal and particular, whole and parts, the listener is unable to hear the work's full expression. As Richard Leppert explains, for Adorno 'the relation between part and whole is radically reciprocal; each emerges and, indeed, lives from and through its other.'⁴⁸ Thus, both the universal and the particular remain inaudible until they are heard *through* each other. Adorno's logic that 'structurally, one hears the first bar of a Beethoven symphonic movement only at the very moment when one hears the last bar,'⁴⁹ applies not only to Beethoven, but to all works produced (and received) under the sign of modernity.

As shown here, Adorno's account of structural listening entails a focus on the unfolding of the musical work, an exploration of Becoming over time (as opposed to successive moments of Being), and of 'hearing' the tension between the work's parts and its whole. For Adorno, this mode of listening takes place outside language and (arguably) outside conceptual thought, and demands a radical openness to the work (*not* a narrowing of interpretive possibilities).⁵⁰ Turning now to Rose Rosengard Subotnik's critique of structural listening, the following discussion illustrates how some musicological reception of Adorno's thought has tended towards unsympathetic readings which obscure the nuance and relevance of his concepts. By presenting structural listening as

⁴⁶ Adorno, "Types of Musical Conduct," 7.

⁴⁷ Adorno, "Types of Musical Conduct," 7. The atomistic listener does not stand at the bottom of Adorno's typography, for there is also the unmusical (even antimusical) type who 'may not even be gratified any longer by the atomistic stimuli,' and for whom 'music will hardly be enjoyed any longer, in any conceivable sense.' Adorno, "Types of Musical Conduct," 7.

⁴⁸ Leppert, "Music 'Pushed to the Edge of Existence,'" 116.

⁴⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, "The Radio Symphony: An Experiment in Theory," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 255. This essay from 1941 dates from the time of his work on the PRRP. Both Subotnik and Leppert make reference to "The Radio Symphony" in their (respective) critique and defence of Adorno's account of structural listening. "The Radio Symphony" offers a more explicit exploration of the importance of the universal/particular dialectic to adequate aesthetic experience than "Types of Musical Conduct."

⁵⁰ See note 39 above.

an exclusionary practice, Subotnik (and arguably much musicological thought after her) forecloses many of the interpretive and expressive possibilities such an approach facilitates.

2.2 Subotnik's Deconstruction of Structural Listening

From the outset of her essay "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening: A Critique of Schoenberg, Adorno, and Stravinsky," Rose Rosengard Subotnik makes explicit her assumption of a complicity between musical formalism and structural listening. For Subotnik, the 'developing critique of musical formalism would be facilitated by a reexamination of what I would like to call "structural listening," a method that concentrates attention primarily on the formal relationships established over the course of a single composition.'⁵¹ For Subotnik, 'The concept of structural listening...was intended to describe a process wherein the listener follows and comprehends the unfolding realization, with all of its detailed inner relationships, of a generating musical conception, or what Schoenberg calls an "idea."'⁵² Subotnik argues that 'Adorno's concept of structural listening, like all of his music criticism, was not only developed in full and informed sympathy with Schoenberg's enterprise but can in fact be read as a defence of Schoenberg.'⁵³ With a deft hand, but with very little justification, Subotnik conflates the disparate approaches of Schoenberg, Adorno and formalism into the single homogenous entity of structural listening, an approach she finds elitist, ideological, exclusionary, socially divisive and even a cultural violation:

Grounding structural listening on a supposedly universal rational capacity, Adorno was utterly unable to criticize as 'ideological' the elite social standing and the long years of education that were ordinarily required for the exercise of this capacity...Structural listening...turns out to be socially divisive, not only in what it demands but also in what it excludes or suppresses.⁵⁴

Subotnik conflates Adorno's account of structural listening with Schoenberg's, largely without explanation. Beyond Adorno's well-documented enthusiasm for the latter's

⁵¹ Subotnik, "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening," 148.

⁵² Subotnik, "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening," 150.

⁵³ Subotnik, "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening," 149-50.

⁵⁴ Subotnik, "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening," 166 and 170. 'Structural listening can be construed as a cultural violation.' Subotnik, "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening," 161.

compositions, the reasons behind why one should accept Subotnik's assertion that 'the two men were in very close agreement as to the specifics of structural listening'⁵⁵ remain unclear. Although Subotnik concedes that the two conceptualisations of structural listening are 'not identical',⁵⁶ Adorno's sympathy for Schoenberg's compositional approach is taken to be a simultaneous endorsement of the composer's philosophical output. Given the critical force Adorno applies to Schoenberg's music and 'socially naïve' philosophy,⁵⁷ the assumption that structural listening functions in the same way for both men is without justification.⁵⁸ It is beyond the scope of this study to consider the manner in which Adorno's account of structural listening differs from Schoenberg's, and so the following proceeds with a critique of Subotnik's account, considering her framing of structural listening *for Adorno*, thereby leaving aside any discussion of Schoenberg's position or its interpretation.⁵⁹

2.2i The Cultural and Historical Particularity of Structural Listening

In an effort to 'expose some of the concealed ideological assumptions that the concept of structural listening reflects',⁶⁰ Subotnik asserts its historical and cultural

⁵⁵ Subotnik, "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening," 149.

⁵⁶ Subotnik, "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening," 149.

⁵⁷ See Theodor W. Adorno, "Arnold Schoenberg, 1874-1951," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), 171. Schoenberg's ahistorical notion of the musical idea is in direct conflict with Adorno's historical understanding of musical material. Schoenberg asserts that 'an idea can never perish.' Arnold Schonberg "New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea," in *Style and Idea: Selected writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. L. Stein, trans. L. Black (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 123. This is in direct contrast to Adorno for whom 'history is sedimented in the figurations [*Figuren*] in which the composer encounters the material.' Theodor Adorno, quoted in Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, 88. See also Murray Dineen, "Adorno and Schoenberg's Unanswered Question," *The Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 3 (Autumn, 1993), 415-427.

⁵⁸ Gianmario Borio argues that 'indiscrimination' is a fatal flaw within the New Musicology: 'New Musicology's critique of the ideological premises of modern music theory goes nowhere exactly because of their indiscrimination: Schoenberg must be distinguished from Schenker and both must be distinguished from their respective successors.' Gianmario Borio, "Work Structure and Musical Representation: Reflections on Adorno's Analyses for Interpretation," trans. Martin Iddon, *Contemporary Music Review*, 26, no. 1 (2007): 56. See also, Gianmario Borio, "Schenker versus Schoenberg versus Schenker: The difficulties of a Reconciliation," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 126, no. 2 (2001): 250-274.

⁵⁹ Schoenberg does not discuss the notions of 'structural listening' or 'structural hearing' explicitly in either his *Theory of Harmony* or *Style and Idea*. See, Arnold Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, trans. Roy E. Carter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (London: Faber, 1984). Schoenberg does, however, advocate ear training: 'A trained ear is valuable... Like harmony, counterpoint and other theoretical studies, ear training is not an end in itself, but only a step towards musicianship.' Like Adorno, his presumption seems to be that these skills are available to those who pursue them: 'just as almost anyone can be trained to draw, paint, write an essay or deliver a lecture, it must also be possible to make people with even less than mediocre gifts use the means of musical composition in a sensitive manner.' Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, 379.

⁶⁰ Subotnik, "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening," 149.

particularity: ‘Schoenberg and Adorno quite openly define structural listening as developmental listening. But as virtually all scholars would concede, very little music, even Western art music, makes use of the technique of development.’⁶¹ In order to debunk the ‘allegedly objective method’⁶² of structural listening – its attempt to reach the status of ‘scientific observation,’⁶³ Subotnik suggests that ‘structural listening seems to work most smoothly when applied to the “common practice” repertoires of Germany and Italy, say, between, Corelli and Mahler, which form the basis of the Western canon.’⁶⁴ Subotnik later argues that ‘the only body of music for which we can be fairly confident that structural listening, in its most consistent sense, does not pose a violation of originating norms is Schoenberg’s own.’⁶⁵ In any case, as Richard Leppert describes, Subotnik has ‘aptly pointed out that very little music can actually lay claim to the (utopian) autonomy principle assumed by Adorno and critical to the demand for structural listening.’⁶⁶ However, Subotnik’s implication that structural listening necessarily precludes considerations of affect, emotion, reception and meaning is worth debating.

As Subotnik argues (and Leppert echoes), structural listening might justifiably be applicable to a limited segment of twentieth-century Modernist art music, but should not be applied beyond this narrow scope. Needless to say, Adorno’s vision for the application of structural listening was rather more expansive: ‘the desideratum of structural listening could also be put this way: that every piece of music since the beginning of the through-bass age should be heard as if it were Modern.’⁶⁷ Traditional works are those which generate dynamism by ‘coming up against’ the restrictions of standardised forms: traditional works are engaged with the challenge of generating novelty within (largely unchallenged) pre-ordained structures. Modernity signals the questioning and de-naturalisation of all such pre-ordained structures, and modern works are those which are no longer able rely upon traditional forms, instead seeking to

⁶¹ Subotnik, “Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening,” 159.

⁶² Subotnik, “Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening,” 157.

⁶³ Subotnik, “Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening,” 157.

⁶⁴ Subotnik, “Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening,” 157.

⁶⁵ Subotnik, “Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening,” 163.

⁶⁶ Leppert, “Music ‘Pushed to the Edge of Existence,’ 117. Subotnik argues that Adorno ‘maintains the achievement of a totally autonomous musical structure as a utopian ideal.’ Subotnik, “Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening,” 152. The question of aesthetic autonomy is dealt with in detail in the following section. As I argue below, aesthetic autonomy for Adorno is understood *not* an ideal, but as a dialectic. For Adorno, the dialectic of autonomy and mediation (brought about by a range of social and economic forces) produces a variety of positive and negative outcomes for the arts.

⁶⁷ Adorno, *The Faithful Répétiteur*.

generate coherence on their own terms. Adorno's gesture of listening to antiquated works 'as if' they were modern is to listen to them from within the historical context of the erosion (and eventual disintegration) of accepted formal structures. The advent of Modernism brings to a climax processes that have been operating throughout modernity: for music this means that (due to the disintegration of accepted formal organisation) all musical parameters become bearers of structure. For Adorno, it is 'because no forms exist any longer, everything must become form.'⁶⁸ Thus, for Adorno, listening structurally does not mean to listen only for traditional structural relationships (as Subotnik's critique suggests), but to confer on all musical relationships a structural significance. Such an approach remains much more radically open-ended (and open-eared) than the restrictive, almost coercive, approach Subotnik deconstructs. Structural listening can justifiably be understood as a practice that applies to *all* art under modernity (and not just to a small segment of Modernist works), because all modern works are engaged in this process of self-making.

2.2.ii Elitism, Reason, Universality

Subotnik rightly asserts that structural listening assumes that 'valid structural logic is accessible to any reasoning person.'⁶⁹ As argued above, Adorno's account of structural listening does assume a fundamental accessibility of formal musical relationships (which occur outside conceptual thought) to all modern subjects who care to listen: structural listening means 'the ability as sounds unfold to think that unfolding in its necessity with one's ears.'⁷⁰ Subotnik's charge of elitism has the curious effect of presuming structural listening to *actually be* beyond the capacity of the uneducated listener.⁷¹ Adorno need not be taken to presume 'elite social standing' nor 'long years of education,' but rather, as discussed above, a mimetic 'thinking along' with the music. As Christopher Norris has argued, critiques such as Subotnik's 'may be indulging in a form of inverted cultural snobbery whereby it is assumed that complex, long-range or sophisticated modes of musical appreciation are *ipso facto* beyond reach of a popular

⁶⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, "Form in the New Music," trans. Rodney Livingstone, *Music Analysis* 27, no. 2-3 (2008): 213.

⁶⁹ Subotnik, "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening," 150.

⁷⁰ Adorno, *The Faithful Répétiteur*.

⁷¹ Subotnik, "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening," 166.

audience.⁷² As Adorno argues, expertise is in fact no guarantee of the capacity for structural listening,⁷³ and structural listening may well occur unconsciously, and thus outside the bounds of language, communication and expertise.⁷⁴

Subotnik goes on to argue that, ‘such structural listening discourages kinds of understanding that require culturally specific knowledge of things external to the composition structure,’⁷⁵ and it is here that she begins her unsupported dehistoricisation of Adorno’s position, suggesting that structural listening is taken to be a strongly universal mode of engagement, explicitly at odds with culturally and historically grounded analysis. Subotnik’s critique of Adorno’s position fails to register the historical particularity of Adorno’s understanding of art itself. Adornian aesthetics is directed towards art under modernity, which (despite being difficult to pinpoint historically) means that art is experienced for itself, in categorical separation from ritual, religion, and other forms of life (though, of course, this separation is chimerical, as art’s autonomy is never fully achieved).⁷⁶

Even the most cursory overview of Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* leaves the reader with a profound sense of the authors’ treatment of reason and rationality as a *problematic*, a constellation of historically and culturally specific developments, which they describe as equally prone to facilitating the fulfilment of human potential as its debasement. Subotnik’s uncomplicated presentation of reason and logic in no way reflects Adorno’s detailed and careful dialectical understanding, and bypasses the important step Adorno and Horkheimer made in exposing the cultural and historical specificity of reason itself. Subotnik reminds the reader that, ‘Western science has increasingly been criticized as a culturally limited and limiting construct, [and] so, too, there is a strong argument to be made that the terms on which structural listening operates originate far less in universal conditions of music than in our own specific predilections.’⁷⁷ To thus imply that Adorno, one of

⁷² Christopher Norris, “In Defence of ‘Structural Hearing’: Some Problems with the New Musicology,” *Muzikološki zbornik/Musicological annual*, 41, no. 2 (January 1 2005): 31. Accessed January 20, 2016. <http://revije.ff.uni-lj.si/MuzikoloskiZbornik/article/view/5590/5330>.

⁷³ ‘A person can have in their power all of the rules of pure harmonization, all the prescriptions of counterpoint, and nevertheless be incapable of spontaneously following the first movement of the Eroica.’ Adorno, *The Faithful Répétiteur*.

⁷⁴ Adorno, “Types of Musical Conduct,” 5.

⁷⁵ Subotnik, “Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening,” 150.

⁷⁶ These themes are explored in greater detail in chapter four “Purely Instrumental: Autonomy and Mediation in Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory.”

⁷⁷ Subotnik, “Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening,” 157.

the first to explore historio-cultural specificity of reason itself, might suggest an approach to aesthetic experience that is universal in the strongest possible sense (outside the bounds of history, culture and place) is without basis. It is more useful to understand Adorno's approach as universalist in a weak sense; his aesthetic theory *does* presume a modern, Western subject, and it is intended to be applied to modern (though not just Modernist) Western contexts. Given that Adorno spent an entire career explicating the particular historical development of the modern subject, chastising him for failing to make the now-expected distantiations over the limitations of what one takes to be the universal conditions of subjectivity seems insupportable. Instead, reading Adorno's music criticism from within the broader context of his philosophical project (in particular, his exploration of the limits of Enlightenment rationality) tempers the extent to which one can claim (as Subotnik does) that his approach universalises specific cultural conditions.

For Adorno, dialectics brings attention to the inevitable incompleteness/partiality of conceptual thought, highlighting the concept's necessary exclusion of elements or characteristics of the thing it describes: 'The name dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder, that they come to contradict the traditional norm of adequacy...It indicates the untruth of identity, the fact that the conceptual does not exhaust the thing conceived.'⁷⁸ Following Hegel, Adorno employs dialectical thinking in order to uncover the way in which the apparent self-evidence and immediacy of any concept is always-already premised upon presuppositions.⁷⁹ Adorno overlays this dialectical approach with Marx's theory of commodity fetishism (itself a dialectical theory),⁸⁰ in order to challenge the logic of equivalence that erases difference in order to render the incommensurable commensurable (to facilitate exchange). The purpose of Adorno's approach is not to reach a point of synthesis or equilibrium, rather, 'the dialectic advances by way of extremes.'⁸¹ Adorno's thought is imbued with the idea of progress through struggle achieved via the intensification of the poles of the dialectic, be it the proletarian struggle with the bourgeoisie, or the artists struggle with their materials.

⁷⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 5.

⁷⁹ Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1998), 166

⁸⁰ Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, 167.

⁸¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: reflections from damaged life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1985), 86.

2.2.iii Purity and Autonomy

Subotnik's suggestion that 'in Adorno's formulation, knowing even the name of the composer or the composition in question could muddy the purity of the desired process,'⁸² hints at a frustration with the abstraction of analysis and a desire to ground music analysis via reference to composer biography and reception history. The accusation of the fetishisation of purity and the intellect, along with the desire to locate art outside of the contaminating social situation, is often levelled at Modernism,⁸³ but to accuse Adorno of this is to remain stubbornly blind to any of his major philosophical works. It is certainly true that, for Adorno, the full experience of the aesthetic object requires no specific knowledge of the composer, their intentions or historical details, but to suggest that such knowledge constitutes a contamination is overblown. To further suggest that composer biography or intentionality should be equated with 'culturally specific' knowledge more generally is also to level two very different kinds of knowledge onto a single plane. An understanding of tonality and traditional notions of harmony and resolution in Western music *is* culturally specific, yet simultaneously universal for those who are brought up in that particular cultural milieu; the expectation that dissonance should resolve is surely inescapable from within what might be thought of as the aural 'unconscious' of the post-Enlightenment Western world. Entrenched cultural norms (such as tonality, language, or the law) profoundly condition our experiences, to the extent that tonality continues to be the backdrop against which all Western musical experience unfolds. Even those working within noise-based genres, or dissonant score-based styles, can be said to be engaged in an ongoing exploration of tonality and its disintegration.

Subotnik's discussion of purity and contamination recognises the critical role autonomy plays in Adornian aesthetics. It also stands as a good example of the way in which Adorno's theory of art's autonomy provokes more resistance than any other aspect of his aesthetic theory. By presenting art's autonomy as if it were a strictly positive category, however, Subotnik's account fails to capture the full dialectical force of Adorno's understanding of aesthetic autonomy. Aesthetic autonomy for Adorno names an historical process triggered by the crisis in received meanings that modernity has

⁸² Subotnik, "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening," 150.

⁸³ For example, McClary argues that serialism 'fetishises intellectual work for its own sake.' McClary, "Terminal Prestige," 80.

brought about. No longer in the service of ritual, religion of the courts, art enters into an 'independent sphere of value,'⁸⁴ a sphere separate from other forms of life and praxis. Art's liberation from ritual (its autonomy), however, is immediately curtailed through its new dependence on the market, and its autonomy comes into direct conflict with its status as commodity. The simultaneous emergence of art's autonomy alongside its commodification marks the process as a problematic, rather than as an ideal (as Subotnik would have it). Adorno identifies within this dialectic a degenerative tendency, through which any attempt to ward off the erosion of autonomy leads to art's entrenched isolation, and an inevitable contraction in possible sites of genuine aesthetic experience.

Subotnik's presentation of autonomy as an ideal (rather than a dialectic) misses the important dual character of aesthetic autonomy: 'Although he [Adorno] sees no actual way of extricating musical structure from its embodiment of social values...he nevertheless maintains the achievement of a totally autonomous musical structure as a utopian ideal.'⁸⁵ Adorno does not suggest that musical structure should be extricated from social values. Indeed, his understanding that social antagonisms are sedimented within musical forms stands Subotnik's assertion, precisely, on its head. The notion that aesthetic autonomy in any way excludes art from social influence is quite simply a misreading of Adorno's account. Furthermore, Adorno nowhere suggests a 'utopia' of total autonomy, which for him would also constitute art's total and abject alienation (given the dialectic of autonomy-mediation). Adorno's understanding of art's autonomy is strictly dialectical, and thus the striving towards autonomy from society is *always* incomplete. In order to be understood as art, aesthetic objects resist being mere functionality or exchange-value. However, this movement towards autonomy inevitably fails, and total autonomy can never be achieved, as works of art are always also commodities. This failure is essential to Adorno's account of aesthetic autonomy, yet this failure is systematically downplayed by his critics within both new and historical musicology.

2.3 Discussion: Structural Listening

⁸⁴ Peter Osborne, "Adorno and the Metaphysics of Modernism: The Problem of a Postmodern Art," in *The Problem of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1989), 26.

⁸⁵ Subotnik, "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening," 152.

Subotnik's critique of structural listening merges with her critique of aesthetic autonomy. Her criticism coalesces around a concern that structural listening allows the listener to proclaim 'an allegedly objective method of perception' in order to 'confirm the aesthetic superiority of whole styles, particularly Viennese Classicism.'⁸⁶ From this position of 'alleged objectivity' (which is really just a 'stylistic impression of objectivity'),⁸⁷ the structural listener could theoretically reach absolute and enduring judgments, which, for Subotnik, is simply self-deluded formalist hubris. As argued here, Subotnik has over-extended the bounds of Adorno's criticism (which is directed towards works of art under modernity), by (mistakenly) suggesting that Adorno's arguments are universal in the strongest possible sense. Structural listening (and any other method of interpreting art) does apply to all music under modernity, as it is by definition embroiled in the problem of creating meaning when convention and tradition have been eroded. In this way, all modern musical works of art are engaged in a process of self-making that separates them from earlier (traditional) forms, and thus require some engagement with this process (of self-making) for their full experience. In music, such an engagement demands that all musical parameters are heard structurally.

For Adorno, modern artworks demand a structural reception because, by virtue of their modernity, they are necessarily engaged in a process of radical self-making. In a situation in which traditional forms and received meanings have lost their perceived neutrality and necessity, the location of structure or form in modern works is no longer discreet: *all* elements take on a structural significance. This fully revealed contingency (the absence of any 'givens') lends modern works a certain vulnerability,⁸⁸ as they necessarily strive to order themselves within a world no longer organised around unchallenged (natural) representation.⁸⁹ For Adorno, the modern self-referential work of art (which creates its *own* rules of inclusion and exclusion) *requires* a structural reception on the grounds that its adequate consumption cannot be achieved unless this aspect of self-production is recognised. Modern art can only function when this

⁸⁶ Subotnik, "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening," 157.

⁸⁷ Subotnik, "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening," 158.

⁸⁸ Adorno writes, 'Modern art, with its vulnerability, blemishes, and fallibility, is the critique of traditional works, which in so many ways are stronger and more successful: It is the critique of success.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 209.

⁸⁹ For a concise account of the difference between traditional and modern modes of social self-description (which includes not only all discursive practices, but also non-discursive ones such as art) see Niklas Luhmann, "Tautology and Paradox in the Self-Descriptions of Modern Society," *Sociological Theory* 6, no. 1 (1988): 26-37.

necessity of creating self-referential structures (rather than received ones) is recognised, and so modern music demands (at some level at least) structural listening.

Rather than naming a strictly idealist and exclusionary practice (as Subotnik would have it), structural listening for Adorno names the mode of attention to music that understands all forms and media as explicitly contingent. Structural listening names a process in which the listener receives the work as a self-referential object, in the full knowledge that natural representation (for example, a notion of tonality as a natural hierarchy of tones) is now impossible. Arguably, without structural listening modern music is *inaudible* as music, and would simply be experienced as noise. Structural listening, with its focus on musical relationships does not constitute a ‘renunciation of sensuous distractions,’⁹⁰ but a focus on the many (necessarily sensuous) musical relationships that unfold during the course of the work. From an Adornian perspective, the non-structural elements (issues of composer biography or authorial intent) are unnecessary for the experience of the sensuous sounding music, and cannot in any sense be said to constitute a theory of *listening*. Subotnik’s staging of the conflict between ‘structural’ and ‘non-structural’ approaches suggests two mutually exclusive modes of listening, but from an Adornian perspective the non-structural elements do not pertain directly to the experience of the sounding music. For Adorno, if music under modernity is to be heard at all, it must be heard in a specific way: and that way is structurally.

⁹⁰ Subotnik, “Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening,” 156.

Chapter Three

On the Modernist Problem: Aesthetic Autonomy

3.0 Introduction

Within the (both New and historical) musicological literature, the idea of aesthetic autonomy has been resolutely dismissed: at best, a folly from another era; at worst, a pernicious, stifling ideology. From arguably more progressive thinkers such as Rose Rosengard Subotnik and Susan McClary to more conservative ones such as Richard Taruskin, the rejection of aesthetic autonomy is taken to be an essential first step towards the socially grounded study of music. This denunciation of the ‘myth’ or ‘ideology’ of aesthetic autonomy,¹ and the positioning of autonomy in categorical opposition to the socially grounded study of music, arguably shuts down a debate whose relevance is ongoing. As previously demonstrated, Subotnik’s deconstruction of structural listening occurred in tandem with her critique of aesthetic autonomy, and Subotnik takes both concepts to be at odds with the socially situated study of music. The work of fellow musicologists McClary and Taruskin echoes many of the criticisms advanced by Subotnik, but (unlike Subotnik) the rejection of aesthetic autonomy advanced by McClary and Taruskin works in the service of a broader critique of Modernism. For both McClary and Taruskin, the quest for autonomy reaches its apex in serialism, and their critiques of autonomy unfold through their criticism of serialist composers.

Philosophical debates surrounding the social mediation of art works waged between important thinkers such as Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin² (to name just two in

¹ See Janet Wolff, ‘Foreword: The Ideology of Autonomous Art,’ in *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, eds. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1-12.

² See Ernst Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, afterword Fredric Jameson, trans. Ed. Ronald Taylor (London: Verso, 1980). Walter Benjamin’s important essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” is a rebuff to Adorno’s valorization of aesthetic autonomy. Benjamin equates the striving for autonomy within “*l’art pour l’art*” with Fascism: ‘[Art’s] self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art.’ Walter Benjamin, “The

a trajectory which can be traced much further back to thinkers such as Leibniz)³ go largely unmentioned in the critiques advanced by McClary and Taruskin. As this chapter and the next show, Adorno's understanding of aesthetic autonomy brings to light important aspects of the social situation of music even today, aspects which cannot be summarily dismissed through a rejection of the idea of autonomy itself. Fredric Jameson's claim that 'as an ideal and a prescription, a supreme value as well as a regulatory principle, aesthetic autonomy did not yet exist in the Modernist period,'⁴ illustrates the contested nature of the idea of aesthetic autonomy. The lack of consensus surrounding the parameters (in terms of historical specificity, artistic genre or style, and so on) under which we might usefully discuss the autonomy of musical works is striking. As Sarah Collins argues, 'its current maligning in musicology reflects an ongoing disciplinary anxiety with practices of autonomy.'⁵ This chapter does not seek to seek to 'resolve' the case of aesthetic autonomy; it is neither 'for' nor 'against' it. Rather, my discussion follows Adorno's lead, taking Modernist autonomy to be the intensification of processes set in motion long before the twentieth century crisis of audience alienation.

This chapter examines a number of musicological challenges to the idea of aesthetic autonomy. To begin, Susan McClary's critiques of aesthetic autonomy (drawn from "The Blasphemy of Talking Politics during Bach Year" (1987) and "Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition" (1989)) are discussed.⁶ Following this comes consideration of the work of Richard Taruskin (drawn from a number of essays and the *Oxford History of Western Music*).⁷ In closing, this chapter turns to Georgina

Work of Art in the age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 242.

³ Lambert Zuidervart, "The Social Significance of Autonomous Art: Adorno and Bürger," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 48, no. 1 (Winter, 1990): 63.

⁴ Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), 208.

⁵ Sarah Collins, "The Composer as 'Good European': Musical Modernism, *Amor Fati* and the cosmopolitanism of Frederick Delius," *Twentieth-Century Music* 12, no. 1 (2015): 99.

⁶ Susan McClary, "The Blasphemy of Talking Politics during Bach Year," in *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, eds. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 13-62; Susan McClary "Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition," *Cultural Critique* 12 (1989): 57-81.

⁷ Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, Vols. 1-6 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Richard Taruskin, "Is There a Baby in the Bathwater?" Part I, *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, 63 3 (2006): 163-185; Richard Taruskin, "Is There a Baby in the Bathwater?" Part II, *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, 63, no. 4 (2006): 309-327; Richard Taruskin, "Shall We Change the Subject? A Music Historian Reflects" Part I, *Dissonance: Schweizer Musikzeitschrift für Forschung und Kreation* 112 (December, 2010): 22-29.

Born's critique of the prominent Modernist musical institution IRCAM, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde* (1995),⁸ and Peter Bürger's critique of aesthetic autonomy drawn from his *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984).⁹

3.1 McClary on Autonomy

Susan McClary's engagement with Adorno's opus (which she describes as an 'autopsy of Western Culture')¹⁰ animates much of her thinking, both explicitly and implicitly. McClary has inherited Adorno's spirit of grounding music analysis within a social and historical context, and some of her most convincing work unfolds through explicitly Adornian terms.¹¹ In pursuing her central aim, 'the deconstruction of the canon,'¹² however, McClary mounts a critique of aesthetic autonomy that is largely deaf to Adorno's formulation of the concept. McClary characterises the autonomous work of art as little more than a Romantic ruse, peddled by various elites in order to maintain their privilege. For McClary, aesthetic autonomy has become an 'ideology,'¹³ complicit in the preservation of inherited structures of prestige and domination. McClary's interpretations of music (in particular her 'readings' of music as 'metaphorical narratives')¹⁴ expressly challenge the notion of aesthetic autonomy.¹⁵ The role of aesthetic autonomy will be shown to take on particular significance in McClary's critique of Modernism, which is for her the latest manifestation of an ancient confrontation between music-as-metaphysics versus music-as-social-discourse. As contended here, Adorno's account of aesthetic autonomy can be applied to (and is

⁸ Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁹ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

¹⁰ McClary, "The Blasphemy of Talking Politics During Bach Year," 61.

¹¹ See for example Susan McClary, "A Musical Dialectic from the Enlightenment: Mozart's Piano Concerto in G Major, K. 453, Movement 2," *Cultural Critique* 4 (1986): 129-69.

¹² Susan McClary, "The Blasphemy of Talking Politics During Bach Year," 62.

¹³ See Richard Leppert and Susan McClary, "Introduction," in *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, eds. Richard Leppert & Susan McClary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): xiii.

¹⁴ Stephen Miles uses this term to describe McClary's approach: 'McClary refuses to respect the supposed autonomous status of absolute music, and instead interprets such music as metaphorical narrative, drawing equally on musical texts and the discourse devoted to them.' Stephen Miles, "Critics of Disenchantment," *Notes* 52, no. 1 (Sept. 1995): 25.

¹⁵ See for example, Susan McClary, "Narrative Agendas in 'Absolute' Music: Identity and Difference in Brahms's Third Symphony," in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 326-44.

perhaps an essential concept for) the socially grounded study of music in the twentieth century and beyond.

In “The Blasphemy of Talking Politics During Bach Year” McClary argues that a confrontation between a ‘Pythagorean’ approach to music scholarship (characterised by ‘claiming autonomy from social practice’),¹⁶ and a more socially minded approach (which ‘regards music as essentially a human, socially grounded, socially alterable construct’),¹⁷ has been the motivating factor animating music scholarship since antiquity. McClary traces the Pythagorean tradition, which ‘accounts for music in non-social, implicitly metaphysical terms,’¹⁸ from Pythagoras, to Jean-Philippe Rameau, Heinrich Schenker and Allen Forte. More recently, McClary has reiterated her opposition to the quest for absolute autonomy, arguing that it is the ‘radical sense of “autonomy” – by which music transcends human meanings, rendering it exempt from interpretation – that my generation of Postmodernists rejected.’¹⁹ For McClary, it is not only metaphysics, but also Modernism that is aligned with the ‘Pythagorean’ concept of radical autonomy (to which Postmodernism provide the necessary social-constructivist antidote), and aesthetic autonomy is understood as necessarily at odds with the socially grounded study of music. This opposition between the radically autonomous approach and a more (de)constructivist one may be indeed be an significant problematic throughout music history, but the fact that McClary maintains these positions in categorical separation (rather than exploring how they operate in dialectical tension) means her analysis of the problematic remains superficial.

3.1.i Autonomy and Authorial Intent

In “Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition,” McClary challenges the (apparently hegemonic) status of serialism, positioning minimalism and popular music as its ‘progressive’ opponents. Arnold Schoenberg, Milton Babbitt and Pierre Boulez are singled out as ‘avant-garde’ composers who share a ‘siege mentality’ that has given rise to an active disdain for their audience.²⁰ In order to mount her critique of ‘difficult’ Modernist composers (and “Terminal Prestige” is indeed a critique of

¹⁶ McClary, “The Blasphemy of Talking Politics During Bach Year,” 15.

¹⁷ McClary, “The Blasphemy of Talking Politics During Bach Year,” 15.

¹⁸ McClary, “The Blasphemy of Talking Politics During Bach Year,” 15.

¹⁹ Susan McClary, “More Pomo Than Thou: The Status of Cultural Meanings in Music,” *New Formations* 66 (Spring, 2009): 31.

²⁰ McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 61.

composer's polemics and not of *music*), McClary states that 'avant-garde music's glory lay in the illusion that it had transcended social context altogether,'²¹ and that it 'sought to secure prestige precisely by claiming to renounce all possible social functions and values...The prestige value of this music, in other words, is inversely correlated with public response and comprehension.'²² For McClary, Modernist music sought prestige via the alienation of its own audience by reference to its autonomy from social practice. McClary attempts to reduce the scope of high-Modernist (and particularly serialist) composition to 'puzzle-playing' and 'displays of total control.'²³ McClary suggests that 'one could...explain on many levels how this music is meaningful in other than quasi-mathematic terms,'²⁴ but why she is reluctant to engage in this task remains unclear. McClary hints at the 'fear and confusion'²⁵ that mark the contemporary cultural landscape, but does not delve into how this social context might drive the alienation of high-Modernist composition. In her own interpretation, McClary retreats at precisely the point of insight.

When McClary seizes on the *words* of Schoenberg, Boulez and Babbitt rather than critically engaging with their *music* she allows the author the final word on the meaning of their works. These composers did indeed maintain a very precarious position vis-a-vis their audience, they both desired and rejected the affirmation of their publics. However, McClary's main charge is that avant-garde Modernist composers were contemptuous of their audience, but she locates the evidence for this contempt in their words, and not their music. These outspoken Modernist composers raise, with a certain candour, important questions about the place of art music in contemporary society. It is the duty of any polemicist to overstate their case, and perhaps Boulez and Babbitt do not qualify their thoughts with the rhetorical distancing which, since deconstruction, have become now mandatory ('if we accept the metaphysical notion of language's capacity to clearly identify objects, then may we not risk the hypothesis that, in the conditions of our language game, this can indeed be said to be a pipe...') More importantly, however, the *music* of Boulez and Babbitt expresses something beyond their polemics, and can be heard as a concerted effort to engage with the complexities

²¹ McClary, "Terminal Prestige," 63.

²² McClary, "Terminal Prestige," 60.

²³ McClary, "Terminal Prestige," 66.

²⁴ McClary, "Terminal Prestige," 66.

²⁵ McClary, "Terminal Prestige," 66.

of modern life. McClary makes the important (and justified) claim that ‘much of the avant-garde musical repertory similarly both flaunts and conceals its misogynistic content,’²⁶ but bases her critique almost entirely upon the narrative content of works (the focus here is on Milton Babbitt’s *Philomel* (1964), but McClary also mentions Paul Hindemith’s *Murderer, Hope of Women* (1919) which is based on Oskar Kokoschka’s play of the same name (1909), and Alban Berg’s *Lulu* (1935) amongst others). The absence of any substantial discussion about how the music frames the female characters weakens McClary’s argument; in particular the possibility that dissonance might function within such works as a potential critique of the (symbolic and systemic) psychological and physical torment endured by the heroines is left unexplored. Simply proposing that the ‘moribund, elite status quo’ of classical composition be replaced by ‘energetic, previously disenfranchised voices’²⁷ in the popular music industry is romantic in the extreme, and does not even begin to scratch the surface of the complex relationship between art and popular music, and does not delve into the social forces that resulted in the Modernist icon of the composer-as-(anti)hero.

Adorno provides a useful framework here, particularly in his rejection of the importance of authorial intent: ‘Among the sources of error in the contemporary interpretation and critique of artworks the most disastrous is the confusion of the intention, what the artist supposedly wants to say, with the content [*Gehalt*] of the work.’²⁸ Adorno’s rejection of authorial intent has generated criticism on the grounds that issues of composer biography and intent are taken to contaminate the apparent purity of the aesthetic experience. Subotnik, for example, argues that ‘in Adorno’s formulation [of structural listening], knowing even the name of the composer or the composition in question could muddy the purity of the desired process.’²⁹ Whilst themes of purity and contamination undoubtedly pervade Modernist art, music and criticism,³⁰ it is not for the sake of ‘purity’ that Adorno rejects authorial intent, but for the inescapable reality that works (due to their social ‘lives’) inevitably take on meanings beyond or outside the intentions of the composer. It is curious that thinkers

²⁶ McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 74.

²⁷ McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 80.

²⁸ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 197.

²⁹ Subotnik, “Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening,” in *Deconstructive Variations: Music and Reason in Western Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 150.

³⁰ See, for example, Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

such as Subotnik and McClary, who are so keen to assert the social quality of musical works, should be so focussed on composer intent, which is, after all, only a small part of (social) lives of musical works.³¹

3.1.ii Radicalism or Relocation?

Despite McClary's stated aim of undermining notions of mastery and prestige (her explicit intention in essays such as "The Blasphemy of Talking Politics During Bach Year" and "Terminal Prestige"),³² she in fact implicitly reinscribes these very notions. In "The Blasphemy of Talking Politics," for example, rather than actually undermining the concept of mastery (by arguing for the fundamental accessibility of reflective aesthetic experience) McClary simply proposes that the 'priesthood' of professionals (of whom she is a prime example) be updated, to embrace issues of gender, sexuality, national identity and so on. Rather than offering insights into how prestige and hyper-masculinity work together in a complex matrix in Modernist music (for example, by looking at what Babbitt's fetishistic fidelity to the most abstract composing methods reveals about the relationship between art, commodity exchange and technology in the twentieth century), McClary simply proposes to invert the location of prestige, heaping praise on 'marginalised'³³ popular music, as if it were immune to its own codes of prestige, exclusion and misogyny.

For McClary, 'difficulty' in Modernist music operates as an expression of its desired social 'transcendence,' though she offers little account of how this difficulty is made manifest through music. McClary argues that compositional techniques such as 'self-denying, "difficult" rhythms derived by externally generated means'³⁴ render Modernist works alienating, but the reader is left having to assume that other factors such as sustained dissonance or abstract form might also contribute to resistance to easy listening, as no discussion of these parameters is offered. In an attempt to subvert the supposed prestige of this Modernist fetish for difficulty, McClary suggests one 'need

³¹ Adorno echoes Roland Barthes' famous rejection of (literary) criticism's enthusiasm for authorial intent and biography. For Barthes it is only once 'the voice loses its origin, [and] the author enters into his own death, [that] writing begins.' Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text*, selected and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1990), 142. Adorno, however, would likely have challenged the subjectivism of Barthes' account (for Barthes, 'a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination,' "The Death of the Author," 148). A comparison of the two thinkers on this matter would be valuable, but is beyond the scope of this study.

³² See note 4 above.

³³ In the sense that it has been excluded from the academy.

³⁴ McClary, "Terminal Prestige," 78.

only observe professional classical performers attempting to capture anything approaching “swing” (forget about funk!) to appreciate how *truly* difficult this apparently immediate music is.’³⁵ McClary’s broader project is to upset the traditional (disparaging) association between the body and the feminine, and she wishes to revalorise corporeality as a way of asserting a place for women (and other minorities or excluded groups) within musical practice and discourse. Despite the egalitarian premise of McClary’s project, however, it is important to note that she fails to subvert the notion of prestige, preferring to simply relocate it. A fuller critique would attempt to show how the performance of *any* style of music (or indeed subjectivity)³⁶ is learnt and reproduced socially; simply inverting the location of prestige is misguided at best, and ultimately ineffectual.

Similarly, McClary approvingly cites the ‘exhaustive discussions of the mechanical details of execution’³⁷ of the song *System of Survival* by Earth, Wind & Fire in a music magazine, noting how the description resembles program notes for ‘serious music.’³⁸ ‘Difficulty’ and an enthusiasm for technical sophistication are certainly not the exclusive domain of modernist art music, yet it is precisely such ‘exhaustive discussions’ that McClary finds so alienating in the domain of ‘serious music’ (for example, the programme notes from Philip Glass’ ‘academic’ years).³⁹ Furthermore, McClary’s uncritical approval of the technical discussion quoted in the *Roland Users Group* trade magazine (““One of the things I do is take the ROM presets from the JX-10, copy them to one of the blank slots and just go nuts””)⁴⁰ fails to note how exclusionary and masculinist such approaches can be.⁴¹ Whether in ‘serious’ or popular music, opaque ‘insider’ language and a focus on techniques and technologies exclude the uninitiated (‘ROM presets’ and ‘blank slots’ are likely to be just as alienating to the

³⁵ McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 79.

³⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

³⁷ McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 79.

³⁸ McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 79.

³⁹ McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 71.

⁴⁰ Mike McKnight (keyboard and technician and programmer for *System of Survival*) quoted in McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 79.

⁴¹ I do not mean to imply that female composers are necessarily alienated by technology, but rather that technology in music is often coded as a masculine pursuit. Tara Rodgers argues ‘the terms *technology* and *music* are often marked as male domains.’ See Tara Rodgers, *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 32. Extending Rodgers’ assertion, Linda Kouvaras argues that ‘with the rise of feminism, however, women innovators in sound art (such as Pauline Oliveros and Meredith Monk) have been recognized...[but] they are often presented as being welcome or accepted in the ‘club’ as ‘honorary boys.’ Linda Kouvaras, *Loading the Silence: Australian Sound Art in the Post-Digital Age* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 207.

casual listener as ‘isomorphic partitioning’ and ‘contrapuntal manipulations.’) By seeking to elevate her chosen example of ‘good’ music (*System of Survival*) via the very categories that she says unjustly confer prestige upon Modernist composition, McClary renders her argument in utter contradiction with itself.

McClary argues that *System of Survival* is ‘a song that gives no credence whatsoever to the mind/body split’, unlike ‘the avant-garde which fetishises intellectual work for its own sake.’⁴² McClary’s position again hints at an uncritical attitude towards popular forms: how can *any* subject of the twentieth century avoid the Cartesian split? When McClary writes that ‘the fact that this song [*System of Survival*] reaches a wide audience, that it speaks in a comprehensible language of exuberant hope in the face of hardship is...a mark of success in an economy of prestige that rewards communication and political effectiveness,’⁴³ the reader is left without any doubt that inverting, rather than subverting, economies of prestige is the main aim of her project. Though escapism may be one (perhaps) necessary response to marginalisation, the desire only to be spoken to in ‘a comprehensible language of exuberant hope’ reads as both infantilising and politically evacuated. Simply relocating the site of prestige, rather than subverting the category of prestige *per se*, McClary reveals her concept of the listening public to be unable to face the difficulties of the injurious classical canon.

Operating in tandem with McClary’s enthusiasm for popular music is a valorisation of minimalism, which she considers ‘the single most viable extant strand of the Western art-music tradition.’⁴⁴ In particular, Philip Glass is congratulated for making his writing more accessible to his audience:

As long as Philip Glass was straddling the fence between the academy and the audience, he wrote program notes that explained in excruciating, abstract detail how his compositional constructs operated. However, now that he has attracted an audience and has become comfortable about composing for people, his writing is extremely accessible.⁴⁵

⁴² McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 80.

⁴³ McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 81.

⁴⁴ Susan McClary, “Rap, Minimalism and Structures of Time in Late Twentieth-Century Culture,” in *Audio Culture*, ed. Christopher Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2007), 289.

⁴⁵ McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 71.

It is important to note the absence of Glass' *music* to the discussion here. Where one might expect McClary to trace the changes in Glass' musical style as he shifts from 'academic' to commercially successful composer, instead his program notes stand in. The composer's word once again warrants greater attention than his music. The fact that Glass' compositional (as opposed to writing) style itself has actually *not* shifted with his move from the academy to the mainstream directly undermines McClary's point here, which is that 'academic composers' write purposefully incomprehensible music. McClary's preference for critiquing composer's polemics rather than discussing their music significantly weakens her arguments, and certainly undermines the apparent radicalism of her stance. A critical interpretation of the music of Babbitt or Boulez may indeed 'violate the criteria of prestige the avant-garde has defined for itself,'⁴⁶ but why McClary shies away from fulfilling her own objective remains unclear.

3.2 Taruskin Against Adorno

The foregoing has demonstrated the ways in which the 'radical' understanding of aesthetic autonomy has been posited as a Modernist imperative, against which Postmodernist musicologists such as McClary may define themselves.⁴⁷ Importantly, however, aesthetic autonomy has also been roundly rejected by historical musicologist Richard Taruskin:

If the arts are to be ranked in order of their autonomy — that is, their freedom from worldly function — then that art will come out best which specifies its content least, for in that lack of specificity — that abstraction — lies its freedom from limitation and possible constraint... It goes without saying, but I'd better say it anyway, that this is the most asocial definition of artistic value ever promulgated.⁴⁸

Taruskin goes on to discuss Adorno in this paragraph, clearly identifying him as a promulgator of this 'poietic fallacy.'⁴⁹ For Taruskin, 'aesthetic autonomy...has been

⁴⁶ McClary, "Terminal Prestige," 66.

⁴⁷ Jonathan Kramer also considers autonomy as central to the distinction between Modernism and Postmodernism, and similarly considers autonomy to be in tension with the socially grounded study of music: '[Postmodernism] considers music not as autonomous but as relevant to cultural, social, and political contexts.' Johnathan D. Kramer, "The Nature and Origins of Musical Postmodernism," *Postmodern Music/ Postmodern Thought*, ed. Judy L. Lochhead and Joseph H Auner (London: Routledge, 2002), 16.

⁴⁸ Taruskin, "Shall We Change the Subject?" 27.

⁴⁹ Taruskin, "Shall We Change the Subject?" 27.

the dominant regulative concept of both art-theory and art-practice for more than two centuries,⁵⁰ and its primary outcome has been the establishment of an ‘authoritarian hierarchy’ that has ‘effectively sterilized twentieth-century performance of all literate (or “classical”) repertoires.’⁵¹ Taruskin’s apparently ‘social’ critique of the ‘autonomy principle’ posits aesthetic autonomy as a pernicious regulative ideal working as part of a repressive social apparatus. J.P.E Harper-Scott lambasts Taruskin’s anti-Modernism, underpinned by what Harper-Scott describes as xenophobic attitude towards Europe, and a pervasive (yet disavowed) neo-liberalism. According to Harper-Scott, Taruskin reduces modernism to an appendage of nineteenth century Romanticism, robbing it of its critical and dialectical function.⁵² Whilst conceding that a certain ‘artistic autonomy’ might serve a useful political function as a bulwark against the censorship and interference of totalitarian regimes,⁵³ Taruskin’s methodological commitment to empiricism forecloses any investigation into the (real or imagined) autonomy of works themselves. Michael Gallope considers the contradictions within Taruskin’s method, noting a tension between his explicit assertion that ‘agents can only be people,’⁵⁴ and an implicit recognition that ‘ideas can hold collective power over and above the agency of individuals.’⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Taruskin, “Is There a Baby in the Bathwater?” Part I, 163.

⁵¹ Taruskin, “Is There a Baby in the Bathwater?” Part II, 309.

⁵² J.P.E. Harper Scott, *The Quilting Points of Musical Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). See especially Part I “A Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing,” 1-42. The critiques of Subotnik, McClary and Taruskin advanced here concur with Harper-Scott’s analysis of the vexed reception of musical Modernism within American musicology. Through their critiques of aesthetic autonomy, each of the authors discussed here reveals an unexamined commitment to the market as the proper arbiter on matters of aesthetic value. The authors similarly tend to explain the alienated individualism of Modernist composers (and Modernist thinkers, in the figure of Adorno) as a straightforward elitism.

⁵³ ‘Responding only to what Adorno called “the inherent tendency of musical material” rather to any call from the wider world, twelve-tone music seemed to embody a perfect artistic “autonomy.” That autonomy easily translated into personal and political autonomy—that is, individual integrity—in the minds of many who were emerging from decades of oppression, an oppression that was still going on in the East.’ Richard Taruskin, “Zero Hour,” *Music in the Late Twentieth Century*, *Oxford History of Western Music*. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordwesternmusic.com.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/view/Volume5/actrade-9780195384857-div1-001006.xml> (accessed 14 June 2017).

⁵⁴ ‘My assertion that “agents can only be people” has met with with more resistance than any other in the Ox.’ Richard Taruskin, “Agents and Causes and Ends, Oh My,” *The Journal of Musicology* 32, no. 2 (2014): 289.

⁵⁵ Michael Gallope, “Why was this Music Desirable? On A Critical Explanation of the Avant-Garde,” *The Journal of Musicology*, 32, no. 2 (2014): 218. Gallope reads Taruskin ‘against the grain,’ concluding that ‘Taruskin’s explanation [of alienation of the musical avant-garde during the Cold War] finds its gravity in the power of ideas, a variety of hypothetical determinants, and the enigma of aesthetic practices, it is hard to imagine that there would come a moment where the evidence can rigorously verify one as a “true” cause. A speculative space of critical thought seems intrinsic to the account.’ Gallope, “Why was this Music Desirable?” 225.

For Taruskin, autonomy stands as the modern-day incarnation of the Absolute – a category against which all the muddle-headedness and ideology of earlier thinking might be contrasted with its socially-grounded corrective: for McClary, this is simply called ‘Postmodernism,’ whilst Taruskin has replaced the historical hegemony of musical idealism with his own grand narrative of its denunciation.⁵⁶ For Taruskin, ‘Adorno’s assertion of the autonomy principle as resistance’ stands as the ‘ultimate hypocrisy, and the ultimate, life-threatening pollution.’⁵⁷ Unlike McClary (whose critique of autonomy does not develop against Adorno’s thinking specifically), Taruskin’s indictment of both the ‘autonomy principle,’ and Adorno’s culpability in disseminating such ‘pollution,’ could hardly be expressed with any more drama. If aesthetic autonomy is thought to produce a negative or repressive sociability then one might wonder why Adorno (who was primarily concerned with identifying and critiquing domination) was so intent on asserting its importance. As argued here, Taruskin has significantly misinterpreted Adorno’s account of autonomy. By presenting aesthetic autonomy as an ideal (rather than a dialectic), it is Taruskin who tacitly stands guilty of ‘the revolting snobbery’⁵⁸ with which he charges Adorno.

3.3 Discussion – McClary and Taruskin

As argued here, self-proclaimed Postmodernists (such as Susan McClary) and anti-Modernists (such as Richard Taruskin) alike have forged their positions in opposition to Modernist thinking in general, and the writings of Theodor W. Adorno in particular. At the centre of such musicological criticisms of Adorno stands the desire to assert a socially grounded understanding of music as antithetical to Adorno’s project generally, and the concept of aesthetic autonomy in particular. Though any reader familiar with Adorno’s work can simply dismiss such a perverse critique on the grounds that Adorno is constructed as a straw man to bring down (attributing to him positions and opinions that he would have simply rejected), situating Adorno’s notion of autonomy in dialectical relation to mediation allows for not only the much-needed clarification of his positions, but also provides an opportunity to reflect on why this aspect of his

⁵⁶ See Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*.

⁵⁷ Taruskin, “Is There a Baby in the Bathwater?” Part II, 323.

⁵⁸ Taruskin, “Is There a Baby in the Bathwater?” Part II, 326.

thinking has generated such hostility. Chapter four “Purely Instrumental: Autonomy and Mediation in Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory” expands upon these themes.

3.4 The Institutionalisation of Radicalism

3.4.i Born, Boulez and IRCAM

Georgina Born’s study *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde* (1995) provides an exhaustive study of the institutionalization of musical Modernism through the prism of IRCAM (Institut de Recherche et de Coordination Acoustique/Musique) in Paris, founded in 1977 by Pierre Boulez and funded by the French government.⁵⁹ Born considers how and why Modernism, with its self-conscious desire for the radically new, formal experimentation and ‘a sense of the necessity of revolutionizing the “language” of art itself,’⁶⁰ might, against its own founding principles, produce a new hegemony.⁶¹ Born’s exploration of the distinction between musical Modernism and Postmodernism considers (amongst other things) the Postmodern rejection of the ‘Modernist belief in the autonomy of the aesthetic.’⁶² The central argument advanced by Born is that Modernism has fallen into contradiction with its founding principles: the institutionalization of Modernism (through organizations such as IRCAM) has forced it to relinquish its oppositional or subversive stance (the resonances here between Born’s critique and Bürger’s critique discussed below are considerable). Like McClary and Taruskin, Born’s critique of the ‘dominant position’ of IRCAM takes serialism to be a dominant and domineering force, despite the ‘extreme alienation of most audiences from Modernist music.’⁶³ For Born, IRCAM and Pierre Boulez occupy an analogous position to the place of Schoenberg in the work of Richard Taruskin – un-listened-to, yet exerting a domineering force over contemporary musical life.⁶⁴ Echoing McClary’s discomfort with the ‘sheltered

⁵⁹ Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 1.

⁶⁰ Born, *Rationalizing Culture*, 41.

⁶¹ ‘The investigation of how IRCAM continually legitimizes itself in order to reproduce its current dominant position, in the absence of great public or industrial success and while at the same time enunciating avant-garde ideology, is thus at the heart of this book.’ Born, *Rationalizing Culture*, 4.

⁶² Born, *Rationalizing Culture*, 46.

⁶³ Born, *Rationalizing Culture*, 5.

⁶⁴ Taruskin writes: ‘During his lifetime, and – astonishingly – in the half-century since his death, the music of Arnold Schoenberg has been influential and controversial out of all proportion to the frequency with which it has ever been performed or otherwise disseminated.’ Richard Taruskin, “The Poietic Fallacy,” *The Musical Times* 145, no. 1886 (Spring, 2004): 7. Similarly, Taruskin writes that work of

workshop' situation of academic composers,⁶⁵ Born notes that IRCAM 'is handsomely funded by the French state,'⁶⁶ and she considers the effects of the centralization of state funding during the late 1970s.⁶⁷ Critiques such as McClary's and Born's signal a growing tolerance of the (apparent) neutrality of the market within music scholarship, with the market (implicitly) standing as the proper arbiter of questions of cultural value.⁶⁸

Born writes of 'the necessity of Modernist mourning the loss of the totemic belief in a supervening reason – or, we might add, aesthetics – that would order or subsume, control or police all that it encountered', adding that 'mediation' might form 'the clue to transcending idealist ontologies of music' and the 'Modernist presupposition of universalism.'⁶⁹ Despite Born's recognition of Adorno's status as philosopher-musicologist and Modernist *par excellence*, and key generator of theories of mediation, he is nonetheless critiqued on account of his 'normative project.'⁷⁰ This charge of an unacknowledged normativity within Adorno's project echoes the charge laid by McClary and Taruskin that Modernist music (serialism in particular) exerts a domineering force over musical life. Like McClary and Taruskin, Born also takes Adorno's aesthetics to be universalist in the strongest possible sense. The difficulty, of course, is that any critical aesthetics (or music analysis or interpretation) tends to make implicit claims about *how things should be done*, as Born's own work on Boulez and IRCAM clearly shows. Born's vigorous criticism of the institutionalisation of the European Modernist avant-garde itself runs the risk of naturalizing apparently non-institutional (that is, commercial) music production as the proper way of doing things, and thus arguably carries its own normative content.

Arnold Schoenberg is 'resolutely esoteric and unsellable.' Taruskin, "Shall We Change the Subject?" 27.

⁶⁵ McClary, "Terminal Prestige," 66-71.

⁶⁶ Born, *Rationalizing Culture*, 41.

⁶⁷ Born, *Rationalizing Culture*, 84-94.

⁶⁸ McClary seems excised at the fact that the 'academic prestige racket' is awarded public funding. McClary, "Terminal Prestige," 68. Political theorist Wendy Brown argues that, despite appearing as a spontaneous social order, the apparent neutrality of the market under neo-liberalism is highly regulated and 'involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action.' Wendy Brown, "Neo-Liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy," *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ: 2005), 40.

⁶⁹ Georgina Born, "On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity," *Twentieth Century Music* 2, no. 1 (March, 2005): 11.

⁷⁰ Born, "On Musical Mediation," 13.

Though Born's book is now more than twenty years old, her ideas have shaped our understanding of musical Modernism. Like the arguments advanced by McClary and Taruskin, Born's book is representative of the hostile criticism against Modernist music that was a persistent thread within Anglophone musicology of the 1980s and 90s. As Björn Heile argues, this view of Modernism 'shows all the hallmarks of "othering," of a violent reaction to what is perceived as a threatening cultural influence.'⁷¹ With the various post-war avant gardes now being understood as distinct aesthetic and historical phenomena,⁷² anti-Modernist critiques are now perhaps losing their dominance.

3.4.ii Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*

As discussed above, McClary constructs an uncomfortable opposition between avant-garde (serialist) and progressive (minimalist) compositional approaches in "Terminal Prestige".⁷³ Peter Bürger's book *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984) disputes such conflation of Modernist and avant-garde artworks, arguing that avant-garde movements should be understood as distinct historical phenomena, which operate both within Modernism and constitute a break with it. After Adorno, Bürger argues that Modernist artworks exist in an antagonistic relationship with modernity. In particular, he notes, Modernist artworks resist their commodity status, often resulting in the alienation of their audience (this is particularly true of Modernist music).⁷⁴ Against Adorno, however, Bürger suggests that the Modernist artworks fail to recognise their complicity within the institution of art, and as such are ideological, institutionalising the supposed aesthetic autonomy of the artwork within a self-reinforcing high culture. Bürger argues that, under Modernism, the notion of the autonomy of art 'becomes transformed into the (erroneous) idea that the work of art is totally independent of

⁷¹ Björn Heile, "Darmstadt as Other: British and American Responses to Musical Modernism," *Twentieth-Century Music* 1, no. 2 (2004): 169.

⁷² Heile, "Darmstadt as Other," 176.

⁷³ By locating 'avant-garde' as a negative category against which minimalist composition is contrasted McClary fails to credit minimalism (particularly in its early years) as an avant-garde movement in its own right. McClary attempts to recast the traditional conservative/progressive antagonism by forcing the categories 'avant-garde' and 'progressive' into uncomfortable opposition, a problem which clouds her argument. See McClary, "Terminal Prestige."

⁷⁴ Clement Greenberg takes modernist music's isolation to be essential to its progressive quality: 'I want to suspect that music, when we look back in time to come, is where those issues [of "advancedness" of modernism] will have been most brought out into the open, if not decided. (Modernist music's very lack of a sufficient public seems to me to make its case the exemplary, maybe even the most significant one.)' Clement Greenberg, quoted in Jonathan D. Kramer, "Can Modernism Survive George Rochberg?" *Critical Inquiry* 11, no. 2 (December 1984): 353.

society.’⁷⁵ In contrast, avant-garde movements go beyond the Modernist assault on tradition and attack the bourgeois institution of art itself.⁷⁶ By attempting ‘to reintegrate art into the praxis of life,’⁷⁷ avant-garde art renounces the very notion of autonomy upon which the Modernist work of art is premised. For Bürger, avant-garde movements seek the ‘realization of a utopia in which art and life are united’,⁷⁸ and thus necessarily demand that the institution of art (with its erroneous notion of autonomy and its opposition to mass culture) be destroyed.

Despite the many insightful observations Bürger makes, his attempt to locate Adorno’s valorisation of autonomy in direct opposition to avant-gardism relies on an understanding of autonomy that Adorno would not defend, namely that ‘art is totally independent of society.’⁷⁹ Bürger does not fully take into account Adorno’s musicological writings, in which he distinguishes between the avant-gardes of the early twentieth century and the new music of the 1950s and 1960s. Bürger’s account neglects to credit Adorno’s recognition of the institutionalization of certain compositional practices. For example, in his essay “The Aging of the New Music (1955),” Adorno criticises the new music for ‘falling into contradiction with its own idea’⁸⁰ by allowing formal and technical advances to be derived from abstract planning rather than subjective need,⁸¹ thus institutionalising the very methods which sought to liberate music from the traditional compositional systems. When Adorno writes that some composers ‘amuse themselves with the juggling of tone rows as a substitute for tonality, without really composing at all,’⁸² he is lamenting not only the loss of serialism’s critical stance, but also its focus on procedure over the expressive possibilities of the musical materials. This focus on procedure rather than expression results in what Adorno calls ‘moderate Modernism,’⁸³ which is arguably the very institutionalisation of art that Bürger identifies.

⁷⁵ Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 46.

⁷⁶ Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 46.

⁷⁷ Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 22-23.

⁷⁸ Peter Bürger, “Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of *Theory of the Avant-Garde*,” *New Literary History* 41, no. 4 (Autumn 2010): 696.

⁷⁹ Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 46.

⁸⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, “The Aging of the New Music,” in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 181.

⁸¹ Alistair Williams, “New Music, Late Style: Adorno’s ‘Form in the New Music’,” *Music Analysis* 27, no. 2-3 (July-October 2008): 194.

⁸² Adorno, “The Aging of the New Music,” 196.

⁸³ Adorno, “The Aging of the New Music,” 197.

3.5 Conclusion

Given that sociological studies such as Joseph Straus' "The Myth of Serial 'Tyranny' in the 1950s and 1960s" have debunked the myth of serial domination of the American academy,⁸⁴ it might be expected that anti-Modernist rhetoric would have softened over time. Yet McClary's more recent work decrying 'the hostile takeover of music studies by the serialist mafia'⁸⁵ shows that empirical evidence is no match for enduring stereotypes. In bringing together the essence of the disparate critiques of McClary, Taruskin, Born and Bürger, this chapter has painted a picture of the status of musical Modernism in the contemporary cultural landscape. Though the remainder of this thesis is dedicated to an explicit engagement with Adornian aesthetics and the possibilities for Adorno-inspired analysis, this project is motivated by a desire to unsettle the many hostile depictions of musical Modernism, which construct it (discursively) as a domineering, monolithic force. Thus it is not just Adornian aesthetics to which I hope to turn a 'speculative ear,' but to musical Modernism more generally. By incorporating a critical theoretical to approach to Modernist and Postmodernist musical aesthetics, this thesis points to new ways of exploring the music of the twentieth – and twenty-first – centuries. The institutionalisation of hostile border wars between serious and popular forms, and an academic penchant for casting Modernism and Postmodernism as utterly antithetical compositional and aesthetic processes, has resulted in the de-historicisation of post-war music: serialism has been cast as an 'historical wrong turn'⁸⁶ with minimalism providing its natural correction. Against this characterisation (presented by both 'historical' and 'New' musicologists), this thesis draws out some of the intimacies at work between Modern and Postmodern music to explore the complex relationship between autonomy, consensus, subversion, and the unending search for new forms of musical expression.

⁸⁴ Joseph N. Straus, "The Myth of Serial 'Tyranny' in the 1950s And 1960s," *Musical Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (1999): 301-343. Straus shows that 'serialism never came close to dominating any aspect of American musical life... it remained a visible but effectively marginal phenomenon throughout the period [1950s and 1960s].' 302.

⁸⁵ Susan McClary, "The World According to Taruskin," *Music & Letters* 87, no. 3 (2006): 414.

⁸⁶ Andrew Timms, "Modernism's Moment of Plenitude," *The Modernist Legacy: Essays on New Music*, ed. Björn Heile (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 14.

Chapter Four

Purely Instrumental: Autonomy and Mediation in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory

*Autonomous art is a work of contrived immortality, utopia and hubris in one.*¹

4.0 Introduction

From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, one can see that transcendence is, and always has been, a fiction. To Postmodern² ears, the idea of aesthetic autonomy, like the idea of absolute music before it, might sound like a relic of German Idealism: the sheer impossibility for *any* art form to operate wholly autonomously, without reference to anything outside itself, has long been accepted. The notion that art transcends its social situation has given way to porous understandings of both art and society; one can no longer locate a fixed inside or outside to society, and all art is now understood to be thoroughly mediated by its social context. Despite the furious agreement over the social character of art and music, there remains a certain degree of confusion surrounding the work of Adorno. As chapters two and three demonstrated, many important musicologists take Adorno's assertion of aesthetic autonomy to be in

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997), 184.

² Musicologists are now reevaluating the notion of Postmodernity as it is applied to music, with some regarding the division between Modernism and Postmodernism as anachronistic. See for example, Mark Carroll, "Out of the Ordinary: The Quotidian in the Music of Graeme Koehne," *Music & Letters*, 95, no. 3 (2014): 429-451. Carroll argues for the usefulness of the terms 'hypermodernity' (after Gilles Lipovetsky) and 'supermodernity' (after Marc Augé). In a similar vein Linda Kouvaras describes more recent trends (from the late 1990s onwards) as 'altermodern.' See Linda Kouvaras, *Loading the Silence: Australian Sound Art in the Post-Digital Age* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 47-48. The distinction between Modernism and Postmodernism as aesthetic categories remains contested. *Transmorem/Transmortem* (1973) by Eliane Radigue (considered in detail in chapter 10) was written when this distinction was being much debated. Johnathan Kramer's influential article makes explicit distinctions between Modernist and Postmodernist musical traits. See Johnathan D. Kramer, "The Nature and Origins of Musical Postmodernism," *Postmodern Music/ Postmodern Thought*, ed. Judy L. Lochhead and Joseph H Auner (London: Routledge, 2002), 13-26.

tension with, even antithetical to, the socially grounded study of music.³ In light of the criticisms outlined in the previous chapter, this chapter defends Adorno's critique of aesthetic autonomy by drawing on some of his more explicitly philosophical texts, in particular *Aesthetic Theory* (1969). Far from signalling a rejection of the socially mediated nature of music, this chapter argues that Adorno's valorisation of aesthetic autonomy, and the special significance he accords autonomous art music, is thoroughly historical and saturated with social significance.

This chapter begins with a consideration of the historical developments which led to the special status of music within the tradition of Western art, noting that the discourse surrounding aesthetic autonomy, and in particular autonomous music, can be traced back to early German Idealist and Romantic thinkers. Adorno's understanding of autonomy and his theory of the artwork are then considered in more detail. Then follows an exploration of the Adornian dialectic of autonomy and mediation by tracing the development of Adorno's position through his (critical) reception of the ideas of Kant (autonomy) and Hegel (mediation). Thus, this chapter considers both Adorno's inheritance of the ideas of Kant and Hegel, *and* the important ways in which of his thinking departs from earlier approaches.

4.1 Music as a 'Special Case': An Historical Perspective

³ See Chapter One "On the Modernist Problem." Richard Taruskin's (previously discussed) argument is emblematic: 'if the arts are to be ranked in order of their autonomy – that is their freedom from worldly function – then that art will come out best which specifies its content least, for in that lack of specificity – that abstraction – lies its freedom from limitation and possible constraint...It goes without saying, but I'd better say it anyway, that this is the most asocial definition of artistic value ever promulgated.' Richard Taruskin, "Shall We Change the Subject? A Music Historian Reflects, Part 1," *Dissonance: Schweizer Musikzeitschrift für Forschung und Kreation* 112 (December, 2010): 27. Georgina Born considers musical mediation in relation to the work concept, but does not consider the dialectical relationship between mediation and autonomy. See Georgina Born, "On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology, Creativity," *Twentieth Century Music* 2, no. 1 (2005): 7-36. Gianmario Borio notes that a rejection of aesthetic autonomy is a recurring theme in the critiques of Modernism articulated by McClary, Taruskin and Born (and others). See Gianmario Borio, "Musical Communication and the Process of Modernity (Round Table: Modernism and its Others)" *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 139, no. 1 (2014): 177-183. The rejection of aesthetic (or musical) autonomy is by no means universal within musicology; nonetheless, the concept remains highly contested. James Currie, for example, provides a compelling case for the revaluation of musical autonomy via Heidegger, Hegel and Marx. See James Currie "Music After All," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 62, no. 1 (2009): 145-203. Sarah Collins argues for the relationship between autonomy and commitment in modernism to be understood as dialectical. Collins notes the 'ongoing disciplinary anxiety with practices of autonomy' within Anglo-American musicology. See Sarah Collins, "The Composer as 'Good European': Musical Modernism, *Amor Fati* and the cosmopolitanism of Frederick Delius," *Twentieth-Century Music* 12, no. 1 (2015): 97-123. The aim of this chapter is to consider Adorno's framing of aesthetic autonomy, particularly as it applies to music.

The special place afforded to music within Adorno's philosophy is not without precedent: the conception of music as an exemplar, or 'special case'⁴ amongst the arts, emerged with the idea of absolute music. Though the genesis of the term 'absolute music' remains much debated,⁵ there can be no doubt that a revolutionary shift occurred in musical aesthetics at the turn of the nineteenth century, upending traditional hierarchies; not only was instrumental music proclaimed the highest musical form (when it had once been the lowest), it was named the condition to which all the other arts ought constantly aspire.⁶ Schlegel, Hoffmann and Hanslick, among other Romantic thinkers, agreed that this remarkable change in fortunes was thanks to the abstract nature of instrumental music.⁷ Abstraction, once the cause for instrumental music's low status among the arts, became the means through which music achieved its newfound power, capable of embodying not only artistic, but metaphysical, concepts.

As Carl Dahlhaus argued, despite the importance of the concept of the Absolute for idealist and early Romantic thinkers, the term 'absolute music' was not operating as a coherent term with an agreed understanding until Wagner used it as the foil against which he could define his own project (of creating the *Gesamtkunstwerk*).⁸ Dahlhaus' important insight is to suggest that the *idea* of absolute music preceded its actuality. As Daniel Chua explains, the notion of 'absolute music' actually emerged alongside the *literary* innovations of German Romanticism, and as such was brought into being through discourse:⁹ 'far from standing speechless before its ineffable utterances, the Romantics spoke absolute music into existence. It is a music emancipated from

⁴ Peter Tregear notes the special significance of autonomous art music within Adorno's philosophy, describing music as a 'special case.' See Peter Tregear, "Sounding Fascism: T. W. Adorno and the Political Susceptibility of Music," *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 42 (1999): 36-48.

⁵ Roger Scruton's entry on absolute music in the *New Grove Dictionary* claims that, 'the expression [absolute music] is of German origin, first appearing in the writings of Romantic philosophers and critics such as J.L. Tieck, J.G. Herder, W.H. Wackenroder, Jean Paul Richter and E.T.A. Hoffmann,' whilst Sana Pederson argues that none of the authors Scruton lists ever used the term. See Roger Scruton, "Absolute music," in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed April 22, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/subscriber/article/grove/music/00069> and Sana Pederson, "Defining The Term 'Absolute Music' Historically," *Music & Letters* 90, no. 2 (2009): 250.

⁶ Walter Pater famously wrote that 'All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.' Quoted in Patricia Herzog, "The Condition to which All Art Aspires: Reflections on Pater on Music," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 36, no. 2 (April 1996): 122.

⁷ Mark Evan Bonds, "Idealism and the Aesthetics of Instrumental Music at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50, no. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn, 1997): 387.

⁸ Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 20.

⁹ Daniel K. L. Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 6. James Buhler makes a similar point in "Disenchanted Music," *19th-Century Music* 26, no. 2 (Fall, 2002): 186 – 187.

language *by language*.’¹⁰ For Chua (following Dahlhaus), it was through language that the idea of absolute music came into being, the music led into the world by a discourse that preceded it. Mark Evan Bonds goes further, arguing that absolute music can be viewed as a construction of later formalist thinkers, who applied the term retrospectively onto early Romantics, who had preferred the term ‘pure music.’¹¹

Despite his reputation as absolute music’s greatest advocate, Eduard Hanslick’s famous treatise of 1854 *Vom Musikalisch Schönen* never actually used the term ‘absolute music’ [*absolute Musik*], instead writing only of ‘pure, absolute musical art’ [*Tonkunst*].¹² Hanslick’s famous defence of *Absolute Tonkunst* against the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* arguably framed absolute music as a philosophical and aesthetic aporia,¹³ rather than an eternal, a-historical and transcendental genre, whose signs did not signify.¹⁴ The scarcity with which even late Romantics used the term ‘absolute music’, and the varying meanings attached to the term, suggests that, despite the undoubted correspondence between ‘pure’ and ‘absolute’ music, the development of the idea of absolute music as utterly self-referential (without influence from, or relevance to, extra-musical ideas or processes) occurred considerably later than might be imagined – with the ascendancy of formalist thinking.¹⁵

The highly contested nature of absolute music has arguably influenced contemporary understandings of aesthetic autonomy, particularly within musicology, as both discourses share a declared (but impossible) self-referentiality. Whilst a closed hermeticism undoubtedly lies at the core of both the idea of absolute music *and* Modernist claims of aesthetic autonomy, the discourses share significant differences: whereas self-referentiality appears as a harmonious ideal in the discourse surrounding absolute music, the self-referentiality of the autonomous Modernist artwork is self-consciously refracted (even if it strives to keep this self-consciousness mute in the art’s presentation), and this process is marked by negation, failure and alienation. Importantly, Modernist autonomy places the artwork in an antagonistic relationship

¹⁰ Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning*, 6.

¹¹ Bonds, “Idealism and the Aesthetics of Instrumental Music,” 387 – 420.

¹² Klaus Kropfinger, *Wagner and Beethoven: Richard Wagner's Reception of Beethoven*, trans. Peter Palmer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 114.

¹³ Scruton, “Absolute music.”

¹⁴ Or, as Chua explains: absolute music’s ‘signs signify nothing.’ Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning*, 4.

¹⁵ Bonds, “Idealism and the Aesthetics of Instrumental Music,” 387 – 420.

with the society from which it emerges, and it is this oppositional stance that many musicological critiques of autonomy actively forget.¹⁶

Thus, Adorno's particular privileging of the autonomous musical work as a 'special case' undoubtedly emerges from a tradition that has long celebrated the aconceptual and non-discursive qualities of musical works. Whilst aesthetic autonomy might appear as the swan-song of an earlier, decaying idealism (with autonomy only ever embodying an *idea*, and never appearing as an empirical *reality*), the standard New Musicological approach¹⁷ of dismissing aesthetic autonomy risks a willful blindness to a material condition of all art under late modernity: namely, that the autonomy of the work of art is an inescapable precondition of art being understood as such.¹⁸ As argued in this chapter, Adorno's formulation of aesthetic autonomy names both a quality of artworks themselves, and an intensifying but ever-incomplete social process acting upon all artworks. Whilst individual works are inevitably more or less autonomous, the notion that a composer or a work can simply 'opt out' of autonomy, or that aesthetic autonomy must be rejected in the spirit of a progressive engagement with musical works, demands a willful blindness towards the material conditions of art in the twentieth century and beyond.

¹⁶ Citing the work of Ruth Solie, Lawrence Kramer, David Schwarz and others, Martin Scherzinger argues that 'the *antagonistic* side of aesthetic autonomy, which was tied to notions of critique and negativism, has largely been forgotten.' Martin Scherzinger, "In Memory of a Receding Dialectic: The Political Relevance of Autonomy and Formalism in Modernist Musical Aesthetics," in *The Pleasure of Modernist Music*, (ed.) Arved Ashby (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 69. The 'inaccessibility' of modernist music has long been discussed. Critic Clement Greenberg takes modernist music's isolation to be essential to its progressive quality: "I want to suspect that music, when we look back in time to come, is where those issues [of 'advancedness' of modernism] will have been most brought out into the open, if not decided. (Modernist music's very lack of a sufficient public seems to me to make its case the exemplary, maybe even the most significant one.)" Clement Greenberg, quoted in Jonathan D. Kramer, "Can Modernism Survive George Rochberg?" *Critical Inquiry* 11, no. 2 (December 1984): 353. Within the musicological literature, 'difficult' modernist music is often regarded as elitist rather than antagonistic. See for example, Susan McClary "Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition," *Cultural Critique* 12 (1989): 57-81. See for example, Ruth Solie (ed.), *Musicology and Difference* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Lawrence Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995); David Schwarz, *Listening Subjects: Music Psychoanalysis, Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

¹⁷ Some evidence of this approach has been detailed above in chapters one and two. Martin Scherzinger also argues that 'There is scarcely a critical musicological account of the last ten years that fails to lambaste at least one aspect of what are perceived to be modernism's surviving intellectual practices – the structural analysis of formal musical notes alone (i.e. treating musical works as if they were self-sufficient totalities), for example, or the teleological approach to music history (i.e. writing as if some utopia in waiting lay ahead).' Scherzinger, "In Memory of a Receding Dialectic," 68-69.

¹⁸ Janet Wolff argues for the social and historical contingency of judgements of value and taste, but nonetheless contemplates 'the possibility that "the aesthetic" has its own irreducible specificity.' Janet Wolff, *Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 26. See especially Chapter Five "The Specificity of Art," 85-104.

4.2 Modernism and Autonomy

Modernism is primarily an artistic movement best understood as a response to the overwhelming change and disorientation brought about by modernity. It is generally accepted that modernity (understood as a descriptor for the social, economic and intellectual conditions of the post-industrial Western world from 1860 to the middle of the twentieth century) engendered a more radical break with its immediate past than previous periods had experienced,¹⁹ and thus the notion of rupture from the past is central to the Modernist project.²⁰ The rejection of traditional forms within the arts, and Modernism's privileging of the new and the confronting, should be understood not only as a challenge to received notions of beauty and truth, but as part of the questioning of inherited norms. Alienation and estrangement brought about by the rise of the imperial metropolis, a new understanding interiority informed by Freud's exploration of the unconscious, and a 'radical questioning of the process of representation'²¹ are key Modernist concerns. Advances in technology meant that 'photography, cinema, radio, television, reproduction and recording all make their decisive advances during the period identified as Modernist.'²² These social and economic changes affected not only in the material structures of artworks, but also had a significant impact upon the very nature of aesthetic experience.

In music, the term 'modern' was first used during mid-nineteenth century, pejoratively, by Wagner as a way of calling into question grand opera's capitulation to popular taste, and the co-option of the arts more generally to the interests of industry, trade and populism.²³ A more positive use of the term 'modern' arose after Baudelaire's defense of Wagner in 1861, with his subsequent use of the term to title his 1861 essay *The Painter of Modern Life*.²⁴ Virginia Woolf famously dated the birth of British Modernism with her declaration that 'in or about December, 1910, human character

¹⁹ Leon Bostein, "Modernism," in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed April 22, 2015, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/subscriber/article/grove/music/40625?q=m odernism&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit

²⁰ This sense of rupture brought about by modernity is explored further chapter five 'Killing Time I.'

²¹ Raymond Williams, "When was Modernism?" in *The Politics of Modernism*, ed. Tony Pinkney (London: Verso, 1989), 33. This was originally a lecture delivered on March 17 at Bristol University.

²² Williams, "When was Modernism?" 33.

²³ Bostein, "Modernism," 868.

²⁴ Bostein, "Modernism," 868.

changed,²⁵ and Raymond Williams locates the ‘dominant version’ of modernism ‘between, say 1890 and 1940.’²⁶ Andy Hamilton notes that ‘modernism did not appear in the arts simultaneously – arguably, literary modernism began in the 1860s with Baudelaire, followed by painting with impressionism and, finally, in the 1890s, music – [with] Debussy’s ‘*Prelude a l’après-midi d’un faune*,’²⁷ suggesting that Modernism emerged in a rather uneven fashion across the different artistic disciplines both historically and geographically.²⁸

According to Andy Hamilton, ‘autonomy is normally taken to mean that art is governed by its own rules and laws, and that artistic value makes no reference to social or political value.’²⁹ As Hamilton shows, however, this is a rather unsustainable understanding of autonomy, which becomes meaningless once the notion is accepted that all concepts of value are socially grounded. A much more nuanced notion of autonomy is required in order to consider the social situation of art, and the ongoing tension (from Modernism through to Postmodernism) of the lines between art and life. Adorno’s valorisation of aesthetic autonomy is best understood as part of a broader exploration of how art is possible in an age where inherited forms have lost their neutrality. As Max Paddison writes, ‘the fundamental problem addressed by Adorno’s aesthetics is how to philosophize about art in the absence of aesthetic norms.’³⁰ J. M. Bernstein echoes this sentiment, writing that Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* ‘can be construed as the philosophical articulation of the meaning of artistic modernism, as modernism brought to the level of the concept.’³¹ For Bernstein, Modernist art is defined by its autonomy:

²⁵ Virginia Woolf, quoted in David Bennett, “Checking the Post: Music, Postmodernism or Post-Postmodernism,” *New Formations* 66 (Spring 2009): 7.

²⁶ Williams, “When was Modernism?” 32.

²⁷ Andy Hamilton, *Aesthetics and Music* (London: Continuum, 2007), 154.

²⁸ The applicability of the term Modernist remains contested. As Ben Earle notes, ‘recent historical revisionism...has seen the applicability of the term “Modernist” widely extended in scope,’ an approach Earle regards as unhelpful. See Ben Earle, “Modernism and Reification in the Music of Frank Bridge,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 141, no. 2 (2016): 336. Earle seeks to resolve the methodological impasse between analytical and philosophical approaches to writing about musical Modernism via ‘methodological historicism,’ whereby works are ‘analysed according to theories with which composers and critics of the period were widely familiar.’ Earle, “Modernism and Reification in the Music of Frank Bridge,” 335.

²⁹ Andy Hamilton, “Adorno,” in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*, ed. Theodore Gracyk and Andrew Kania (New York: Routledge, 2011), 394. Also, Andy Hamilton, “Adorno and the Autonomy of Art,” in *Nostalgia for a Redeemed Future: Critical Theory*, ed. Stefano Ludovisi (Rome: John Calbot University Press, 2009), 293-310.

³⁰ Max Paddison, *Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2.

³¹ J. M. Bernstein, “‘The Dead Speaking of Stones and Stars’: Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, ed. Fred Rush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 139

‘Modern art is characterized by its becoming autonomous: modernism is that increment in which art becomes self-conscious of its autonomy.’³² Or in Adorno’s more tautological formulation: ‘It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist.’³³ Thus, autonomy from overt social function comes at the price of an incessant self-questioning: with the collapse of inherited forms, how is art to be understood as such?

Modernism and aesthetic autonomy are intimately intertwined, but modernity itself is also characterised by the intensifying autonomy of all spheres of life (rationalisation).³⁴ Thus, aesthetic autonomy becomes (perhaps paradoxically) a mechanism through which to critique the process of rationalization. As Martin Scherzinger argues, the Modernist insistence on aesthetic autonomy is part of ‘an effort to arrest critical space in an increasingly administered world. While [Modernism] insisted on its self-sufficiency and its ability to disclose truths about the world (principally in negative terms), modernism’s adversarial impulse also claimed art as an agent for social change.’³⁵ For Mark Carroll, it was Pierre Boulez who pursued this dialectical impulse to its high-Modernist extreme, forcing the isolation of the artist from their audience, and the driving of musical expression to the point of incomprehensibility. It was Boulez who ‘pursued Adorno’s belief in the autonomous work of art as the sublime expression of bourgeois self-isolation to the point at which autonomy threatened the very foundations of bourgeois art.’³⁶ Thus, aesthetic autonomy is both a condition of art in an era when the heritability of forms has decayed, *and* a stance of opposition towards society, and the growing instrumentalisation of all forms of thought and action.

Aesthetic autonomy arguably reached its apotheosis in the high-Modernist musical work of the mid-twentieth century: resolute in its isolation, aimless in its lack of social purpose, and defiantly resistant to incorporation into popular culture (in contrast to the popular incorporation of movements such as expressionism and abstraction in painting,

³² Bernstein, “‘The Dead Speaking of Stones and Stars,’” 146.

³³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997), 1.

³⁴ Weber articulated this tendency in Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Harper Collins, 1991). Adorno and Horkheimer explore the intensification of this tendency with the rationalization of reason itself in Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 2010).

³⁵ Scherzinger, “In Memory of a Receding Dialectic,” 69.

³⁶ Mark Carroll, *Music and Ideology in Cold War Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 157. Carroll traces a direct correlation between Boulez’s radical high-Modernism and the emerging Cold War.

architecture and film). As argued here, the obscurity of Modernist music is at once a function of autonomy and (resistance to) commodification, and it is through this unwavering loneliness that Modernist works oppose and critique dominant social codes. This isolation is also central to the Modernist account of what the work of art *is* and how it functions in the world, and it is towards Adorno's theory of the artwork to which this chapter now turns.

4.3 Theory of the Artwork

4.3.i Monad

Adorno's theory of the artwork (which is also a theory of its autonomy) is articulated through the metaphor of the windowless monad. As Max Paddison explains, Adorno's conceptualization of the monad is originally taken from the seventeenth-century philosophy of Gottfried Leibniz and then 'filtered through Hegel.'³⁷ According to Leibniz: 'Monads have no windows, by which anything could come in or go out... The natural changes of monads come from an *internal principle*, since an external cause would be unable to influence their inner being.'³⁸ Scherzinger also asserts the influence of Walter Benjamin on Adorno's formulation of the autonomous monad, which was essential to Benjamin's method of dialectical materialist history.³⁹ Adorno's use of the monad arguably anticipates the paradoxical conceptual formulations so favored by poststructuralism: the monad is closed to the outside world yet reflects it; the monad is processual yet also the arrest of that process, at once a process and a thing:

The artwork is both the result of the process and the process itself at a standstill... a monad: at once a force field and a thing. Artworks are closed

³⁷ Max Paddison explains: 'The term 'monad' (*Monade*) is taken originally from Leibniz's *Monadology* (1714). Adorno's use of the concept is distinctly filtered through Hegel, however.' Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, 300, note 180.

³⁸ Leibniz quoted in Scherzinger, "In Memory of a Receding Dialectic," 76.

³⁹ Scherzinger, "In Memory of a Receding Dialectic," 76.

Benjamin uses the metaphor of the monad in order to contrast historicism with materialist historiography: 'Universal history has no theoretical armature. Its method is additive; it musters a mass of data to fill the homogenous, empty time. Materialist historiography, on the other hand, is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes... a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework.' Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Concept of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 262-263. Benjamin's philosophy of history, and its influence upon Adorno is explored at greater length in chapter five, see 5.3 Benjamin and the Vulnerability of the Past.

to one another, blind, and yet in their hermeticism they represent what is external...The interpretation of an artwork as an immanent crystallized process at a standstill approximates the concept of the monad.⁴⁰

Monads are indivisible, autonomous entities, yet the monad includes within itself its relationship to all other monads. Unlike Leibniz's formulation, in which individual monads form a harmonious collective,⁴¹ in Adorno's thinking the totality (universal) always exists in a state of antagonism with the parts (particular). For Adorno, the monadological quality of artworks lies in their representation of the seemingly inescapable emergence of domination in all forms of exchange, *and* their apparent autonomy from this process:

That artworks as windowless monads "represent" what they themselves are not can scarcely be understood except in that their own dynamic, their immanent historicity as a dialectic of nature and its domination, not only is of the same essence as the dialectic external to them but resembles it without imitating it... Art's double character as both autonomous and *fait social* is incessantly reproduced on the level of its autonomy.⁴²

Antagonism between universal and particular, parts and whole, occurs on many levels. Importantly for artworks, the work exists in an antagonistic state with the society from which it emerged (because it reflects social tensions), *and* in a state of immanent antagonism with itself, as the parts and the whole each seek to exert themselves. Thus, artworks exist in a state of flux, not only in their relationship with society; they are themselves in a constant state of motion, calling into question the very notion of coherence and the idea of a harmonious whole:

The artwork is a process essentially in the relation of its whole and parts. Without being reducible to one side or the other, it is the relation itself that is a process of becoming. Whatever may in the artwork be called totality is not a structure that integrates the sum of its parts. Even objectified the work remains a developing process by virtue of the propensities active in it. Conversely, the parts are not something given...they are centers of

⁴⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 237.

⁴¹ Daniel Garber, "Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm (1646-1716)," in *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2000), 480.

⁴² Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 6.

energy that strain toward the whole on the basis of a necessity that they equally perform.⁴³

Although Adorno famously insisted upon the superiority of the score over the performed musical work,⁴⁴ he nonetheless understood artworks to be events as well as objects: ‘Artworks have the immanent character of being an act, even if they are carved in stone, and this endows them with the quality of being something momentary and sudden.’⁴⁵ The *thing*-ness of the artwork, its objectification, stands in dialectical relation to the impossibility of its completion and coherence; thus the artwork reflects the illusory nature of all objectification, illuminating the domination inherent in conceiving of things as totalities.

Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* details many qualities of artworks, some of which are further elaborated upon below, but to take stock of the important qualities described thus far: an artwork is both a thing and a process; it is closed to the world yet reflects it (it is monadological); it is a knot of antagonisms, both in its internal construction (the dialectical pull between universal and particular), and its relation to society (in its autonomy the artwork turns away from society, whilst social antagonisms inhere within artworks).

4.3.ii On Art’s ‘Double Character’: Autonomy and Commodity

For Adorno, the great musical works of the bourgeois period are functionless in the sense that they do not operate in the service of religion, the courts, dance or theatre: ‘Insofar as a social function can be predicated for artworks, it is their functionlessness.’⁴⁶ Importantly, however, autonomous works *do* function as commodities and as such art music’s autonomous status always exists in dialectical relation to its commodity form.⁴⁷ This contradictory aspect of autonomy (art is social yet also outside society; it is autonomous yet also commodified) is described by Adorno

⁴³ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 235.

⁴⁴ ‘For scores are not only almost always better than the performances, they are more than simply instructions for them: they are indeed the thing itself.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 130. Adorno goes on to qualify this statement, with ‘both concepts of the artwork as thing [score/performance] are not necessarily distinct.’

⁴⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 105.

⁴⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 297.

⁴⁷ ‘The truth content of artworks, which is indeed their social truth, is predicated on their fetish character. The principle of heteronomy, apparently the counterpart of fetishism, is the principle of exchange, and in it domination is masked...only what is useless can stand in for the stunted use value.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 298.

as its ‘double character’ (art has a ‘double character as both autonomous and *fait social*’).⁴⁸ To assert the autonomous status of the work of art, then, is not to deny the very particular historical and social context from which all works emerge (Adorno’s entire project is historically grounded), but is to recognise the aspiration towards autonomy that all artworks carry in order to be understood as art. It is precisely this aspiration towards autonomy, of being-for-itself, that enables one to recognise a work of art (from Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1913) to Beuys’ *grease stain* (1986), which was mistakenly mopped up by a cleaner)⁴⁹ in an age when the separation of art from non-art is no simple matter.

For Adorno, aesthetic autonomy is not an ideal state, or an abstract stance for which one might be ‘for’ or ‘against,’ but a concrete (though historically contingent) reality brought about by the emergence of bourgeois social and economic relations:

The artwork’s autonomy is, indeed, not a priori but the sedimentation of a historical process that constitutes its concept...The more they [artists] freed themselves from external goals, the more completely they determined themselves as their own masters. Because, however, artworks always turn one side toward society, the domination they internalized also radiated externally.⁵⁰

For Adorno, autonomous art resists incorporation into dominant cultural formations, patterns of value and structures of knowledge, despite the reality that it can never fully succeed. Far from being an ideal state, art’s autonomy can never be fully achieved (so it is always failing), yet autonomy is a necessary quality of artworks being understood *as art* under the social and economic conditions of late modernity. Rather than presenting autonomous works as somehow transcending human meanings, Adorno presents autonomy as the condition of critical opposition to dominant social codes (in particular commodification), from which artworks can never fully escape:

⁴⁸ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 5.

Max Paddison explains that ‘Adorno maintains that the social function of music today is that of the *commodity*.’ Max Paddison, *Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 123.

⁴⁹ Helen Pidd, “Overzealous cleaner ruins £690,000 artwork that she thought was dirty,” *The Guardian*, November 4, 2011, accessed February 1, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/nov/03/overzealous-cleaner-ruins-artwork>.

⁵⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 23.

Art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art. By crystallizing in itself as something unique to itself, rather than complying with existing social norms and qualifying as ‘socially useful,’ it criticizes society by merely existing...There is nothing pure, nothing structured strictly according to its own immanent law, that does not implicitly criticize the debasement of a situation evolving in the direction of a total exchange society in which everything is heteronomously defined.⁵¹

Art promises the possibility for forms of knowledge and experience that are not governed by (domineering) instrumental reason, and possibly even a space for exchange without domination.⁵² In their freedom from overt social function, artworks challenge the primacy of the exchange relation. As J. M. Bernstein explains:

The rationality of bourgeois society requires that every object be fungible...an object can oppose social fungibility only if it is unique and nonsubstitutable; but an object can be nonfungible only through lacking a social purpose; autonomous works of art are unique objects of aesthetic attention that are purposeful in themselves...[and] lacking [in] any imposed social purpose.⁵³

In their quality of being-for-themselves, artworks are able to maintain the existence of something irreducible to exchange value. Not only do artworks challenge the dominance of the exchange principle (in their quality of being-for-themselves), they promise the possibility that things might be other than they are: ‘The reality of artworks testifies to the possibility of the possible.’⁵⁴ Yet the artwork’s promise of being-for-itself is also the source of its fetish character: artworks claim to be autonomous (for-themselves), whilst they are always also commodities (perhaps even ‘absolute’ commodities).⁵⁵

⁵¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 296. Also: ‘Whereas art opposes society, it is nevertheless unable to take up a position beyond it; it achieves opposition only through identification with that against which it remonstrates.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 132.

⁵² This possibility is explored further in chapter five, see 5.5 Mimesis.

⁵³ Bernstein, “‘The dead speaking of stones and stars,’” 147.

⁵⁴ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 174.

⁵⁵ J.M. Bernstein writes that ‘artworks might be thought of as “absolute” commodities: they are social products that reject every semblance of being for society, unlike typical commodities.’ In Bernstein, “‘The dead speaking of stones and stars,’” 148. The fetish is perhaps the key metaphor within Adorno’s

When considering the social situation of music in light of the ongoing tension (from Modernism through to Postmodernism) between art and life, aesthetic autonomy can be regarded as art's primary enabling condition; it is the concept through which we differentiate art from non-art in the absence of accepted aesthetic norms and forms. As argued here, art's autonomy is at once a social reality *and* an impossibility (for total autonomy can never be fully achieved), and art's autonomy operates in tension with its commodity status, and this tension is the source of its fetish character.⁵⁶

4.3.iii Truth Content

Adorno is at pains to distinguish between the content of an artwork and the author's intent.⁵⁷ Importantly, the content of a work of art is not exhausted by what the artist intended, for history itself, along with its unsolvable social antimonies, is sedimented within all authentic works:⁵⁸ 'History is the content of artworks. To analyse artworks means no less than to become conscious of the history immanently sedimented in them.'⁵⁹ Thus, artworks can be said to make claims to truth that cannot be 'verified' against the artist's intentions,⁶⁰ and the task of interpretation is to seize hold of these truths as they fleetingly appear. For Adorno, sensuous aesthetic experience must be completed with thought, as the work's (truth) content can only be discerned through reflection:

music criticism that alerts one to the centrality of Marxism to Adorno's conceptual apparatus. Adorno's reception of Marxism is beyond the scope of this study, and has been explored in detail elsewhere. See for example "Adorno's Marxism," in Espen Hammer, *Adorno and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005), 26-48; Max Paddison "Adorno's Marxian Model," in Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, 121-128.

⁵⁶ Adorno also makes note of the ominous aspects of aesthetic autonomy. For example, 'The purer the form and the higher the autonomy of the works, the more cruel they are.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 65. And its proximity to ideology: 'through its refusal of society, which is equivalent to sublimation through the law of form, autonomous art makes itself a vehicle for ideology.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 296.

⁵⁷ Adorno writes: 'Among the sources of error in the contemporary interpretation and critique of artworks the most disastrous is the confusion of the intention, what the artist supposedly wants to say, with the content [*Gehalt*] of the work.' *Aesthetic Theory*, 197.

⁵⁸ Max Paddison notes the vexed problem of using 'authenticity' in relation to music: 'The term "authenticity" has been hijacked in music by the historical performance movement in a manner that has all but obliterated any other understanding of it within musicology.' See Max Paddison, "Authenticity and Failure in Adorno's Aesthetics of Music," in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 200. Also, as Robert Hullot-Kentor explains: 'Wherever Adorno...archcritic of Heideggerian "authenticity" (*Eigentlichkeit*), uses the concept of authenticity in a positive sense, he always employs the Greek/French loan word "Authentizität" rather than the German root word "*Eigentlichkeit*" or the adjective "echt."' In Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 131, note 3.

⁵⁹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 112.

⁶⁰ 'Just how little the truth content converges with the subjective idea, with the intention of the artist, is evident to the most rudimentary consideration.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 170.

The truth content of artworks is the objective solution of the enigma posed by each and every one. By demanding its solution, the enigma points to its truth content. It can only be achieved by philosophical reflection. This alone is the justification for aesthetics.⁶¹

For Adorno, art promises an escape from the domination of thought by reason and concepts, and thus such ‘philosophical reflection’ is best understood of as a form of ‘non-conceptual thinking.’⁶² The response artworks invoke is a mimetic one (such as the ‘thinking along’ with music already discussed in relation to structural listening),⁶³ and so offers the subject a way around instrumental reason.

‘Artworks, especially those of the highest dignity, await their interpretation,’ and it is this demand for interpretation that separates artworks from other objects and forms of life.⁶⁴ Through the task of interpretation, a work’s truth is discerned: ‘the work wants its truth and untruth to be grasped.’⁶⁵ For Adorno, art is meaningful in relation to its social and historical situation yet also carries a ‘truth content’ which may be discerned even outside of its particular moment.⁶⁶ Unlike ‘common-sense’ understandings of truth (as stable facts), Adorno takes truth to be fragile (due to its temporal nature),⁶⁷ and utterly historical.⁶⁸ A work’s truth content cannot be reduced to the level of a ‘message’ to be taken from the work,⁶⁹ there is no single conclusion to be drawn, nor

⁶¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 169.

⁶² Nathan Ross notes that Adorno refers to art as a form of ‘non-conceptual thinking’ or ‘non-conceptual synthesis’ in his lectures on aesthetics (1958-59, 1961-62). See Nathan Ross, “On Truth Content and False Consciousness in Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory,” *Philosophy Today* 59, 2 (Spring 2015): 272.

⁶³ See chapter two 2.1.ii ‘Types of Musical Conduct.’ See also chapter five 5.5 Mimesis for a further discussion of mimesis in Adorno’s thinking.

⁶⁴ ‘The claim that there is nothing to interpret in them, that they simply exist, would erase the demarcation line between art and nonart.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 169.

⁶⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 18. The fragility and temporal dependence of truth is explored further in chapter five, see 5.3 Benjamin and the Vulnerability of the Past.

⁶⁶ ‘Authentic art of the past that for the time being must remain veiled is not thereby sentenced. Great works wait. While their metaphysical meaning dissolves, something of their truth content, however little it can be pinned down, does not; it is that whereby they remain eloquent.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 51. Also, however, ‘what works say through the configuration of their elements in different epochs means something objectively different, and this ultimately affects their truth content. Works may become uninterpretable and fall mute.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 254. Thus, truth content can endure over time, but the meanings of works are also susceptible to change. This is in keeping with Adorno’s notion of the past being vulnerable to the passage of time. The historical quality of truth is developed further in chapter five, “Killing Time I.”

⁶⁷ See chapter five 5.3 Benjamin and the Vulnerability of the Past.

⁶⁸ ‘History enters into the constellation of truth: through the dead stare of their speechless eternity the stars will strike down with confusion anyone who tries to partake of truth outside history.’ Adorno, quoted in Paddison, *Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory*, 91.

⁶⁹ ‘No message is to be squeezed out of *Hamlet*; this in no way impinges on its truth content.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 169.

enduring judgement to be made: artworks are always in motion, and so their truth content may potentially appear, dissolve, or be damaged over time. Artworks may fall silent because ‘artworks are alive in history by virtue of their processual character; [however,] they are also able to perish in it.’⁷⁰ Thus, the consideration of a work’s truth content is the consideration of its own internal consistency (the manner in which it fulfils its own logic), but this process is vulnerable to the passing of time, and so truth content is, for Adorno, necessarily open-ended. As Tom Huhn explains, ‘truth content is the open-endedness of an object at rest within its lack of completion. Its content is not something, especially not some truth, to be deciphered by the subject. The artwork is instead an occasion for the subject to liken itself to a state of unfinishedness.’⁷¹ Concurring with Huhn’s presentation of truth content as ‘a state of unfinishedness,’ Nathan Ross argues that (Adorno’s formulation of) truth content does not culminate in the kinds of enduring judgements proposed by traditional (Kantian) aesthetics, but rather:

The aesthetic thus presents us with a “feeling of the world” instead of a judgement about it, and in so doing, it embodies an aesthetic mode of truth that is not less rigorous, but less reductive than the experience presented by conceptual judgement. This form of synthesis that determines what is true and untrue in the artwork is guided not by the standard of presenting an objectively valid account of the world, but is instead guided by presenting a coherence of elements that is infinitely rich and true to the complexity of experience.⁷²

Adorno explicitly negates the necessity for, and the power of, aesthetic judgements: ‘to judge is contrary to the artwork.’⁷³ In the absence of judgement (which, for Adorno, is too subjective), Adorno proposes that the task of interpretation is to reveal a work’s truth content. Unlike the judgement of traditional aesthetics, which is static, immobile, even outside history, truth content is fragile, in motion, and utterly historical. Unlike

⁷⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 235. Also, ‘Works are usually critical in the era in which they appear; later they are neutralized, not least because of changed social relations. Neutralization is the social price of aesthetic autonomy. However, once artworks are entombed in the pantheon of cultural commodities, they themselves – their truth content – are also damaged.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 299.

⁷¹ Tom Huhn, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 8.

⁷² Ross, “On Truth Content and False Consciousness,” 273.

⁷³ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 129.

the state of resolution that judgement presupposes, aesthetic truths are an ‘intertwinement of truth and untruth,’⁷⁴ and thus are in a state of flux and irreconcilability. The interpretation of artworks is ongoing and ever-incomplete; works themselves change over time; they dissolve and transform: ‘the truth character of works is tied precisely to their disintegration.’⁷⁵ Interpretation thus requires consideration of a work’s inner logic (the manner in which it achieves coherence through its own formal constitution), but this process demands an acknowledgement of the inevitable disintegration of artworks, and so the claims to truth that artworks make are always fragmented, partial and particular.

4.3.iv Form and Material

For Adorno, ‘form is the artefacts’ coherence, however self-antagonistic and refracted, through which each and every successful work separates itself from the merely existing.’⁷⁶ ‘Material, by contrast, is what artists work with: It is the sum of all that is available to them, including words, colors, sounds, associations of every sort.’⁷⁷ Materials are the (historically determined) malleable substances that the artist shapes with his/her decisions. With the advent of Modernism, inherited forms themselves become materials for the artist to manipulate. This rendering of all aesthetic parameters formal is part of the social and historical situation that defines Modernist (and perhaps also Postmodernist) artworks. Content, on the other hand, may easily escape the artist’s intentions, and, importantly for Adorno, content is ‘self-determining,’⁷⁸ and cannot be decided upon in advance.

The aim of form is no longer the harmonious unification of a work’s disparate elements (as the lie of the harmonious whole has been exposed),⁷⁹ but rather the work’s formal

⁷⁴ ‘Since ordinary judgements are usually for or against something, say that something is like this or that, they remain standing at the original position or offer a criticism of it, and they thereby destroy the intertwinement of truth and untruth, destroy the intertwinement of life itself; now it seems that since the artwork does not arbitrarily divide these things and does not force a resolution in this way, but offers them up in their mutual interdependence, it also restores something of the truth which we generally lose in the very form of judgement.’ Adorno, cited in Ross, “On Truth Content and False Consciousness,” 273.

⁷⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, “Night Music,” in *Night Music: Essays on Music 1928-1962*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. and intro. Wieland Hoban (London: Seagull Books, 2009), 88.

⁷⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 187.

⁷⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 194.

⁷⁸ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 191.

⁷⁹ This theme is explored in greater detail in chapter seven, “Adornian Mode: Ugliness and Dissonance in 20th Century Musical Modernism.”

construction lends aesthetic expression to social antinomies: ‘The unsolved antagonisms of reality return in artworks as immanent problems of form.’⁸⁰ Importantly for Adorno, successful Modernist works also search for ways of structuring difference without domination, and as a result constantly call their own unity into question:

Aesthetic form is...the nonviolent synthesis of the diffuse that nevertheless preserves it as what it is [the diffuse] in its divergences and contradictions, and for this reason form is actually an unfolding of truth. A posited unity, it constantly suspends itself as such; essential to it is that it interrupts itself through its other just as the essence of its coherence is that it does not cohere.⁸¹

Form gives the illusion of totality while simultaneously revealing totality to be illusory. Despite turning Hegel on his head, by announcing that ‘The whole is the false,’⁸² Adorno nonetheless wants to assert the reciprocity at play between the whole and its parts: ‘form seeks to make the individual speak through the whole.’⁸³ Adorno describes the work of art as ‘at once a force field and a thing,’⁸⁴ and a work’s form and its material, like the whole and its parts, each exert centripetal and centrifugal forces upon one another.⁸⁵ All works, then, exist in a state of flux, and ideally form is not something that is subjectively imposed on the artwork, but ‘arise[es] naturally from the formed material without doing violence to it.’⁸⁶ For Adorno, domination is inherent within reason and conceptual thought, which relies upon rendering the diffuse similar in order to be categorised.⁸⁷ Under the rubric of concepts, non-identity is inevitably subsumed by identity, and difference (or particularity) is erased. The importance of art in Adorno’s thinking stems from its *non*-conceptuality (art is a form of cognition outside

⁸⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 7.

⁸¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 189. This is very similar to Adorno’s understanding of ‘peace,’ which ‘is a state of distinctness without domination, with the distinct participating in each other.’ Theodor W. Adorno, “Subject-Object,” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, intro. Paul Piccone (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), 500.

⁸² Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: reflections from damaged life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1985), 50.

⁸³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C Lenhardt, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London, Routledge & K. Paul, 1984), 208.

⁸⁴ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 237.

⁸⁵ ‘Every authentic work is the result of centripetal and centrifugal forces.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 384.

⁸⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, (Lenhardt) 205.

⁸⁷ See Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Also, Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

the conceptual), and aesthetic form names the structuring of this non-conceptuality. Works of art generate their own logic and coherence outside of reason (though works always participate in the dialectic of Enlightenment),⁸⁸ and thus maintain a space for thinking that escapes the domination inherent within conceptual thought.⁸⁹ This radical promise of art is made manifest through aesthetic form: the possibility for structuring difference without domination.

4.4 Kant and Judgement (for Adorno)

Adorno agrees with Kant that there is something beyond individual sensuous experience at stake within aesthetics, and he credits Kant with recognising the primacy of aesthetic autonomy, for ‘the route to aesthetic autonomy proceeds by way of disinterestedness.’⁹⁰ Importantly, however, each thinker grounds aesthetic autonomy upon a different plane: for Kant it is the autonomy of the judgement of taste (won in disinterest, but nonetheless located within the subject), whilst for Adorno aesthetic autonomy is immanent to the work of art itself (a quality located within the aesthetic object). Although Adorno argues that the ‘Kantian concept of the judgement of taste, by its subjectively directed query, concerns the core of objective aesthetics: the question of quality – good and bad, true and false – in the artwork,’⁹¹ he nonetheless concludes that Kant’s account is too subjective. For Adorno, Kant’s doctrine of disinterested satisfaction ‘initiates the fragmentation of the supremacy of liking,’⁹² and so begins a turn towards object-oriented aesthetics.

Kant’s purposefulness without purpose is central to Adorno’s theory of the artwork, and aesthetic autonomy is directly related to art’s capacity to circumvent means-ends relations:

⁸⁸ Adorno writes that, through ‘reception, as well as through the modification of synthesizing reason, artworks participate in the dialectic of enlightenment.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 387-88.

⁸⁹ ‘In themselves, artworks ineluctably pursue nature-dominating reason by virtue of their element of unity, which organises the whole... artworks... synthesize like reason, but not with concepts, propositions, and syllogisms...rather, they do so by way of what transpires in the artworks. Their synthetic function is immanent; it is the unity of their self, without immediate relation to anything external given or determined in some way or other; it is directed to the dispersed, the aconceptual, quasi-fragmentary material with which in their interior space artworks are occupied.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 387.

⁹⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 15.

⁹¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 216.

⁹² Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 12.

Kant's paradoxical formulation that the beautiful is what is purposive without a purpose, expresses – in the language of transcendental philosophy – the heart of the matter...For Kant, artworks were purposive as dynamic totalities in which all particular elements exist for the sake of their purpose – the whole – just as the whole exists for the sake of its purpose, the fulfilment or redemption through the negation of its elements. At the same time, artworks were purposeless because they had stepped out of the means-ends relation of empirical reality.⁹³

For Kant, disinterestedness is of primary importance in the subjective experience of art, and thus aesthetic judgements are 'morally significant because the pleasure they elicit is won in disinterest.'⁹⁴ For Adorno, the disinterestedness of artworks is manifested through their purposelessness and their resistance to exchangeability; an artwork has the quality of being for-itself rather than for-other. For Adorno, artworks exhibit 'purposefulness without purpose' in their resistance to exchange-value, and this purposelessness is central to their autonomy as it distances artworks from the demand to be socially useful placed upon all other registers of life. As Jay Bernstein writes, 'Adorno reads [art's] autonomy as double: both as art's loss of a (direct) social purpose, and as art's refusal of the kind of purposiveness that has come to dominate society.'⁹⁵

Adorno's understanding of the aesthetic subject (who is 'a subject saturated with historical experience')⁹⁶ is directly at odds with Kant's formulation of the transcendental subject (who is understood to be capable of disinterested and enduring judgements). For Adorno, the 'impossibility of grounding aesthetics in mere subjectivity'⁹⁷ leads him to immanent critique, in which conceptual developments within the artwork are traced from inside the material work itself (rather than the work's reception). For Adorno, aesthetic experience names the (mimetic) process of meeting a work of art as such, *not* the subjective judgements that might arise out of that aesthetic experience:

⁹³ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 184.

⁹⁴ Alison Ross, "The Modern Concept of Aesthetic Experience: from Ascetic Pleasure to Social Criticism," *Critical Horizons* 11, no. 3 (2010): 334.

⁹⁵ J. M. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 208.

⁹⁶ Adorno, quoted in Peter Uwe Hohendahl, "Nature and the Autonomy of Art: Adorno as a Reader of Kant," *Philosophical Forum* 43, no. 3 (Fall, 2012): 249.

⁹⁷ Adorno, quoted in Hohendahl, "Nature and the Autonomy of Art," 249.

Aesthetic feeling is not the feeling that is aroused: It is astonishment viv-à-vis what is beheld rather than viv-à-vis what it is about; it is a being overwhelmed by what is aconceptual and yet determinate, not the subjective affect released...The observing subjectivity is to be strictly distinguished from the subjective element in the object, that is, from the object's expression as well as from its subjectively mediated form.⁹⁸

For Kant, experience remains something of an aporia; the beginning of all knowledge, which is paradoxically always already premised upon that which is outside itself (the transcendental). As Adorno explains, 'the transcendental in Kant represents the transcendent nature of our minds in the sense that it supplies the conditions that make...experience possible...but on the other hand...these conditions can only be held to be valid if they do in fact relate to experience.'⁹⁹ Adorno argues that, for Kant, experience is a point of departure, and cannot be regarded as an actual source of knowledge.¹⁰⁰ Unlike Kant, Adorno posits experience as epistemologically unproblematic, with the particularity of experience forming the centre of his more empirical understanding of subjectivity. Because reception is socially and historically habituated, judgements of taste are unable to function as the legitimate grounds for the universal assent that artworks demand. This is not to suggest that, for Adorno, aesthetic truths are unable to operate as a source of knowledge; instead, he locates the site of such 'truth content' within the work itself, rather than in its reception. For Adorno, the experience of artworks cannot be extricated from the historically embedded particularity of all perception, and thus Kant's account of the judgment of taste tends towards subjectivism. Adorno understands Kant's universalism to be false, but rather than rejecting universality *per se*, he instead seeks a better grounding for the assertion of universality, and for Adorno this is located in the (objectified) work itself, rather than the (subjective) experience of the work.

The fundamental difference between Kant's subjective account (characterised by the autonomy of aesthetic *judgements*) and Adorno's objective account (characterised by

⁹⁸ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 216-17.

⁹⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 21.

¹⁰⁰ 'There can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience. For how should our faculty of knowledge be awakened into action...? But though all our knowledge begins *with* experience, it does not follow that it all arises *out of* experience.' Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1934), 25. Also, Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 25.

the autonomy of aesthetic *objects*) is often eclipsed within musicological criticism.¹⁰¹ Kant's 'purposiveness without purpose' articulates a quality of feeling or aesthetic response aroused in the subject, rendering such aesthetic judgements morally significant as 'the pleasure they elicit is won in disinterest.'¹⁰² The Kantian understanding of aesthetic autonomy, then, is directly addressed to the subject, and does not make specific claims about the autonomy of the object of such judgements. As Alison Ross notes, in Kant 'the autonomy of the aesthetic is specifically designed to corroborate the moral perspective of Kantian philosophy,' rendering autonomy curiously heteronomous.¹⁰³ In contrast, Adorno's understanding of autonomy, in which works have 'the function of having no function,' is directed towards aesthetic objects themselves, rather than subjective responses to them.

Adorno's account of aesthetic autonomy should be understood as the condition through which the subject is able to understand art as art; the assertion of art's autonomy is not simply one definition of artistic value among many (as Taruskin would have it), but is part of the web of historical and social conditions under which art occurs. Not all works are autonomous, but the uncertain separation of art from non-art (of which aesthetic autonomy is a symptom) is the condition under which all art is produced and experienced under the conditions of high-capitalism. Adorno's refutation of Kant's assessment of taste, and his procedure of assessing works via immanent critique (rather than judgements of taste) reinforces autonomy as a process. As argued here, both Kant and Adorno assert the universality of aesthetic autonomy, but they provide antithetical accounts, each locating the grounds for autonomy upon entirely different planes.

4.5 Hegel, Mediation and Immediacy (for Adorno)

Adorno's concept of mediation is derived from Hegel.¹⁰⁴ Like his critical inheritance of Kant's aesthetics, however, Adorno's theory of mediation also escapes the confines of a strictly Hegelian paradigm. In Adorno's thinking, mediation plays an important role in explaining a number of important questions, including how sense and thought

¹⁰¹ See for example, Taruskin, "Shall We Change the Subject?"

¹⁰² Ross, "The Modern Concept of Aesthetic Experience," 334.

¹⁰³ Ross, "The Modern Concept of Aesthetic Experience," 334.

¹⁰⁴ Max Paddison, "Music and Social Relations: Towards a Theory of Mediation," in *Contemporary Music: Theoretical and Philosophical Perspectives*, eds. Max Paddison and Irène Deliège (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 261. Margherita Tonon, "Theory and the Object: Making Sense of Adorno's Concept of Mediation," in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 21, no.2 (May 2013): 184.

come together to generate knowledge, and his ongoing argument for a dialectical understanding of the relation between subject and object. The concept against which mediation might be contrasted, immediacy,¹⁰⁵ is usually taken to be that which requires no interpretation, the ‘raw data’ of sensuous experience.¹⁰⁶ Following Hegel, Adorno calls into question the very possibility of unmediated experience, and thus, unmediated knowledge. For Adorno, any elucidation is necessarily dialectical: there can be ‘no mediation without the immediate – though also, of course, no immediacy without mediation.’¹⁰⁷ Adorno’s theory of mediation, though never succinctly articulated, is essential to his understanding of experience (including, of course, aesthetic experience), and his exploration of the subjective and objective aspects of existence:

According to Hegel, there is nothing between heaven and earth that is not ‘*vermittelt*’ [mediated], nothing, therefore, that does not contain, merely by being defined as something that exists, the reflection of its mere existence, a spiritual moment: “Immediacy itself is essentially mediated.”¹⁰⁸

Adorno’s dialectical method seeks understanding through the polarisation of extremes (not by seeking out the middle ground). Adorno claims inheritance of the Hegelian method, ‘for Hegel, mediation is never a middle element between extremes...instead, mediation takes place in and through the extremes, in the extremes themselves.’¹⁰⁹ Adorno’s method, however, also stands Hegel on his head. In particular, Adorno is at pains to argue for the non-identity of identity and non-identity (whereas ‘Hegel argued for the identity of identity and non-identity’),¹¹⁰ strictly avoiding the culminating synthesis so often attributed to Hegelian dialectics. Adorno reads Hegel’s philosophy ‘against the grain’ by ‘confronting its claims and contradictions with its own aspirations

¹⁰⁵ Max Paddison writes that ‘mediation...is to be contrasted with “that which is immediate,” direct, *unvermittelt, unmettelbar*.’ Max Paddison, “Music and Social Relations,” 261.

¹⁰⁶ Tonon notes ‘in *Hegel: Three Studies*, while comparing competing accounts of experience, Adorno takes up the Hegelian criticism of certain philosophical position that take immediacy as something more primary and ultimately superior to what is merely derived.’ Tonon, “Theory and the Object,” 189. Phenomenology and existentialism might serve as examples.

¹⁰⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Edmund Jephcott (California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 57.

¹⁰⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson, intro. Shierry Weber Nicholson and Jeremy J. Shapiro (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 57.

¹⁰⁹ Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, 8-9.

¹¹⁰ Shierry Weber Nicholson and Jeremy J. Shapiro “Introduction,” in Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, xv.

and criteria.’¹¹¹ For Adorno, Hegel’s reconciliation of subject and object inevitably results in the domination of the particular and the eradication of difference, with ‘repetition...becom[ing] the only acknowledged criterion of reality.’¹¹²

Adorno turns his theory of mediation to the specific question of music: ‘A solution to the problem of musical mediation has by no means been found; it is rather only that the location of the problem has been designated with greater precision.’¹¹³ Max Paddison offers a useful conceptualisation of Adorno’s concept of musical mediation as ‘a theory of how social relations inhere in musical relations.’¹¹⁴ Beginning with Hegel, Paddison shows how (for Adorno, following Hegel) everything, including knowledge and experience, is subject to mediation, despite mediated effects paradoxically appearing as immediacy.¹¹⁵ For Paddison, a number of important features of Adorno’s account of mediation need to be stressed, namely ‘that mediation is total, and that mediation seems to disappear in the process of mediation itself to reappear as immediacy.’¹¹⁶ For Paddison, Adorno’s important insight is that ‘mediation is not simply a fact of our experience of the world, but is also our only route to the *interpretation* of that experience as meaningful.’¹¹⁷ Thus, a recognition of mediated nature of knowledge and experience is essential to aesthetic experience and the task of interpretation.

Adorno’s concept of mediation is essential to his critique of the culture industry, and the apparent immediacy of popular forms.¹¹⁸ For Adorno, artworks that promise immediate enjoyment are those that have been fully coopted into a process of domination that requires subjects to revel in their own subjugation. Given that

¹¹¹ Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, 100.

¹¹² Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, 100. Hammer goes on the challenge Adorno’s reading of Hegel: ‘Hegel’s critique of the Enlightenment...by and large agrees with Horkheimer and Adorno’s diagnosis of it in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and elsewhere.’ Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, 100-1.

¹¹³ Theodor W. Adorno, “On the Social Situation of Music,” in *Essays on Music*, selected, with introduction, commentary and notes Richard Leppert, new trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 404-5.

¹¹⁴ Paddison, “Music and Social Relations,” 265.

¹¹⁵ Max Paddison’s chapter “The Problem of Mediation,” explores in detail Adorno’s concept of mediation, noting the importance of Hegel, Marx, Freud and Weber to his conceptualization. See Paddison, *Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music*, 108-48. As Hegel argues, unmediated knowledge and experience are impossible: ‘It has been shown to be untrue in fact to say that there is an immediate knowledge, a knowledge without mediation either by means of something else or in itself. It has also been explained to be false in fact to say that thought advances through finite and conditioned categories only, which are always mediated by a something else, and to forget that in the very act of mediation the mediation itself vanishes.’ Hegel, cited in Paddison, “Music and Social Relations,” 261.

¹¹⁶ Paddison, “Music and Social Relations,” 261.

¹¹⁷ Paddison, “Music and Social Relations,” 273.

¹¹⁸ The relationship between corporeality and pleasure is explored in greater detail in chapter seven, see 7.4 Pleasure and Asceticism in Adorno’s Aesthetics.

immediacy is only ever apparent (never actual), any sense of immediate enjoyment generated by such works is both misplaced (for mediation is inescapable), and essentially masochistic (because the subject is required to enjoy their own subjection). And so, for Adorno, ‘whoever concretely enjoys artworks is a philistine.’¹¹⁹ Whilst Adorno’s tone might seem patrician, he is nonetheless arguing against the reification of consciousness that inheres in all cultural products that promise sensual immediacy, but deliver only alienation and anxiety.¹²⁰ Adorno’s stinging critique of popular music can equally be applied to works from the art-music tradition that seek a reconciliation between the individual and their world through the appearance of immediacy:

By circling them, by enveloping them as inherent in the musical phenomenon – and turning them as listeners into participants, it contributes ideologically to the integration which modern society never tires of achieving in reality. It leaves no room for conceptual reflection between itself and the subject, and so it creates an illusion of immediacy in a totally mediated world, of proximity between strangers, the warmth of those who come to feel a chill of unmitigated struggle of all against all.¹²¹

Only autonomous works that bring their own mediated nature to the fore are able to offer the subject insight into their own alienated life. For Adorno, taking pleasure in works that reconcile the listener with a degraded state of subjectivity offer nothing but false consciousness. Adorno’s valorisation of Schoenberg occurs on many levels, but fundamental to his critique is the capacity for atonal (and also serial) works to expose the extent of their own mediation, drawing attention to the fact of music’s mediation, and exposing the ideology of immediacy. Perhaps more than any other style before it, serialism insisted upon revealing to the listener music’s dependence on materials, techniques and technologies. Rejecting the shared sensibilities of the common-practice period, serialism and atonality display music’s dependence on constructed techniques and processes. Not only does post-tonal music upend the notion that music operates as

¹¹⁹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 13.

¹²⁰ ‘Reified consciousness provides an ersatz for the sensual immediacy of which it deprives people in a sphere that is not its abode. While the artwork’s sensual appeal seemingly brings it close to the consumer, it is alienated from him by being a commodity that he possesses and the loss of which he must constantly fear.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 16.

¹²¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 45-46.

a comprehensible and immediate ‘language,’ it challenges the received naturalism and neutrality of the many inherited musical conventions (in particular, tonality).

Despite Adorno’s elevation of the score to the status of privileged musical artefact, what he called ‘the thing itself,’¹²² he nonetheless tempers this fetishisation of the score with a characterisation of artworks as essentially processual events, anticipating more contemporary music scholarship which has focussed on the impossibility of pinning down musical meaning in any single location. As Max Paddison writes, ‘mediation is not a thing, but a dynamic network of interactions,’¹²³ and arguably any aesthetics that foregrounds such a process necessarily destabilises the notion of the wholeness (or repleteness) of the work of art. No single score, performance or recording can be understood as the single site of musical meaning – with each performance, each ‘hearing,’¹²⁴ each reproduction destabilising the possibility for a single musical artefact. As Lydia Goehr writes, ‘there is nothing about the concept of a work, the relations between works and performances, or works and scores, or works and experiences of them, that is going to tell us where the locus of musical meaning “really” resides.’¹²⁵ The destabilisation of the musical ‘work’ can be understood as the unfolding of the problem of musical mediation, whereby the location(s) of the problem of musical meaning is gradually designated with greater precision.¹²⁶ Undermining the static concept of the work forms part of the shifting understanding of the mediation of musical material during the late twentieth century, and is often taken to be an anti-Modernist gesture, rejecting heroic understandings of the resolutely autonomous work of art. It is important to note, however, that this focus on mediation, which has led to recent characterisations of musical meaning as contingent, partial and dependent on webs of

¹²² See note 41 above.

¹²³ Paddison, “Music and Social Relations,” 263.

¹²⁴ ‘Although judgements may occur in it, the work itself does not make judgements, perhaps because ever since Attic tragedy the work has been a hearing.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 129. Nathan Ross explains that Adorno ‘evoked the image of Greek tragedy as a ‘hearing’ as a metaphor for all art: the hearing is able to seek truth in an open-ended way precisely because it does not judge.’ Ross, “On Truth Content and False Consciousness,” 273.

¹²⁵ Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 278.

¹²⁶ Linda Kouvaras considers the destabilisation of the location of the musical work to be an essentially Postmodern trait: ‘experimentalists (obliquely) and sound artists (pointedly) embraced “the world” in their work, often as their work.’ Kouvaras, *Loading the Silence*, 225. Citing the work of Charles Jenks and Linda Hutcheon, she also argues that undecidability as a feature also applies to Postmodern intellectual practices: ‘In Postmodernism’s “prime,” from the late-1970s through to the early-1990s, this kind of double-edged presentation – of complicit critique – was hailed as a discernibly “pomo” trait.’ Kouvaras, *Loading the Silence*, 198.

interconnected effects, arguably begins with Adorno and signals an engagement with his project rather than its refutation.

4.6 Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, Adorno's theory of the artwork, and his understanding of the processes of autonomy and mediation are indebted to, but also make significant departures from, the ideas of Kant, Hegel and Leibniz. Far from taking aesthetic autonomy to mean that 'art is totally independent of society,'¹²⁷ this chapter has shown that Adorno takes art's autonomy to be an indifference to that which is outside it, with autonomous artworks maintaining a quality of being-for-themselves; nonetheless, artworks contain or carry the trace of that which is external to them (this is their monadological quality). For Adorno, aesthetic autonomy names a certain distance from, and indifference to, society, *not* the complete isolation of works of art from their social context. As argued here, Adorno's formulation of aesthetic autonomy is not something to be argued 'for' or 'against,' but forms part of the material and social conditions under which Modern art can be recognised as such. Without a striving towards autonomy, art cannot be separated from other forms of life.

Drawing on the metaphor of the Leibnizian monad to illustrate his theory of the artwork and the process of mediation, Adorno argues that mediation is 'not a relation between the object and those to whom it is brought', but lies 'in the object itself.'¹²⁸ This chapter has argued for an understanding of both autonomy and mediation that takes each to be inherently processual; they are 'dynamic networks of interactions'¹²⁹ within which social antagonisms inhere. As monads, autonomous works carry within them the traces of the society from which they emerge, and it is an exploration of this social content within the work of art which motivates the task of interpretation. It is because of art's autonomy that any theory of art (aesthetics) is simultaneously a critical theory of society; in being both of society yet against its structural logic, autonomous works are necessarily engaged in a process of critique.¹³⁰ Far from operating in the service of

¹²⁷ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 46

¹²⁸ Adorno, quoted in Paddison, "Music and Social Relations," 261.

¹²⁹ Paddison writes: 'mediation is not a thing, but a dynamic network of interactions.' Paddison, "Music and Social Relations," 263.

¹³⁰ James Hellings explains: 'If art is both an artefact and a social fact, if art is constructed in and against society whilst also being a social construct, then, any aesthetic theory of the work of art, is, at once, a critical theory of society, and both art and aesthetics may become placeholders for a radical politics long

conservative formalist concerns, Adorno's formulation of aesthetic autonomy deserves recognition for its genuine radicalism and political relevance. The understanding of autonomy and mediation, along with Adorno's theory of the artwork, explored in this chapter forms the basis from which the musical analyses of works by Schoenberg, Babbitt and Radigue (in chapters eight, nine and ten) proceed.

since lost to late-capitalist society.' James Hellings, *Adorno and Art: Aesthetic Theory Contra Critical Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 3.

Chapter Five

Killing Time I: Key Influences and Concepts

One might almost say that truth itself depends on the tempo, the patience and perseverance of lingering with the particular.¹

5.0 Introduction

The newfound pleasures and perils of speed are central to many theories of modernity.² The acceleration of life brought about by industrialisation is a defining feature of modern life. The whirring of the machine, the body hurtling through space at break-neck speed, and the ever-intensifying pace of social and commercial exchange, evidence a physical environment of ever-increasing speed brought about by an apparently endless capacity for technological improvement. Similarly, the modern rationalisation of time, its segmentation into the measureable increments of days, hours, minutes and seconds (and beyond), takes time to be a ‘resource’ ready for exploitation. And in music, the mechanised sounds of modernity (the whirring, clunking, wailing of machines) are heard as musical sonorities: in the works of composers such as the Futurists in the early part of the twentieth century and later, Pierre Schaeffer and Edgar Varèse, through to John Cage’s Experimentalism and more recent work from Noise Artists. Not only do the sounds of modernity become musical materials for many composers, but the exploration of time itself (in particular, the subjective nature of time) becomes a central feature of music during the twentieth century. Arguably, music has always challenged the objectivity of time through compression and expansion, but it is not until the twentieth century that overt musical experimentation with the polarities of speed and

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1985), 77.

² See for example, Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, intro. Ernest Mandel, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1981). David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006). Enda Duffy, *The Speed Handbook: Velocity, Pleasure, Modernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

stasis force the irreconcilability of the experience of musical time and clock time out into the open. During the twentieth century, this irreconcilability becomes an object of musical exploration, with many musical styles – both Modernist and Postmodern– directly exploring the quixotic nature of time under modernity.

Despite the fundamental importance of temporality to Adorno's thinking generally,³ and his direct engagement with time as a *philosophical* category,⁴ he nowhere offers a singular interpretation of time as a *musical* category. Adorno's understanding of musical time, then, emerges from many disparate corners of his work, and it is by bringing some of these threads together that this chapter affirms the absolute centrality of time to his thinking. This chapter begins with a theoretical overview of Adorno's understanding of time, noting the thinkers who were key influences: Immanuel Kant, Henri Bergson and Walter Benjamin.⁵ As the following chapter, "Killing Time II: Time and Temporality in Adorno's Music Criticism" argues, repetition within Adorno's music criticism usually figures as a disavowal of musical time, a signal of the subject's regression into myth. In search of a more nuanced approach to musical repetition, the second part of the present chapter considers Adorno's formulation of shudder, mimesis and repetition. By considering repetition in light of the mimetic faculty, this chapter shows that Adorno eventually came to entertain the possibility that repetition in music might serve a critical function.

The objective of the companion "Killing Time" chapters is twofold; firstly, to illuminate Adorno's understanding of time in both philosophical and musicological terms, and secondly, to trace the genealogy of the figure of 'regressive' music through Adorno's thinking via the category of time. Max Paddison has noted that 'the concept of time in Theodor Adorno's aesthetics of music has so far received little attention in musicology or philosophy in the English-speaking world.'⁶ This chapter hopes to contribute to a foregrounding of Adorno's understanding of time, as well as to more

³ 'The concept of time in Adorno's thinking is certainly fundamental, whether taken as the experience in nature of all that is fleeting, transient, and in a perpetual process of growth and decay; or as historical time as change and "progress"; or as the experience of time in the temporal arts, and especially as ways of organizing time in music.' See Max Paddison, "Adorno, Time and Musical Time," *The Opera Quarterly* 29, no. 3-4 (Summer-Autumn, 2013): 244.

⁴ See for example, Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

⁵ Adorno's understanding of time and temporality is also indebted to the philosophy of Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger. For an account that considers the influence of Hegel and Heidegger in particular see Nikolaus Bacht, *Music and Time in Theodor W. Adorno*, (PhD diss., University of London, 2002).

⁶ Paddison, "Adorno, Time and Musical Time," 244.

general musicological inquiry into time (an aspect of music of such self-evident importance it seems to be widely overlooked.)⁷ Finally, these chapters provide evidence of the interconnectedness of philosophy and music criticism in Adorno's thinking, displaying the extent to which theories of modernity and musical aesthetics can fruitfully be thought through one another. The possibility of applying Adorno's critique of time is later considered in chapter ten "A Mirror to the Mind: Listening to Eliane Radigue" in which the analysis of Eliane Radigue's 1973 work *Transamorem/Transmortem* explores the possibility that Adorno's aesthetics, and his conceptualisation of musical time in particular, might be brought into the study of more recent non-score-based musical works.

5.1 Kant on Time and Space

As explored in chapter four, "Purely Instrumental: Autonomy and Mediation in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory," Adorno's aesthetic theory is deeply indebted to Kantian aesthetics. And, as chapter seven "Adornian Mode: Ugliness and Dissonance in 20th Century Musical Modernism" also argues, this inheritance of traditional aesthetics (in particular the categories of beauty and pleasure) is critical at every turn. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) undoubtedly forms the backdrop against which Adorno's thinking about time emerges. Given the seminal importance of Kant's *Critique* to philosophical understandings of time and space, it is worth recalling Kant's theories and considering how Adorno develops these.

Kant's great insight was that time (and space) are *conditions for the constitution* of experience: space and time are not objective, independent aspects of the world, but are the basic aesthetic forms through which experience is 'subjectively' constituted (they are then 'objective' to the extent that they are intersubjective, or shared).⁸ In other words, time and space are the elements through which the subject's experience of all things emerges, 'filters' through which we understand the world. Whilst for Kant time is indeed real, it is inextricably bound to human perception: 'time is certainly something

⁷ Musicological investigation of time and temporality has tended not to be informed by (continental) philosophy. See for example Jonathan D. Kramer, *The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1988). Thomas Reiner's work offers an exception, Thomas Reiner, *Semiotics of Musical Time* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000); as does Julian Johnson, *Out of Time: Music and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁸ My thanks to Ashley Woodward for clarifying how Kant's ideas are usually understood, and for illuminating some of the idiosyncrasies of Adorno's interpretation of Kant.

real, namely the real form of inner intuition.’⁹ As Paul Guyer explains: ‘The claim that space and time are nothing but the essential forms of our own representations of things is Kant’s doctrine of “transcendental idealism;”’ this insight is important because it lays the foundations for Kant’s argument that ‘all genuine knowledge requires a sensory component’ (thus refuting the claims of metaphysics).¹⁰ For Kant, empirical reality is (always-already) spatio-temporal: things appear to us in time and in space. However, time and space are forms of human experience, and so it cannot be assumed that space and time apply to things-in-themselves.¹¹ As Kant argues, ‘the transcendental ideality of time, according to which it is nothing at all if one abstracts from the subjective conditions of sensible intuition, and cannot be counted as either subsisting or inhering in the objects themselves, without their relation to our intuition.’¹²

Following Kant, Adorno takes space and time to be non-conceptual forms of intuition (what Adorno calls ‘speculative constructs’),¹³ suspended between being subjectively and objectively defined.¹⁴ Thus, Adorno inherits from Kant an understanding of time marked by a fundamental antinomy; time exhibits both an empirical character (time passes, indifferent to the subject experiencing it) *and* a subjective character (the category of time is formed through our particular experience of it, time passes through its subjective experience), yet neither character can be straightforwardly defined. Importantly, Adorno inherits Kant’s understanding of time as non-conceptual because time understood in the particular cannot be related to time in general: ‘Space and time are not more general than spaces and times, nor are they more abstract, but the latter are simply the components of the former. It is in this sense that we are not dealing with concepts.’¹⁵ Thus, time for Adorno is neither purely empirical (because the idea of time relies on conceptual abstraction), nor purely conceptual (because the idea of time is dependent upon empirical experience).

⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 165.

¹⁰ Paul Guyer, *Kant* (London: Routledge, 2014), 60.

¹¹ Gideon Goosen, *Spacetime and Theology in Dialogue* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008), 26.

¹² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 182.

¹³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 230.

¹⁴ See Adorno, *Kant’s Critique*, especially ‘The Transcendental Aesthetic,’ 224-234.

¹⁵ Adorno, *Kant’s Critique*, 230.

For Adorno, Kant's thinking about time (and space) remains stalled by his subjectivism: '[Kant] has once again attempted to solve the riddle in one direction only, by reducing it to the pole of subjectivity.'¹⁶ So whilst Adorno inherits Kant's identification of the 'riddle' of time (the impossibility of defining time either subjectively or objectively),¹⁷ he is sceptical of Kant's treatment of this aporia. For Adorno, 'a sufficient theory of time and space can only be arrived at through the concrete relation between temporal and spatial phenomena, on the one hand, and the forms of time and space, on the other.'¹⁸ This interdependence of forms of time (objective time) and lived temporality (subjective time), establishes 'a reciprocity between the form of knowledge and its material.'¹⁹ Understanding this reciprocity (or mutual dependence) of (abstract) time and (empirical) temporality, inherited (albeit critically) from Kant, is essential to understanding Adorno's formulation of time in both philosophical and musical terms. For Adorno, an adequate understanding of time must be directed towards both metaphysics *and* experience, and cannot be thought adequately when reduced to either pole.²⁰

Adorno's critique of beauty in traditional aesthetics challenges the perceived 'timelessness' of works of art, with ugly Modernist works forcing a recognition of art's historicity. In his critique of Kant, Adorno confronts 'an Enlightenment tradition that has figured the aesthetic as ahistorical,'²¹ rejecting metaphysical (Heideggerian) approaches that 'consider the art work in terms of the metaphysics of presence.'²² Adorno's valorisation of the ugly informs his critique of temporality by affirming art as strictly historical: the ugliness of Modernist works, their refusal of reconciliation, is an expression of the (historically determined) injustice of unequal social relations.²³

¹⁶ Adorno, *Kant's Critique*, 227. Adorno's criticism of Kant's subjectivism is also to be found throughout Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997).

¹⁷ To state the riddle obtusely, the (objective) idea of time presupposes the (subjective) experience of time, whilst the (subjective) experience of time presupposes the (objective) idea of time.

¹⁸ Adorno, *Kant's Critique*, 227.

¹⁹ Adorno, *Kant's Critique*, 232.

²⁰ Pamela Leach writes: 'Adorno thus objects to the epistemological separation of sensuality and intellect, nature and reason, implicit in Kant's aesthetics.' Pamela Leach, "On Adorno's Aesthetics of the Ugly," in *Adorno and the Need in Thinking: New Critical Essays*, ed. Donald A. Burke (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 271.

²¹ Leach, "On Adorno's Aesthetics of the Ugly," 267.

²² J. M. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 77.

²³ Leach writes: 'As records of historical struggles, all artworks contain the scars of the contradictions of the social fabric – a myriad of ugly traces.' Leach, "On Adorno's Aesthetics of the Ugly," 269.

5.2 Bergson and Duration

Another key influence upon Adorno's understanding of time is the work of Henri Bergson, whose influential essay *Time and Free Will* of 1889 was itself a response to the problem of free will in Kant's philosophy.²⁴ In *Time and Free Will* Bergson considers how the conception of time impacts upon the possibility for free will. Though Adorno's remarks on Bergson are scattered,²⁵ it nonetheless appears that the Bergsonian categories of *temps durée* (duration) and *temps espace* (clock time) deeply influenced Adorno's understanding of time, and his own distinction between aesthetic time and empirical time.²⁶ Max Paddison notes the polarity of Bergson's categories: *temps durée* (duration) is 'the flux of experience, fleeting, elusive, not measurable, and identified with intuition,' and *temps espace* 'identifies measured time, clock time, with space, and with intellect, reason and rationality.'²⁷ However, Paddison argues that Adorno's categories of aesthetic and empirical time (which are both critical and dialectical, in that 'musical time constitutes a critique of empirical time')²⁸ should be contrasted with the *non*-dialectical duality of Bergson's *temps durée* and *temps espace*, which hinge upon an understanding of 'duration as the absolute unity of Being and continuity.'²⁹

Bergson's notion of duration formed the basis for his public refutation of Albert Einstein's concept of 'physicist's time,' and the scientific understanding of time as continuous, objective and measurable.³⁰ Time can only be made measureable when it is conceived as a sequence of instants and thus spatialised, and for Bergson this concept of time is an abstraction. Bergson's notion of duration is at odds with scientific understandings of time, because duration depends of human consciousness and

²⁴ Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (London: Routledge, 2013).

²⁵ Roger Foster notes that references to Bergson are often accompanied by remarks on Husserl. See Roger Foster, *Adorno: The Recovery of Experience* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 113.

²⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 141.

²⁷ Max Paddison, "Performance, Reification, and Score: The Dialectics of Spatialization and Temporality in the Experience of Music," *Musica Scientiae* 8, no. 1 (Fall, 2004): 159.

²⁸ Paddison, "Adorno, Time and Musical Time," 250.

²⁹ Paddison, "Adorno, Time and Musical Time," 250.

³⁰ In his discussion of the Bergson-Einstein debate, David Scott positions time as a key modernist concern, with arguments over the nature of time and temporality pervading modernist art and thought: 'the crisis of modernism becomes the problem of time, or rather the problem of the temporalizing of time.' David Scott, "The 'Concept of Time' and the 'Being of the Clock': Bergson, Einstein, Heidegger, and the Interrogation of the Temporality of Modernism," *Continental Philosophy Review* 39, no. 2 (2006): 183. This arguably becomes Postmodernism's problem too.

experience: ‘duration is essentially a continuation of what no longer exists into what does exist. This is real time, perceived and lived...Duration therefore implies consciousness; and we place consciousness at the heart of things for the very reason that we credit them with a time that endures. However, the time that endures is not measurable, whether we think of it as within us or imagine it outside of us.’³¹ Bergson goes on: ‘real duration is *experienced*; we *learn* that time unfolds and, moreover that we are unable to measure it without converting it into space and without assuming all we know of it to be unfolded.’³² In short, for Bergson, the *temporal quality* of time is erased when time is rendered measurable, and its relationship to consciousness obscured.

Despite the undoubted influence of Bergson’s categories upon Adorno’s thinking, it is important to note that Adorno treats time (in both its aesthetic and empirical guises) dialectically, with aesthetic and empirical time exhibiting elements of both continuity *and* discontinuity. Paddison notes that the importance of *discontinuity* for Adorno’s aesthetics (and Modernism generally), was not anticipated in Bergson’s formulation,³³ which ultimately failed to sever thinking about time from the traditional metaphysical conception of Being as ahistorical and continuous.³⁴ Adorno rejects Bergson’s essentialism (his positioning of *temps durée* as originary and authentic), considering neither of his (undoubtedly Bergsonian) categories (aesthetic time and empirical time) to be an authentic source. This rehabilitation of *temps durée* and *temps espace* into the dialectical categories of aesthetic time and empirical time is essential to understanding the influence of Bergson on Adorno’s thinking. Whilst Bergson’s categories for analysis, and his rejection of time as a straightforward sequence of instances, certainly influenced Adorno’s thinking, his presumption of Being as continuous and ahistorical, and his positing of duration as a more authentic or ‘real’ time, are at odds with Adorno’s formulation of both time (disjointed, open to rupture, without clear origin) and consciousness (strictly historical).

³¹ Henri Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity, with Reference to Einstein’s Theory*, trans. Leon Jacobson, intro. Herbert Dingle (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), 49.

³² Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity*, 62.

³³ Paddison, “Adorno, Time and Musical Time,” 250.

³⁴ Max Paddison cites Gaston Bachelard as a contemporaneous (with Adorno) critique of Bergson’s work. Bachelard’s 1950 study *The Dialectic of Duration* argued that Bergson’s concepts were not dialectical. See Paddison, “Performance, Reification and Score,” 160; and Paddison, “Adorno, Time and Musical Time,” 250.

5.3 Benjamin and the Vulnerability of the Past

The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised and is never seen again. ‘The truth will not run away from us’: in the historical outlook of historicism these words of Gottfried Keller mark the exact point where historical materialism cuts through historicism. For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.³⁵

As Walter Benjamin, whose profound influence upon Adorno is well known,³⁶ has explored: to be modern is to be alienated from a past that recedes at an accelerating pace, from a past that is always running away from us.³⁷ In 1941, whilst living in exile in America, Adorno came into possession of Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940), a collection of twenty aphoristic meditations on the concept of history. Benjamin’s “Theses” proved an important catalyst for Adorno’s understanding of history and time: stressing the synergy between Benjamin’s concept of history and his own, Adorno wrote to Max Horkheimer that the “Theses” gave voice ‘above all to the idea of history as a permanent catastrophe, the criticism of progress, the domination of nature and the attitude to culture.’³⁸ Benjamin’s identification of the vulnerability of the past and of truth due to their temporal nature is of great importance to Adorno’s thinking. For Adorno: ‘Truth is suspended and frail, due to its temporal substance.’³⁹ Indeed, ‘truth has a temporal core,’⁴⁰ and it is this that means the past is vulnerable. Benjamin challenges the assumed causality and continuity of historical processes. This characterisation of truth as always in motion, rendering the past perpetually vulnerable, and an understanding of historical processes as discontinuous and non-causal,⁴¹

³⁵ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Concept of History,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 255.

³⁶ E. B. Ashton writes that Walter Benjamin ‘may be the one object of Adorno’s unqualified admiration,’ “Translator’s Note,” in Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, xii.

³⁷ See Benjamin, “Theses on the Concept of History,” 255.

³⁸ Adorno, quoted in Stefan Müller-Dooch, *Adorno: A Biography*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 269. Original source, Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 17 *Briefwechsel 1941-1948* (1996), ed. Alfred Schmidt and Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt am main: S. Fischer, 1985-96), 60.

³⁹ Adorno continues: ‘Benjamin sharply criticised Gottfried Keller’s arch-bourgeois dictum that the truth can’t run away from us. Philosophy must do without the consolation that the truth cannot be lost.’ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 34.

⁴⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Edmund Jephcott (California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 45.

⁴¹ ‘Historicism assumes a historical continuum through the laws of causality, so that the past determines the present. Benjamin, by contrast, put forward the idea of historical materialism, which seeks to unmask

permeates Adorno's philosophical works (in particular later works such as *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*), and shows his great debt to Benjamin's conception of time and history.

According to Benjamin, the propulsion through time towards radically new forms of life and knowledge leaves the modern subject in a state of traumatic shock, torn between the demands of the new whilst consumed with an impossible desire for the restoration of an originary, un-alienated condition. It is an undoubted enigma, that from the midst of decay, from the impossibility of an authentic relation to the past, bourgeois individualism emerges; from the conditioning experience of time as disintegration, as the empty search for lost origins, comes the modern self-making subject. This search for irretrievable origins marks the modern experience of time as an inescapable process of decay: the passing of time is encountered as perpetual disintegration and loss.⁴²

Benjamin notes the pertinence of the experience of time to all political life in his "Theses": 'The concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogenous, empty time. A critique of the concept of such a progression must be the basis of any criticism of the concept of progress itself.'⁴³ This understanding of time as profoundly political imbues Adorno's music criticism, and helps to explain the urgent tone of much of his music writing. The radical potential of aesthetic experience is intimately bound up in its capacity to generate new experiences of time, and it is the inherently temporal nature of music that elevates it to a position of privilege (and political significance) among the arts in Adorno's thought. Musical time (as the Adornian exemplar of aesthetic time), when properly treated, has the capacity to generate new experiences of time, opening up new forms of experience and thus the possibility for new ways of being in the world to emerge. For Adorno, when poorly treated, musical time has the capacity to generate reactionary political consciousness, with tangible and deep political consequences. The production of time as 'homogenous, empty time,' and the specific relation musical time is able to generate between the subject and history, forms the basis for all of Adorno's

that causal connection and blast open (*aufsprengen*) this continuum, thereby making it possible to understand the past through the concerns of the present.' Bertold Hoeckner, "Preface: On Apparition," in *Apparitions: New Perspectives on Adorno and Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. Berthold Hoeckner (London: Routledge, 2006), ix.

⁴² Samuel Weber, "The *Ring* as *Trauerspiel*: Reading Wagner with Benjamin and Derrida," in *Benjamin's -abilities* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008), 286.

⁴³ Benjamin, "Theses on the Concept of History," 261.

most notorious negative assessments. From Wagner to Stravinsky and jazz to the hit song, it is the composer's approach to the making and unmaking of musical time that lies at the heart of each critique.

Benjamin's characterisation of the vulnerability of the past, and the political importance of disrupting the notion of history as continuum, are central to Adorno's thinking. Following Benjamin, Adorno takes history to be always in motion: historical 'facts' are not waiting – patient and unchanging – to be excavated, but are themselves in a constant state of flux. For both thinkers, a properly historical relation to the past depends *not* upon establishing a clear continuity between facts and events, but upon a *disruption* of the presumed continuity of historical time. For Adorno, philosophies of history that assume continuity presume that a particular idea (progress) runs through history and that the unearthing of facts enables the subject to come closer to history's driving force: historicism's 'overweighting of the factual...presupposes a theory that historical processes have some sort of meaning.'⁴⁴

Where historicism presumes the preservation of systems, a 'fossilisation' of practices awaiting excavation, the materialist presumes decay: for Adorno, the past that we have inherited is not only incomplete and fragmented, but is altered within itself with the passing of time. As Adorno wrote in his 1929 essay "Night Music": 'It is vital to remain mindful of the fact that changes take place within the works, not simply in the people who interpret them.'⁴⁵ Not only do we hear with the ears of our own time, but the passing of time effects the inner life and formation of works themselves.⁴⁶ Adorno rejects the clear lines of fact, cause and effect that are the hallmark of historicism, which mistakenly attributes meaning to disrupted and contingent processes (the great pile of wreckage Benjamin describes in his "Theses").⁴⁷ For Adorno, the danger of historicism

⁴⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-65*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 11.

⁴⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, "Night Music," in *Night Music: Essays on Music 1928-1962*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. and intro. Wieland Hoban (London: Seagull Books 2009), 86.

⁴⁶ This theme was previously discussed in chapter four, 4.3.iii Truth Content. See also chapter four, note 63.

⁴⁷ The best-known of Benjamin's theses is perhaps the ninth, based on the painting *Angelus Novus* by Paul Klee; it famously depicts the angel of history aghast with horror: 'A Klee painting named "*Angelus Novus*" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them.

lies in its ahistorical concept of history. When understood in terms of continuity and progress, history is ontologised (that is, taken to be a basic structure of existence, and thus fundamentally unalterable). Historical processes, rightly understood as contingent, discontinuous and socially constituted come to be seen as, necessary, progressive and inevitable. Following Benjamin, Adorno takes historical time to be continuous in only its discontinuity, a constantly repeated process of life disrupted.⁴⁸

For Adorno, musical works grow old and die, eventually falling silent,⁴⁹ their meaning cannot be preserved, and this recognition of the vulnerability of musical works (indeed all aesthetic objects) is linked to his (Benjaminian) conception of time and history. As works decompose, their meaning disperses, and whatever truth they might have once held begins to evaporate. Through a recognition of this process of disintegration (and *not* through a doomed attempt at restoration), antiquated works *can* fruitfully interpreted.⁵⁰ Fragments of truth than have not been lost entirely, or truths that emerge as the work decomposes, can only be released through interpretation that acknowledges this disintegration: 'the truth character of works is tied precisely to their disintegration.'⁵¹

Like Benjamin's '*Jetztzeit*,'⁵² Adorno argues that progressive works of art generate an interruption capable of exploding the continuum of time in order to make way for the radically new. Adorno proposes that the shock of Modern art is a special site of possibility, from which new modes of experience and social formation might emerge. This interruption occurs through formal innovation (through the production of new forms, sounds and so on), but unless this innovation produces an untimely effect of throwing the observer outside their own time, of forcing a break in their experience of time as continuous, then the progressive possibility of such formal innovation remains unrealised. For Adorno, the experience of the work of art is precisely the experience of

This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.' Benjamin, "Theses on the Concept of History," 257-58.

⁴⁸ Adorno writes: 'history constantly repeats this process of disruption.' Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 91.

⁴⁹ Max Paddison explores this 'falling silent,' as well as the place of silence in Adorno's music criticism more generally. See Paddison, "Performance, Reification, and Score," 157-179.

⁵⁰ 'Denying the disintegration of works into history is reactionary in its purpose.' Adorno, "Night Music," 88.

⁵¹ Adorno, "Night Music," 88.

⁵² *Jetztzeit* Benjamin explains, is 'time filled by the presence of the now.' Benjamin, "Theses on the Concept of History," 261.

historicity, of a sense of becoming over time, in which neither becoming nor temporality are taken to necessarily pursue linear, progressive trajectories. An undialectical understanding of time as mere empirical time, as a state of the pure flow of numerical succession, facilitates an unproblematic and uncritical relationship with the past, and indeed the future. Wagner's circular, eternal temporality, thundering heroically down the road to nowhere, presents time precisely as an infinite line of single moments.

5.4 Shudder (*Erschütterung*)

The non-correspondence between musical time and empirical time may be experienced as interruption; the subject, thrown out of time and consciousness, might be (fleeting) liberated from the patterns and structures of conceptual thought. This temporal interruption, which Adorno describes as part of the aesthetic 'shudder,' is an experience of being-outside, a state of alterity (non incorporation). In music, shudder can be achieved through the non-correspondence of musical time (which challenges linear conceptions of time and remains indifferent to the passing of empirical time) and its counterpart, empirical time (which for Adorno means the linear flow of clock time). For Adorno, Wagner's temporality chooses ahistorical being over temporal becoming and as such is bound to reinforce (rather than interrupt) empirical time. Both Benjamin's 'homogenous, empty time' and Adorno's 'empirical time' are articulations of time experienced *ahistorically*, as if the past stands unaltered by the events that follow. For both of these thinkers, conceptualisations of time as a linear progression exclude the reality of the actual vulnerability of the past. As already discussed, for Adorno and Benjamin, the subject's relationship to the past is of essential political importance, and a thoroughly historical formulation of time is essential to progressive politics and truly radical works of art ('every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.')

Like the experience of the sublime in traditional aesthetics, the shudder that Modern artworks induce is not necessarily a pleasant experience. However, unlike the sublime in traditional aesthetics, which affirms the power of the I,⁵⁴ aesthetic shudder undoes

⁵³ Benjamin, "Theses on the Concept of History," 255.

⁵⁴ Adorno writes: 'For Kant, what is sublime in nature is nothing but the autonomy of the spirit in the face of the superior power of sensuous existence.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 122.

the coherence of the I in the moment of mimetic exchange. The capacity to experience the shudder is the marker of the subject's openness to aesthetic experience: 'the aesthetic comportment is to be defined as the capacity to shudder.'⁵⁵ The shudder Adorno describes is not a minor state, but is an intense and destabilising experience for the subject. In this regard, Adorno concurs with traditional aesthetics: an authentic aesthetic experience demands a profound reaction in the aesthetic subject. The involuntary quality of the shudder links it to mimesis and the momentary loss of self as the subject is assimilated into the work itself (see below). Importantly, shudder indicates the unity of mimesis and rationality in a non-regressive moment,⁵⁶ signaling the possibility for the emergence of radically new experiences. Aesthetic shudder expresses and reproduces the historical antagonism between subject and object,⁵⁷ apparently cancelling the distance between the subject and the work before them⁵⁸ (which is in reality impossible), in order that the work's truth becomes the subject's own, and in this moment of shudder is the moment in which 'the subject finds...true happiness in the moment of being convulsed.'⁵⁹ In the shudder, 'subjectivity stirs without yet being subjectivity,'⁶⁰ signaling the mimetic process of assimilation without subordination. In this moment of shudder, our fragility, our mortality, our finitude, is brought into the domain of experience.⁶¹

5.5 Mimesis

The connection between mimesis and temporality may not seem entirely self-evident, but through the figure of repetition this chapter hopes to make this connection explicit. As argued below, Adorno takes the mimetic faculty to be fundamental to human consciousness, an inescapable feature of our inheritance as animals in nature. The mimetic faculty involves a loss of self that appears in Adorno's writing to be largely outside the individual's conscious control: a compulsive submission and internal recreation (repetition) of that which is external. The subconscious (perhaps compulsive) quality of mimesis, and the fact that it involves a *remaking*, links mimesis to repetition, and thus to Adorno's formulation of time and temporality. Through an elaboration of

⁵⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 418.

⁵⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 26-27.

⁵⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 111.

⁵⁸ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 349.

⁵⁹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 349.

⁶⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 418.

⁶¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 319.

Adorno's understanding of the mimetic faculty, this chapter argues that Adorno's theoretical framework *does* allow for the possibility that repetition in music might serve a critical function (even if it seems reasonably clear that Adorno himself dismissed 'mere repetition' in music as hopelessly regressive).

Of particular concern to this investigation of the status of repetition in Modernism and Postmodernism, is the issue of mimesis and its relationship to repetition. Mimesis in Adorno's work is a concept often employed but never fully revealed, and the purpose of the following is to explore the relationship between mimesis and repetition in music from within the context of Adorno's writing. As will become clear in chapter six "Killing Time II: Time and Temporality in Adorno's Music Criticism" Adorno's most negative musical critiques (from Wagner and Stravinsky, to jazz and the hit song) coalesce around a critique of temporality. The place of repetition within music, and how it relates to musical 'becoming,' can be fruitfully thought together with Adorno's formulation of mimesis.

Historically, the term mimesis has been marked by indeterminacy, with its formation shifting with each historical period since antiquity.⁶² 'Common-sense' understandings of mimesis typically render it as 'imitation'⁶³ or 'imitation of nature.'⁶⁴ As Max Paddison has noted, the familiar concepts of imitation and expression, along with the older notion of mimesis, have largely been eclipsed in contemporary musicology by terms such as 'representation' and 'resemblance.'⁶⁵ The Modernist break with representation is sometimes characterised as a 'failure' of the mimetic faculty, thereby implicitly linking mimesis with realism and representation. Julian Johnson, for example, argues that 'by the twentieth century it had become a familiar aesthetic precept of Modernism that art should fail in its mimetic representation of the world.'⁶⁶ Whilst the mimetic moment is undoubtedly linked to reproduction and imitation (and many strands of Modernism certainly pursued abstraction over representation), the

⁶² Gunter Gebauer, "Mimesis," in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics, Oxford Art Online*, ed. Michael Kelly, Oxford University Press, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/subscriber/article/opr/t234/e0355>.

⁶³ Gebauer, "Mimesis."

⁶⁴ Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 140.

⁶⁵ Max Paddison, "Mimesis and the Aesthetics of Musical Representation," *Music Analysis* 29, no. 1-3 (March 2010): 126.

⁶⁶ Julian Johnson, *Out of Time*, 16. Nidesh Lawtoo makes a similar claim in relation to the work of D. H. Lawrence: the 'failure of communication, however, may not only be a consequence of the limits of mimetic representation.' Nidesh Lawtoo, *Phantom of the Ego: Modernism and the Mimetic Unconscious* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 155.

following shows that Adorno was careful to distinguish mimesis from imitation or representation. For Adorno, abstraction is no barrier to the mimetic faculty; indeed, by rejecting representation, abstract works may prove more mimetically ‘effective’ than their representational counterparts, because abstraction allows for the circumvention of conceptual thought, and thus the possibility of a more powerful mimetic exchange.

Adorno dislodges the apparently self-evident concepts of mimesis and imitation from their everyday usage, instead employing mimesis to indicate a process of adaptation to that which is outside the self.⁶⁷ Adorno distances mimesis from ‘mere imitation,’⁶⁸ describing it as ‘the assimilation of the self to its other,’⁶⁹ or, more obliquely, as ‘the nonconceptual affinity of the subjectively produced with its unposited other.’⁷⁰ As Michael Cahn argues, Adorno’s framing of mimesis ‘takes its starting point from a biological context...which considers *mimicry* to be a prehistroical or zoological version of mimesis.’⁷¹ As Paddison describes it, mimesis is ‘a pre-rational, or not-yet-rationalised, mode of behavior, with an affinity towards the sensuous and embodied, non-conceptual re-enactment of cognitive processes.’⁷² Thus, the mimetic faculty functions within Adorno’s work as the non-conceptual (pre-conscious and practising) foundation for human consciousness, a faculty inherited not only from archaic traditions of magic, ritual and myth, but indeed from the fact of our animalism.

Influenced by Roger Caillois’ essays “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia” (1935) and “The Praying Mantis: From Biology to Psychoanalysis” (1934),⁷³ as well as Walter Benjamin’s pieces “On the Mimetic Faculty” (1933) and “Doctrine of the Similar” (1933),⁷⁴ Adorno takes the mimetic faculty to be a central feature of human

⁶⁷ Max Paddison, *Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music*, 140.

⁶⁸ Adorno contrasts the ‘mimetic impulse’ with ‘mere imitation’ in his monograph on Wagner. See Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 2005), 27.

⁶⁹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 416

⁷⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 70.

⁷¹ Michael Cahn, “Subversive Mimesis: Theodor W. Adorno and the Modern Impasse of Critique,” in *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory: A Interdisciplinary Approach*, Vol.1, ed. Mihai Spărius (Philadelphia: J. Benjamins Pub. Co. 1984), 32.

⁷² Paddison, “Mimesis and the Aesthetics of Musical Representation,” 136.

⁷³ Roger Caillois, “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,” trans. John Shepley, *October* 31 (12/01/1984): 17-32; Roger Caillois, “The Praying Mantis,” in *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader*, ed. and intro. Claudine Frank, trans. Claudine Frank and Camille Naish (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 66-81. On Caillois’ influence upon Adorno see, Paddison, “Mimesis and the Aesthetics of Musical Representation,” 134.

⁷⁴ Walter Benjamin, “On the Mimetic Faculty,” *Selected Writings, Volume 2: Part 2*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2005), 720-722; Walter Benjamin, “Doctrine of the Similar,” *New German Critique* 17, Special Walter Benjamin Edition (Spring, 1979): 65-69.

consciousness, with mime and imitation influencing all areas of human communication and life (gesture, language, music, dance and so on). As Paddison has explained, Caillois's anthropological understanding of the mimetic faculty positions it as the ritualised (and not simply defensive) assimilation of the self into the environment. Understandings of mimesis that suppose it to be purely a defence mechanism (for example, insects blending with their surroundings) underplay the extent to which mimesis fails in nature; mimetic gestures often fail to stave off predators, and at times mimetic gestures even provoke one creature's consumption by another.⁷⁵ Instead, Caillois proposes that mimesis functions as a ritualistic and 'magical' surrender to the environment, a submission to death through the performance of the loss of self.⁷⁶

Similarly, Benjamin's theologically inflected historical-anthropological understanding of the role of early mimetic forms of expression (what he calls 'non-sensuous similarity')⁷⁷ in the genesis of language, informs Adorno's own understanding of mimesis as a process of self-surrender that orients consciousness. Adorno and Horkheimer develop Benjamin's interest in those historical modes of perception and expression that lie outside the purview of Enlightenment thought (such as the occult, madness and myth)⁷⁸ by situating the criminal in an analogous relation to the artist. The notion of mimesis as a 'sinking back into nature' emerges in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* through the discussion of the porous boundary between art and criminality.⁷⁹ As Adorno and Horkheimer describe it, the 'yielding attitude' of the artistic disposition is 'not so very remote from the violence of the criminal.'⁸⁰ Underlining the dangerous, subversive quality of mimesis, Adorno and Horkheimer go so far as to suggest a synonymy between the death-drive and mimesis: 'Freud called it the death-instinct, Caillois "*le mimétisme*."⁸¹ By linking repetition with the death-

⁷⁵ Caillois writes that in the animal kingdom, mimesis is 'a *luxury* and even a dangerous luxury, for there are cases in which mimicry causes the creature to go from bad to worse...[In] The case of the *Phyllia* ... they browse among themselves, taking each other for real leaves, in such a way that one might accept the idea of a sort of collective masochism leading to mutual homophagy, the simulation of the leaf being a *provocation* to cannibalism in this kind of totem feast.' Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and the Legendary Psychasthenia," 25.

⁷⁶ Paddison, "Mimesis and the Aesthetics of Musical Representation," 135.

⁷⁷ Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," 722.

⁷⁸ Anson Rabinbach, "Introduction to Walter Benjamin's 'Doctrine of the Similar,'" *New German Critique* 17 (1979): 60-65.

⁷⁹ See "A Theory of Crime," in Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997), 225-229.

⁸⁰ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 227. See also Paddison, "Mimesis and the Aesthetics of Musical Representation," 135.

⁸¹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 227

drive and mimesis Adorno arguably makes space (in his theoretical writing at least) for repetition to have a subversive, critical function, despite remaining perilously close to affirmation. This mimetic urge ‘underlies everything which runs counter to bold progress, from the crime which is a shortcut avoiding the normal forms of activity, to the sublime work of art.’⁸² Just as the successful criminal shortcuts normal social relations (and processes of exchange), so the successful work of art short-circuits conceptual thought.

The praying mantis (Callois), the astrologer (Benjamin) and the criminal (Adorno and Horkheimer) each present the mimetic faculty as natural faculty opposed to rationality, yet, as Adorno argues, is through its encounter with mimesis that rationality might be freed from its irrationality and brought to its full fruition. Thus, mimesis stands not only in dialectical tension with rationality, but leans precariously towards irrationality; through the intentional loss of self, mimesis contains both regressive tendencies (towards the loss of identity), and progressive possibilities (in its capacity to navigate outside the confines of rationality). By engendering the subject’s ‘assimilation of the self to its other,’ a process simultaneously rational and anti-rational, willed and unconscious, the mimetic faculty opens up the possibility for thinking without concepts. Given that the drive to dominate is the unintended consequence of Enlightenment rationality (as conceptual thinking),⁸³ the mimetic aspect of art promises the possibility for thought without concepts, which in turn offers the possibility for circumventing rationality’s collapse into its opposite. Thus, as Martin Jay argues, Adorno does not present mimesis as an alternative to rationality, and nor does his valorisation of mimesis constitute an argument against rationality. Rather, Adorno ‘posits a constellation in which reason and mimesis each make up for the deficiencies of the other,’⁸⁴ with mimesis holding the possibility for reason’s full fruition.

⁸² Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 227.

⁸³ ‘Conceptual thought can be understood as an act of aggression perpetrated by a dominating subject on a world assumed to be external to it; it subsumes particulars under universals, violently reducing their uniqueness to typifications or exemplars of a general or essential principle. Mimesis in contrast, involves a more sympathetic, compassionate, and noncoercive relationship of affinity between nonidentical particulars, which do not then become reified into two poles of a subject/object dualism.’ Martin Jay, “Mimesis and Mimetology: Adorno and Lacoue-Labarthe,” in *The Semblance of Subjectivity: Essays in Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervart (Cambridge, Mass: MIT press, 1997), 32.

⁸⁴ Jay, “Mimesis and Mimetology,” 46.

The simultaneous pull towards identity and non-identity marks mimesis with an essential ambivalence, and this contradiction forms the precarious core of Adorno's formulation of the concept. As Steven Helmling argues, the danger of mimesis collapsing back into its opposite (identity thinking) is central to its power: "'mimesis' is [immanent] critique's own most potent, if also most treacherous, device: indeed, the potency and the treachery must be its very *condition*.'⁸⁵ The positing of this ambivalence at the core of mimesis typifies Adorno's discursive practice as well as his aesthetics. The intensification of contradiction in art and philosophy is used to bolster against their failure; rather than seek reconciliation (as in realist art) or consolation (as in idealist art), Modernist art (like Adorno's philosophy) is marked by a desire to hold things in tension. This practice of intensifying contradiction (rather than seeking resolution) expresses the negativity of Adorno's dialectical method. By intensifying Adorno's own formulation of the internal contradictions within mimesis, the possibility for works of art to pursue *repetition as a form of determinate negation*⁸⁶ is potentially opened up (this possibility is explored in greater detail below).

Adorno provides no clear articulation of the precise point at which mimesis occurs within art – but certainly imbues both the production of artworks and their consumption (through interpretation) with a mimetic aspect. Unlike Benjamin, for whom 'language is the highest application of the mimetic faculty',⁸⁷ Adorno's valorisation of music as the 'purest' instance of the mimetic impulse is justified on account of its distance from the rigidity of conceptual thought. For Adorno, 'there can be no doubt that music as a language achieves – as no other art does – a pure objectification of the mimetic impulse, free of any concreteness or denotation; nothing but the gesture, codified and placed above the physical world, yet at once sensual.'⁸⁸ It is interesting to note that Adorno here treats music 'as a language,' a recurring theme throughout his work that is treated specifically in his essay *Music, Language, and Composition* (1956). Adorno's exploration of the many similarities between music and language, its 'becoming

⁸⁵ Steven Helmling, "'Immanent Critique' and 'Dialectical Mimesis' in Adorno and Horkheimer's Dialectic of Enlightenment," *Boundary 2* 32, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 110.

⁸⁶ Bacht, *Music and Time in Theodor W. Adorno*, 160.

⁸⁷ Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar," 68.

⁸⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction: Notes, a Draft and Two Schemata*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 170.

linguistic,’⁸⁹ also foregrounds their major difference, namely their relation to reason. According to Adorno, the cognitive nature of language calls for a deciphering of the concepts it contains, a process that is inextricably linked to reason’s desire to dominate.⁹⁰ Although undoubtedly mimetic, language (for Adorno) is less so than music, which lays claim to a degree of non-conceptuality (and hence mimetic ‘purity’) that language cannot. As Adorno succinctly puts it: ‘To interpret language means to understand language; to interpret music means to make music.’⁹¹ The implication that composing, performing, listening and even the silent recollection of music are all mimetic practices reveals the core of *musical* mimesis to be at once like language (as a process of social subjectivisation where shared meanings are developed and hardened into conventions), and yet unlike language, in its capacity to engender the loss of individuation without domination. Mimesis, then, is a relation of exchange like no other, without the demand for abstraction and equivalence made by rational thought, where the loss of self occurs without domination.

The sensuousness of mimesis in Adorno’s account is an important rebuff to those who accuse him of fetishising the intellect over sensual perception. As Martin Jay explains, the body is central to mimetic behavior: ‘mimesis necessarily entails a crucial role for the body in the interaction between self and world.’⁹² For Adorno, ‘mimetic comportment’ is not imitation of the other, but the ‘assimilation of the self to its other.’⁹³ As Jay explains, ‘Adorno prefers the verb *anschmiegen* (to snuggle up or mold to) to stress a relationship of contiguity,’⁹⁴ foregrounding the physicality of the mimetic exchange beyond mere imitation. As Lisa Yun Lee explains ‘the body is a salient part of Adorno’s understanding of mimesis because as the wellspring of spontaneity, instinct, emotions, and everything else that animates mimesis, the body is the form that

⁸⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, “On the Contemporary Relationship of Philosophy and Music,” in *Essays on Music*, selected, with introduction, commentary and notes Richard Leppert, new trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 145.

⁹⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, “Music, Language, and Composition,” in *Essays on Music* selected, with introduction, commentary and notes Richard Leppert, new trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 115. Adorno makes a similar point in Theodor W. Adorno, “Music and Language: A Fragment,” in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1998), 1-6.

⁹¹ Adorno, “Music, Language, and Composition,” 115.

⁹² Jay, “Mimesis and Mimetology,” 32-33.

⁹³ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 416.

⁹⁴ Jay, “Mimesis and Mimetology,” 32.

mimesis takes.’⁹⁵ The moment of mimetic exchange, and therefore the basis for aesthetic experience itself, emerges from sensuous experience; Adorno places the corporeal experiences of the body at the heart of his aesthetic theory.

This yielding of the self to the other provides moments of progressive as well as regressive possibilities, and, as noted already, this ambiguity is a decisive feature of the mimetic faculty. Just as ‘Art is a refuge for mimetic comportment,’⁹⁶ so too is mimesis central to the Fascist (or more generally, totalitarian) spectacle.⁹⁷ ‘That art, something mimetic, is possible in the midst of rationality, and that it employs its means is a response to the faulty irrationality of the rational world.’⁹⁸ Yet this precise reflex, which promises the realisation of rationality, also functions as a primary technology of repression:

The purpose of the Fascist formula, the ritual discipline, the uniforms, and the whole apparatus, which is at first sight irrational, is to allow mimetic behavior. The carefully thought out symbols (which are proper to every counterrevolutionary movement), the skulls and disguises, the barbaric drum beats, the monotonous repetition of words and gestures, are simply the organized imitation of magic practices, the mimesis of mimesis.⁹⁹

Indeed, if, as Michael Taussig has observed, mimesis is the ‘obscure operator’ underlying Adorno’s entire project,¹⁰⁰ then one might consider Adorno’s thinking around mimesis to be a speculative exploration of the uncanny persistence of sensuousness and irrationality in all areas of life under modernity. Far from doing away with myth, rationality accomplishes its most spectacular performance. The sensuality of mimesis, the intimacy it accords with the Other, need not function as an ethical gesture of reconciliation. Indeed, Adorno and Horkheimer identify the desire to imitate

⁹⁵ Lisa Yun Lee, *Dialectics of the Body: Corporeality in the Philosophy of T.W. Adorno* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 111. The dispersed nature of Adorno’s writing about the mind/body duality makes it difficult to plot clearly the ways in which his thinking changed over time, and according to the musical material under consideration. An exploration of the precise nature of these changes would be useful, but is beyond the scope of the present study.

⁹⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 69.

⁹⁷ We could obviously extend the analogy here to the contemporary situation, the society of the hyper-produced spectacle.

⁹⁸ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 70.

⁹⁹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 184-5.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 45.

the Jew as a central feature of anti-Semitism.¹⁰¹ ‘Hitler can gesticulate like a clown, Mussolini strike false notes like a provincial tenor, Goebbels talk endlessly like a Jewish agent whom he wants murdered.’¹⁰² Once again, in its sensuality, danger appears as a central feature of mimesis.

The mimetic loss of self that Adorno describes undoubtedly swings precariously between affirmative and critical modes of engagement and political possibilities. Ultimately, however, for Adorno mimesis saves aesthetic experience from necessarily folding back into identity thinking. As argued here, mimetic impulse, from which all art must at some level emerge, reflects ‘the assimilation of the self to its other.’¹⁰³ For Adorno, mimesis (‘the nonconceptual affinity of the subjectively produced with its unposited other’)¹⁰⁴ stands in opposition to reason, and he understands the dialectic of rationality and mimesis to be immanent to art.¹⁰⁵ Art’s archaism, its links to myth and magic, live on in mimesis; it is the impulsive, archaic element that involves an ‘involuntary adjustment to something extra-mental.’¹⁰⁶ Mimesis confronts rationality with irrationality; despite its secularisation, art remains enchanted. Art’s continuing enchantment, its mimetic character, holds a mirror to reason, reflecting back to reason the extent to which it has been instrumentalised. Adorno’s formulation that: ‘The opposition of artworks to domination is mimesis of domination’¹⁰⁷ hints at the possibility that even apparently affirmative art promises the possibility for social critique. Adorno’s notion that through the mimesis of domination artworks generate critical potential allows for the possibility (from *within* his aesthetic framework) that repetition in music might be used progressively.

5.6 Repetition

Given Adorno’s valorisation of mimesis, it is curious that he should be so categorical in his renunciation of repetition in music; from his Wagner critique to his analysis of the conformity of the hit song, the failure of repetition in music is a recurring theme in his critique of popular culture and high art from the nineteenth century onwards.

¹⁰¹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 184.

¹⁰² Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 185.

¹⁰³ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 416.

¹⁰⁴ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 70.

¹⁰⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 70.

¹⁰⁶ Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 213.

¹⁰⁷ Adorno writes: ‘The opposition of artworks to domination is mimesis of domination.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 370.

Adorno presents no clear principle upon which to delineate mimesis from (mere) repetition or imitation, and the absence of a clear articulation of this point is something of a lacuna in his thought. As Jay Bernstein has argued, ‘repetition has been a continual resource for modernism,’¹⁰⁸ and yet in Adorno’s music criticism it is disavowed, with ‘mere repetition’ figuring in his work as the degradation of mimesis. By situating repetition alongside mimesis, this chapter suggests that Adorno’s thinking points towards (even if it does not actually voice) the possibility that musical repetition might serve a subversive, critical function.

Repetition is a central figure to the standard psychoanalytic account of identity formation:¹⁰⁹ Freud linked repetition to the death-drive in order to explain why individuals return repeatedly to traumatic events and unpleasurable experiences (thus violating the ‘pleasure principle’).¹¹⁰ As Nikolaus Bacht argues, repetition for Adorno is suspect precisely because of its unconscious and *compulsive* quality; Adorno follows Freud in understanding repetition to be essentially destructive: the ‘repetitive compulsion pushes the subject into anxiety, which is sometimes discharged in the form of aggression against the self or the environment.’¹¹¹ In Adorno’s thinking, repetition is fundamental to the dialectic of Enlightenment; it is aligned with the eternal recurrence of the same, and thus a regression into myth.¹¹² Repetition is also central to the social and economic process which defines modernity: the radical fungibility of all persons and things. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, ‘being is apprehended in terms of manipulation and administration. Everything – including the individual human being, not to mention the animal – becomes a repeatable, replaceable process.’¹¹³

Adorno finds in Kafka’s prose an analogy from literature to the inimitability of Schonberg’s music, commenting that ‘the work that shatters individuation will at no

¹⁰⁸ J. M. Bernstein, *Against Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 297. Modernism is undoubtedly also concerned with the new, and thus the place of repetition within modernism is contested.

¹⁰⁹ John M. Carvalho, “Repetition and Self-Realization in Jazz Improvisation,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 68, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 286.

¹¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Stachey, vol. 18 (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974), 7-64.

¹¹¹ Bacht, *Music and Time in Theodor W. Adorno*, 86-87.

¹¹² For Adorno, the reconstruction of ‘repetitive-circular movements...give a false image of eternity and therefore regress into the mythical.’ Bacht, *Music and Time in Theodor W. Adorno*, 88.

¹¹³ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 65.

price want to be imitated.¹¹⁴ Here the impossibility of imitation functions as part of a work's rationality (within a dialectic of *ratio-mimesis*), as evidence of having been shaped by a mind in full control of itself and its (historically determined) materials.¹¹⁵ Yet Adorno also notes that 'the sameness or intriguing similarity of a variety of objects is one of Kafka's most persistent motifs,'¹¹⁶ apparently allowing within literature the possibility for progressive duplication. Repetition of motifs in Kafka's prose seems to allow for the properly transgressive moment of mimesis, yet in music Adorno seems to foreclose this possibility. If, as Adorno argues, 'Kafka's epic style is, in its archaism, mimesis of reification,'¹¹⁷ could repetition in contemporary forms such as jazz and minimalism perform an analogous critical function? If the mimesis of reification is also (in part) resistance to domination, then could a progressive function be discerned for repetition in music? If critical art is necessarily engaged in a reproduction of precisely the unequal social relations that it seeks to illuminate, can repetition, at its most extreme and fetishised baldness, reified into a principle of complete organisation, not function in the same way as Kafka's archaic, epic style and disrupt the sphere of identity? Adorno argues that 'the opposition of artworks to domination is mimesis of domination. They must assimilate themselves to the comportment of domination in order to produce something qualitatively different from the world of domination.'¹¹⁸ In literature at least, Adorno suggests that the mimesis of domination forms a necessary aspect of critique, and thus allows for the possibility that repetition might serve a progressive function.

In his essay *Vers une musique informelle* (1961), Adorno notes the fundamental and constructive power of repetition to all music, but also understands the relationship of difference to repetition (in more Adornian terms non-identity to identity) to be properly dialectical: 'As a developmental structure music is an absolute negation of repetition...On the other hand, it is only able to develop by virtue of repetition.

¹¹⁴ See Theodor W. Adorno, "Notes on Kafka," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), 254. Adorno's reception of Kafka is important here, as a number of his most forceful statements on mimesis are articulated with reference to Kafka's work.

¹¹⁵ Adorno makes this point in relation to Kafka, 'There is nothing mad in his prose...every sentence has been shaped by a mind in full control of itself; yet, at the same time, every sentence has been snatched from the zone of insanity into which all knowledge must venture if it is to become such in an age when sound common sense only reinforces universal blindness.' Adorno "Notes on Kafka," 253-4.

¹¹⁶ Adorno goes on, 'all possible demi-creatures step forward in pairs, often marked by the childish and the silly, oscillating between affability and cruelty like savages in children's books. Individuation has become such a burden for men and has remained so precarious, that they are mortally frightened when the veil is raised a little.' Adorno, "Notes to Kafka," 253.

¹¹⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 302.

¹¹⁸ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 370.

Thematic work, the principle which concretizes the abstract passage of time in terms of musical substance, is never more than the dissimilarity of the similar.’¹¹⁹ In serialism, this dialectic is intensified through the pole of difference, through the fetishistic adherence to non-repetition the distinction between difference and repetition becomes difficult to comprehend or even observe: ‘Absolutely nothing may be repeated and, as the derivative of One thing, absolutely everything is repetition.’¹²⁰ Theoretically at least, this leaves Adorno’s thinking open to interpretation, to the possibility that the dialectic (between identity and non-identity) might also be intensified at the opposite pole, that of repetition. If, through the use of repetition, absolutely everything comes to be heard as difference (through the most infinitesimal changes), the intensification of the dialectic (identity – non-identity) may well be achieved. If ‘identity in non-identity’ is indeed music’s ‘lifeblood,’¹²¹ then perhaps non-identity within identity contains similar musical potential.

In his 1962 essay “Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait,” Adorno draws the work of Samuel Beckett into his interpretation of Stravinsky, providing important reappraisal of both Stravinsky’s work and the status of repetition in music more generally. As Max Paddison explains, Adorno felt that Beckett’s work expressed ‘the ultimate *reductio ad absurdum* of the human condition, Walter Benjamin’s “dialectics at a standstill,”’¹²² indeed, Adorno had intended to dedicate *Aesthetic Theory* to Beckett.¹²³ Paddison suggests that Adorno’s critique of Stravinsky found in the “Dialectical Portrait” essay could easily be applied to Beckett, and vice versa.¹²⁴ Nicholas Bacht argues that, in this late Stravinsky critique, Adorno ‘attempts here for the first time to think repetition as determinate negation within the context of new music.’¹²⁵

In the “Dialectical Portrait” essay, Adorno conducts a self-criticism of his earlier work (from *Philosophy of New Music*) in explicitly temporal terms: ‘By opposing the static ideal of Stravinsky’s music, its immanent timelessness, and by confronting it with a dynamic, emphatically temporal, intrinsically developing music, I arbitrarily applied to

¹¹⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, “Vers une musique informelle,” in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 2002), 284, n. 7.

¹²⁰ Adorno, “Vers une musique informelle,” 284 n. 7.

¹²¹ Adorno, “Vers une musique informelle,” 284 n. 7.

¹²² Max Paddison, “Stravinsky as the Devil: Adorno’s Three Critiques,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, ed. Jonathan Cross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 201.

¹²³ Paddison, “Stravinsky as the Devil,” 202.

¹²⁴ Paddison, “Stravinsky as the Devil,” 202.

¹²⁵ Bacht, *Music and Time in Theodor W. Adorno*, 160.

him an external norm, a norm which he rejected.¹²⁶ Nonetheless, Adorno goes on to argue that music requires development: ‘As a temporal art, music is bound to the fact of succession and is hence as irreversible as time itself. By starting, it commits itself to carrying on, to becoming something new, to developing.’¹²⁷ This ‘musical becoming’ (my term, inspired by Adorno)¹²⁸ is to be contrasted with musical stasis, in which works loose themselves in myth, the mirage of eternal being, and ‘timelessness.’¹²⁹ ‘Timelessness’ in music leads it to capitulate to myth, to the eternal recurrence of the same, and in so doing, music forfeits its oppositional core, its role as protestation against myth.¹³⁰

Despite this preference for musical development over repetition, Adorno suggests that the reification of repetition found in Stravinsky’s approach might itself be the site of its truth: ‘Is not the taboo that Stravinsky’s static music imposes on life the manifestation of negative truth? Is not the regression whose formulae are invoked in his works the faithful and unadorned image of an emergent truth?’¹³¹ Adorno writes: ‘if the devil did not lie, he would cease to be himself,’¹³² suggesting that the ‘untruth’ of Stravinsky’s works might also be the site of a potential (negative, ‘lying’) truth. If, as Adorno argues in *Aesthetic Theory*, ‘the opposition of artworks to domination is mimesis of domination,’ then Stravinsky’s works which ‘bow to the order of time only to suggest obsessively that time has stopped,’ and ‘have abrogated time and achieved a state of pure being,’ bring into the listener’s consciousness their own damaged subjectivity,¹³³ evidenced by the self-annihilating desire to side with fate and myth. If Stravinsky’s work embodies

¹²⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, “Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait,” in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1998), 150.

¹²⁷ Adorno, “Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait,” 150-151.

¹²⁸ I am using the phrase ‘musical becoming’ to denote a musical unfolding and development that should not be confused with development in the strict sense of motivic or thematic development. This phrase also suggests the philosophical notion of becoming (*Werden*), a term saturated with temporality, which is to be contrasted with being (*Sein*), which suggests existence outside time.

¹²⁹ ‘The self-evident, that music is a temporal art, that it unfolds in time, means, in the dual sense, that time is not self-evident for it, that it has time as its problem. It must create temporal relationships among its constituent parts, justify their temporal relationship, synthesize them through time. Conversely, it itself must act upon time, not lose itself to it; must stem itself against the empty flood.’ Theodor W. Adorno, “On Some Relationships Between Music and Painting,” trans. Susan Gillespie, *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (Spring, 1995), 66. Adorno’s approach to time in this essay, first published in 1965, resonates with the 1961 essay “Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait.”

¹³⁰ ‘Ever since music has existed, it has always been a protest, however ineffectual, against myth, against a fate which was always the same, and even against death.’ Adorno, “Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait,” 151.

¹³¹ Adorno, “Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait,” 149.

¹³² Adorno, “Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait,” 174.

¹³³ ‘Subjectivity... assumes the character of the victim in Stravinsky.’ Adorno, “Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait,” 149.

‘an inhumanity which acts as the mirror of inhumanity,’¹³⁴ then perhaps this might be the precarious moment of mimetic power that contains the potential to unmask domination. The precarious position of the mimetic faculty in Adorno’s work, teetering between progressive and regressive potentialities, arguably sits in an analogous relation to repetition in music: ‘its complicity with untruth lies cheek by jowl with the truth itself.’¹³⁵

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has considered some of the key influences upon Adorno’s understanding of time and temporality, noting the importance of the ideas of Kant, Bergson and Benjamin to Adorno’s framework. As argued here, Adorno’s preference for musical ‘becoming’ over static ‘being’ stems from his rejection of metaphysics, and in particular, his rejection of the conception of history and time as overarching totalities.¹³⁶ As described here, Adorno’s method is strictly historical, and his approach foregrounds the importance of temporality in the production of progressive works of art, music, politics and philosophy. Adorno’s understanding of mimesis and repetition were then considered, and the argument was made that Adorno’s (later) work *does* allow for the possibility that musical repetition (particularly when considered in light of his formulation of mimesis) might be treated in a progressive manner.

Adorno’s championing of what I have called ‘musical becoming’ spanned his entire career, and has been widely interpreted as a preference for thematic development over repetition.¹³⁷ The two poles of (progressive, developmental, historical) ‘becoming’ and (regressive, static, ahistorical) ‘being’ are understood to serve as a musical analogy for the two possible modes of modern subjectivity. Whilst there is certainly evidence in

¹³⁴ Adorno, “Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait,” 149.

¹³⁵ Adorno, “Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait,” 174.

¹³⁶ Susan Buck-Morss writes that ‘Adorno rejected Hegel’s metaphysical conception of history as an overarching totality.’ However, she also notes that ‘Adorno’s language was often more idealist, more metaphysical, than his intent.’ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 50.

¹³⁷ ‘The corollary of Adorno’s position – that any music which does not display the developmental characteristic of ‘becoming’ is dangerous because, like the products of the culture industry, it serves to subjugate the freedom of the individual subject, to bring about the dissolution of individual identity – would now seem, from our present perspective, generally untenable.’ Jonathan Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 234. Similarly, ‘Adorno associates becoming chiefly with what he calls “motivic-thematic” composition; more specifically, from the roster of composers...Webern, Schoenberg, Mahler, Berg, and of course Beethoven.’ Janet Schmelfeldt, *In the Process of Becoming: Analytic and Philosophical Perspectives on Form in Early Nineteenth-Century Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 31.

Adorno's writing to substantiate such interpretations (most notably, his *Philosophy of New Music*), there are also notable works which point to musical becoming being something more than a demand for thematic development. The special place that (the athenatic) *Erwartung* holds in Adorno's thinking complicates the notion that musical becoming can be straightforwardly equated with thematic development.¹³⁸ As this chapter has shown, Adorno's notion of musical becoming should perhaps be more broadly conceived, to encompass the production of musical time in the broadest possible sense (rather than simply thematic development). It is towards Adorno's critique of works that 'fail' to enact such a musical becoming to which the next chapter turns.

It remains uncertain whether the total organisation of musical materials around a principle of maximal repetition might constitute the mimesis of domination, and so construct a path of (Adornian) progressive possibility. Repetition undoubtedly sits 'cheek by jowl' with its precise antithesis: the reproduction of domination, pure regression. Yet this possibility for utter failure, this precariousness and ambivalence, is, for Adorno, the very condition of mimesis and the source of its power. By bringing together Adorno's formulations of mimesis and repetition, this chapter has highlighted the extent to which repetition in music – in his mature works at least – contains the potential for critique.

¹³⁸ See chapter eight "'Loneliness as Style': Adorno's *Erwartung*."

Chapter Six

Killing Time II: Time and Temporality in Adorno's Music Criticism

*Being musical...is a becoming, something that has to form itself, something that is open in principle.*¹

6.0 Introduction

We all know what's wrong with Adorno.² He is a left-wing elitist, an ill-informed snob and a champagne-sipping pessimist; qualities that are somehow all captured by Georg Lukacs' famous barb that Adorno had 'taken up residence in the "Grand Hotel Abyss,"'³ which he described as 'a beautiful hotel, equipped with every comfort, on the edge of an abyss, of nothingness, of absurdity. And the daily contemplation of the abyss between excellent meals or artistic entertainments, can only heighten the enjoyment of the subtle comforts offered.'⁴ Adorno has served as a convenient scapegoat (particularly within cultural studies and media theory, but also within musicology) against which a more progressive engagement with popular culture is neatly juxtaposed. Even those who are broadly sympathetic to Adorno's wider project

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, "Adorno on Listening to New Music: an Excerpt from *The Faithful Répétiteur*," trans. Marc Hiatt, accessed July 7, 2015, <https://uebersetzen.wordpress.com/2008/04/23/adorno-on-listening-to-new-music-an-excerpt-from-the-faithful-repetiteur/>

² Lydia Goehr notes that 'there is already a large literature on "what's wrong with Adorno."' Lydia Goehr, *Elective Affinities: Musical Essays on the History of Aesthetic Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), xiii.

³ Martin Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), 18.

⁴ György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A historico-philosophical essay on the forms of great epic literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1971), 22. Lukács' criticism (levelled at other Frankfurt school theorists also) expressed his frustration at their preference for theory at the expense of praxis. For Lukács, the Frankfurt school theorists watched on as the crises of the twentieth century (Nazism, authoritarianism, consumer capitalism and so on) unfolded, unwilling to enter into political action. For a recent look at the veracity of Lukács' critique, and exploration of the lives of Adorno in relation to his colleagues and contemporaries, see Stuart Jeffries, *Grand Hotel Abyss: The Lives of the Frankfurt School* (London: Verso, 2016).

and Freudo-Marxist paradigm⁵ are keen to distance themselves from his analysis of jazz and popular music. Historian Eric Hobsbawm dismisses Adorno's writing on jazz as 'some of the stupidest pages ever written about jazz'.⁶ Mark Poster (also a historian) refers to Adorno's 'revulsion' for popular culture and 'disgust for the common.'⁷ Harry Cooper characterises Adorno's 'furtive, repeated *glances* [at jazz]' as 'the bad faith of the high-cultural fetishist.'⁸ Robert Mielke, in a particularly evocative moment, suggests that Adorno 'has risen up like the undead, feeding voraciously every night on the passive, blood-warm corpus of mass culture.'⁹ And Perry Meisel writes that 'Adorno's fury rises at the prospect that the difference between high and low may well collapse.'¹⁰ Adorno is painted as an unapologetic German mandarin, out of touch with the radical possibilities of popular culture, against which those who move more willingly with the times are able to define themselves.¹¹

Contrary to such characterisations as those above, Adorno does not seek to patrol the border between the popular and high arts, but rather understands the institutionalisation of this division to be a consequence of the economic conditions of modernity. For Adorno, collapsing the division between 'art' and 'pop' music in the name of a taste democracy robs both forms of their critical potential. Arguably, reading Adorno's work on popular music and jazz in isolation, without reference to his writing on art music, has skewed the reception of his work, allowing easy caricaturing and much misreading. This chapter considers three of Adorno's most notoriously 'negative' musical assessments (the essay "On Jazz" (1937), his critique of Stravinsky from the *Philosophy of New Music* (1949), and his monograph on Wagner (1952)), showing the extent to

⁵ See, for example, Deborah Cook, *The Culture Industry Revisited: Theodor Adorno on Mass Culture* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996).

⁶ Eric Hobsbawm quoted in Robert W. Witkin, "Why did Adorno 'Hate' Jazz?" *Sociological Theory* 18, no. 1 (2000): 145.

⁷ Mark Poster, cited in John Hutnyk, *Critique of Exotica: Music Politics and the Culture Industry* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 28.

⁸ Harry Cooper, "On Über Jazz: Replaying Adorno with the Grain," *October* 75 (Winter, 1996): 108.

⁹ Robert Mielke, *Roll Over Adorno: Critical Theory, Popular Culture, Audiovisual Media* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 195.

¹⁰ Perry Meisel, *The Myth of Popular Culture: From Dante to Dylan* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 49.

¹¹ Needless to say, not all accounts reduce Adorno's nuanced view of the divide between 'art' and 'popular' music to caricature. David Clarke considers the Postmodern erasure of the high/low distinction in light of Adorno's famous invocation of the 'torn halves' of the high and low spheres of culture, along with the more contemporary political philosophy of Slavoj Žižek, Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau. See David Clarke, "Elvis and Darmstadt, or: Twentieth-Century Music and the Politics of Cultural Pluralism," *Twentieth-Century Music* 4, no. 1 (2007): 3-45.

which they coalesce around a single critique of time. As argued here, each of these key texts reflects Adorno's argument that progressive works enact a musical Becoming, whilst regressive works generate pure presence, the musical equivalent of ahistorical Being. By focussing on how time and temporality are framed within each of Adorno's critiques, this chapter shows the centrality of time to Adorno's critical project, and illustrates the continuity of his thinking about time across genres, periods and styles.

Through the foregrounding of time and temporality, this chapter also aims to dispel the caricature of Adorno as a thinker primarily concerned with maintaining the privilege of his supposedly patrician tastes. This parody of Adorno as the imperious intellectual, too busy maintaining the borders of the canon to offer a proper critique of it, has often been used to discredit his critiques of popular forms. By tracing the category of time through Adorno's music criticism, from the hit song of the 1940s and jazz to Wagner and Stravinsky, this chapter shows that the treatment of time is perhaps *the* central category through which Adorno's judgements of 'progressive' and 'regressive' (themselves temporal terms) works takes place. By linking Adorno's critique of popular forms to his critiques of Stravinsky and Wagner, this chapter dispels the notion that Adorno is merely policing the boundary between popular and 'serious' art forms, arguing instead that Adorno offers a philosophically and musically coherent critique that he applies across the divide of high *and* low culture.

6.1 "On Jazz" and Popular Forms

Adorno's essay "On Jazz" (1937) was written in response to Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), with the two thinkers considering the radical potential of mass art forms (jazz and film respectively) from different points of view.¹² Adorno and Benjamin came to very different conclusions regarding the radical potential of mass forms: for Adorno, jazz (as an exemplar of mass forms more generally) inevitably tends towards conformism, whilst for Benjamin, it is autonomous art that is politically suspect, and in his eyes cinema holds significant political potential.¹³ It is from their correspondence over these essays

¹² Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 216-217.

¹³ In a letter to Walter Benjamin, Adorno writes that "[“On Jazz”] arrives at a complete verdict on jazz, in particular by revealing its ‘progressive’ elements (semblance of montage, collective work, primacy of reproduction over production) as façades of something that is in truth quite reactionary." Theodor W. Adorno, in Ernst Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, afterword by Frederic Jameson, trans. ed. Ronald

that Adorno's famous characterisation of the torn halves of 'great' and 'mass' art comes. From London, on 18 March 1936, Adorno wrote to Benjamin:

The reification of a great work of art is not just loss, any more than the reification of the cinema is all loss...the dialectic of the lowest has the same value as the dialectic of the highest...Both bear the stigma of capitalism, both contain elements of change (but never, of course, the middle-term between Schoenberg and the American film). Both are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which, however, they do not add up. It would be romantic to sacrifice one to the other.¹⁴

Ever the dialectician, Adorno understands autonomous and mass art to occupy two irreconcilable poles. Any attempt to bring the two poles together (in a fusion of high and low forms) would only result in false consciousness; the division of the arts reflects the truth of a divided society, and any attempt to close this gap will only conceal a truth that should be revealed. Adorno's method demands the intensification of tensions: only the intensification of the division between autonomous and mass forms (*not* their reconciliation) can unmask the social domination sedimented within them. Importantly, the outcome of both poles is alienation: on the one hand, the isolation and 'difficulty' of Modern art-music which resists its commodity status; on the other, the assimilated popular work, which accepts total submission to its commodity form. Interestingly, Adorno's suggestion that 'the dialectic of the lowest has the same value as the dialectic of the highest,' opens up the possibility for both autonomous *and* mass forms to have (at least theoretically) a critical potential.

6.1.i Contextualising "On Jazz"

Given Adorno's vast output of music criticism, it is curious that his essays on jazz have attracted so much critical attention. In all, Adorno wrote seven essays on Jazz: three in the 1930s, two in the 1940s and two in the early 1950s.¹⁵ Both musicologists and social scientists with an interest in popular culture have debated the merits of his undoubtedly

Taylor (London: Verso, 1980), 125. Benjamin's suspicion of autonomous art is revealed: "'*Fiat ars – pereat mundus*,' says Fascism...This is evidently the consummation of '*L'art pour l'art*.'" Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. and intro. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 242.

¹⁴ Adorno, quoted in *Aesthetics and Politics*, 123.

¹⁵ James Martin Harding, *Adorno and 'A Writing of the Ruins'* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 97.

unflattering portrait of the genre. Simply titled “On Jazz,” Adorno’s most famous essay on jazz sets out all the major points of his critique, points to which he would return in later publications.¹⁶ By situating Adorno’s essay “On Jazz” within its historical moment, and within the framework of Adorno’s music writing more broadly, this chapter counters some of the more obtuse criticism of the essay.

Criticism of “On Jazz” falls into two main categories. Sympathetic readers argue that Adorno’s criticism takes aim at commercial dance band music,¹⁷ exemplified by acts such as the Paul Whiteman Band. Though he may have been named the ‘King of Jazz’ in his day, Whiteman would certainly no longer be categorised alongside more serious jazz musicians of the time (such as Louis Armstrong) for his obvious commercialism and the questionable appropriation of ‘hot’ elements for the titillation of his white audiences. Positioning Adorno as ignorant of ‘authentic’ jazz exonerates him to some extent, and, as explained below, the only specific examples of jazz he gives suggest that his critique is directed towards the early dance-band jazz forms. On the other hand, unsympathetic readers regard Adorno as unapologetically highbrow and disdainful of all popular culture.¹⁸ Such critics tend to take issue with Adorno’s Euro-centrism, finding his critique elitist, at best, and, at worst, racist. The reading of “On Jazz” presented here is undoubtedly sympathetic, arguing that when the essay is considered in relation to the music it specifically targets, namely, commercial dance-band music, the main arguments stand. A number of other important issues raised in “On Jazz” (such as the manner in which Adorno frames race, and the irony of Adorno’s apparent accord with the Nazi ban on jazz) are not addressed here, in order to maintain a focus upon time and temporality.

Having lost the right to teach at a German university in September 1933,¹⁹ Adorno left Germany for England in 1934 hoping to obtain a teaching position, but had to make do with being accepted as an “advanced student” in philosophy.²⁰ In her analysis of the

¹⁶ See for example, “Perennial Fashion: Jazz” in Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms* trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), 119-132.

¹⁷ See for example, James Buhler, “Frankfurt School Blues: Rethinking Adorno’s Critique of Jazz,” in *Apparitions: New Perspectives on Adorno and Twentieth Century Music*, ed. Berthold Hoeckner (New York: Routledge, 2006), 103-30; Evelyn Wilcock, “Adorno, Jazz and Racism: ‘Über Jazz’ and the 1934-7 British Jazz Debate,” *Telos* 107 (1996): 63-91.

¹⁸ See for example, Cooper, “On Über Jazz”; Miklitsch, *Roll Over Adorno*; Meisel, *The Myth of Popular Culture*.

¹⁹ Müller-Doohm, *Adorno*, 177.

²⁰ Müller-Doohm, *Adorno*, 190.

British jazz debates of the 1930s, Evelyn Wilcock offers some convincing speculations as to the kinds of jazz Adorno might have heard during his time in England, where he wrote “On Jazz.”²¹ Wilcock shows that Adorno would have been exposed to a great deal of jazz, given its ubiquity in England at the time. Though we cannot be sure exactly what kind of jazz Adorno heard during this period, it was the soundtrack to the 1930s, and many of the American greats (including Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington) toured while he was in England.

Exactly what Adorno meant by the term ‘jazz’ is still somewhat contested, but he offers this definition:

The question of what is meant by jazz seems impossible to answer with a clear definition...To give some approximate idea, one could say that it refers to the realm of dance music, whether used directly for that purpose or slightly stylized, since the war, which stands apart from the previous kind though a decided, but still highly ill-defined, character of modernity.²²

One can see from this passage that, while accepting that jazz may have ‘slightly stylized’ other uses, for Adorno it is primarily a dance form. Throughout “On Jazz” one finds much evidence to support such a position. Adorno writes that the genre is controlled by its function, that is, dance,²³ and he makes mention of the popular dance styles of the tango and Valencia in his analysis. While noting that jazz experts may not consider such popular forms strictly jazz, Adorno explains that for the general public, jazz is essentially for dancing. While he acknowledges that ‘hot’ elements abound (syncopation, blue notes, technical virtuosity) in jazz, Adorno’s fundamental argument is that jazz remains regressive because none of these techniques actually disrupt the fundamental order of rhythm and tonality.

The only jazz standard that does receive mention in Adorno’s essay is “Tiger Rag” (1917), a rag composed by (Dominic) ‘Nicky’ LaRocca and originally recorded by his all-white group The Original Dixieland Jazz Band.²⁴ In the original “On Jazz” essay of

²¹ Wilcock, “Adorno, Jazz and Racism,” 63-91.

²² Theodor W. Adorno, “On Jazz,” in *Night Music*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Wieland Hoban (London: Seagull Books, 2009), 118-119.

²³ Adorno, “On Jazz,” 120.

²⁴ Roger D. Kinkle, *The Complete Encyclopaedia of Popular Music and Jazz 1900-1950*, Vol. 3: Biographies (New Rochelle New York: Arlington House Publishers, 1974), 1294. Although LaRocca is credited as the composer (and copyright holder) of *Tiger Rag*, ‘Jelly Roll Morton claimed he had

1936 Adorno mentions “Tiger Rag” once, and in the ‘Oxford Additions’ of 1937 he makes mention of it twice more. As “Tiger Rag” is the only specific jazz example Adorno employs, it is worth considering the piece a paradigmatic example of what he took jazz to be. Although one year before Adorno’s arrival in England, *Melody Maker* reported that at ‘an Oxbridge summer ball in 1933, Billy Cotton’s Band was requested to repeat “Tiger Rag” over thirty consecutive times,’²⁵ so it is indeed likely that it was this kind of jazz to which Adorno’s essay is addressed.

From Example 1 below, the reader can immediately see the conventional harmony and rhythmic uniformity of the piece, confirming Adorno’s interpretation that ‘hot’ elements fail to disrupt the order of rhythm and tonality. “Tiger Rag” is made up of (mostly) 16-bar sections (such as shown in the example), often an 8 bar statement followed by a repetition of that statement with some minor alterations. Aside from a restatement of the original theme in the second section (from bar 25-31), each of the 16-bar sections brings in new material. The rhythm section maintains the dominance of the first and third beats throughout, and the harmony stays within the comfortable use of I, IV and V chords (with added 7ths), flavored with the occasional applied dominant, and two changes of key (“Tiger Rag” begins in B ♭ major, moves to E ♭ major at bar 33 and then A ♭ major at bar 65). In short, the use of rhythm and harmony in “Tiger Rag” is appropriately described by Adorno, it is essentially conservative.

transformed *Tiger Rag* from an old French quadrille.’ See Jack Stewart, “Tiger Rag,” notes to *Tiger Rag*, full score as recorded by The Original Dixieland Jazz Band, 1918 (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution and Jazz at Lincoln Center, 1999), iv.

²⁵ Evelyn Wilcock, “Adorno, Jazz and Racism,” 64.

Ex. 1: Dominic J. LaRocca, “Tiger Rag,” bars 1-16.²⁶

CONDUCTOR
EJE9904C

Essential Jazz Editions Set #1:
New Orleans Jazz, 1918 - 1927

As recorded by The Original Dixieland Jazz Band

TIGER RAG
(Hold That Tiger)

Composed by D.J. LaRocca
Transcribed by WYCLIFFE A. GORDON
Edited by CHUCK ISRAELS

$\text{♩} = 126$

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

* Dynamic markings do not appear in the score and ppp as the limitations of early technology made it impossible for the musician to discern dynamic values from the recording. The pianissimo markings in this score are merely suggestions for the pianist.

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Adorno’s characterisation of the division of the work process in jazz also lends weight to the assertion that his critique was aimed primarily at commercial dance-band music. Adorno is keen to point out that jazz’s dependence on not just composers, but also arrangers, orchestrators and producers, is not a sign of systematic collectivity, but rather represents a bureaucratisation of the creative process.²⁷ This level of professional *commercial* input is not what is typically associated with ‘authentic’ jazz artists such as Louis Armstrong and his Hot Five and Hot Seven bands, but rather the larger (and predominantly white) commercial dance band groups of Paul Whiteman or later Glenn Miller.

²⁶ Dominic J. LaRocca, *Tiger Rag*, full score as recorded by The Original Dixieland Jazz Band, 1918 (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution and Jazz at Lincoln Center, 1999), 1.

²⁷ Adorno, “On Jazz,” 140-142.

Miles Davis' famous four-word history of jazz, 'Louis Armstrong; Charlie Parker' gives pause to think about how so much of jazz's progressive stance was still yet to come at the time of Adorno's jazz essay in 1936. In particular it is worth noting that Parker and his contemporaries were some of the first to unflinchingly address jazz's history of minstrelsy and the degradation of African-Americans for entertainment. One could even suggest that Parker and bebop operate in dialectical relationship with Armstrong and his earlier diatonic jazz. The fact that Adorno's understanding of jazz remained static and unchanging throughout his lifetime is less defensible than his original characterisation of the genre in "On Jazz." To be sure, jazz moved on; Adorno didn't.

6.1.ii Jazz, Time, Repetition

The two musical elements that Adorno identifies as essential to the 'modern' character of jazz (aspects which also lend themselves to supporting its avant-garde credentials) are syncopation and the use of vibrato: 'Musically speaking, that "modernity" [of the jazz idiom] essentially revolves around sonority and rhythm, without breaking fundamentally with the harmonic-melodic convention of traditional dance music.'²⁸ Adorno acknowledges the extraordinary rhythmic complexity of much jazz (even in early dance-band forms), and is willing to credit the virtuosity of the form. Despite undoubted complexity, however, Adorno insists that the syncopated rhythms never actually challenge the primacy of the steady pulse, and serve only to ornament (rather than disrupt) the beating of time: 'With all these syncopations, however, which sometimes appear extremely complicated in virtuoso pieces, the basic metre is retained with the utmost rigor; it is always marked by the bass drum.'²⁹ For Adorno, the subordination of all elements to the beat constrains dance band jazz to a profound rigidity, arresting the entire idiom. Time is central to Adorno's conception of jazz as an strict and inflexible form, with the syncopations and often hair-raising tempos unable to unshackle jazz from its military (march) origins.³⁰ For Adorno, jazz is defined by

²⁸ Adorno, "On Jazz," 119.

²⁹ Adorno, "On Jazz," 119-120.

³⁰ 'The effectiveness of the march principle in jazz is evident. The basic rhythm of the continuo instruments and bass drum consistently coincides with that of the march, and jazz could – since the six-eighths – very easily change into the march. The connection is based in history: one of the bass wind instruments used in jazz is the sousaphone, named after a composer of marches. And it is not only the saxophone that came from military bands; the entire division of the jazz orchestra into melody, bass, "obligato" accompanying and mere filler instruments is identical to that of marching bands.' Adorno, "On Jazz," 148-149.

‘the rigid, almost timeless immobility within movement.’³¹ Stasis in jazz might be contrasted with stasis in Wagner, the former providing a busy, hypnotic effect within small forms (stasis within movement), whilst the latter achieves stasis over large-scale forms (stasis within stasis). Both jazz and Wagner, for Adorno, are characterised by the suspension of musical time, and thus the production of a regressive temporality.

“On Jazz” goes on to compare jazz to (musical) Impressionism, noting its influence upon jazz harmony and melody in particular.³² This comparison unfolds explicitly on the plane of temporality, with repetition in the place of development occupying a very similar place as it does in the Wagner critique: ‘The dissolution into tiny motivic formulas that do not develop dynamically, but are rather repeated statically, only being altered rhythmically and apparently circling some immovable centre, is specifically impressionistic.’³³ Debussy’s Impressionism is spared the characterisation of pure regression, as Adorno hears in Impressionistic repetition a ‘formal sense’ through which ‘melodic commas form spaces of time and colour from within themselves, according to the constructive command of subjectivity.’³⁴ In other words, repetition in Impressionism has a productive capacity, the ability to produce a musical allegory of unrestrained subjectivity. In jazz, however, this function is reversed, with repetition serving a purely destructive function, with standardisation and rhythmic rigidity performing a musical allegory of alienation: ‘in jazz, however, they [repeated melodic fragments and temporal surfaces] – like the false metres of hot music – are subsumed under the metric-harmonic schema of the ‘normal,’ cadential eight-bar period.’³⁵ Rather than achieving new forms and thus allegories for new subjectivities (as, for Adorno, Impressionism can), Adorno contends that jazz achieves the opposite, with the incorporation of potentially oppositional forces into standardized forms (in which syncopation serves only to confirm the dominance of the beat, and ‘blue’ notes serving only to confirm the primacy of traditional functional harmony) performing a musical allegory of the self-effacement of the subject, the willing submission to domination.

³¹ Adorno, “On Jazz,” 135.

³² ‘The impressionist influence is most obvious in the harmony. Ninth chords, added sixths and other mixtures such as the stereotypical ‘blue chord,’ parallel chord movements and whatever vertical attractions jazz has to offer, are all borrowed from Debussy. But the treatment of melodies, especially in the more consistent pieces, is based on impressionist models.’ Adorno, “On Jazz,” *Night Music*, 146.

³³ Adorno, “On Jazz,” *Night Music*, 146.

³⁴ Adorno, “On Jazz,” *Night Music*, 146.

³⁵ Adorno, “On Jazz,” *Night Music*, 146.

Adorno's critique of other popular forms elaborates upon much the same argument, suggesting that in popular musical forms 'complications have no consequences.'³⁶ Adorno's study *On Popular Music* (written with the assistance of George Simpson and published in 1941), suggests that 'regardless of what aberrations occur, the hit will lead back to the same familiar experience, and nothing fundamentally novel will be introduced.'³⁷ Whilst popular forms undoubtedly exhibit technical innovation, Adorno contends that innovation is always reconciled, with the fleeting 'complication' (such as syncopation, 'blue' note, wide intervals, unexpected harmonies) unable to challenge the dominance of the beat, or the supremacy of conventional harmony. In popular forms structural standardisation is preordained, with complexity or technical innovation only ornamenting (and thus confirming) the dominance of the whole over its parts.

6.2 Temporality in *Philosophy of New Music*

Adorno considered the pair of essays on Schoenberg and Stravinsky contained in *Philosophy of New Music* to be an 'extended appendix' to his book, written with Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947).³⁸ For musicologists such as Jonathan Cross, *Philosophy of New Music* stands as the 'fullest expression' of 'the inter-war disputes between the followers of (serial) Schoenberg and the admirers of (neoclassical) Stravinsky.'³⁹ For Adorno, Schoenberg and Stravinsky formed the two poles of progress and reaction within musical Modernism: Schoenberg's method of 'developing variation' provided a musical iteration of the subject's pursuit for freedom, whilst Stravinsky's non-developmental primitivism and neoclassicism sounded the subject's celebration of their own domination.⁴⁰ Whilst many have taken *Philosophy of New Music* to be a straightforward defense of Schoenberg and admonishment of Stravinsky, the critique is rather more complex and nuanced.⁴¹ Nonetheless, *Philosophy of New*

³⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, "On Popular Music," in *Current of Music*, ed. and intro. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 413.

³⁷ Adorno, "On Popular Music," 413.

³⁸ Richard Leppert, "Commentary," in Theodor W. Adorno, in *Essays on Music*, selected, with introduction, commentary and notes Richard Leppert, new trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 551 note 87.

Adorno calls the *Philosophy of New Music* a 'detailed excursus to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.' Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. ed. and intro. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 5.

³⁹ Jonathan Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 227.

⁴⁰ Adorno's critique of Stravinsky's *Rite* is also explored in chapter seven, see 7.3.iii Progress and Primitivism.

⁴¹ Max Paddison writes that 'A commonly held view has been that Adorno simply sanctified Schoenberg and demonized Stravinsky. This is certainly a crude simplification.' Max Paddison, "Stravinsky as the

Music stands as a polemic in favor of development over non-development, of musical becoming over static being.

It is interesting to note that, unlike the Wagner critique (in which Bergson is not specifically mentioned), Adorno's critique of Stravinsky's construction of time unfolds on explicitly Bergsonian terms: 'Stravinsky and his school prepare the end of Bergsonianism in music. They play *temps espace* against *temps dur  e*.'⁴² Adorno cites *The Soldier's Tale* (1918) as an example of this approach, in which repetition serves to suspend duration in favor of a spatialised (suspended, static) time. Instead of *temps espace* and *temps dur  e* forming a dialectical pair, they are 'played off,' with the *temps espace* emerging the victor: 'the spasmodic, piercingly present repetitions are to be interpreted as a means for extirpating memory – the safeguarded past – from the suspension of duration.'⁴³ The severing of (the soldier's) memory results in a perpetual present, in which a primordial being takes the place of subjectivity.⁴⁴ The desire to 'live for the moment' (perhaps *the* social imperative of the late twentieth century and beyond, the command comes from all directions – from advertising to psychology) conceals a contradiction; in order to be realized the self must be forgotten, presence demands erasure.⁴⁵

Adorno extends this analysis beyond subjectivity: 'this suspension of musical time consciousness corresponds to the entire history of the bourgeoisie, which, no longer seeing anything in front of itself, denies the process of history itself and seeks its own utopia through the revocation of time in space.'⁴⁶ The production of pure presence demands from the subject a regressive gesture of self-effacement (Adorno identifies on this the characters of the soldier in *The Soldier's Tale* and the virgin sacrifice in *The Rite of Spring*): however, it is important to note that this is not achieved in Stravinsky's work only on the level of narrative. The self-effacement of the subject is achieved musically through repetition, which, for Adorno, has a pacifying, even catatonic, effect.⁴⁷ This *appearance* of movement, which *actually* fails to move the music ahead,

Devil: Adorno's Three Critiques," in *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, ed. Jonathan Cross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 193.

⁴² Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 142.

⁴³ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 191, n. 44.

⁴⁴ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 191, n. 44.

⁴⁵ Adorno writes, 'The coherence of experience in memory is the mortal enemy of that self-preservation that is earned at the price of self-effacement.' Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 191, n. 44.

⁴⁶ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 140.

⁴⁷ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 132.

is for Adorno the musical manifestation of both subjective alienation and the denial of historical consciousness. Repetition without development stands in for the subject's denial of memory, and the social denial of historical consciousness. The spatialisation of time in Stravinsky is for Adorno 'evidence of a pseudomorphism of music on painting'⁴⁸ (Adorno's language is echoed in his Wagner critique – the 'frozen' gestures⁴⁹ and 'miniature pictures'⁵⁰ of Wagnerian leitmotif), which denies the temporal unfolding that is the basis of music's distinction from the plastic arts.⁵¹ Although Adorno's characterisation of the spatialisation of time as a denial of history unfolds through specifically Bergsonian terms,⁵² his musical-utopianism nonetheless persists; not only does the spatialisation of time represent a denial of history, but it forecloses the oppositional force of music. When musical time is spatialised, music's capacity for positing a temporality outside empirical time is denied altogether.⁵³

Repetition remains a compromised technique throughout *Philosophy of Modern Music*, and Adorno's chapter on Schoenberg notes that the avoidance of repetition was a motivating force in the development of the twelve-tone technique. In contrast, Adorno casts Stravinsky 'with some exaggeration,' as 'a Wagner who has come fully into his own, who has intentionally surrendered to the repetition compulsion.'⁵⁴ Adorno hears in Stravinsky's motoric repetitions a 'catatonic condition,'⁵⁵ an 'aimless obedience to blind rules,'⁵⁶ apparently condemning non-developmental repetition as a necessarily regressive musical device. Thus, Stravinsky's use of repetition achieves not only the negation of historical consciousness, but denies the musical materials the capacity for

⁴⁸ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 141.

⁴⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 2005), 36

⁵⁰ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 35

⁵¹ 'All painting, even the most abstract, has its pathos in what emphatically is; all music presupposes a becoming, and it is precisely from this, on the basis of the fiction of its mere existence, that Stravinsky's music would like to withdraw.' Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 141.

⁵² See chapter five, 5.2 Bergson and Duration.

⁵³ Adorno's consideration of Stravinsky's *Rite* as a concert piece (that is, divorced from its original role as ballet music) is now potentially regarded as outmoded. By considering the music in isolation from the dance one inevitably dissociates musical features from physical gestures. The extent to which this negates Adorno's critique is open to argument, because the possibility that the choreography operates 'against' the music in *The Rite* does not necessarily negate Adorno's critique. One could argue (after Adorno) that the music draws the listener into the identification with power (the community), whilst the dance encourages the audience to consider the plight of the victim (the Chosen One who is to be sacrificed). A thorough exploration of this tension is beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁵⁴ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 140.

⁵⁵ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 132.

⁵⁶ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 133.

technical development (whilst arresting the listener in a state of passivity). In Schoenberg's music Adorno hears a self-reflexive un-concealing, in which the technical domination over the musical materials is exposed and made the very object of musical inquiry.⁵⁷ In Stravinsky's work, Adorno hears only obfuscation; shrouded in a cloak of primordial origins, domination slips by unobserved. Repetition plays a fundamental role in this understanding of Schoenberg as a model for self-reflexivity in music, against whom Stravinsky is contrasted as the musical manifestation of false consciousness. Arguably, however, it might not be the use of repetition per se that Adorno finds regressive in Stravinsky's compositions, but a failure to treat this exploration of musical materials dialectically. After all, if the self-reflexive exploration of non-repetition can achieve adequate musical outcomes (as Adorno argues, is the case with Schoenberg's compositions), then perhaps a self-reflexive and properly dialectical exploration of repetition might satisfy a similar Adornian scrutiny.

Adorno notes that Stravinsky's method in the *Rite* proceeds from the assembly of cell-like 'particles,' which cannot be considered atonal because they always exhibit some reference to a predetermined scale.⁵⁸ Cells are then repeated or displaced through rhythmic variation (through the reordering of accents and note lengths),⁵⁹ and for Adorno, this 'motivic model give[s] the effect of resulting from a throw of the dice. Accordingly, the melodic cells stand under a spell: They are not condensed but rather impeded in their development.'⁶⁰ Stravinsky's method of musical construction via the repetition and manipulation of musical fragments has been acknowledged (to varying ends) by many important musicologists.⁶¹ Thus, aspects of Adorno's critique have

⁵⁷ This theme is explored in greater detail in chapter eight, "'Loneliness as Style': Adorno's *Erwartung*."

⁵⁸ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 114. Adorno relates Stravinsky's harmony to the polytonality of the French impressionists, and his motivic method to the 'trove of Russian music.' Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 114.

⁵⁹ 'The elementary case of rhythmical variation, in which repetition consists, is that the motif be so constructed that if it suddenly reappears without a pause after its conclusion, the accents fall on other notes... Often, as with the accents, long and short beats are also interchanged.' Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 114.

⁶⁰ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 114.

⁶¹ See for example, Pierre Boulez "Stravinsky Remains," in *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, collected by Paule Thévenin, trans. Stephen Walsh, intro. Robert Piencikowski (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 55-110; Pieter C. van den Toorn and John McGinness, *Stravinsky and the Russian Period: Sound and Legacy of a Musical Idiom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); and Jonathan Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy*.

arguably influenced more recent scholars, including authors who explicitly reject Adorno's conclusions.

Adorno describes the “Cercels Mystérieux des Adolescents” (the “Mystic Circle of the Young Girls”) from the *Rite* as an ‘historicizing evocation of a primordial age,’ projecting an ‘archaism that constitutes the bedrock of the individual...[that] obtrudes undistinguished in the decomposition of the individual.’⁶² For Adorno, this founding of community upon an ‘authentic’ archaic past is proto-fascist: it erases the individual, posits a false origin, and facilitates a submission to a regressive historicism. In the dance the “Mystic Circle of the Young Girls,” the sacrificial victim is chosen; the circular repetitions of the dance, and the musical repetition (and displacement) of the short melodic line and bass ostinato, evoke the myth of eternal return. The melody, bound by a perfect fifth (B-F#) shows the reorganisation and rhythmic displacement of the melodic fragments, which are ornamented with neighbor notes (Example 2). The bass ostinato shares similar pitch-class content to the melody above it, but the ostinato proceeds unchanging whereas the melody is displaced (so the two are not always in alignment). Analysis of this dance (by authors such as Pierre Boulez and Gretchen G. Horlacher)⁶³ reveals a construction that does indeed emerge out of repetition, reiteration and reorganisation (rather than development), an assembly of fragments rather than the unfolding of musical material.

⁶² Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 120-121.

⁶³ See Boulez “Stravinsky Remains,” 58-60; Gretchen G. Horlacher, *Building Blocks: Repetition and Continuity in the Music of Stravinsky* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 40-46. Boulez notes the flexibility generated by Stravinsky’s detached rhythmic cells, whilst Horlacher notes the prevalence of repetition and what she describes as ‘ordered succession,’ an analytic method which demonstrates ‘how Stravinsky manipulates repetition by showing both those things preserved in a series of iterations and those things that change.’ Horlacher, *Building Blocks*, viii.

Ex. 2: Igor Stravinsky, “Mystic Circle of the Young Girls,” *The Rite of Spring*, figures 91-94.⁶⁴

MYSTIC CIRCLES OF THE YOUNG GIRLS
CERCLES MYSTÉRIEUX DES ADOLESCENTES

91 Andante con moto $\text{♩} = 60$ 92

Cl. bas. in Sib

Cor. in Fa

Tr. in Do

Melody assembled through repetition and expansion of melodic fragments

91 Andante con moto $\text{♩} = 60$ 92

molto cant.

Decorated melodic fragment via neighbour tones, note rhythmic displacement

6 Vle. Solo

molto cant.

molto cant. ma non *f*

tenuto sempre

2 Vc. Soli

Bass ostinato

gli altri Vc. div.

pizz.

tenuto sempre

2 Cb. Soli

senza sord. tenuto sempre

senza sord.

gli altri Cb.

⁶⁴ Igor Stravinsky, *The Rite of Spring: Picture from Pagan Russia* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1967), 84-85.

93 Più mosso $\text{♩} = 80$ 50

Fl. alto

Cl. in Sib 1 2

Cor. in Fa 2 3 4

Tr. in Do 1 2 3

93 Più mosso $\text{♩} = 80$

pizz. senza sord. e flautando

pizz. senza sord. e flaut.

arco

Tutti div.

2 Vc. Soli

gli altri Vc. div.

2 Cb. Soli

94

Fl. alto

Cl. in Sib 1 2

94

con sord.

con sord.

con sord.

senza sord. flautando div.

2 Sole Vle.

le altre

div. flautando al segno

(serve)

B. & H. 19441

6.3 In Search of Wagner

Adorno's short monograph, *In Search of Wagner* (1952),⁶⁵ stands poised between critique and rescue. Detailing the radicalism of Wagner's oeuvre (his many musical and dramatic innovations), *In Search of Wagner* also considers Wagner's anti-Semitism and the reactionary force of his artworks. For Adorno, Wagner's works exhibit a dual character; for all their technical innovation, Wagner's music dramas evoke both an idealistic impulse towards liberation *and* a fatalistic submission to authority. For Adorno, Wagner's modernity is located precisely within this dual character of his works, which express something of the radical undecidability, if not Janus-face, of the legacy of the Enlightenment.⁶⁶ Gesturing towards reason's promise of self-determination whilst simultaneously tending towards phantasmagoria (in which the object appears as its own origin), Adorno articulates a view of Wagner's works as the operatic embodiment of the most fundamental paradoxes of aesthetic modernity. For Adorno, it is this dual quality of Wagner's works which lent them so readily to fascist appropriation. This section considers *In Search of Wagner* with a focus on temporality, exploring Adorno's argument that Wagner's manifestation of musical time exerts a regressive force. This centrifugal pull between progress and reaction, freedom and submission, past and future, marks the experience of modernity, and it is in this paradoxical 'untruth' that Adorno finds an expression of truth in Wagner's works.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 2005).

⁶⁶ Immanuel Kant's response to the question 'What is Enlightenment?' famously began: 'Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity...*Sapere Aude!* [Latin translated: Dare to know, from Horace]. Have courage to use your own mind! Thus is the motto of Enlightenment.' For Kant, the Enlightenment and rational thinking promised liberation from authority (and authoritarian social structures). Immanuel Kant, *Answering the Question: "What is Enlightenment?"* new English trans. David Ferrer, accessed May 26 2015, <https://archive.org/details/AnswerTheQuestionWhatIsEnlightenment>. Adorno and Horkheimer challenge the positivism of Kant's account, arguing that the Enlightenment (through rational thought and action) produced the systemic violence of the twentieth century. 'Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity. Enlightenment's program was the disenchantment of the world. It wanted to dispel myths, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge.' Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997), 1.

⁶⁷ Although written during 1937 and early 1938 while Adorno was in exile in London and New York, *In Search of Wagner* was not published until shortly after his return to Germany in 1952. John Deathridge has noted that the English translation of the book's German title (*Versuch über Wagner*) might be cause for some confusion, reminding the reader that 'the word *Versuch* [lit. 'attempt' or 'try'] refers to the book's method and not to its author's modesty.' John Deathridge, "Review of Theodor Adorno's *In Search of Wagner*," trans. Rodney Livingstone, *Nineteenth-Century Music* 7, no. 1 (Summer 1983): 81. Deathridge suggests that '*Essay on Wagner*' might be a more apt title in English. Importantly, Deathridge also affirms the influence of Adorno's book on the post-war performance and reception of Wagner's

In Search of Wagner considers both the man and the music, exploring how the musical characteristics of Wagner's operas (his approach to time, his use of motif, the place of dissonance, orchestration and so on) connect with the social character of Wagner himself (his anti-Semitism, his repression of pleasure and sexuality, his nihilism). Fundamental to Adorno's approach is his understanding that social and historical conditions are sedimented within all art, and so political and social formations are expressed through music, even when the composer is not consciously attempting this. Importantly, Adorno does not take Wagner's personality or politics to be a matter of private eccentricity. For Adorno, personality is always taken to be a site for the manifestation of social tendencies. Wagner's politics, his authoritarianism and his nihilism, are not excised from Adorno's music analysis, but rather understood as more general social tendencies that find particular expression within his work. Adorno's approach offers some compelling explanations as to *why* Wagner's work was so readily appropriated by the Third Reich, whilst also identifying the sites of genuine radicalism and musical innovation within the composer's opus. Whilst Adorno's views on Wagner softened somewhat in later essays,⁶⁸ the essential elements of his critique are all contained within *In Search of Wagner*.

6.3.i History and Stasis

If Wagner does not dominate time like Beethoven, neither does he fulfill it like Schubert. He revokes it. The eternity of Wagnerian music, like that of the poem of the *Ring*, is one which proclaims that nothing has happened; it is a state of immutability that refutes all history by confronting it with the silence of nature...the amorphous primal condition.⁶⁹

As detailed in the previous chapter, Adorno takes the experience of time to be profoundly political, and the political consequences of our relationship with the past is a theme that permeates Adorno's entire opus. Forged against the thinking of philosophers such as Husserl, Bergson and Heidegger, Adorno's philosophy and music criticism can be read together as part of a broad critique of history and historical

works, noting that *In Search of Wagner* 'probably did more than any other publication to clear the Wagnerian air in Germany after the Second World War.' Deathridge, "Review of Theodor Adorno's *In Search of Wagner*," 81 and 84.

⁶⁸ See for example, Theodor W. Adorno, "Wagner's Relevance for Today," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 584–602.

⁶⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 30.

experience. Adorno's thinking (be it philosophical or musical) repeatedly returns to the possibility for affirming historical becoming [*Werden*] over metaphysical being [*Sein*].

For Adorno, music rightly embodies an historical process, in which (historically determined) problems of form are 'worked out' through an engagement with the (historically determined) musical materials available at the time. By Adorno's measure, adequate works engender a properly historical relationship to the past (a consciousness of the subject's own 'sedimentation' within contingent social and historical forces), creating a musically coded experience of rootedness within a historical process. In affirming the contingency and historical specificity of human social relations, successful works of art promise the possibility of new modes of experience and thus new modes of social organisation. Music (indeed, any art) that treats the present as pure presence, an origin in itself, necessarily engenders a mystification of history, perpetuating the illusion of the necessity and inevitability of any given social conditions. The importance of historical consciousness (which can find expression through different social practices including politics and art) lies, for Adorno, in the confirmation of contingency that a materialist approach to history confers on all human social relations.

Adorno takes the creation of musical time (and indeed the manifestation of all musical materials) to be engaged in either the illumination or obfuscation of historical social processes. With musical forms no longer accepted as self-evident, Modern composers are charged with creating forms specific to the particular demands of the musical materials they wish to work through. Whilst Wagner's rejection of traditional musical structures (which had provided a ready-made source of dynamism and friction, as composers sought contrast within a pre-ordained musical structure) certainly allowed the composer an unprecedented freedom, Adorno finds Wagner unable to fulfill this freedom, as a lack of temporal differentiation within his works leads to an encounter with the social world as pure nature. For Adorno, Wagner's works amount to 'a phantasmagoric reflection of a phantasmagoric world,'⁷⁰ in which the absence of historical time forecloses human agency altogether. The fundamental charge of

⁷⁰ Stephen Decatur Smith, "Awakening Dead Time: Adorno on Husserl, Benjamin, and the Temporality of Music," *Contemporary Music Review* 31, no. 5-6 (Oct-Dec 2012): 406.

Adorno's critique is that Wagner's works perpetuate the illusion that what *is* is inevitable.

Adorno identifies Wagner's construction of temporal stasis as central to the questionable politics of his works, and Adorno describes Wagner's revocation of time on a number of levels. Through the notion of beating time (which Adorno understands as fundamental to both Wagner's music and his position as conductor), Adorno argues that Wagner subjects his musical materials to arbitrary and abstract control, reifying time instead of deriving immanent order from the musical materials themselves.⁷¹ Adorno notes Wagner's preference for regular and unchanging time-signatures, suggesting that time operates in his music as an 'abstract framework,' an emptiness to be 'filled in,'⁷² rather than emerging immanently from the organisation of the musical material. Adorno writes that 'The whole of *Lohengrin*, with the exception of a tiny part, is written in regular time, as if the evenness of the beat allowed entire scenes to be grasped at a glance.'⁷³ This apparent apprehension of the whole in a single moment, the apparent simultaneous experience of the whole, is what Adorno calls the spatialisation of time.⁷⁴ This spatialisation of temporality denies the unfolding experience of the whole through its parts, which, in Adornian terms, is an expression of the dialectic of universal and particular. The polarisation of universal-particular, which is expressed in art through the tension between the whole and its parts, is a central feature of a self-reflexive modernity. The spatialisation of time presents the whole and its parts in an illusory state of reconciliation (rather than revealing the actual tension between whole and parts, universal and particular). Similarly, Adorno hears in the stasis of Wagner's harmonic progressions the production of a 'mirage of eternity'.⁷⁵ 'The absence of any real harmonic progression becomes the phantasmagorical emblem for time standing still...The standing-still of time and the complete occultation of nature by means of phantasmagoria are thus brought together in the memory of a pristine age.'⁷⁶ History stands negated in favor of eternal nature. Adorno hears repetition and reiteration (rather

⁷¹ 'Wagner's use of the beat to control time is abstract; it is no more than the idea of time as something articulated by the beat and then projected onto larger periods....the measure to which he subjects time does not derive from the musical content, but from the reified order of time itself.' Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 23.

⁷² Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 22.

⁷³ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 23.

⁷⁴ Curiously, Adorno cites Alfred Lorenz's study of form in Wagner's *Ring* (not Henri Bergson) in his discussion of the spatialisation of time. I think we can assume Bergson's influence.

⁷⁵ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 76.

⁷⁶ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 76.

than development) as part of a process of evading musical and historical time: 'Every repetition of gestures evades the necessity to create musical time; they [themes] merely order themselves, as it were, in time and detach themselves from the temporal continuum that they seemingly constituted.'⁷⁷ This continual reiteration of musical gestures and motives denigrates the mimetic impulse into mere imitation,⁷⁸ with Wagner's leitmotifs (and characters) ultimately assuming the narcissistic stance of admiring themselves in the mirror.⁷⁹

In Search of Wagner also traces the ways in which other musical elements contribute to an overarching sense of stasis. Wagner's use of leitmotif produces 'frozen' gestures and 'miniature pictures,'⁸⁰ which arrests the movement and temporal flow of his music.⁸¹ The promise of 'unending melody,' of 'unfolding in a genuinely free and unconstrained manner,' is thwarted by Wagner's stringing together of 'small-scale models in substitution for true development.'⁸² Max Paddison has noted the paradox between the apparently unending development of Wagner's leitmotifs and Adorno's characterisation of these procedures as 'frozen' or static: 'Adorno argues...that the device of the leitmotif is, of its very nature resistant to development, in spite of the overall impression given by Wagner's music, which is that of perpetual development.'⁸³ Adorno writes: 'Beneath the thin veil of continuous progress Wagner has fragmented the composition into allegorical leitmotifs juxtaposed like discrete objects.'⁸⁴ For Adorno, even over the course of the *Ring* there is only the *appearance* of development: Wagner's leitmotifs remain juxtaposed symbols whose developmental possibilities are never fully explored. Thus, for Adorno, the potential of Wagner's musical materials remains unfulfilled.

Though at times achieving 'hitherto unprecedented melodic flexibility,'⁸⁵ Adorno is also dissatisfied with Wagner's reliance on conventional voicing of the melody in the

⁷⁷ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 27.

⁷⁸ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 27.

⁷⁹ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 28.

⁸⁰ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 35-36.

⁸¹ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 35.

⁸² Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 47.

⁸³ Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 246.

⁸⁴ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 37. Max Paddison translates the passage as 'Beneath the thin shell of continuous movement [*Verlauf*] Wagner has fragmented the composition into allegorical leitmotifs strung together like discreet objects.' See Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, 246.

⁸⁵ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 45.

top voices,⁸⁶ and his frustrated attempts at polyphony.⁸⁷ Wagner's use of colour and orchestration, which Adorno conceded was 'properly speaking, his [Wagner's] own discovery,'⁸⁸ is described as 'essentially intimate...magical and familiar at the same time.'⁸⁹ For Adorno, though, even Wagner's truly revolutionary approach to orchestration is compromised by the concealment of its own origins, the production of 'thing-like' sounds (like that of the organ), in which 'the final sound gives no clue as to how it was created.'⁹⁰ This theme of obscured origins, of sounds emerging from unidentifiable combinations of instruments, of melody emerging and then submerging into the texture, of dissonance emerging out of and then folding back into consonance, permeates Adorno's critique.

The basis for Wagner's 'endless' melodies is the weaving or interlocking of leitmotifs.⁹¹ This use of linking, reordering and succession (rather than development) is central to Adorno's characterisation of Wagner's music as static. The prelude to the first of Wagner's music dramas (which can be contrasted with his earlier romantic operas)⁹² provides a ready example (Example 3). In the prelude to *Das Rheingold*, circular interlocking motives evoke the cyclic workings of nature, an allegory of emergence from primordial beginnings. Thomas S. Grey describes the prelude as 'an enactment of musical origins...a kind of endless melody...The music projects endlessness in an obvious sense, as the infinite flux of elemental natural forces, but paradoxically it relies on a rigorously "quadratic" framework of two-, four-, and eight-measure groupings of its tonic-key figurations to achieve this effect.'⁹³ The apparent

⁸⁶ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 45.

⁸⁷ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 46.

⁸⁸ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 60.

⁸⁹ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 61.

⁹⁰ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 63.

⁹¹ William Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1989), 276-305. Carl Dahlhaus describes the 'art of transition' as 'the technique of conjoining diverging motifs without a discernible break and of making it seem that they emanate from one another with compelling logic...the constituent elements of unending melody...often stand unrelated side by side.' Carl Dahlhaus, "The Music," in *Wagner Handbook*, eds. Ulrich Müller and Peter Wapnewski, trans. John Deathridge (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 307-308.

⁹² Rothstein describes *Lohengrin* as 'the last of Wagner's self-designated "romantic operas."' Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music*, 262.

⁹³ Grey goes on, 'after this point, *Rheingold* offers any number of examples of the evolution of Wagner's "musical prose," and thus of what Dahlhaus considered the basic meaning of endless melody.' Thomas S Grey, *Wagner's Musical Prose: Texts and Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 285.

organicism is in fact dependent upon a barely concealed rigidity and conformity; a juxtaposition rather than an unfolding of musical material.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ The interpretation offered by Grey, along with the analyses offered by Rothstein and Dahlhaus, confirm aspects of Adorno's critique. Adorno's conclusion that Wagner's music is fundamentally regressive, however, would be likely contested.

VORSPIEL UND ERSTE SCENE.

(Auf dem Grunde des Rheines. Grünliche Dämmerung, nach oben zu lichter, nach unten zu dunkler. Die Höhe ist von wogendem Gewässer erfüllt, das rastlos von rechts nach links zu strömt. Nach der Tiefe zu lösen die Fluthen sich in einen immer feineren feuchten Nebel auf, so dass der Raum der Manneshöhe vom Boden auf gänzlich frei vom Wasser zu sein scheint, welches wie in Wolkenzügen über den nächtlichen Grund dahinfließt. Ueberall ragen schroffe Felsenriffe aus der Tiefe auf, und gränzen den Raum der Bühne ab; der ganze Boden ist in wildes Zackengewirr zerspalten; so dass er nirgends vollkommen eben ist, und nach allen Seiten hin in dichtester Finsterniss tiefere Schlüfte annehmen lässt. — Das Orchester beginnt bei noch niedergezogenem Vorhang.)

Ruhig heitere Bewegung.

1 Fu. 2f
FAGOTT.
3f
4 erste
CONTRABASSE.
4 zweite

8 HÖRNER in Es.
6f

7f
8f
3 Fag.
8 Cr. Bs.

1: 8 HÖRNER.

2f
3f
4f
5f
6f
7f
8f
3 Fag.
8 Cr. Bs.

*Die 4 zweiten Contrabässe haben die unterste Saite nach Es gestimmt.

⁹⁵ Richard Wagner, *Das Rheingold* (London: Dover, 1985), 1.

Adorno's critique foregrounds the fundamental and constitutive ambivalence at the core of Wagner's work (its dual character): 'progress and reaction in Wagner's music cannot be separated out like sheep and goats.'⁹⁶ The internal inconsistencies, the failures within Wagner's work are, for Adorno, simultaneously the paths of greatest possibility: 'his impotence in the face of the technical contradictions and the social conflicts underlying them, in short all the qualities that prompted his contemporaries to speak of "decadence" – is also the path of artistic progress.'⁹⁷ It is this indeterminacy, this inseparability of progress and reaction within Wagner's works that forms, for Adorno, the precise location of their modernity. Wagner's music is, often in spite of itself, full of both conformity *and* radical possibility, and it is this duality that marks Wagner's project as seminal for the entire trajectory of modern music. Whilst Wagner's use of dissonance and instrumentation (in Adorno's terms, 'sonority' and 'colour') are understood to contain the germs of radicalism that would find full expression in the New Music of the twentieth century, Adorno explicitly positions Wagner's temporality and refusal of development at a dialectically opposed extreme, as the germ of the musical regression to come — the Hollywood score and the hit song. Despite Wagner's incomplete fulfillment of the radical potential that many of his innovations promise, Adorno shows how nearly all of his compositional processes contain at least the kernel of something radically new. This combination of progressive *and* regressive possibility is central to what makes Wagner such an influential figure in Adorno's eyes, as he heralds the full spectrum of music to ensue; from the alienation of the avant-garde to the conformism of mass culture. Wagner's betrayal is his conflation of the two poles of progress and reaction, which in Adorno's eyes should properly have been held in (dialectical) tension. Instead, in reconciliation with the tradition and authority that Wagner sought to usurp, his works present regression as progress; similarly, domination appears as freedom, and subjugation as resistance. And it is from this aestheticisation of powerlessness, achieved largely through temporal stasis, that Adorno charges Wagner with nihilism and capitulation to blind Fate.

Wagner's overarching pursuit of stasis over development comes down in favour of myth (the myth of eternal return) over history, and for Adorno this hinders the radicalism and progressive possibilities of Wagner's project. The suspended

⁹⁶ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 37.

⁹⁷ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 34.

temporality of Wagner's works lends the eternally same the air of the eternally new, and thus the static is presented *as* the dynamic.⁹⁸ The state of *atemporal* and *ahistorical* (metaphysical) being takes the place of (historical) becoming, and the living, changing, historical processes of society appear as their opposite: absolute cessation, death.⁹⁹

Unlike Wagner's sense of eternal return and circularity, the unflinching modern subject must face their own sense of alienation in time in order to enter into an authentic relationship with the past. Importantly for Adorno (as for Benjamin), this state of *unreconcilability* of *untimeliness* is properly experienced as tension, if not crisis. For Adorno, Wagner's presentation of this state of crisis as one of reconciliation is a failure of courage, as he had the technical command over his materials to express these poles as properly antithetical, yet recoiled and presented them as indistinguishable. As Adorno notes, Wagner's presentation of opposing states such as love and hate, life and death, pleasure and suffering, resistance and submission, justice and law, renders them indistinguishable.

Wagner's music-dramas, through a whole host of narrative, musical and dramatic techniques, stage a conflation of concepts that should properly exist in a state of antagonistic tension, if not outright opposition. The rendering of opposing forces as indeterminate confirms Wagner's works as undoubtedly modern (as an aesthetic expression of a primary technique of modern forms of power dissemination), but for Adorno also confirms them as deeply reactionary. The appearance of pleasure as death, justice as law, resistance as submission, stasis as dynamism, reduces the rightful space of tension and antagonism between these conceptual couples to one of reconciliation, ultimately affirming the hopelessness and futility of human action in the face of Fate. This failure to hold conflicting concepts in tension in some regards marks Wagner's work as profoundly modern; however, this conceptual indistinctness, which rests on the reconciliation of concepts rightly in tension, is, for Adorno, also precisely the grounds upon which fascism, and the fascist appropriation of Wagner's work, depends. Adorno confirms Wagner's undoubted modernity, but also his reactionary force.

⁹⁸ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 51.

⁹⁹ Citing Adorno's book on Kierkegaard, Nikolaus Bacht argues that, for Adorno: 'the constellation of repetition and the inability to close – or to die – is an allegory of modernity as hell.' Nikolaus Bacht, *Music and Time in Theodor W. Adorno*, (PhD diss., University of London, 2002), 46. Max Paddison also explores the problem of closure that Adorno describes in his music criticism, see Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, 179-181.

As described in the previous chapter, Adorno (following Benjamin) takes temporal interruption to be essential to the successful work of art. For Adorno the experience of the work of art is precisely the experience of being embedded within a historical process: a sense of becoming over time, in which neither becoming nor temporality are taken to necessarily pursue linear, progressive trajectories. For Adorno, the concept of ‘shudder’ (which names the mimetic response to a work of art bounded by a certain experience of time, presence and memory)¹⁰⁰ names this oscillation between the authentic experience of time (in which the subject experiences belonging *in* the world) and its abstract counterpart, the linear flow of abstract time. When a work of art breaks through the continuum of linear time, the subject experiences themselves as a properly historical being, for whom every instant of their past and future is at stake. In order to resist conceiving of history as the irresistible march of fate, the subject must resist the experience of time as a linear progression through ‘empty time.’¹⁰¹

For Adorno, Wagner’s temporality fails to achieve a properly historical relationship with time, and as such is bound to reinforce (rather than interrupt) empirical time. Benjamin’s ‘homogenous, empty time,’ and Adorno’s ‘empirical time,’ are each articulations of time experienced *ahistorically*, as if the past stands unaltered by the events that follow. For both thinkers, the vulnerability of the past and the importance of our relationship to the past, are central elements of progressive politics and truly radical works of art.

From a twenty-first-century standpoint it is worth considering whether the elongation and temporal stasis Adorno considered so reactionary in Wagner’s works might indeed be capable of interrupting the continuum of linear time. One might also question the idealism of ‘shudder,’ which promises to propel the subject outside an apparently all-enveloping social system. Adorno identifies the intoxicating temporal stasis of Wagner’s works as a site of their aesthetic truth; by drawing the listener into a state of complicity with their own subjugation, Wagner’s operas make available to thought our own vulnerability to power. Considering Adorno’s Wagner critique in light of his later Stravinsky critique (discussed in the previous chapter), both composers can be

¹⁰⁰ See chapter five, 5.4 Shudder.

¹⁰¹ Adorno’s use of Henri Berson’s notion of ‘*temps espace*,’ and Walter Benjamin’s notion of ‘homogenous, empty time’ are discussed in chapter five, see 5.2 Bergson and Duration and 5.3 Benjamin and the Vulnerability of the Past.

interpreted for their *negative* truth, for the possibility that untruth might be the very site of their truth content.

6.4 Reading “On Jazz” with Adorno’s Classical Criticism

The sheer force of Adorno’s critique of jazz is rather incomprehensible without reference to his various critiques of art music. If Adorno had simply disliked jazz, or ‘hated’ it as Robert Witkin suggests,¹⁰² why expend such energy? The reason why Adorno took jazz so seriously is because he saw it as encroaching on the sphere of autonomous art music. Considering Adorno’s critique of jazz alongside his Stravinsky-critique and the Wagner-critique outlined above, one can see that it is not just jazz music or the hit song at which Adorno takes aim. Adorno fiercely critiques ‘serious’ composers such as Wagner and Stravinsky, as well the *Gebrauchsmusik* (utility music) of Hindemith, Krenek and Weil as well as the philosophy and music of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), which he criticises for reveling in its own alienation (a privilege, he notes, reserved for the bourgeoisie).¹⁰³ When Adorno suggests that Stravinsky is ‘the only significant composer at all close to jazz’¹⁰⁴ it is not a glowing endorsement for either Stravinsky or jazz, but is a criticism of the jazz subject who masochistically revels in their victimisation, recalling Stravinsky’s ritualistic human sacrifice in the *Rite of Spring* (1913). For Adorno both Stravinsky’s music and jazz provide an *accompaniment to* rather than critical *interpretation of* the circumstances of their production. Adorno’s jazz/Stravinsky juxtaposition shows that he is not simply critiquing popular culture in order to simply maintain the status the ‘high’ arts. Rather, Adorno’s mission is to critique all cultural products, high or low, that fail to resist the oppressive conditions of their genesis. For Adorno, the culture industry makes a mockery of both the high and low arts, as even supposedly ‘folk’ and popular forms come to be manufactured *for* the masses rather than created *by* them (as would be the case with genuine folk art).

Art music’s autonomy is the driving force behind Adorno’s critique of both popular and classical forms. As described in chapter four, the quest for autonomy is, for Adorno, paramount, as it is only autonomous art that is able to forge a creative space outside the

¹⁰² Witkin, “Why did Adorno ‘Hate’ Jazz?”

¹⁰³ Adorno, “On Jazz,” *Essays on Music*, 473-4.

¹⁰⁴ Adorno, “On Jazz,” *Night Music*, 156.

reach of instrumental reason. As Jay Bernstein puts it, ‘high culture exists because what it promises does not.’¹⁰⁵ Contrary to much characterisation of his work, Adorno does not seek to patrol the divide between the popular and high arts. Rather, under modernity, the traditional separation of high and low arts no longer carries its initial (pre-modern) meaning: ‘There is no longer any “folk” left whose songs and games could be taken up and sublimated by art.’¹⁰⁶ Older forms of collectivity are mythologised and used in the service of ideology (Fascism, for example, or the naturalisation of bourgeois categories), and the accompanying separation of genre comes to be determined by the culture industry and represents nothing more than marketing innovation. Though the traditional separation of high and folk arts has been robbed of its significance, this is not to say that all products of the culture industry are without artistic value. Rather, in Adorno’s analysis, the culture industry neutralises innovation ensuring that the system of cultural production is never actually threatened – which, Adorno notes, is a problem for the avant-garde also.¹⁰⁷ As Buhler writes, ‘Adorno is not hostile to the better products [of the culture industry] because they contaminate the rarefied air of high art, but because they seem to abolish the qualitative distinction between high and low art, a distinction that, for him, alone reflects the truth of a false society.’¹⁰⁸ Celebrations of jazz as America’s classical music present a false unity of a society torn asunder. The stakes could not be higher, with jazz acting as the up-tempo alibi to the gaping holes of racial and class division, drowning out the possibilities for individual emancipation and social equality.

6.5 Conclusion

The centrality of time and temporality to Adorno’s critique of Stravinsky in *Philosophy of New Music*, when considered alongside his critiques of Wagner and jazz, shows that his treatment of popular forms is not based simply on elitist prejudice or a desire to defend the receding importance of high art against the growing influence of popular forms. Adorno’s critiques of the production of musical time and stasis apply equally to

¹⁰⁵ Jay Bernstein, editor’s introduction to *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, by Theodor Adorno, ed. and intro. Jay Bernstein (London: Routledge, 2001), 15.

¹⁰⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, quoted in Max Paddison, *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture: Essays on Critical Theory and Music*, (London: Kahn & Averill, 1996), 83.

¹⁰⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, “The Aging of the New Music,” in *Essays on Music*, selected, with introduction, commentary and notes Richard Leppert, new trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 181-202.

¹⁰⁸ Buhler, “Frankfurt School Blues,” 116.

both high and low forms, and he makes no attempt to quarantine art music from these criticisms. Through the figure of time, one can see that the content of Adorno's critique persists across the 'great divide': the unsatisfactory production of musical time is perhaps *the* central category through which Adorno's negative assessments of music takes place, regardless of whether it is directed towards popular or art forms. The suspension of musical time in favor of stasis (which Adorno hears in the music of Wagner and Stravinsky as well as jazz) is of such consequence because it functions as a negation of historical time, an active forgetting in favor of eternal being. Adorno's criticism of the eternal return of Wagnerian leitmotif, the beating of time and repetition in jazz and Stravinsky, and even the imposition of preordained structure upon the musical materials of the late Schoenberg and other serialist composers,¹⁰⁹ reveal time to be the central focus of these critiques. Despite existing in time in an objective sense (music cannot escape the reality that it unfolds through time), Adorno hears in all 'regressive' music the musical manifestation of time standing still, of a state of pure being, outside history. The refutation of historical consciousness in favor of stasis (in Wagner this appears as eternal return, and in jazz as a perpetual present), and the negation of history via the production of a musical allegory for ahistorical 'pure nature' (Stravinsky, in particular *The Rite of Spring*), fail to intensify the tension between musical time and empirical time, between historical becoming and ahistorical being.

As this chapter has shown, temporality is a unifying theme through which Adorno's most critical conclusions unfold. Importantly, Adorno is equally critical of 'high' musical works that fail to enact the sense of becoming that is essential to musical time (Wagner and Stravinsky) as he is of 'low' works (jazz and other popular forms). When read alongside his critiques of 'serious' composers, Adorno's criticism of jazz and popular forms can be seen as a single thread within his far-ranging cultural critique: popular forms are not singled out for harsher criticism than 'serious' forms, rather, both sides of the cultural divide are subjected to equally searing critique.

¹⁰⁹ Adorno writes, 'Late Schoenberg shares with jazz – and, incidentally, also with Stravinsky – the dissociation of musical time. Music drafts the image of a world that – for better or for worse – no longer knows history.' Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 50. See also Theodor W. Adorno, "Vers Une Musique Informelle," in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1998), 269-322, and Theodor W. Adorno "Form in the New Music," *Music Analysis* 27, no. 2/3 (July 2008): 201-216.

Modernism sees the compression and expansion of musical time become a central feature of musical exploration: Schoenberg wrote that his aim with *Erwartung* was to ‘represent in slow motion everything that occurs during a single second of maximum spiritual excitement, stretching it out to half an hour.’¹¹⁰ This exploration of time in twentieth-century music has largely been achieved through repetition (from Stravinsky to Glass) or its systematic negation (serialism from Schoenberg to Babbitt). By foregrounding the role of temporality to Adorno’s musical aesthetics, these chapters have suggested some new paths for the interpretation of Modernist and Postmodernist music, as well as some new possibilities for theorising time in music. With a renewed focus on musical time and temporality, perhaps the focus on the breakdown of tonality as *the* marker of musical innovation in the twentieth century can be re-contextualised, and taken to be part of a broad exploration of the structural possibilities of *all* musical parameters, including time itself.

As described here, Adorno’s preference for musical becoming over repetition or stasis stems from his desire to situate musical forms in an analogous relationship to subjectivity: works that develop signal the presence of (or possibility for) the self-realising subject, whilst repetitive works signal a regressive, self-negating subjectivity. For Adorno, repetition signals the dominance of the whole over its parts (or the universal over the particular), the musical affirmation of unequal relationships of exchange. As argued in the preceding chapter, the progressive possibilities Adorno identifies within the mimetic moment of exchange could be understood to imply the possibility for non-regressive repetition, a moment of exchange without domination. Though the examples of musical repetition that Adorno discusses (from Wagner to Stravinsky to jazz) are indeed found to be uncritical and regressive, his theoretical writing does not preclude the possibility that repetition might be used critically. Through the mimetic faculty, Adorno’s thinking arguably does make space for the possibility of difference *within* repetition. It is upon this possibility for repetition to be turned in on itself and thus become difference (in other words, the possibility for self-critical, reflexive repetition) that the closing analysis of this thesis (of Eliane Radigue’s *Transamore/Transmortem*) turns.

¹¹⁰ Arnold Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, trans. Roy E. Carter, Third Edition (London: Faber, 1978), 105. See chapter eight, “‘Loneliness as Style’: Adorno’s *Erwartung*.”

Chapter Seven

Adornian Mode: Ugliness and Dissonance in 20th Century Musical Modernism

*When traditional aesthetics...praised harmony in natural beauty, it projected the self-satisfaction of domination onto the dominated.*¹

7.0 Introduction

The emancipation of dissonance during the early twentieth century marked the final stage of the disintegration of tonality; Schoenberg's celebrated achievement – the release of musical material from the long-required reconciliation of dissonance into resolution – transformed the modern aural environment.² Amongst Schoenberg's most ardent admirers was Theodor W. Adorno, who heard in the new music the capacity for bringing suffering into the domain of aesthetic experience and thus knowledge. Adorno argued that the dissonant works of the second Viennese school exploded the semblance of reconciliation that tonal works projected, staging a radical reversal of the primacy of the beautiful over the ugly. This chapter offers an account of the ugly (*das Häßlichen*) in Adorno's aesthetics, exploring the philosophical underpinnings that led him to imbue dissonant Modernist soundscapes with emancipatory potential. Given Adorno's status as one of the most important and insightful philosophers of Modernist music, as well as the centrality of the categories of dissonance and ugliness to the Modernist musical

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997), 207.

² Schoenberg was certainly not alone in his exploration of atonality or twelve-tone techniques, and the breaking down of tonality can be traced back to Debussy, Wagner and many others before him. Josef Matthias Hauer also devised a twelve-tone system. See George Perle, *Serial Composition and Atonality: An Introduction to the Music of Schoenberg, Berg and Webern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 5-7. Importantly, Schoenberg saw his work as steeped in tradition: 'Whilst his introduction of radical atonality was itself commonly thought to be a violent break with tradition, Schoenberg nevertheless maintained that it was precisely a respect for tradition that ultimately justified his compositional advances.' Peter Tregear, "Schoenberg, Satire and the *Zeitoper*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Schoenberg*, eds. Jennifer Shaw and Joseph Auner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 147.

aesthetic generally, this chapter offers an account of Modernism's break from Enlightenment aesthetics through the prism of ugliness as Adorno understood it.³

For Adorno, Modernism has brought about a change in the way the subject relates to art, and the judgement of beauty so central to traditional aesthetics has been displaced. The question governing traditional judgements of taste ('Is it beautiful?') has been replaced: not only do Modernist works question the self-evidence of art (the first question many Modernist works pose is: 'Is it art?')⁴ but, as discussed in chapter four, their interpretation demands that we ask 'Is it true?'⁵ In Adorno's analysis, this displacement of beauty has reversed the traditional primacy of the beautiful over the ugly, with ugliness fulfilling the ethical dimension once claimed by beauty: 'it is for the sake of the beautiful that there is no longer beauty: because it is no longer beautiful.'⁶ It is important to note that the concept of ugliness in Adorno's thought does not carry the pejorative meaning that might be expected. Indeed, ugliness and dissonance (which in Adorno's thinking names both a specific category of musical ugliness as well as a more philosophical category of the resistance to reconciliation or false harmony) signal works of the highest maturity: in dissonant ugly works tension remains unresolved.

³ It is important to note the historical specificity of Adorno's critique, which takes issue with the notion of beauty advanced by Enlightenment aesthetics. Also, one must acknowledge that the depiction of pain and suffering are constants within the Western tradition of art. See for example, Nigel Spivey, *Enduring Creation: Art, Pain and Fortitude* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); David B. Morris, *The Culture of Pain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); and Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: the Making and Unmaking of the World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). As Adorno would argue, however, a work's subject matter should *not* be confused with the content or meaning of the work; the depiction of suffering does not necessarily lead to 'ugliness,' nor empathy for the body in pain. Many representations of suffering (such as the tradition of Christian iconography of the martyrdom of saints) operate in the service of something else (the development of Christian identity) and are thus not autonomous works of art, and are therefore outside the domain of art to which Adorno's aesthetics is addressed. Art that depicts suffering may also be actively obscuring pain in order to tame and domesticate that which is essentially un-representable. These themes are certainly avenues for further investigation, but are beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁴ *Aesthetic Theory* opens with this observation: 'It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 1.

⁵ 'Ultimately, artworks are enigmatic in terms not of their composition but of their truth content. The indefatigably recurring question that every work incites in whoever traverses it – the "What is it all about?" – becomes "Is it true?" – the question of the absolute, to which every artwork responds by wresting itself free from the discursive form of answer.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 168. And, further: 'The truth content of artworks is the objective solution of the enigma posed by each and every one. By demanding its solution, the enigma points to its truth content. It can only be achieved by philosophical reflection. This alone is the justification of aesthetics... Artworks, especially those of the highest dignity, await their interpretation.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 169.

For a discussion of Adorno's understanding of 'truth content,' see 4.3.iii Truth Content.

⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 69.

Given the centrality of dissonance and ugliness to the Modernist musical aesthetic, both concepts remain curiously under-theorised in the musicological literature. The notion that dissonance and ugliness stand as barriers to pleasure is taken to be entirely self-evident,⁷ and little thought has been given to the function or meaning of these categories. Even the categories of beauty and pleasure, so central to traditional aesthetics and so much debated in philosophy since Kant, are taken to be so self-evident in music that little specific thought has been given to how these concepts are framed or expressed through that medium. This chapter is motivated by a desire to contribute an Adorno-inflected offering to this lacuna in the literature, as well as by the desire unsettle the musicological (and popular) consensus that Modernist ugliness necessarily stands as a barrier to pleasure – sensual pleasure, in particular.⁸ This chapter also wishes to defend Adorno's aesthetic theory from the accusation that it is tainted by a fetishisation of the intellect and a denial of sensual experience.⁹ Richard Taruskin presents Adorno's thinking, and perhaps the notion of critique itself, as necessarily in conflict with the enjoyment of music,¹⁰ and Carolyn Abbate, though less derisory of Adorno than he, similarly argues that 'drastic' intellectual approaches impede the 'gnostic' corporeal enjoyment of music.¹¹ Going against the grain of such musicological approaches, this

⁷ In praise of Richard Taruskin's 'common-sense' erasure of the distinction between art and entertainment, Kyle Gann asks: 'And why would a composer try to do anything in his music except elicit pleasure?' Kyle Gann, "Taruskin Charges Again," *PostClassic* Blog, October 27, 2007, accessed March 23, 2015, http://www.artsjournal.com/postclassic/2007/10/taruskin_charges_again.html.

The self-evident nature of both common sense and pleasure are taken for granted.

⁸ Richard Taruskin takes pleasure to be the motivator for all engagement in art: 'That pleasure, the agreeable mental pursuit that (if one is persistent and lucky) can repay the pursuer with a great intensity of delight, was certainly my own conduit into what has become my vocation... Can there be any other motivation for engagement with art? Before romanticism raised the stakes, the purpose of art was always described as that of "pleasing."' Whilst conceding that 'pleasure does not have to be defined sensuously, and there are all kinds of pleasures,' Taruskin nonetheless takes the agreeableness of pleasure itself to be self-evident. Richard Taruskin, "The Musical Mystique," *The New Republic* 237, no. 4823 (Oct 22, 2007): 39.

⁹ As J. M. Bernstein argues, 'In opposition to Nietzsche and the Kantians,' who 'agree on the duality of reason and sense, norm and drive, but come down on opposite sides of the duality,' Adorno and other critical theorists 'denied that the rational and the sensible belonged to intrinsically incommensurable domains; on the contrary, the governing *animus* of Critical Theory aesthetics is to claim that sense is indeed the repressed or repudiated other of reason... a repudiated and hence split off part of reason itself... The domain of art (or, more widely, culture) is the social repository for the repressed claims of sensuousness, society's sensory/libidinal unconscious.' J. M. Bernstein, "'The Dead Speaking of Stones and Stars': Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, ed. Fred Rush, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 141.

¹⁰ For Taruskin the 'dour Frankfurter,' Adorno is 'the most histrionically pessimistic of all cultural critics.' Taruskin "The Musical Mystique," 39. A thorough critique of Taruskin's strident (and often absurd) anti-Modernism is beyond the purview of this thesis. That Taruskin's hyperbole and dismissal (often via enthusiastic mis-readings) of thinkers from Kant to Adorno goes largely unchallenged highlights the need for musicology and philosophy (particularly aesthetics) to be read together.

¹¹ Carolyn Abbate, "Music – Drastic or Gnostic?" *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (2004): 505-36.

chapter argues that Adorno's assertion of the primacy of interpretation – understood as the completion of experience with thought – in no way forecloses the capacity for pleasure. Far from denying physical pleasure, Adorno's aesthetic theory is highly attuned to the sensuousness of the experience of art. By rejecting the oppositions between sense and intellect, feeling and understanding, work and pleasure, that mark the contemporary cultural landscape, this chapter offers a speculative Adornian account of the cerebral *and* sensual pleasures of ugly Modernist music.

Despite the undoubted centrality of ugliness and dissonance to Modernist aesthetics, theoretical engagement with these concepts remains surprisingly sparse. Adorno's incomplete and posthumously published magnum opus *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) attempted a radical reversal in the primacy of the beautiful over the ugly, offering a rare theoretical exploration of the philosophical grounding underpinning Modernist ugliness. In turn, there have been curiously few explorations of ugliness in Adorno's work, despite the central role it has played in Modernist art and aesthetics. The few essays that do take up Adorno's concept of the ugly have been addressed to the plastic arts generally, or painting in particular.¹² Musical ugliness, despite occupying pride of place in Adorno's aesthetics (and possibly operating as *the* paradigmatic illustration of Modernism's oppositional stance, thanks to its resistance against incorporation into popular culture), has been taken for granted. As such, the treatment of dissonance, arguably the most important site of musical innovation in the twentieth century, has been simultaneously under-theorised and over-determined within the musicological literature. In particular, the categorical separation of tonal from non-tonal music (or perhaps dissonant from consonant is more apposite), along with their attending description as respectively pleasurable and dis-pleasurable, has led to rigid understandings of the function of dissonance, as well as undeveloped notions of the pleasures afforded by ugly, Modernist works.

¹² Pamela Leach gives a general philosophical account. See Pamela Leach, "On Adorno's Aesthetics of the Ugly," in *Adorno and the Need in Thinking: New Critical Essays*, ed. Donald Burke (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 263-277. Thomas Huhn addresses Adorno's theorisation of ugliness through Piet Mondrian, see Thomas Huhn, "Diligence and Industry: Adorno and the Ugly," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 12, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 138-46. Whilst J. M. Bernstein considers Adornian ugliness through the work of Pablo Picasso in J. M. Bernstein, "'The Demand for Ugliness': Picasso's Bodies," in J. M. Bernstein et al. *Art and Aesthetics After Adorno* (Berkeley: The Townsend Center for the Humanities, University of California, 2010), 210-248. Peter Uwe Hohendahl considers ugliness in relation to the 'primitivism' in Stravinsky's *Rite* and Carl Einstein's study of African sculpture in Peter Uwe Hohendahl, "Aesthetic Violence: The Concept of the Ugly in Adorno's 'Aesthetic Theory,'" *Cultural Critique* 60 (Spring 2005): 170-196.

7.1 Kant: Disinterest and Beauty

In disparate ways, all the important philosophers of art in the twentieth century have positioned themselves in relation to Kant and his aesthetics. The distinguished genealogy of Kant criticism, running from Hegel, Nietzsche, Dilthey, Simmel, Heidegger, Adorno, Lukács, Jaspers and Habermas, features all the heavyweights of modern philosophy, and much contemporary thought continues to orbit around the fundamental questions raised by Kantian aesthetics (in particular, questions raised in Kant's 'Critique of Aesthetic Judgement,' which forms the first half of his *Critique of Judgement* of 1790). Though the content of the various Kant critiques has indeed been wide-ranging, most criticism has orbited around an implicit reification of reason found lying dormant in Kant's philosophy, whilst confirming Kant in his rejection of metaphysics.¹³

Through his critique of metaphysics, Kant sought to identify the grounds upon which human reason could make valid claims to knowledge. Kant's distinction between knowledge and metaphysics (between valid claims of knowledge about the *appearance* of objects, and the reality that things *in themselves* are radically unknowable and fundamentally inaccessible to knowledge) has important consequences for aesthetics and its relationship to knowledge (in particular, Adorno identifies the Kantian 'block' between reason and other modes of knowledge, which in Adorno's account, locks out aesthetic truths from the domain of knowledge).¹⁴ The importance for aesthetics in Kant's philosophy stems not from its capacity to enter into the sphere of reason and knowledge directly, but rather from its capacity to cultivate a mode of intersubjectivity, which in turn develops the subject's capacity for reason. Despite the important place of the autonomy of *reason* in Kantian aesthetics, the importance of *aesthetics* itself is

¹³ 'Each important critical reading of Kant contains either an implicit or manifest discussion of the *reification* of reason in Kant's philosophy...Kant turns reason into a *thing*; as a thing, reason is falsely extrapolated from the plural arenas of local and experiential knowledge, and it reduces thinking to a formal act, whose content is merely a variable in an infinitely extensible sequence of cognitive functions.' Chris Thornhill, "'Adorno Reading Kant,' review of *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* by Theodor W. Adorno," *Studies in Social and Political Thought*, 100. Accessed March 20, 2015. <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=12-5.pdf&site=412>

¹⁴ The 'Kantian block can be understood as a form of unmediated Cartesian dualism that is reflexive, that reflects upon itself. It is a dualism in which a great chasm yawns between inner and outer, a chasm that can never be bridged. This chasm is the alienation of human beings from one another, and the alienation of human beings from the world of things. This alienation is in fact socially caused; it is created by the universal exchange relation.' Theodor W. Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 174.

confirmed on curiously heteronomous grounds, namely in the capacity for judgements of taste to develop within the individual the faculty of (human) reason.¹⁵ For Kant, successful aesthetic judgement depends upon the harmonious accord of reason and nature within the individual, in which judgements of beauty, devoid of interest, purpose and concept, result in the (disinterested) feeling of pleasure in the assessment of the aesthetic object. Adorno considers Kant's aesthetics to be 'subjectively directed'¹⁶ because, for Kant, judgements of taste are important primarily because they show the faculties working together in receiving an object (but do not extend to claims about the object itself). Importantly, the judgement of beauty in Kant's aesthetics is devoid of all interest and demands universal assent:

Taste is the faculty of judging an object or a mode of presentation by means of a delight or aversion *apart from any interest*. The object of such a delight is called *beautiful*.¹⁷

The *beautiful* is that which, apart from a concept, pleases universally.¹⁸

Despite the apparent autonomy of aesthetic judgements, their value for Kant ultimately rests upon the capacity for judgements of taste to enable a mode of intersubjectivity in which subjects – and analogously aesthetic subjects and objects – are able to engage with each other as *ends in themselves*. Thus, the moral quality of Kantian aesthetics (which Adorno arguably inherits) resides in the analogous 'modes of reflection' at work in both judgements of beauty, and moral ideas or social actions. Rather than understanding the moralism of Kant's aesthetics to be linked to the *content* of beauty (in which moral ideas turn out to be the content of works we find beautiful), I follow Salim Kemal in understanding aesthetic judgement and moral thinking in Kant to be analogous modes of reflection, marked by an engagement with objects (or subjects) understood to be things-for-themselves.¹⁹

¹⁵ Salim Kemal, 'Kant on Beauty,' in Michael Kelly, *Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics*. [electronic resource] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007-c2008), University of Melbourne Catalogue EBSCOhost (accessed March 19, 2015).

¹⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 216. This aspect of Adorno's critique of Kant is discussed below.

¹⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith, revised, ed., intro., Nicholas Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), § 5, 42.

¹⁸ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, § 9, 51.

¹⁹ Kemal, 'Kant on Beauty.'

The priority of beauty over ugliness expressed in Kant's aesthetics stems from the moral humanism of his thought, and the need to theorise the possibility for (or even necessity of) human empathy, even in the face of its manifest absence in reality. The universal validity of aesthetic judgement stems from this desire to endow all human beings with the capacity for agreement. For Kant, the possibility for the *sensus communis* (our capacity to have feelings in common) depends on a mode of reflection in operation in judgements of beauty.²⁰ In Kant, the possibility for shared judgements confirms the universality of the faculties: because we are all human (and thus share the same faculties) we are (theoretically) all able to agree on judgements of taste. Thus, for Kant, it is not the content of beautiful works that makes them beautiful, but rather the possibility for the shared judgement of 'this is beautiful,' and the necessary and universal empathy that this gesture expresses.

7.2 Adorno on Kant: An Uneasy Synthesis

In keeping with the oppositional stance of Modernism, Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* seeks a radical reversal in the primacy of the beautiful over the ugly. If the great Kantian reversal was the displacement onto subjectivity of categories previously thought to be entirely objective (in particular space and time), then perhaps the great Adornian reversal is the recasting of the primacy of ugliness over beauty, dissonance over resolution, and the recasting of social relations that such a reversal demands. Not only does Adorno understand ugliness to be the origin of beauty, he also imbues ugliness with greater importance than beauty, rendering it primary in every sense. Staging his own 'Copernican revolution' in aesthetics, Adorno turns Kant and the entire tradition of aesthetics on its head.

Despite the radical reversal Adorno stages of Kantian aesthetics, he also inherits Kant's contribution to aesthetics on many levels. Most important for the discussion here, is Adorno's recasting of two interconnected ideas governing Kantian aesthetics – the idea of disinterestedness and the primacy of the beautiful in the formation of the *sensus communis*. Adorno attempts a recasting of Kant's project for the twentieth century through a (perhaps, Kantian) gesture of reversal (taken to an undoubtedly un-Kantian

²⁰ Thierry De Duvre maintains Kant's 'prudence and scepticism' over the real-world possibility for the *sensus communis*. See Thierry de Duvre, "Resisting Adorno, Revamping Kant," in J. M. Bernstein et al. *Art and Aesthetics After Adorno* (Berkeley: The Townsend Center for the Humanities, University of California, 2010), 270-271.

end), in which he affirms the universalism of Kant's account, but upends the prudence and sobriety of disinterestedness, and rejects the possibility for grounding *sensus communis* on the positive category of beauty.

Much of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* is dedicated to displacing the primacy of subject over object inherited from traditional aesthetics, and Adorno's reading of *The Critique of Judgement* roundly rejects Kant's subjectivism, which 'tacitly seeks aesthetic quality in the effect the artwork has on the observer.'²¹ As Pamela Leach argues, Adorno 'deconstructs the subject's priority as imposed and historical rather than natural.'²² Further, Adorno stages the reversal of the subject-object priority through an explanation of the dependence of aesthetic feeling on the aesthetic object itself, and he insists that aesthetic feeling is marked by a non-conceptual yet determinate astonishment at what is beheld (*not* feeling about what the aesthetic object is about).²³ For Adorno, then, there is perhaps only one aesthetic feeling (the recognition of the work of art as such), beyond this recognition stands a determination of the quality of a work of art (good or bad), from which aesthetic feeling cannot be separated, but which is nonetheless objectively defined and independent of the feelings the subject may have about the content or meaning of the artwork. Thus, Adorno distinguishes strictly between the quality of feeling released in the observing subject and the quality of the object's own expression, understood as its capacity to fulfil its own concept.

Showing his desire to move through (rather than away from) Kantian aesthetics, Adorno credits Kant's understanding of disinterestedness of judgements of taste with planting within aesthetics the germ of an objectivist stance. For Adorno, Kant was right to distance aesthetic judgement from what he calls 'the culinary consumption of art,'²⁴ with disinterest suggesting a level of distance from the aesthetic object that avoids 'that avaricious philistinism that always wants to touch it and taste it.'²⁵ Also, the disinterestedness of judgements of taste posits within aesthetics a demand that the object be understood as for-itself. Adorno credits Kant's aesthetics with what he calls

²¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 12.

²² Leach, "On Adorno's Aesthetics of the Ugly," 270.

²³ 'Aesthetic feeling is not the feeling that is aroused: It is astonishment vis-à-vis what is beheld rather than vis-à-vis what it is about; it is a being overwhelmed by what is aconceptual yet determinate, not the subjective affect released, that in the case of aesthetic experience may be called feeling.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 217.

²⁴ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 121.

²⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 12.

‘a fragmentation of the supremacy of liking,’²⁶ which sets in motion an understanding of disinterestedness that demands objective definition. Adorno writes: ‘The Kantian concept of the judgement of taste, by its subjectively directed query, concerns the core of objectivist aesthetics: the question of quality – good and bad, true and false – in the artwork.’²⁷ For Adorno, Kant’s subjectivism is betrayed by his understanding of disinterest, which stems from not only the subject’s relinquishment of liking, but also from the irrelevance to the aesthetic object of likes and dislikes. Adorno undoubtedly finds disinterestedness an insufficient concept for the exploration of aesthetic feeling, but he nonetheless takes it to be an important conceptual development on the way towards an understanding of the autonomy of art.

Adorno also upsets the sober and moderate tone of Kant’s notion of disinterest, suggesting that despite demanding a certain distance from the artwork itself, disinterest is achieved through intensity: ‘If it is more than mere indifference, the Kantian “without interest” must be shadowed by the wildest interest, and there is much to be said for the idea that the dignity of artworks depends on the intensity of the interest from which they are wrested.’²⁸ This understanding of the intensity of aesthetic experience (for Adorno, to the point where the subject is in fact extinguished)²⁹ is of central importance to his reshaping of pleasure under the conditions of modernity.³⁰ Adorno chastises Kant for his complete suppression of the role of liking and sensual interest in aesthetic judgements,³¹ ultimately concluding that ‘disinterestedness debases art.’³² Nonetheless, Adorno credits Kant (and the concept of disinterest) as the first to understand the necessity for displacing the demand that successful works of art are likeable.

Adorno posits understanding (rather than judgement) as the primary task of interpretation, and this is taken to be a process that seeks to recognise the aesthetic object on its own terms. This displacement of judgement makes way for the possibility that the aesthetic subject is able to interpret works that they do not ‘like’ to be

²⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 12.

²⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 216.

²⁸ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 13.

²⁹ For ‘the beholder disappear[s] into the material.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 15. See also 5.5 Mimesis.

³⁰ This theme is developed below, see 7.4 Pleasure and Aestheticism in Adorno’s Aesthetics.

³¹ ‘For Kant, aesthetics becomes paradoxically a castrated hedonism, desire without desire. An equal injustice is done both to artistic experience, in which liking is by no means the whole of it but plays a subordinate role, and to sensual interest, the suppressed and unsatisfied needs that resonate in their aesthetic negation and make artworks more than empty patterns.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 14.

³² Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 15.

nonetheless successful, which is ultimately a confirmation of art's autonomy: 'The route to aesthetic autonomy proceeds by way of disinterestedness...[y]et art does not come to rest in disinterestedness. For disinterestedness immanently reproduces – and transforms – interest.'³³ Even though Adorno's account is firmly at odds with Kant's intent, he nonetheless attributes to Kant an implicit recognition of the limits of subjectivist accounts of aesthetics, a process set in train by Kant's displacement of the supremacy of liking.

Given Adorno's championing of aesthetic autonomy, it is hardly surprising that he challenges the heteronymous grounds upon which Kant asserts the value of the aesthetic (namely in its capacity to substantiate his moral philosophy and assertion of the *sensus communis*). As explored above, Adorno does not wish to completely surrender the idea of disinterestedness, and he traces back to Kant the modern mode of seeking meaning and significance in aesthetic experience that lies outside the bounds of semantic communication. Adorno responds in a similar fashion to Kant's assertion of the primacy of the beautiful within aesthetics, and the endowment of human empathy, which judgements of taste signal, in his philosophy. Rather than refusing the primacy of judgement per se, or rejecting outright the moral imperative of Kant's philosophy, Adorno stages a radical reversal of its terms. Where Kant cuts out beauty from the sphere of knowledge (through its purposelessness) but nonetheless attributes it value on the grounds of its capacity to develop reason through empathy, Adorno insists on the primacy of the ugly in order to bring suffering into the domain of knowledge. For Adorno, the shared capacity for suffering (*not* an innate faculty for spontaneous empathy precipitated by the shared recognition of beauty) is the only meaningful sense in which the *sensus communis* might be understood. According to Thierry de Duve, 'Adorno's credo... assigns pain the universalizing function pleasure had for Kant.'³⁴ Though Adorno *overtly* rejects the possibility for culture to cultivate any kind of *sensus communis* (evidenced by his famous barb that 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric'),³⁵ his entire project nonetheless confirms art as the (perhaps) final sphere of human freedom in the face of the overarching domination of the exchange relation. Implicitly then, Adorno posits ugliness, not beauty, as the (morally) proper site for the

³³ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 15.

³⁴ De Duve, "Resisting Adorno, Revamping Kant," 271.

³⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society (1951)," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), 34.

expression of human agreement. Though he would no doubt reject the positivism of aspiring to any kind of *sensus communis* drawn together in the experience of disinterested *displeasure*, Adorno maintains the moral imperative of Kant's aesthetics, albeit on the un-Kantian grounds that aesthetics has the power to bringing suffering directly into the domain of knowledge.

7.3 Ugliness for Adorno

For Adorno, beauty has never existed outside of ugliness, violence and domination, and as such, the beauty long celebrated by traditional (Enlightenment) aesthetics has been revealed to be an illusion. Beauty must be understood to be conditioned by, and impossible without, ugliness: 'According to traditional aesthetics the ugly is that element that opposes the work's ruling law of form; it is integrated by that formal law and thereby confirms it.'³⁶ Thus, in traditional artworks where beauty reigns and ugliness is reconciled, the tension between beauty and ugliness ultimately confirms the truth of 'beauty'; ugliness remains a servant, but beauty stands as nothing other than domination. For Adorno, only oppositional works open up the possibility for truth or any genuine beauty, and they can only achieve this through ugliness; 'in the ugly, art must denounce the world that creates and reproduces the ugly in its own image.'³⁷ Indeed, once the reconciliation that beauty projects is recognised to have emerged from violence and domination, beauty itself is no longer possible.³⁸ Instead, ugliness holds the key to what was once called beauty. The detritus of modern life (the excluded, the exhausted, the left-over) is now the material of aesthetic possibility, for 'only what does not fit into this world is true.'³⁹ Any aesthetic form that attempts reconciled beauty appears as its opposite, kitsch, in which the suppression of ugliness results in its unfettered reappearance. Kitsch is 'the beautiful as the ugly,'⁴⁰ because the *tension* between beauty and ugliness necessary for truth in art is suppressed. Adorno stages a thoroughly dialectical rehabilitation of Kant, recasting beauty as the nexus of an aporia,

³⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 60.

³⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 64.

³⁸ For this reason, 'it is for the sake of the beautiful that there is no longer beauty: because it is no longer beautiful.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 69.

³⁹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 76.

⁴⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 62.

rather than as the successful reconciliation of a work's various elements into stability and balance.⁴¹

Adorno also cites the influence of Hegel upon his understanding of beauty: 'according to a Hegelian topos, beauty is the result not of a simple equilibrium per se, but rather of the tension that results.'⁴² It is this dialectical understanding of beauty, imbued with flux and unresolved antinomies,⁴³ that Adorno takes to be a beauty worth its name; it is only in dissonant or ugly artworks that the suffering and alienation of modern life can be expressed.⁴⁴ In short, ugliness calls attention to art's own historicity, and to the ongoing complicity between art, beauty and domination, long-concealed through what Adorno calls 'reconciliation as an act of violence.'⁴⁵ The important positive role ugliness plays in Adorno's thinking stems from his recasting of tension into a positive category. Dissonance, when left to stand alone unresolved, has the capacity to render visible the cruelty and injustice of modern social formations, and in this way art bears witness to the pain inflicted by domination and exploitation. What was once considered beautiful (the state of equilibrium in which tension is resolved) is revealed to be a state of domination of the whole over the parts, in which the particular is suppressed.⁴⁶ Part of the positive role ugliness plays is in foregrounding of particularity, which resists the reconciliation of the parts into the whole that the Kantian concept of the beautiful demands. Through his foregrounding of unresolved dissonance and unreconciled particularity, Adorno upends the traditional hierarchy that relegates ugliness to the state of a mere foil for beauty (which remains primary).

⁴¹ Of interest here is further study into the question of the role assigned by the artist to their art. What might their motivations be? What did Picasso hope he might achieve in *Guernica*? Bu Chapter 3, page 41 offers an account of the place of authorial intent for Adorno, specifically his caution against confusing the artist's intention with the content of the work. I have consciously aimed to follow Adorno in this regard, and so have purposefully left such matters to one side.

⁴² Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 60.

⁴³ Adorno's reception of Hegel might seem idiosyncratic, as Hegel is typically taken to be attempting to reconcile tensions (rather than intensify them).

⁴⁴ 'Closely observed, even tranquil works discharge not so much the pent-up emotions of their makers as the works' own inwardly antagonistic forces. The result of these forces is bound up with the impossibility of bringing these forces to any equilibrium; their antimonies, like those of knowledge, are unsolvable in the unreconciled world.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 112.

⁴⁵ 'Reconciliation as an act of violence, aesthetic formalism, and unreconciled life forms a triad.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 63.

⁴⁶ 'For Kant, artworks were purposive as dynamic totalities in which all particular elements exist for the sake of their purpose – the whole – just as the whole exists for the sake of its purpose, the fulfilment or redemption through the negation of its elements.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 184.

Adorno rails against the aesthetic reproach of ugliness that is used to justify the suppression of knowledge of pain, which, in the name of beauty, charges those suffering with degeneracy, granting licence to scorn those who suffer. The nexus between beauty and domination is revealed by the Fascist spectacle. Having provided an alibi for unspeakable horrors, aesthetic beauty can no longer operate as the ideal sphere of human agreement:

The aesthetic condemnation of the ugly is dependent on the inclination, verified by social psychology, to equate, justly, the ugly with the expression of suffering and, by projecting it, to despise it. Hitler's empire put this theorem to the test, as it put the whole of bourgeois ideology to the test: The more torture went on in the basement, the more insistently they made sure that the roof rested on columns.⁴⁷

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer consider the prevalence of sadism (pleasure in the suffering of others) within popular culture, which inevitably folds over into the self-subjection of the consumer: 'Donald Duck in the cartoons and the unfortunate victim in real life receive their beatings so that the spectators can accustom themselves to theirs. The enjoyment of the violence done to the film character turns into violence against the spectator.'⁴⁸ As Nathan Ross explains:

Adorno considers how this sadism comes to misshape the process of aesthetic judgement... This sadistic misdirection of hostility explains why works that give voice to suffering through dissonance often elicit such extreme aversion and even hostility from the listening public, while films depicting extreme violence might become subject to popular enjoyment.⁴⁹

In order to avoid reproducing domination, the depiction of suffering in art necessarily leads to ugliness. It is interesting to note that the popular (and critical) rejection of dissonant musical works seems at odds with the reception of ugly Modernist painting (such as Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) or *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907)), with the ear

⁴⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 64.

⁴⁸ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzenlin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 110.

⁴⁹ Nathan Ross, "On Truth Content and False Consciousness in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory," *Philosophy Today* 59, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 280.

perhaps maintaining a sensitivity to suffering that the eye has long since forgotten.⁵⁰ In any case, Adorno considers ugly, dissonant artworks (of all kinds) to be privileged sites of human agreement (and so both continues and upends Kant's aesthetics), for it is through ugliness and dissonance that suffering can be brought into the domain of knowledge.

7.3.i The Primacy of the Ugly

The ugly, for Adorno, is the site from which beauty originates: 'Beauty is not the platonically pure beginning but rather something that originated in the renunciation of what was once feared, which only as a result of this renunciation – retrospectively, so to speak, according to its own telos – became the ugly. Beauty is the spell over the spell.'⁵¹ Adorno offers a 'prehistory' of art in order to establish the categorical primacy of the ugly over the beautiful; once the beautiful is understood as the suppression of fear (which thus carries an affirmative social role), the critical and, for Adorno, 'corrective' qualities,⁵² of the ugly are then open to exploration. This archaic function of art (the reconciliation or suppression of that which is feared) stems from the magical practices which preceded it, and which Adorno and Horkheimer argue in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, continue to be expressed today in the culture industry.⁵³ The continuing role that beauty plays in the social regulation of fear (particularly of nature) is, for Adorno, an undoubtedly historical process.⁵⁴ Threat and order are inherent to beauty, and the 'beautiful single whole' stands as testament to reason's domination over nature.⁵⁵

Not only is ugliness prior to beauty: for Adorno, it must also be made primary. In order to resist these inherited notions of beauty that Adorno finds so wanting in traditional

⁵⁰ Clement Greenberg's argument that Modernist music's lack of enthusiasm from the listening public makes it the exemplary Modernist art is noted in chapter four, note 15. There are also writers exploring the capacity for sound and music to enter the subject's unconscious more 'directly' than the visual arts. See for example, Ian Biddle and Marie Thompson (eds.), *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorising Sonic Experience* (London: Continuum, 2013). This is a vast and complex topic which cannot be considered here.

⁵¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 62. Also: 'If one originated in the other, it is beauty that originated in the ugly, and not the reverse.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 66.

⁵² Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 62.

⁵³ Horkheimer and Adorno, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,' in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 94-136.

⁵⁴ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 67.

⁵⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 68.

aesthetics (as ‘the concept of beauty is inadequate to the full content of the aesthetic’),⁵⁶ beauty for its own sake must be renounced. The function of ugliness in Adorno’s aesthetics is to attest to the particularity of truth, which is suppressed in traditional understandings of beauty. Ugliness rejects the semblance of wholeness that beauty projects, through ugliness the subject relinquishes the illusory consolations that beauty affords, what Adorno calls the ‘self-satisfaction of domination.’⁵⁷ The particularity of truth, for Adorno, renders beauty incompatible with aesthetic truth content, for beauty demands that particularity operate in the service of (the semblance of) wholeness; beauty demands reconciliation. Whilst artworks, by their very nature, project the semblance of wholeness and being things-for-themselves, only ugliness calls attention to the reality of their fractured and particular truths. As Jay Bernstein explains, Adorno’s dialectical pairs reveal the *unresolvable* core of Modernism: ‘beauty and ugliness, integration and disintegration, spiritualisation and fragmentariness, construction and expression, harmony and dissonance, art and anti-art.’⁵⁸ All properly Modern artworks, then, participate in the expression of these irreconcilable dialectical pairs, projecting at once the semblance of wholeness *and* the reality of the fragmentary, particular nature of truth. As Bernstein argues: ‘Artworks, after all, are not real particulars, but only images or semblances of particulars, non-exchangeable thises [*sic.*], only on the condition that they remain enclosed in semblance.’⁵⁹ For Modern art, the price of this honesty, the simultaneous appearance of wholeness and particularity, is ugliness.

7.3.ii Dissonance and Pain

Just as Adorno reveals beauty’s truth to be domination, thus rendering ugliness a positive category, he similarly contends that ‘dissonance is the truth about harmony.’⁶⁰ Both beauty and harmony, when taken to their logical endpoint, prove to be incompatible with their own concepts, as beauty demands suppression (thus rendering beauty not-beautiful), and harmony itself requires ‘the coefficient of friction,’ in which what is not reconciled is presented as reconciled, thereby transgressing its own

⁵⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 66.

⁵⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 207.

⁵⁸ Jay Bernstein, “Melancholy as Form,” in *The New Aestheticism*, eds. John Joughin and Simon Malpas (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 170.

⁵⁹ Bernstein, “Melancholy as Form,” 170.

⁶⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 144.

postulate.⁶¹ The truth of beauty is thus not-beautiful, and the reconciliation harmony projects is revealed to be dependent upon tension. It is important to note that, for Adorno, the not-beautiful and the not-harmonious do not equate to ugliness and dissonance, as these categories carry an important positive content in his thinking. In other words, (bad) art may indeed be not-beautiful and not-harmonious, without being ugly or dissonant in Adorno's terms. In Adorno's sense, ugliness and dissonance are not simply the not-beautiful or not-harmonious, but are positive categories that require more than a negation of traditional aesthetics to be fulfilled.⁶²

'Dissonance,' for Adorno, is 'the seal of everything modern, it gives access to the alluringly sensuous by transfiguring it into its antithesis, pain.'⁶³ Like ugliness in art, dissonance names music's capacity for truth, in which the work of art exposes the (necessary) illusion of wholeness to be a lie, acknowledging its semblance character in a gesture of honesty denied by harmony. To read this passage with Kant in mind is to hear Adorno trying to afford art something of inevitability of the *senis communis* – only through a different measure, that of pain. The reconciliation and resolution promised by harmony is never fulfilled, the imagined consensus (and community) delivered by the universally recognised beautiful aesthetic object fails. Despite the failure of beauty, dissonance gives access to a similar promise of universal assent, albeit via an alternative and negative universal; namely, suffering.

Though dissonance in Adorno's philosophy certainly names a particular musical experience, it also operates as a metaphor for critique more generally: a capacity to think (and hear) without the need for resolution.⁶⁴ This desire to leave tension and contradiction hanging pervades Adorno's philosophy, and his writing itself could be

⁶¹ 'If the ideal of harmony is taken strictly, it proves to be unreachable according to its own concept. Its desiderata are satisfied only when such unreachableness appears as essence... The rejection of the ideal of classicism is not the result of the alternation of styles or, indeed, of an alleged historical temperament; it is, rather, the result of the coefficient of friction in harmony itself, which in corporeal form presents what is not reconciled as reconciled and thereby transgresses the very postulate of the appearing essence at which the ideal of harmony aims.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 145.

⁶² This point is developed further in 7.3.iii Progress and Primitivism below, in which I challenge Hohendahl's presentation of Stravinsky's primitivism as the 'wrong' kind of ugly for Adorno. The point is that Adorno finds Stravinsky's primitivism not-ugly (but also not-beautiful).

⁶³ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 17.

⁶⁴ John Rundell links dissonance with freedom, arguing that 'Adorno's critical theory of dissonance is a search for the *memory* of freedom, where freedom, on once level, is a uniqueness that is constantly and continuously delimited by the search for form and structure.' See John Rundell, "Modernity, Contingency, Dissonance: Luhmann contra Adorno, Adorno contra Luhmann," in *Moderne begreifen: Zur Paradoxie eines solo-ästhetischen Deutungsmusters*, eds. Christine Magerski, Roger Savage, Chistiane Weller (Weisbaden: Deutscher Universitäts-Verlag, 2007), 446. Original emphasis.

considered dissonant in its unwillingness to resolve. Adorno's style rejects outright the use of reductive or simplistic formulations, but it also resists the very idea of 'straightforward' communication, demanding not only interpretation but often (silent) performance. David Cunningham has noted that Adorno's implicitly pitch-oriented notion of dissonance may not be the most adequate metaphor for exploring the release from the demand for resolution that was the chief aesthetic marker of music in the twentieth century. As Cunningham argues, 'Jacques Attali's notion of "noise" may provide a better conceptual framework for thinking a generality of musical non-identity than that of dissonance.'⁶⁵ In any case, the metaphorical and literal dissonance that Adorno argues for in both philosophy and music, forms part of his overarching argument for the 'non-identity of identity and non-identity,'⁶⁶ a demand that non-identity (the particular, the fragmented, the dissonant) be left to stand on its own terms, and thus be released from the requirement to resolve in the service of the harmonious whole.

Kant's conceptualisation of the sublime, though he never intended it to be applied to art, was perhaps the first time aesthetics concerned itself with non-beautiful or ugly feelings.⁶⁷ Though the sublime in Kant's aesthetics belongs solely to the realm of nature, Adorno notes the direct lineage that draws the sublime into the domain of art.⁶⁸ For Kant, the sublime experience of nature is marked by the subject's joy in overcoming of the 'dread' and terror' of natural phenomena.⁶⁹ Kant's interest lies in developing a certain subjective response to the sublime: a confirmation of the supremacy of the subject despite the overwhelming power of nature, and thus a affirmation of the coherence of the 'I'. As Kant argues, the sublime experience of nature allows us to discover within ourselves 'a power of resistance of quite another kind, which gives us courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature.'⁷⁰

⁶⁵ David Cunningham, "A Time for Dissonance and Noise: On Adorno, Music and the Concept of Modernism," *Angelaki* 8, no. 1 (April 2003): 68. See also, Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi, foreword Fredric Jameson, afterword Susan McClary (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).

⁶⁶ Shierry Weber Nicholson and Jeremy J. Shapiro, "Introduction," in Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1993) xv.

⁶⁷ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 5.

⁶⁸ 'It is deeply paradoxical that nowhere does Kant come closer to the young Goethe and bourgeois revolutionary art than in his description of the sublime; the young poets, the contemporaries of his old age, share his sense of nature and by giving it expression vindicated the feeling of the sublime as an artistic rather than a moral reality.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 456, note 5.

⁶⁹ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, § 28, 91.

⁷⁰ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, § 28, 91.

According to Adorno, the pain in the face of natural beauty that Kant describes cultivates a certain pleasure or satisfaction in the subject, who enjoys the experience of ‘the autonomy of the spirit in the face of the superior power of sensuous existence.’⁷¹ Whilst Adorno’s own concerns are more objectively determined, the relevance of Kant’s understanding of the sublime continues to hold in the experience of the modern artwork. The possibility for pain in the face of art is thus not taken to be a condition exclusive to Modernist works, as aesthetic experience itself demands submission that both humbles and enables the subject.⁷² Kant’s thought refracted through an Adornian prism replaces beauty with pain, reviving the ethical power of the aesthetic that Kant first articulated,⁷³ and in so doing Adorno shifts the grounds upon which meaningful aesthetic experiences are made. Though Modernist aesthetics cannot claim the aesthetic experience of ugliness and pain solely for its own epoch, the final semantic release of ugliness and pain from purely negative meanings (a process arguably begun by Kant), is brought to fruition in Adorno’s aesthetics.

7.3.iii Progress and Primitivism

The connection Adorno draws between ugliness and the suppression of fear show how well aware he is of the link between ugliness and archaic modes including myth and religion. There is a distinction that needs to be made, however, between Adorno’s understanding of archaic or primitive art and primitivism (understood as the Modernist fashion for drawing inspiration from African, Polynesian and other so-called ‘primitive’ or tribal societies). The need for clarification here can be seen in the account Peter Uhe Hohendahl gives of Adorno’s *Philosophy of New Music* (from which his infamous Stravinsky critique is drawn). In his essay ‘Aesthetic Violence: The Concept of the Ugly in Adorno’s “*Aesthetic Theory*,”’ Hohendahl equates the use of ‘primitive’ tropes in primitivism with ugliness in order to find a place for primitivism in Adorno’s aesthetics.⁷⁴ Ultimately, however, this position cannot be substantiated; once Adorno’s Stravinsky critique is taken into account it is apparent that the primitive tropes

⁷¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 121.

⁷² ‘The pain in the face of beauty, nowhere more visceral than in the experience of nature, is as much the longing for what beauty promises but never unveils as it is suffering at the inadequacy of the appearance, which fails beauty while wanting to make itself like it. This pain reappears in the relation to artworks. Involuntarily and unconsciously, the observer enters into a contract with the work, agreeing to submit to it on condition that it speak. In the pledged receptivity of the observer, pure self-abandonment – that moment of free exhalation in nature – survives.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 95.

⁷³ Leach, “On Adorno’s Aesthetics of the Ugly,” 163.

⁷⁴ See quotation and note 77 below.

employed in *Rite of Spring* (1913) ultimately reconcile the listener with the status quo, and are better understood through the lens of (critiques) of orientalism, rather than through Adorno's discourse on the ugly. Adorno does not hear ugliness (in the positive sense he describes in *Aesthetic Theory*) in Stravinsky's *Rite*, but rather the cloaking of modern forms of domination in the garb of ancient times, which ultimately serve to naturalise, rather than resist, domination.⁷⁵

Adorno's understanding of progress has caused a good deal of confusion in debates over the merits of his aesthetics. Hohendahl's essay provides an interesting example of how uncertainty over what precisely Adorno takes progress to be can lead to problematic readings of the latter's work. Hohendahl attempts to temper Adorno's critique of primitivism by offering Carl Einstein's study of African sculpture *Nagerplastik* as a corrective interpretation. Never mind that Einstein's 'strictly phenomenological approach'⁷⁶ may neither be possible (the thought that one might compare an African fetish sculpture with Cubist painting from a position of phenomenological neutrality is absurd) nor desirable (as historical and geographical knowledge of aesthetic traditions brings to light the unequal relations of power operating between them), Hohendahl suggests Einstein's study as an alternative method to Adorno's as it 'challenge[s] the notion of progress on which the liberal conception of history was built.'⁷⁷ According to Hohendahl, 'Adorno demands...musical progress,'⁷⁸ which he takes to mean progress in a positivist sense. Hohendahl rightly links progress to the ugly in Schoenberg's work, but fails to register the qualified way in which Adorno uses both terms:

Adorno rejects a form of the ugly that is incompatible with his concept of artistic progress. While *The Philosophy of Modern Music* acknowledges the legitimacy of the ugly in Schoenberg's music, in the case of Stravinsky

⁷⁵ 'And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something entirely new, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle slogans and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language.' Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 595.

⁷⁶ Hohendahl, "Aesthetic Violence: The Concept of the Ugly in Adorno's "Aesthetic Theory," 177.

⁷⁷ Hohendahl, "Aesthetic Violence," 176.

⁷⁸ Hohendahl, "Aesthetic Violence," 175.

the verdict is negative because the ugly is linked to a form of regressive primitivism.⁷⁹

For Adorno, Schoenberg's music is indeed both ugly and progressive, but Hohendahl shows his confusion over the parameters of both these terms by suggesting that Adorno had a specific 'concept of artistic progress' (which has a decidedly positivist ring), and that Stravinsky's *Rite* might be ugly in the same sense as works by Schoenberg. As Adorno clearly articulated in a number of places (including *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, his *History and Freedom* lectures, and his essay "Progress" found in *Critical Models*),⁸⁰ progress is the domination of spirit (humanity) over nature, and thus should be understood to have both positive and negative outcomes. Adorno accepts that there is indeed technical progress, and that human knowledge can be said to be expanding, but this constitutes progress only insofar as it extends the human capacity to dominate nature. In the arts, progress should be understood as a progressive mastery (domination) over (historically determined) materials, and thus Adorno's use of the concept of progress should always be understood as part of the dialectical pairing of progress and domination:

Thus in art, too, we can assuredly speak of progress, in the measurable sense, moreover, that we can talk about the astonishing progress made in the mastery of the materials used in the different arts. However, there is no direct relationship between the progress involved in the mastery of the materials of art and the quality of particular works. In certain circumstances, the two may even be in conflict with each other. However, wherever we have reason to say that the conscious spirit progresses, it means that spirit is taking part in the domination over nature.⁸¹

Progress is inextricably intertwined with domination – as rationality dominates nature so too does it dominate humanity – and this is the heart of the dialectic of Enlightenment thinking.⁸² Thus, Hohendahl's argument that Adorno's 'concept of artistic

⁷⁹ Hohendahl, "Aesthetic Violence," 175.

⁸⁰ See Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-1965*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2006); Theodor W. Adorno, "Progress," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford, intro. Lydia Goehr (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 143-160.

⁸¹ Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 166.

⁸² 'The human being's mastery of itself, on which the self is founded, practically always involves the annihilation of the subject in whose service that mastery is maintained...in other words, self-preservation

progress...seems to confirm the dominance of the European development, possibly even a linear conception of history,'⁸³ is unfair as it does not take into consideration the full dialectical force of Adorno's thinking. Perhaps Adorno can be said to confirm the historical dominance of the European canon, in the sense that he offers an account of how rationality informs understandings of aesthetic value. Importantly, however, this does not amount to an affirmation of the historical necessity for any particular set of power relations or patterns of domination, as accusations of 'a linear conception of history' would suggest.⁸⁴ Contingency marks Adorno's thinking at every level; events, relations of power and domination, even the value of any specific work of art or style of composition, is studied in relation to all that occurs around it, and the idea of progress as the necessary or inevitable improvement in human knowledge is fiercely critiqued. Far from suggesting a linear history or telos, Adorno stresses the utter contingency of the world around us, and argues for a *non*-linear materialist history.⁸⁵ Thus, for Adorno, valuations of the most developed compositional procedures depend entirely on interpreting how a composer deals with what he terms the 'state of the material' (that is, the socially and historically determined situation in which musical material finds itself). For Adorno, the possibility of returning to past principles and old solutions is foreclosed as regressive, and in this sense, he maintains that composition must 'progress' in the search for new solutions. To suggest that this forms the basis for a 'linear conception of history' or a positive concept of 'artistic progress' is disingenuous.

Returning to *Philosophy of New Music*, it becomes evident that (contra Hohendahl) Adorno does not choose Schoenberg's ugliness over Stravinsky's; he instead finds the primitivist works of the latter composer not-ugly. Adorno's critique of Stravinsky's *Rite* should not be understood as a prohibition on the use of old or discarded materials. As Fred Rush has argued, 'the importance of the materials of found, discarded culture is an aspect of Adorno's aesthetics that is often downplayed or missed; its demand for formal innovation in art does not entail that the material on which innovation operates

destroys the very thing which is to be preserved.' Reason liberates humanity from the power of myth, but at the cost of self-sacrifice. The subject always gives away more than society gives back: 'The history of civilization is the history of the introversion of sacrifice – in other words, the history of renunciation. All who renounce give away more of their life than is given back to them, more than the life they preserve...The transformation of the sacrificial victim into subjectivity.' Myth endures within reason. Adorno, Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 43.

⁸³ Hohendahl, "Aesthetic Violence," 180.

⁸⁴ Adorno's understanding of history and its relation to time and temporality is explored in chapter five.

⁸⁵ See chapter five, especially 5.3 Benjamin and the Vulnerability of the Past.

comes from canonical high art and does not preclude the use of mass culture as its material.⁸⁶ It is not Stravinsky's use of 'primitive' materials themselves that Adorno takes issue with, but rather the composer's treatment of those materials. Stravinsky's classicism, and thus his refusal of formal innovation, rather than his use of 'primitive' materials, forms the basis of Adorno's critique. The 'ugly' use of archaic materials and tropes would demand that the material be used in a way that de-familiarises them, that uses them to negate (rather than reinforce) the power of myth, threat and order. Archaic materials could indeed be used in a refracted way to illuminate the contingent and artificial nature of patterns of domination and order; Adorno's point, however, is that Stravinsky does not achieve this. Instead of using archaic tropes to question patterns of domination, Adorno argues that Stravinsky's primitivism naturalises and de-historicises domination, inviting the listener to take pleasure in their own subjection. Interrogating the veracity of Adorno's conclusions may indeed prove fruitful, but to suggest (as Hohendahl does) that Adorno rejects Stravinsky's primitivism on the grounds that composing with archaic materials might inhibit the march of 'musical progress' is erroneous, and misses the important place Adorno's aesthetics maintains for antiquated or discarded materials.

Adorno notes that archaic 'effects' of Stravinsky's *Rite* 'belong to musical exoticism'⁸⁷ more than to any genuine embrace of antiquated or foreign cultures. The so-called barbaric elements in the *Rite* conjure, for Adorno, an imagined, exoticised past, a fantasy of 'the longed-for primeval world, which was itself terror.'⁸⁸ Far from signalling 'a merging of two cultures,'⁸⁹ Stravinsky's primitivism produces a fantasy of archaic non-alienation, which is, of course, very much the product of a modern sensibility. Adorno is sceptical of such projections of 'an undivided, phylogenetically determined unity of man and nature,'⁹⁰ as they ultimately affirm all that is as necessary. What Adorno calls 'the real barbarism of antiquity – the slavery, genocide, and contempt for human life'⁹¹ is served up for enjoyment. Rather than engaging the listener in a critique

⁸⁶ Fred Rush, "Adorno After Adorno," in *Art and Aesthetics After Adorno* (Berkeley: The University of California, Townsend Papers in the Humanities, 2010), 49.

⁸⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. ed. and intro. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 120.

⁸⁸ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 123.

⁸⁹ Hohendahl writes: 'The embrace of the barbaric, which for Adorno remains potentially a moment of regression, is for Einstein primarily a shift in the framework, a merging of two cultures.' Hohendahl "Aesthetic Violence," 179.

⁹⁰ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 118.

⁹¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 210.

of barbarism, s/he is drawn into participating with its perpetuation: 'the music identifies not with the victim but with the annihilating authority.'⁹² For Adorno, Stravinsky's *Rite* displays 'a ruthlessly employed artistic principle of selection and stylisation [which] gives the effect of the prehistorical.'⁹³ Far from signalling an openness towards the past, the 'archaic effect of *The Rite of Spring* is due to musical censorship, to the self-renunciation of every impulse not compatible with the principle of stylisation.'⁹⁴ Thus, 'the gesture toward primeval history [which] seemed to serve the emancipation of constricted art' (that is, the use of archaic materials), ultimately subverts difference in order to incorporate it back into identity. It is not the use of archaic tropes *per se*, but their treatment and 'regimentation'⁹⁵ that defines the *Rite* as conformist and sadomasochistic in Adorno's eyes.⁹⁶ The denial of individuality and subjectivity, and the identification with power that Adorno hears in the *Rite*, stems not from the materials that Stravinsky employed, but from the manner in which he gave them expression. For Adorno, the critical use of archaic or discarded cultural materials could indeed provide a basis for sounding the experiences of history's oppressed. Instead, however, Adorno finds that Stravinsky's *Rite* seeks reconciliation and identity with power (the collective), inviting the listener to take pleasure in (rather than pass judgement on) the 'insane ritual murder'⁹⁷ depicted.

Rhythmic repetition, and the predominance of the pulse within the musical texture, along with the division of motivic material into cells, for Adorno, precludes the possibility of musical becoming:

Every musical complex is limited to an initial material that is, as it were, photographed from shifting perspectives yet always remains unaffected in

⁹² Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 110. Tamara Levitz argues that Adorno's interpretation of *The Rite* fails to consider Nijinsky's choreography, which, for Levitz, shows the Chosen One is in defiance of the fate the community has foisted upon her. 'By identifying objective human subjectivity with organic, motivic, teleological musical processes, Adorno abstracted it from the body, imbuing it instead with a deeply deceiving metaphorical corporeality. This practice allowed him to find objective subjectivity in absolute music, while denying its presence in danced works of music.' See Tamara Levitz, "The Chosen One's Choice," in *Beyond Structural Listening? Postmodern Modes of Hearing*, ed. Andrew Dell'Antonio, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 73. However, the possibility that the choreography operates 'against' the music in *The Rite* does not necessarily negate Adorno's critique – which is that the music draws the listener into the identification with power (the community) rather than with the victim (the Chosen One who is to be sacrificed).

⁹³ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 113.

⁹⁴ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 116.

⁹⁵ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 112.

⁹⁶ 'The individual...enjoys his own annihilation.' Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 124.

⁹⁷ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 119.

its harmonic-melodic kernel...Through the authoritarian repetition of a nonentity, the listener is made a fool. He at first supposes that he is involved with something by no means architectonic, but rather something shifting in its irregularity, that is, with his own likeness. He is to identify himself. But at the same time, the constant pounding of it all instructs him on something worse: its immutability. He must conform...Its coercive power of persuasion has to do in part with the self-suppression of the subject and in part with the musical language that is specially concocted to produce authoritarian effects, especially the emphatic, hammering, dictatorial instrumentation that unites terseness with vehemence.⁹⁸

There are many moments that could be taken from *The Rite* to illustrate Adorno's argument. Example 1 gives the opening bars of "The Augurs of Spring," showing a number of the effects Adorno identifies: shifting, but otherwise unchanging, motivic cells (his 'shifting perspectives'); pounding repetition in the strings, punctuated by irregular 'shocks' from the horns (and later the winds) that suggest the dominance of the quaver pulse may be challenged, but this challenge does not eventuate, with all rhythmic irregularities folding back into conformity; along with the domineering rhythm, the instrumentation (the *tutti* strings are opposed to the entire section of eight horns) suggests the overbearing domination of the collective(s) over the individual (who is to be sacrificed), and counterpoint and soloistic writing is strictly avoided (evidence of the 'self-suppression of the subject,' and 'authoritarian effects').

⁹⁸ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 147-48.

Ex. 1: Igor Stravinsky, “The Augurs of Spring,” *The Rite of Spring*, figures 13-16.⁹⁹

THE AUGURS OF SPRING
DANCES OF THE YOUNG GIRLS
LES AUGURES PRINTANERS
DANSES DES ADOLESCENTES

13 Tempo giusto 4 = 54

Rhythmic 'shocks' punctuate
(rather than disrupt) pounding
quaver pulse

Pounding repetition in strings

Static motivic cells

pizz.

14

15

16

17

18

19

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32

Similarly, Example 2 shows the opening bars of the “Sacrificial Dance” which, despite the many shifts in meter and irregular ties over bar lines, maintains the overarching quaver pulse with striking force. The quaver pulse dominates the apparent irregularity of rhythm and meter, and for Adorno such formulations evoke domination and the forceful suppression of the individual to the collective will.

⁹⁹ Igor Stravinsky, *The Rite of Spring: Picture from Pagan Russia* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1967), 10-11.

For Adorno, then, ugliness is not the perversion of beauty, nor a marker of non-pleasurable or sadomasochistic experience (which is the only ‘pleasure’ Adorno affords to Stravinsky’s *Rite*), but a positive category that interrupts the continuum of sensory experience in order to make way for new forms of experience. Dissonance, which in Adorno’s thinking names both a specific category of musical ugliness as well as a more philosophical category of the resistance to reconciliation or false harmony, cannot be achieved through any particular procedure or the application of any given compositional technique. Adorno’s own work on the inadequacy of system-driven approaches to composing is a reminder of the nuanced approach he maintained towards new music throughout his lifetime.¹⁰⁰ Adorno did not celebrate Schoenberg’s music simply for its atonality or serialism, nor did he deride Stravinsky’s work purely for its primitivism: in both cases Adorno addressed the adequacy of the form to its material, and critiqued specific works on those grounds.

¹⁰⁰ See especially Theodor W. Adorno, “Vers Une Musique Informelle (1961),” in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1998), 269-322 and Theodor W. Adorno, “The Aging of the New Music,” in *Essays on Music*, selected, with introduction, commentary and notes Richard Leppert, new trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 181-202.

Ex. 2: Igor Stravinsky, "Sacrificial Dance (The Chosen One)," *The Rite of Spring*, figures 142-143.¹⁰¹ Note that the many shifts in meter and irregular ties over bar lines fail to disrupt the authority of the quaver pulse.

SACRIFICIAL DANCE
(THE CHOSEN ONE)
DANSE SACRALE
(L'ÉLUE)

121

B. & H. 19441

¹⁰¹ Stravinsky, *The Rite of Spring*, 121.

7.4 Pleasure and Asceticism in Adorno's Aesthetics

*The bourgeois want art voluptuous and life ascetic; the reverse would be better.*¹⁰²

Chapters two and three showed how musicologists such as McClary and Taruskin, and anthropologists such as Born, have constructed musical Modernism as a hostile and domineering force. This discourse surrounding Modernist music also contains a subtle (perhaps unconscious) directive about what rightly constitutes musical enjoyment, and thus enacts its own policing of what is able to count as aesthetic pleasure. In an effort to move with the times, disciplinary musicology has opened itself to the study of popular forms, and reaction to perceived Modernist hegemony has led many to embrace Postmodernism in both art and popular music (such as minimalism in its different guises). Importantly, this process has been staged as a clash of aesthetic civilisations, where one's allegiances must lie firmly on one side of the Modernist-Postmodernist (or serial-tonal, high-low) divide, at times culminating in the renunciation the notion of aesthetic value *tout court*. In any case, important critics such as McClary and Taruskin celebrate the (postmodern) reaction against serial techniques as the triumphant return of music we can all *enjoy*.¹⁰³ Whereas Adorno offers a well-theorised account of what he takes aesthetic pleasure to be, musicology has largely taken pleasure and enjoyment to be self-evident categories, allowing critics to stage ('non-pleasurable,' dissonant) Modernist music as the antithesis of (pleasurable, tonal) Postmodernist approaches and popular forms. Through an account of aesthetic pleasure as Adorno understood it, this chapter shows how the lack of theorising within musicology leaves the concept under-explored, relying on 'common sense' understandings of pleasure that are undoubtedly manufactured, and which ultimately rely on understanding aesthetic pleasure as an historically and socially neutral phenomenon.

Adorno draws a stark distinction between pleasure and enjoyment, and it is on this plane, at the level of the reception or experience of artworks, that the reader encounters an undoubtedly moral aspect to his aesthetics. Whilst, in Adorno's thinking, pleasure may be taken in the experience of oppositional or radical works of art, the lesser (and

¹⁰² Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 16.

¹⁰³ For a psychoanalytically informed critique of enjoyment under contemporary political and cultural conditions see Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 2008).

morally suspect) category of enjoyment is all that is offered by affirmative works. Cheerful art, art that seeks happiness and reconciliation with the world through ‘the imbecility of positive thinking,’¹⁰⁴ offers the possibility for enjoyment, but at great cost: ‘The injustice committed by all cheerful art, especially by entertainment, is probably an injustice to the dead; to accumulated, speechless pain.’¹⁰⁵ The fact that, for Adorno, ‘there is more joy in dissonance than in consonance: This metes out justice, eye for eye, to hedonism,’¹⁰⁶ speaks of the connection between art and integrity. The distinction between enjoyment and pleasure, cheerfulness and joyfulness, art and entertainment is an aesthetico-moral one: our obligation is to side with, and open our ears to, history’s oppressed, not its victors. Given that ‘negation may reverse into pleasure, [but] not into affirmation,’¹⁰⁷ Adorno arguably ascribes an important positive role to pain, and is open to the possibility that radical, negative or ‘black art’¹⁰⁸ may indeed be pleasurable. Just as ugliness is now the only passage to (a worthy) beauty, so pleasure in artworks is now marked by darkness and heaviness; unburdened enjoyment signals the deficiency of either the work of art or the subject contemplating it. If there is an asceticism to Adorno’s aesthetics, it is perhaps best registered by the demand that the subject pay full attention to works of art, and open themselves to the full intensity of their experience, to seek understanding rather than surface enjoyment.

Adorno notes the historical pendulum-swing between periods of sensual asceticism and sensual excess, but suggests that adequate art must always refract sensual pleasure in order to resist regressing into an affirmative gesture:

The importance of the sensual in art has varied; after an age of asceticism pleasure becomes an organ of liberation....Yet however powerful, historically, the force of pleasure to return may be, whenever it appears in art literally, undefracted, it has an infantile quality. Only in memory and longing, not as a copy or as an immediate effect, is pleasure absorbed by art.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 51.

¹⁰⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 50.

¹⁰⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 51.

¹⁰⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 51.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Radical art today is synonymous with dark art; its primary colour is black.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 50.

¹⁰⁹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 17.

Refracted pleasure, which resists the pretence of immediacy, is of particular importance to present social and economic conditions; such (refracted) pleasure (as opposed to enjoyment) resists the cooption of art into the logic of equivalences imposed by commodity culture. Art's autonomy stands in opposition to the social and economic demand that art deliver a quantifiable use-value in the guise of sensual pleasure, and so 'sensuous happiness' is the element that 'autonomous formation has always opposed,'¹¹⁰ because autonomous forms by definition must resist (their inevitable) cooption into commodities. For Adorno, then, 'sensual satisfaction' or 'sensuous happiness' stands in the way of art's critical capacity. If required, sensual satisfaction should be used as means of achieving a particular effect in a work of art, and not as an end in itself.¹¹¹ In his *Philosophy of New Music*, Adorno cites Berg's use of the C-Major triad in his operas *Wozzeck* and *Lulu* as an example of how the 'sensual satisfaction' of landing upon a C-Major triad in the midst of an atonal passage operates as a means, not an end. By using the C-Major triad to represent the circulation of money in his operas, Berg problematises both the idea of money (which relies upon collective illusion), and calls into question the self-evident nature of tonality itself. Rather than the 'sensual satisfaction' of arriving at the most familiar aural environment, in which the C-Major triad would be experienced as a simple pleasure or moment of (natural) beauty in amongst the 'difficult' atonal setting from which it emerges, it instead has the immanent musical function of defamiliarising tonality, as well as a narrative function of problematising and making plain the illusory nature of money. As Adorno writes: 'The small-change C-Major coin is denounced as counterfeit.'¹¹²

Thus, easy enjoyment is not a category necessarily related to Adorno's conceptualisation of pleasure, and enjoyment is certainly not the lens through which pleasure may be measured. Furthermore, Adorno is sceptical as to the possibility for such sensual satisfaction regardless of the moral standing of such experience (which he would no doubt denounce as masochistic, 'pseudo-pleasure through identification with

¹¹⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 357.

¹¹¹ 'Sensual satisfaction, punished at various times by ascetic authoritarianism, has historically become directly antagonistic to art; mellifluous sounds, harmonious colours, and suaveness have become kitsch and trademarks of the culture industry. The sensual appeal of art continues to be legitimate only when, as in Berg's *Lulu* or in the work of André Masson, it is the bearer or a function of the content rather than an end in itself.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 357.

¹¹² Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 179, note 29.

power’),¹¹³ writing that ‘what popular consciousness and a complaisant aesthetics regard as the taking pleasure in art...probably does not exist.’¹¹⁴ Because a process of desire-fabrication and its subsequent denial marks the contemporary social situation, the apparent immediacy or sensual satisfaction of popular forms remains an unfulfilled promise as ‘the pleasure, the enjoyment it promises, is given only to be simultaneously denied.’¹¹⁵ The illusion of sensual satisfaction through art is best identified as having fallen prey to the illusion of immediacy, when in fact all music is subject to social mediation.

This antithetical relation between easy enjoyment and aesthetic pleasure should not be taken as a renunciation of the body, nor a rejection of sensuous pleasure. Unlike ‘literature [which] does not require completion through sensuous representation,’¹¹⁶ the experience of music is a priori a sensuous one, and sensuous experience is undoubtedly one aspect of pleasure. However, as Ross Wilson has argued, Adorno’s defence of pleasure against enjoyment centres upon his refusal of ‘that opposition between work and pleasure upon which bourgeois society insists.’¹¹⁷ The notion that the sensuous might be severed from the intellectual in aesthetic experience is a mirroring of the division of labour. The social demand for subjects to be divided into the various functions required of them is not resisted by an escape into sensuality: ‘Work while you work, play while you play – this is a basic rule of repressive self-discipline.’¹¹⁸ Ultimately, the division of sense from intellect (and work from pleasure) serves only to further the subject’s internalisation of a repressive social apparatus, in which enjoyment is the compensation paid for a life deprived of real pleasures. Resisting this division between work and pleasure, sense and intellect, is achieved not through a conflation of sensuality and pleasure, but through an understanding of pleasure that demands sense and intellect, pleasure and work, simultaneously. As Adorno writes: ‘Only a cunning intertwining of pleasure and work leaves real experience open.’¹¹⁹ Unlike enjoyment,

¹¹³ Theodor W. Adorno, “On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening” in *Essays on Music*, selected, with introduction, commentary and notes Richard Leppert, new trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 311.

¹¹⁴ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 15.

¹¹⁵ Adorno, “On the Fetish Character,” 289.

¹¹⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 127.

¹¹⁷ Ross Wilson, “Voluptuousness and Asceticism in Adorno,” *German Life and Letters* 62, no. 3 (July 2009): 274.

¹¹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: reflections from a damaged life*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (London: Verso, 1985), 130.

¹¹⁹ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 130.

pleasure demands a certain amount of work, and only the ‘cunning intertwining’ of the two holds any possibility for resisting the dominant social apparatus that seeks their separation.

As Adorno describes in *Aesthetic Theory*, ‘music embodies complexes that can only be understood through what is sensuously not present, through memory or expectation,’¹²⁰ and as such purely phenomenological accounts fail to register the layers of socially mediated meaning and experience that music offers. Intuitability, or the idea that bodily presence is sufficient for aesthetic experience, belies its positivism through the affirmative demand that pleasure contains no work. As Adorno writes: ‘Behind the cult of intuitability lurks the philistine convention of the body that lies stretched out on the sofa while the soul soars to the heights: Aesthetic appearance is to be effortless relaxation, the reproduction of labour power, and spirit is reduced handily to what is called the work’s “message.”’¹²¹ Thus, aesthetic pleasure may demand work, and may also rely upon that which is not sensuously present (experiences and expectations that are preserved in memory), and as such a purely sensory account of pleasure fails to register the layers of meaning that thought and context bring to aesthetic experience. Adorno’s assertion that ‘the concept of aesthetic pleasure as constitutive of art is to be superseded,’¹²² should not be taken as a prohibition against sensuousness, or as the sign of an understanding of pleasure that exists in opposition to knowledge. On the contrary, Adorno decries the ‘separation of feeling from understanding’ as ‘barbaric.’¹²³ Nonetheless he takes subjective enjoyment or discomfort to be a ‘chance’ element¹²⁴ or ‘accidental aspect’¹²⁵ of the aesthetic object, and thus of secondary importance to work’s truth content.¹²⁶

Assertions of music’s immediacy tend to be couched in the language of pleasure and physicality, with physical responses to aesthetic phenomena cast as the most authentic manifestations of aesthetic experience.¹²⁷ For Adorno, to privilege music that elicits a

¹²⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 128.

¹²¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 128.

¹²² Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 18.

¹²³ Adorno, “The Ageing of the New Music,” 193.

¹²⁴ Adorno, “The Ageing of the New Music,” 197.

¹²⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 18.

¹²⁶ See 4.3 Theory of the Artwork, especially 4.3.iii Truth Content.

¹²⁷ Richard Taruskin, for example, celebrates Steve Reich’s *Different Trains* in such terms: ‘It brings an ache, and a shiver.’ See Richard Taruskin, *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 102. Taruskin also prefers to critique John Adams’ *The Death of Klinghoffer* on the grounds of potential ‘goosebumps and tears to impart,’ rather than the

physical response, or music that is noted for its physicality, as if it somehow allows for unmediated experience is a fallacy, as ‘musical physicalism does not lead back to the state of nature, the untainted world, free of ideology; on the contrary, it accords with the regression of society.’¹²⁸ Sensual enjoyment or physical responses may indeed be part of aesthetic experience, but should not be understood to necessarily signal pleasure (as Adorno understood it). One could speculate that Adorno found Stravinsky’s use of rhythm undoubtedly arresting (perhaps even masochistically enjoyable), yet he also found that ‘its claim to the body...to the regularity of the heartbeat’¹²⁹ invoked domination and the ‘authoritarian attitude.’¹³⁰ Thus the physical experience of the work, even its enjoyment, cannot be said to fulfil the aesthetic experience of the work, which requires reflection upon, and interpretation of, that experience for its completion. Adorno is also careful to maintain that aesthetic experience demands reflection upon the artwork as a whole in relation to its parts, and he rejects the idea that pleasure is possible in the form of ‘momentary effects’¹³¹ or isolated moments of enjoyment. Adequate aesthetic experience demands mediation between the whole and its parts, and is not dependent on momentary flashes of (apparently) immediate satisfaction. For Adorno, ‘in art the sensory’ is ‘the bearer of something intellectual which only shows itself in the whole rather than in isolated topical moments,’¹³² and as such pleasure, thought, feeling and understanding are inexorably intertwined.

For Adorno, aesthetic experience necessarily demands both feeling and understanding, any attempt to separate thinking from sensuality leads to a deficient concept of experience. Likewise, the conflation of immediacy (which for Adorno, is just a function of mediation) with easy enjoyment unjustifiably restricts aesthetic pleasure to the narrow confines of ‘liking.’¹³³ Such an approach remains closed to the pleasures of

political lessons it might impart (he finds the work lacking on both accounts). See Taruskin, “Shall We Change the Subject?” 39.

¹²⁸ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 146.

¹²⁹ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 146.

¹³⁰ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 146. See Examples 1 and 2 above for illustration.

¹³¹ Wilson, “Voluptuousness and Asceticism in Adorno,” 281.

¹³² Adorno, “On the Fetish Character in Music,” 33.

¹³³ Though directed to the sphere of popular (rather than art) music, Adorno argues that thanks to the overriding standardisation of popular forms, the expression of likes and dislikes merely signifies recognition or its absence. For Adorno, likes and dislikes are unable to carry any meaningful subjective expression, as the condition upon which they are based (freedom to choose) is no more than an illusion, all that is actually offered is variations of the same. ‘The fact that the basis of likes and dislikes, namely free choice, has disappeared: the available products are standardized to such a degree that likes and dislikes are largely superficial and, in a great many cases, the consumer is not even offered a choice among similar commodities, but no choice at all.’ Theodor W. Adorno, “Listening Habits: An Analysis

ugly, dissonant or difficult Modernist works, and arguably reduces pleasure itself to the negation of work.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has expanded upon the argument advanced in chapter four that the major tension between Adorno's thinking and much musicological thought stems from the latter's desire to establish music as a domain of unmediated experience, where too much cerebral reflection is thought to get in the way of the experience of the work.¹³⁴ The notion that Modernist ugliness (and the attendant demand for thought) stands as a barrier to pleasure, in particular sensual pleasure, is something of a truism for many musicologists writing today. As discussed already, a number of persistent tropes have distorted discussions of Modernist music, the most pernicious of these is the idea that Modernist music is simply unpleasant to listen to, and as a result is unable to find an audience.¹³⁵ Serial music, in particular, is singled out as simultaneously hegemonic (despite the fact that it has always been one composing style among many)¹³⁶ and deeply unpopular. For Adorno, such understandings of experience are a naive 'reflex to social reification,' amounting to 'the establishment of a special sphere of immediacy that is blind to the thing-like dimensions of artworks.'¹³⁷ The categorical separation of (sensuous) experience from (cerebral) interpretation ultimately collapses the distance between subject and object into a 'disrelation,' plunging the subject and the world

of Likes and Dislikes in Light Popular Music," in *Current of Music: elements of a radio theory*, ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Frankfurt am Main: Shurcamp, 2006), 405-6.

¹³⁴ See for example, Taruskin, "The Musical Mystique," Abbate "Music – Drastic or Gnostic?" and Susan McClary, "Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition," *Cultural Critique* 12 (1989): 57-81.

¹³⁵ For Taruskin 'the resolutely esoteric and unsellable work of Arnold Schoenberg' is emblematic. See Richard Taruskin, "Shall We Change the Subject?" *Dissonance* 112 (December, 2010): 27. Such depictions form part of the ongoing (and longstanding) discussion surrounding the demise of classical music generally, and new music audiences in particular. See for example, Mark Vanhoenacker, "Requiem: Classical Music in America is Dead," *Slate*, January 21, 2014, accessed February 18 2016, http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2014/01/classical_music_sales_decline_is_classical_on_death_s_door.html; Anne Midgette, "Classical Music: Dead or Alive?," *The Washington Post*, January 30, 2014, accessed February 18, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/style/wp/2014/01/30/classical-music-dead-or-alive/>.

¹³⁶ Joseph N. Straus, "The Myth of Serial 'Tyranny' in the 1950s and 1960s," *Musical Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (Fall, 1999): 301-344.

¹³⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 129.

around them into a state of mere given-ness. For Adorno, the price of such thinking is ‘soulessness.’¹³⁸

The ugliness and dissonance exhibited by many Modernist works undoubtedly repels easy enjoyment. As Adorno’s aesthetics shows, ugliness and dissonance form the aesthetic manifestation of pain, arguably the only domain left upon which to ground the possibility for universal human assent. It is through ugliness and dissonance that Modernist works arrest experience, and draw the subject and the work out of a state of ‘mere’ existence. By Adorno’s account, it is through interpretation, the completion of experience with thought, that the subject does justice to the work of art.¹³⁹ As argued here, the commonly-held notion that Adorno’s demand for thought somehow dismisses the corporeal aspect of experience is without basis. Despite the undoubted importance of thought in Adorno’s aesthetics – evidenced by such aphorisms as: ‘Aesthetic experience is not genuine experience unless it becomes philosophy,’¹⁴⁰ and ‘[Art] must also be thought: art itself thinks’¹⁴¹ – he is not seeking to elevate thought *above* experience, but rather he understands thought to be a central feature of experience itself. In other words, experience remains incomplete without thought, and the task of interpretation demands the work of the body as much as the mind.

¹³⁸ ‘Stravinsky said of one of his later works that there is no need to discuss its quality: It is simply there like any other thing. The air of authenticity is bought at the price of insistent soulessness. Music, by putting all its weight on its mere existence and concealing the participation of the subject under its emphatic muteness, promises the subject the ontological footing that it lost precisely through the same alienation that music chose as its stylistic principle. The disrelation of subject and object, driven to its limit, replaces the relationship.’ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 129.

¹³⁹ Roland Barthes’ destabilisation of the location of meaning in the work of art is mentioned in chapter three, note 29. A thorough discussion of how Adorno and Barthes differ in their consideration of the location of aesthetic meaning since the ‘death of the author’ is beyond the scope of this study.

¹⁴⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 172.

¹⁴¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 129.

Chapter Eight

‘Loneliness as Style’: Adorno’s *Erwartung*¹

*The genuinely revolutionary element in his [Schoenberg’s] music is the transformation of the function of expression. Passions are no longer faked; on the contrary, undisguised, corporeal impulses of the unconscious, shocks and traumas are registered in the medium of music.*²

8.0 Introduction

Theodor W. Adorno’s enthusiasm for the composers of the Second Viennese School is well known; he not only moved within its inner circle (Arnold Schoenberg was baffled by the earnest young Adorno’s enthusiasm for his work),³ but also tried his own hand in composition under the tutelage of Alban Berg.⁴ Arnold Schoenberg’s 1909 monodrama *Erwartung* (Expectation) occupies a significant place in Adorno’s thinking; Richard Leppert names it (along with Schoenberg’s *Five Orchestral Pieces*, *Pierrot lunaire*, and Berg’s *Wozzeck*) as a ‘watershed composition,’ which influenced

¹ Describing the climax of *Erwartung* Adorno writes: ‘Here, then, is the formula of loneliness as a style: It is a collective loneliness, that of the city dwellers who know nothing of one another.’ The heading ‘Loneliness as a Style’ introduces the section. Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. ed. and intro. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 40-41.

² Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 35.

³ Lydia Goehr writes that ‘Schoenberg was never convinced by Adorno’s reading of his works.’ Lydia Goehr, “Dissonant Works and the Listening Public,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 224. Stefan Müller-Doohm writes that ‘Schoenberg made no attempt to conceal his dislike of Adorno’s writings on music. He thought his style mannered and his theoretical ideas incomprehensible. In particular, he believed that Adorno’s over-philosophical interpretations damaged his [Schoenberg’s] pioneering contributions to the New Music in the eyes of the public.’ Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 97-98.

⁴ ‘In 1924, after a performance in Frankfurt of the three orchestral fragments from *Wozzeck*, Adorno was introduced to Alban Berg. Adorno asked if Berg would accept him as a composition pupil, and the matter was agreed on the spot. Studies commenced in Vienna the following year, and continued over a period of three years.’ Max Paddison, *Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5.

the development of Adorno's aesthetic theory.⁵ Jonathan Cross suggests that Adorno considered *Erwartung* to be the 'finest instance' of Schoenberg's atonal period, exhibiting the 'unrestricted freedom' of what Adorno termed the '*musique informelle*.'⁶ Any reader familiar with Adorno's lifelong exploration of musical modernism will recognise *Erwartung* as a work to which he often returned in order to illustrate his thinking.

Adorno's most forceful defence of Schoenberg's compositions is to be found in his famous critique of the two great poles of musical modernism, *Philosophy of New Music*, in which he situates the 'progressive' Schoenberg in (dialectical) opposition to the 'regressive' Stravinsky. First published in 1949, the *Philosophy of New Music* celebrates Schoenberg's music for its resistance to totalising impulses, and the book is shot-through with a palpable fear of fascism. Later works, including *Aesthetic Theory* (posthumously published in 1970)⁷ and the lecture delivered at the 1961 Darmstadt Ferienkurse, "*Vers une musique informelle*,"⁸ provide important points of qualification to the arguments presented in *Philosophy of New Music*, tempering the urgency of his earlier polemic. Despite Adorno's continued commitment to, and championing of, musical high modernism, he does not return to the Second Viennese School with breadth or intensity of his 1949 critique. Adorno's small book on Berg of 1968 does not match the scope of his earlier monographs on Wagner (1952) and Mahler (1960),⁹ and while the works of Schoenberg and Webern are often referred to in essays and books, the sustained critique of Schoenberg's composing found in the *Philosophy of New Music* is not revisited.

This chapter begins with a consideration of *Erwartung* within the musicological literature, noting that many prominent analyses of *Erwartung* have unearthed a number of motivic devices. The veracity of these accounts is considered in relation to Adorno's own interpretation, which insists that whilst motivic and tonal structures undoubtedly

⁵ Richard Leppert, "Commentary," in Theodor W. Adorno *Essays On Music*, selected, introduction, commentary, and notes Richard Leppert, new trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 92.

⁶ Jonathan Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 228.

⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997).

⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, "*Vers une musique informelle*," in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1998), 269-322.

⁹ See translator's introduction to Theodor W. Adorno, *Alban Berg: Master of the Smallest Link*, trans., intro., annotation Julianne Brand and Christopher Hailey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), viii.

reverberate throughout the work, these devices do not ultimately disrupt the work's atonality and athematicism. In light of Adorno's analysis (and his philosophy more generally), the chapter then considers issues surrounding *Erwartung*'s text (which Adorno found lacking). The possibility for a structural listening of the work is also considered, and what Adorno's valorisation of *Erwartung* might imply about his understanding of structural listening. This chapter extends upon the critique of structural listening advanced in chapter one, showing that Adorno's structural approach invites a wide range of interpretive possibilities.¹⁰ Finally, this chapter considers how coherence is achieved within *Erwartung*, given that the work makes fragmentation its chief structuring device.

8.1 *Erwartung* in the Literature

Erwartung, Schoenberg's 1909 monodrama scored for solo soprano and large orchestra, although composed as a staged opera, is most often presented in concert performance. Lasting approximately half an hour, *Erwartung* opens with the protagonist, the Woman, wandering through a forest in a state of great anxiety, seeking her missing lover. Through a series of dream-like scenes the Woman discovers her dead beloved, moving through states of grief, anger and (possible) hallucination. *Erwartung*'s narrative proves impervious to certainty of interpretation; precisely what is 'real' and what is the product of hallucination remains unclear, and the question of the Woman's role in her lover's death remains unresolved.

The characterisation of *Erwartung* as atonal and athematic has aroused debate, with various analyses unearthing a range of motivic structures operating within the piece. It is on the grounds of its radical athematicism that Charles Rosen has suggested that '*Erwartung* is traditionally supposed to be the despair of musical analysis.'¹¹ Nonetheless, a number of analysts have identified recurring devices.¹² Bryan R. Simms

¹⁰ Rose Rosengard Subotnik's critique of structural listening is considered in chapter two.

¹¹ Charles Rosen, *Arnold Schoenberg* (London: Fontana, 1976), 48.

¹² Though it is not discussed in here, it is worth noting that Robert Craft suggests a principal rhythmic and pitch motive which 'consists of three notes, a longer first and third, usually at the same pitch, with the second a small interval apart, primarily a minor-second, above or below. The motive is heard more frequently as B-flat-A-B-flat.' Robert Craft, "About this Recording," Liner Notes, *Schoenberg: Pelleas und Melisande / Erwartung*,
http://www.naxos.com/mainsite/blurbs_reviews.asp?item_code=8.557527&catNum=557527&filetype=About%20this%20Recording&language=English#
 (accessed 25 November 2015).

argues that H. H. Stuckenschmidt was, in 1931, the first to hear the ‘constructive device in *Erwartung*,’ ‘by which small motivic particles recur in free variants without a systematic connection to the dramatic context.’¹³ According to Simms, the central motive Stuckenschmidt identifies is the triad D – F – C sharp, with the notes ‘freely reordered, inverted and transposed’ throughout the work.¹⁴ Simms shows the centrality of the D-F-C# triad through the first 153 bars of the work (see Example 1).

¹³ Bryan R. Simms, *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg, 1908 – 1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 97.

¹⁴ Simms, *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg*, 97-98. Simms provides a table noting ‘representative occurrences of the motive and its variants’ also. See Simms, *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg*, 98-99.

Ex. 1: Simms' table shows the prevalence of the D-F-C# triad (in various permutations) found in *Erwartung*.¹⁵

The image displays a musical score for Arnold Schoenberg's *Erwartung*, featuring various instruments and voice parts. The score is organized into systems, each with a measure range and an instrument label. The lyrics are written below the voice parts.

- mm. 1-2**: oboe
- m. 12**: voice
was für schwe - re Luft her - aus - schlägt
- m. 15**: voice
A - ber hier ists we - nig - stens hell
- m. 22**: b. clar.
- mm. 37-38**: brass
- mm. 49-51**: violin
- mm. 76-77**: voice
Es kommt auf mich zu
- mm. 125-26**: voice
Er ist auch nicht da
- mm. 152-53**: voice
Das ist er!
- bassi**: etc.

¹⁵ Simms, *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg*, 99.

In *Philosophy of New Music*, Adorno observes that bars 411–12 of *Erwartung* (a point of significant climax in the work) include a musical quotation of Schoenberg's earlier tonal song “*Am Wegrund*” (1905).¹⁶ Simms argues that because of the many earlier incarnations of the D-F-C# theme ‘when the song [“*Am Wegrund*”] theme is finally quoted beginning in measure 411, its basic materials are already familiar to the astute listener.’¹⁷ Example 2 shows the opening five bars of “*Am Wegrund*,” bracketing the vocal line which (along with the text ‘Tausend Menschen ziehen vorüber’) is quoted in *Erwartung*. *Erwartung*’s important triad D-F-C# is prominent in the melody line (note the presence of the fifth of the chord). Example 3 shows the quotation as it appears in *Erwartung*, with the melody of “*Am Wegrund*” appearing in the bass clarinet and bassoons.

Ex. 2: Arnold Schoenberg, “*Am Wegrund*,” *Acht Lieder*, Op. 6, bars 1-5.¹⁸

2

AM WEGRAND

(John Henry Mackay.)

Arnold Schönberg, Op. 6 No 6

Bewegt (♩)

Gesang

Klavier

f

p

Tau - send Men - schen zie - hen vor - ü - ber - den ich er - seh - ne, er

¹⁶ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 40-41.

¹⁷ Simms, *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg*, 98. Simms writes bar 401, but I think this can be assumed to be a misprint.

¹⁸ Arnold Schoenberg, *Acht Lieder*, Op. 6: für eine Singstimme und Klavier (Berlin-Lichterfelde: Dreililien (R. Birnbach) [193-?]), 2.

Ex. 3: Arnold Schoenberg, *Erwartung*, bars 408-411.¹⁹

Herbert H. Buchanan echoes this observation in his 1967 essay “A Key to Schoenberg’s *Erwartung* (Op.17).”²⁰ Buchanan argues that the ‘key’ to the climax of *Erwartung* lies in the quotation of a ‘major-minor third intervallic cell’²¹ derived from an earlier tonal song “*Am Wegrund*” (which exhibits a clear D-minor tonality). According to Buchanan, such ‘thematic repetition’ demands that descriptions of *Erwartung* as ‘athematic’ and ‘atonal’ be reconsidered in light of the ‘coherent structure’ such repetition lends the work.²²

Richard Taruskin similarly contends that *Erwartung* exhibits two ‘pervasive’ motifs: the ‘atonal triad’ (which is achieved through the ‘superimposition of fourths’),²³ and a three-note /0 1 4/ motif, which ‘in one guise or another...inhabits virtually every measure of the score.’²⁴ For Taruskin, the atonal trichord provides Schoenberg’s music

¹⁹ Arnold Schoenberg, *Erwartung: Monodram in einem Akt*, Dichtung von Marien Pappenheim (Wien: Universal Edition, c1950), 57.

²⁰ Herbert H. Buchanan, “A Key to Schoenberg’s ‘*Erwartung*,’” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 20, no. 3 (Autumn, 1967): 434-439.

²¹ Herbert H. Buchanan, “A Key to Schoenberg’s ‘*Erwartung*,’” 439.

²² Buchanan, “A Key to Schoenberg’s ‘*Erwartung*,’” 434.

²³ Richard Taruskin, “Crossing the Cusp,” *Music in the Early Twentieth Century*, *Oxford History of Western Music*. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordwesternmusic.com.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/view/Volume4/actrade-9780195384840-div1-006014.xml> (accessed 16 November 2015).

²⁴ Taruskin, “Crossing the Cusp.” This motif is the same figure identified by Stuckenschmidt and illustrated by Simms, though Taruskin chooses a different ‘normal order’ for the motif.

with a ‘sonic norm much as the triad had always done in “common-practice” harmony,’ and in particular ‘the harmony of *Erwartung*, to a remarkable degree, consists of chords alternating fourths and tritones, ranging all the way from the basic three-note unit...to extensions of six notes or more.’²⁵ Though the three-note pattern identified by the various analysts is certainly prevalent, it arguably does not function in a ‘motivic’ fashion: there is certainly variation and manipulation, but no recognisable development. Stuckenschmidt’s D-F-C# and Taruskin’s /0 1 4/ fragment (especially when the ordering of the notes is totally flexible) struggles to function as a motive in any conventional sense, as the audible recognition of the motive and its various permutations (audibility of which is essential to the function of the motive) is by no means assured. The fragment is certainly central to the organisation of the pitch materials, but does not generate the kind of order or coherence associated with motivic development. As argued here, *Erwartung*’s success arguably lies in the creation of both familiarity and uncertainty, and the free organisation of thematic material helps to generate this quality within the work.

Despite the repetition of certain melodic or rhythmic fragments, Adorno’s assertion that neither the identification of motivic cells nor moments of tonal resonance disrupt *Erwartung*’s overall atonal (and perhaps even athematic) framework can arguably be sustained.²⁶ As Rosen describes, *Erwartung* upends the very relationship between consonance and dissonance, tension and resolution, to the point where even recognizable cells are unable to *function* as motives over the course of the work.²⁷ The brevity of the myriad of possible motive fragments analysts have identified within *Erwartung* tends to confirm the extent to which the work departs from traditional forms, attempting an entirely new expressive language, which attempts to generate coherence

²⁵ Richard Taruskin, “Atonal Triads,” *Music in the Early Twentieth Century*, *Oxford History of Western Music*. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordwesternmusic.com.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/view/Volume4/actrade-9780195384840-div1-006014.xml> (accessed 16 November 2015). Charles Rosen makes a related argument suggesting that the prevalence of six-note chords in *Erwartung* generates a recognizable sound-world. ‘Almost all of the chords in *Erwartung* have six notes, and this texture is fairly consistent throughout the work. But this six-note chord is generally made up of two three-note chords outlining the seventh.’ Rosen, *Arnold Schoenberg*, 43.

²⁶ This is discussed in further detail below, see 3.2 *Erwartung* for Adorno.

²⁷ As Rosen describes, the fact of there being recognizable patterns does not mean that such cells function as motives. For Rosen, ‘a motif’ must be ‘contextually given,’ via a ‘confluence of rhythm, harmony, and texture lacking in *Erwartung*...*Erwartung* is “athematic” or “nonmotivic” in the sense that understanding and appreciating it does not require recognizing the motifs from one part of the work to another as all music from Bach to Stravinsky demands.’ Rosen, *Arnold Schoenberg*, 41.

in a radically new way. Though the labels atonal and athematic may momentarily be proved false, they are surely the best descriptions available to the extent that the *Erwartung* eschews both the traditional categories of tonality (tension and resolution), and the traditional dependence upon the recognizable organization of motives for structural coherence and expressive effect.²⁸

As Kathryn Whitney has explained, numerous subsequent studies have extended this style of analysis by identifying various ‘interdependent interval configurations – in particular three-pitch groups,’ and pitch centric configurations (often configurations based on D-minor tonality).²⁹ Whitney’s own analysis of the first scene of *Erwartung* emerges from the major/minor third ambivalence identified by Buchanan, identifying hierarchical trichordal configurations as the ‘chief structural element’ of this section.³⁰ Arguably, Adorno’s identification of the “*Am Wegrund*” quotation has thus influenced much subsequent analysis of *Erwartung*, predisposing it towards the search for what Whitney calls “‘remnant’ tonal structures.”³¹

8.2 *Erwartung* for Adorno

For Adorno, *Erwartung* is of central importance to the development of musical Modernism on account of its polarisation of expression; anxiety, loneliness and dread inhere not just within the narrative content of the work, but in all elements of the work’s form. From non-repetition of thematic material and the absence of clear tonal structures, to the continuous shifting in tempo and pulse, to the many sudden changes in orchestral texture and timbre, to the sweet lyricism that abruptly turns to violence, *Erwartung* expresses not only the internal strife of its protagonist, but in Adorno’s thinking, gives voice to the angst and uneasiness of modern life. For Adorno, all of Schoenberg’s subsequent technical innovations can be traced back to this polarisation of expression, the distillation into musical form of the essential elements of the experience of

²⁸ As Rosen argues: ‘In music before Schoenberg, each separate occurrence of a motif connects with the others either as part of a larger continuity or by being placed in a context that clearly recalls – through a similarity of harmony or texture – its other appearances; it is by this continuity and these similarities that we are able to maintain the identity of the motif. But this continuity and similarity are both refused by Schoenberg.’ Rosen, *Arnold Schoenberg*, 41.

²⁹ Kathryn Whitney, “Schoenberg’s ‘Single Second of Maximum Spiritual Excitement’: Compression and Expansion in *Erwartung* Op. 17,” *Journal of Music Theory* 47, no. 1 (Spring, 2003): 156-157.

³⁰ Whitney, “Schoenberg’s ‘Single Second of Maximum Spiritual Excitement,’” 157.

³¹ Whitney, “Schoenberg’s ‘Single Second of Maximum Spiritual Excitement,’” 157. Though this is not an argument that Whitney makes.

modernity, which was of seminal importance (through both adoption and negation) to the entire trajectory of Western art music of the twentieth century. It is worth quoting Adorno at length:

The monodrama *Erwartung* has as its heroine a woman who, at night and at the mercy of all night's terrors, searches for her lover, only to find him murdered. She is consigned to the music as an analytical patient to the couch. The avowal of hatred and desire, of jealousy and forgiveness and beyond that is the whole symbolism of the unconscious, is wrung from her; and only in the moment of her insanity does the music recall its right to console. Yet the seismographic record of traumatic shock at the same time becomes the technical law of music's form. It forbids continuity and development. The musical language is polarised into its extremes: on the one hand, into gestures of shock – almost bodily convulsions – and on the other, into the brittle immobility of a person paralysed by anxiety.³²

Adorno's 1961 lecture at the Darmstadt school, *Vers une musique informelle*, and his contemporaneous essay, "Berg's Discoveries in Compositional Technique,"³³ provide important insights into the logic behind his valorisation of Schoenberg's 'middle period' of atonality. The works of this period (between the Three Pieces for Piano Op.11 and Serenade Op. 24, composed over the years spanning 1909 to 1923) can be considered to be equivocal explorations of the tensions between order and disorder, freedom and organisation. Unlike the later serial works, which arguably prioritise order at the expense of freedom of expression, Schoenberg's atonal works form 'a rhythmic alternation between freedom and organisation, like that between a concentrated breathing in and out.'³⁴ In contrast to traditional musical forms, *Erwartung* and other works from this period upend the traditional domination of the whole over the parts by granting the fragment full autonomy. The athematic works including *Erwartung*, which form a small subset from Schoenberg's atonal period, take this ambivalent position (siding with neither order nor disorder, freedom nor organisation, universal nor particular) to an even greater intensity. Thus, for Adorno, the athematic works occupy

³² Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 37.

³³ Theodor W. Adorno, "Berg's Discoveries in Compositional Technique," in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1992).

³⁴ Adorno, "*Vers une musique informelle*," 278.

an especially important place in Schoenberg's opus; they intensify the tension between freedom and organisation by refusing to resolve the fragment (the particular) into the whole (the universal).

As Ethan Haimo describes, the works of Schoenberg's period of 'radical athematicism' were characterised by 'the complete absence of thematic repetition,'³⁵ in stark contradiction to all earlier works, which had 'treated thematic and motivic return as a *sine qua non* of musical structure.'³⁶ Haimo's position echoes Adorno's: 'In Schoenberg's middle phase...the concept of thematic work is made problematic by the way in which the details become autonomous and because the structures are based on contrasts. Schoenberg's *Erwartung* is the paradigmatic instance of this, one which has not been surpassed to this day.'³⁷ For Adorno, Schoenberg's refusal of repetition during this period remains open-ended rather than systematised (as would become the case with serialism), and comes the closest to representing the 'actual conscious and subconscious of contemporary listeners.'³⁸ Thus, Schoenberg's atonal middle period, and the radically athematic works in particular, pull away from convention towards musical freedom, without folding back into new forms of domination.³⁹ For Adorno, *Erwartung* strikes this balance between freedom and organisation, exploring the creative possibilities of non-repetition without fetishizing or reifying this principle into a new system of organisation.

Although the identification of repeated motivic fragments by Stuckenschmidt, Buchanan, Taruskin and others, challenges Adorno's characterisation of *Erwartung*, such motivically directed analysis does not entirely negate his interpretation, as Adorno does not consider the use of tonal quotations or familiar expressive devices to 'breach' the overall atonality of the work. Adorno would have at least partially refuted Buchanan's conclusions, as he argues in *Philosophy of New Music* that the 'theme and

³⁵ Ethan Haimo, "The Rise and Fall of Radical Athematicism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Schoenberg*, eds. Jennifer Shaw and Joseph Auner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 95.

³⁶ Haimo, "The Rise and Fall of Radical Athematicism," 98.

³⁷ Adorno, "Berg's Discoveries in Compositional Technique," 185.

³⁸ Adorno, "Vers Une Musique Informelle," 291.

³⁹ 'I have never understood the so-called need for order which has led, if not to the invention of twelve-note technique, at least to the current apologies for it. It is also worth reflecting on the reasons which lead people, no sooner have they reached open ground, to create the feeling that it's time for order to be restored, instead of breathing a sigh of relief that which works as *Erwartung* and even the *Electra* could be written, works which are incomparably closer to the actual conscious and subconscious of contemporary listeners than any artificially imposed style.' Adorno, "Vers Une Musique Informelle," 291.

counterpoint [of “*Am Wegrund*”] are embedded with the greatest artistry in the freely moving vocal texture without breaching the atonality.’⁴⁰ Despite the identification of various momentary interval and pitch associations, *Erwartung* remains largely impervious to systematic thematic or pitch-based analysis, particularly as the identifiable melodic fragments are not developed in any traditional sense. For Adorno, the atonality and athematicism of *Erwartung* constitute its rupture with traditional forms. Striving towards what Webern had called ‘an unheard-of event,’⁴¹ *Erwartung* makes freedom its object through the search for something truly new.⁴² Ever the dialectician, however, Adorno links this freedom with the problem of generating coherence, noting the dependence of *Erwartung* upon its text (which Adorno found lacking) for structural coherence.⁴³

By turning away from clear tonal structures and thematic development, *Erwartung* upends the traditional dominance of the whole over its parts, attempting to polarise the dialectical tension between the universal and the particular, rather than seeking its resolution. In traditional (tonal) works, tension is achieved through the departure from, but necessary return to, tonal hierarchies; dissonance (which expresses difference or particularity) merely affirms the power of consonance (an expression of the whole, of the universal). According to Adorno, the method of *Erwartung* seeks the intensification of this dialectic of universal-particular through the release of the fragmented parts from the obligation to capitulate to the demands of the whole, turning particularity itself into a structuring principle: ‘The absolute liberation of the particular from any universality makes it a universal through the polemical and fundamental relation to universality.’⁴⁴ Adorno’s aesthetics and music criticism thus echo arguments advanced elsewhere in his philosophy: Adorno’s famous assertion that ‘the whole is the false’⁴⁵ arguing that particularity is the truth of universality.

⁴⁰ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 40.

⁴¹ Adorno quotes Webern in “Arnold Schoenberg 1874-1951,” in Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), 162.

⁴² Adorno writes ‘It is true that he [Schoenberg] scarcely ever composed anything which was freer than *Erwartung*.’ Adorno, “Arnold Schoenberg 1874-1951,” 162.

⁴³ Adorno, “Arnold Schoenberg 1874-1951,” 162-3.

⁴⁴ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 42.

⁴⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, (London: Verso, 2005), 50. Adorno’s fondness for staging radical reversals (for example, of the terms of both Hegelian and Kantian philosophy) is a noteworthy aspect of his method.

Adorno's insight that *Erwartung* includes a quotation taken from Schoenberg's 1905 tonal song *Am Wegrund* (which appears at bars 411-416 of *Erwartung*), forms the basis of Buchanan's assertion that *Erwartung* should be considered neither atonal or athematic.⁴⁶ The quotation occurs almost exclusively in the orchestral parts, assigning the vocal line of the earlier song to the clarinets.⁴⁷ The text of the *Erwartung* vocal line echoes the earlier poem, quoting the phrase 'Thousands of people march past' (which begins the text of *Am Wegrund* by John Henry Mackay.)⁴⁸ Adorno notes that, 'just as it does in research, the quotation presents authority. The anxiety of the lonely man, who quotes, seeks to gain a footing with the established powers.'⁴⁹ Although the use of the "*Am Wegrund*" quotation trespasses against the governing logic of the work up to this point (non-repetition, innovation), Adorno argues that it also reveals the universality of the collective loneliness of modernity, seeking the authority of quotation and repetition to guard against the impending meaninglessness of both art and life. In this moment of capitulation to communication over expression,⁵⁰ the quotation expresses the subject's desire for consolation, for release from the loneliness and anxiety of the modern world.

This contradiction between the open-endedness of *Erwartung's* principle, and the demand for it to be drawn into a point of recognisable climax and then closure, can be usefully theorised through the Adornian dialectic of (sedimented) musical materials and their mediation. Any attempt to liberate musical materials from the demands of traditional tonality and forms (though the two can hardly be thought of as independent) comes into contradiction with itself if the work is experienced as chaos. Whilst Adorno's criticism of neo-classical forms as regressive and inadequate is well known, he was also critical of integral serialism and aleatoric forms, and noted the convergence of the two: 'the technically integral, completely made artwork converges with the absolutely accidental work; the work that is ostensibly not the result of making is of course all the more fabricated.'⁵¹ For Adorno, chance methods merely substituted an

⁴⁶ As Taruskin notes, Buchanan may have found the quotation independently, but Adorno's work preceded Buchanan's. See Buchanan, "A Key to Schoenberg's '*Erwartung*,'" 434; Taruskin, "Crossing the Cusp."

⁴⁷ Buchanan, "A Key to Schoenberg's '*Erwartung*,'" 436.

⁴⁸ Adorno notes that the words to "Am Wegrund" 'define the intersection of *Jugendstil* and expressionism.' Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 41. (The full text of Mackay's poem can be found here also.)

⁴⁹ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 41.

⁵⁰ 'The expressionist who quotes, capitulates to communication.' Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 178, n.20.

⁵¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 34. Linda Kouvaras makes the same point, from a different angle, in her *Loading the Silence: Australian Sound Art in Post-Digital Age* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 20-23.

alternative mode of musical domination of the subject for the historically codified ones, with aleatoric methods proving no more organic than their integral opposites.⁵² For Adorno, the atonal works of Schoenberg and Berg achieved the proper intensification of the dialectic between history and freedom, order and chaos, tradition and modernity. This ‘informal music’ achieved for this philosopher an unparalleled freedom. By bringing to light the tension between history (expressed via handed-down musical codes) and freedom (the liberation from traditional forms), Schoenberg’s music provided the proper analogy to the modern predicament; the search for freedom within conditions of non-freedom. Unable to liberate his large-scale compositions from their dependence upon text as a source of coherence, however, even Schoenberg ultimately failed (in Adorno’s eyes) to bring his work to its proper fruition: ‘The symphony into which Schoenberg’s work ought to coalesce was never written.’⁵³

Adorno’s characterisation of Schoenberg’s athematic works as ‘spontaneous’⁵⁴ stands in contrast with his criticism of the later serial procedures, which he describes as dominated by ‘the so-called need for order.’⁵⁵ Spontaneity, in Adorno’s thinking, is linked to freedom because freedom finds its catalyst outside of reason, in the realm of involuntary and unconscious impulses.⁵⁶ This identification of the involuntary within reason has important implications for Adorno’s conception of freedom, which involves both the application of reason *and* the unintended, radically contingent possibilities of the not-yet-experienced and the not-yet-thought. Thus, *Erwartung*’s organic unfolding

⁵² ‘But even the principle of indeterminacy that Cage introduced remained as alien to the ego as its apparent opposite, serialism. Pure chance, it is true, breaks stolid, inescapable necessity, but is as external to living hearing as the latter.’ See “Difficulties,” in Theodor W. Adorno *Essays On Music*, selected, introduction, commentary, and notes Richard Leppert, new trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 658.

⁵³ Adorno, “Arnold Schonberg,” *Prisms*, 163.

⁵⁴ ‘Every moment [of *Erwartung*] abandons itself to the spontaneous impulse.’ Adorno, “Arnold Schoenberg 1874-1951,” 162. ‘In this [*Erwartung*] and other closely related works Schoenberg evidently felt that motivic, thematic work was somehow alien to the spontaneous flow of the music. That it was, in short, a form of manipulation, in much the same way as serial determinism appears to be today... The impulses and characteristic relations of such music do not presuppose any system laid down in advance or superimposed, not even a principle like a theme.’ Adorno, “Vers Une Musique Informelle,” 294.

⁵⁵ Adorno, “Vers Une Musique Informelle,” 291.

⁵⁶ By linking freedom with *irrationality* Adorno puts himself into opposition to the entire idealist tradition, in which freedom is taken to be behavior *in accordance with reason*. Adorno’s insight, that ‘the concept of freedom... contains a conflict within itself,’ does not aim to unseat the primacy of freedom itself in order to offer some sort of apology for domination; rather he situates tension (*not* resolution or harmony) as the dynamic force animating freedom itself, and the marker of its real-world existence. Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-1965*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 213. See also “Freedom in Unfreedom,” and “Antinomies of Freedom,” in Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 200-218.

in which ‘everything strives forward without a recapitulation,’⁵⁷ fulfils the demand for a radical music in its departure from traditional forms, but importantly does not reify its own principle. In its logic of non-repetition – in which the fragment, the detail, becomes autonomous – *Erwartung* stands in tension with the history of western musical forms. Adorno’s valorisation of *Erwartung* and other works from this period stems from the manner in which they resist the instrumentalisation of their own principle, a problem that Adorno identifies in Schoenberg’s later serial compositions (in which the logic of non-repetition collapsed into the domination of an ‘artificially imposed style.’)⁵⁸

In short, *Erwartung* signifies for Adorno one of Schoenberg’s greatest achievements in its formulation of the limits of freedom in the modern age, and in its musical objectification of the universal contradictions of contemporary subjectivity. The modernity of *Erwartung* surely lies in its manifestation (through music) of the subject’s desire for freedom, but this freedom is only ever imagined from within conditions of un-freedom, and risks unintelligibility. The Woman’s psychic disintegration forms the narrative content of the work, but this disintegration is also rendered in the music through the constantly changing and fragmented score. And so *Erwartung* gives voice to the profound antinomy of freedom: its dependence upon both reason and unreason (upon both actions taken in accordance with reason and involuntary, irrational processes), and the fragile distinction between free expression and incoherence.

8.3 Text: Madness and Femininity

Erwartung’s dependence upon text is problematic for Adorno, for whom the proper fruition of a truly autonomous work, liberated from both tonality and thematic repetition, would surely be a work of absolute music. *Erwartung*’s dependence upon text for structural coherence appears as its most limiting factor according to Adorno’s critique. Beyond this dissatisfaction with text *per se*, Adorno also finds the ‘comparatively harmless text’⁵⁹ itself wanting:

⁵⁷ Adorno, “Vers Une Musique Informelle,” 274. Adorno considers the polarization of Schoenberg’s technique between the ‘extreme organic, as in *Erwartung*, and the anti-organic.’ See Adorno, “Vers Une Musique Informelle,” 309-312.

⁵⁸ Adorno, “Vers Une Musique Informelle,” 291.

⁵⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, “Vienna,” in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1998), 219

Marie Pappenheim's monodrama is second-hand Expressionism, dilettante in its language and structure, and this rubs off on the music as well. However ingenious Schoenberg is in dividing the whole into three sections, search, outbreak and concluding lament, the music still draws inner form from the text, and, in adapting itself to it, is forced to repeat continually the same gestures and configurations. It thus violates the postulate of incessant innovation.⁶⁰

While it is outside the scope of this present study to assess the veracity of Adorno's critique of Pappenheim's text, his conclusion that 'the symphony into which Schoenberg's work ought to coalesce was never written,'⁶¹ implies that even a more satisfactory text would have similarly compromised the work. The (for Adorno, dubious) quality of the text is secondary to the fact of there being a text at all.

Pappenheim's authorship of the libretto is central to the common characterisation of *Erwartung* as a 'psychoanalytic' work, partly because of a 'putative family connection between the monodrama's librettist, Dr. Marie Pappenheim, and Bertha Pappenheim, better known as "Anna O.," the first patient to undergo "the talking cure."'⁶² Adorno's own analogy of the work as a musico-psychoanalytic case study, ('She [the Woman in *Erwartung*] is consigned to the music as an analytical patient to the couch')⁶³ has surely also been influential in connecting *Erwartung* to psychoanalysis.

According to Elizabeth L. Keathley, the propensity for considering *Erwartung* through the lens of psychoanalysis has silenced alternative approaches:

With few exceptions, recent interpretations of *Erwartung* view it as a slice of Schonberg biography or a Freudian portrait of female hysteria. Such interpretations discount the authorial role of the librettist, generate misunderstandings about the composer's creative processes, and invest

⁶⁰ Adorno, "Arnold Schoenberg 1874-1951," 163.

⁶¹ Adorno, "Arnold Schoenberg 1874-1951," 163.

⁶² Alexander Carpenter, "Schoenberg's Vienna, Freud's Vienna: Re-Examining the Connections between the Monodrama *Erwartung* and the Early History of Psychoanalysis," *The Musical Quarterly* 93, no. 1 (2010): 144. This connection is debated within the literature. Esther da Costa Meyer argues that '[Marie] Pappenheim was not, as is often claimed, related to Bertha Pappenheim.' See Esther da Costa Meyer, "Schoenberg's Echo: The Composer as Painter," in Esther da Costa Meyer and Fred Wasserman (eds.), *Schoenberg, Kandinsky, and the Blue Rider* (New York: The Jewish Museum and Scala Publishers, 2003), 47.

⁶³ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 37.

authority in Freud's problematic theories of hysteria and gender...The view of *Erwartung* as a depiction of female madness or hysteria has become nearly canonic.⁶⁴

With a focus on Pappenheim's contribution to the work, Keathley's critique contextualises *Erwartung*'s reception, bringing to light a number of the librettist's biographical details, and noting the feminist content of the libretto, of which she argues Schoenberg must have been aware.⁶⁵ Keathley rejects an overtly psychoanalytic approach in order to argue that 'gendered assumptions about musical Modernism have tended to blind us to the feminist content of *Erwartung*.'⁶⁶ Keathley reads *Erwartung* as 'woman's allegorical journey toward self-determination,'⁶⁷ noting that '*Erwartung*'s Woman avoids both marriage and death, [which] for the last two centuries [have been] the dominant forms of narrative closure for imaginative works with female protagonists.'⁶⁸ Despite wishing to move away from a (purely) psychoanalytic analysis, it would seem that Keathley's own interpretation is indebted to the psychoanalytic approach of uncovering – with 'woman's allegorical journey toward self-determination' functioning as a hidden, or even suppressed, narrative unveiled via the process of (psycho)analysis.

As Keathley argues, interpretations of *Erwartung* have tended to frame the work through two main prisms: as either 'a slice of Schoenberg biography' (focussing on Schoenberg's possible connections to early psychoanalysis and his preoccupation with his own fragmented state of mind at the time of its composition,)⁶⁹ or as 'a portrait of

⁶⁴ Keathley cites scholars such as Theodor W. Adorno, Willi Reich, Carl Schorske, Susan McClary and Daniel Albright. See Elizabeth L. Keathley, "Interpreting *Erwartung*: collaborative process and early reception," in *The Cambridge Companion to Schoenberg*, eds. Jennifer Shaw and Joseph Auner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 81-82.

⁶⁵ Elizabeth L. Keathley, "'Die Frauenfrage' in *Erwartung*: Schoenberg's Collaboration with Marie Pappenheim," in Charlotte M. Cross and Russell A. Berman (eds.), *Schoenberg and Words: The Modernist Years* (New York: Garland, 2000), 163.

⁶⁶ Keathley, "'Die Frauenfrage' in *Erwartung*," 168.

⁶⁷ Keathley, "Interpreting *Erwartung*," 81.

⁶⁸ Keathley, "'Die Frauenfrage' in *Erwartung*," 162.

⁶⁹ For example, Carpenter, "Schoenberg's Vienna, Freud's Vienna"; and Michael Cherlin, "Schoenberg and Das Unheimlich: Spectres of Tonality," *The Journal of Musicology* 11, No. 3 (Summer, 1993): 357-373. Alexander Carpenter writes that 'all of these works [composed during the period 1908-09, which includes *Erwartung*] can be grouped under the rubric "psychoanalytic" because they articulate Schoenberg's preoccupation with his own neurosis – a kind of hysteria manifest in repressed memory – and reflect a compositional approach that echoes Freud's contemporary writings on the nature of the unconscious.' Carpenter, "Schoenberg's Vienna, Freud's Vienna," 145. During this period, Schoenberg's wife Mathilde was engaged in an affair with the Austrian Expressionist painter Richard Gerstl, also a close friend of Arnold Schoenberg. The affair, and Gerstl's subsequent suicide, had a significant impact upon the Schoenbergs. See Simms, *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg*, 100-104.

female hysteria' (and thus an extension of the operatic tradition, which favours highly gendered depictions of female distress and suffering).⁷⁰ Whilst Keathley's critique offers a convincing interpretation of the feminist content of Pappenheim's libretto, arguably her interpretation can be extended to consider the musical content of *Erwartung* also. As Susan McClary has argued, a mix of intensifying chromaticism and vocal virtuosity have long signalled the psychic disintegration of operatic heroines, with composers ensuring that 'the listener experience[s] and yet does not identify' with the distressed protagonist.⁷¹ In traditional opera, tonality performs an important narrative function, representing the (healthy/normal/masculine) society against which the (sick/deviant/feminine) madwoman is contrasted. The presentation of The Woman in *Erwartung* challenges this tradition: there is no longer a stable 'frame' of healthy sociability against which madness is contrasted, but rather a depiction of psychic stress in a broken world. The fragmentation and instability of both the solo vocal line and the orchestral score, point not to the 'final shriek' of 'German romanticism'⁷² as Taruskin would have it, nor to 'exhibition' and 'titillation,' or 'monstrosity'⁷³ as McClary would have it, but to the modernity of the work and its critical stance, compelling the listener to identify and empathise with the plight of the protagonist. In this way, *Erwartung* can be heard as an allegory of the modern individual, consigned to a hopeless search for meaning in an incoherent, fractured world.

There are many ways in which psychoanalysis might inform an analysis of *Erwartung*, and many ways in which it might be directed (towards the Woman, towards Schoenberg himself, even towards *Erwartung* being explored as a musical allegory of analysis). Psychoanalytic approaches need not necessarily 'discount the authorial role of the librettist', as Keathley suggests; indeed psychoanalysis would surely provide an

⁷⁰ According to Richard Taruskin *Erwartung* is 'a portrait of a sexually obsessed madwoman,' Richard Taruskin, "Psychological Realism," *Music in the Early Twentieth Century, Oxford History of Western Music*. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordwesternmusic.com.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/view/Volume4/actrade-9780195384840-div1-006012.xml> (accessed 16 November 2015). Similarly, for Susan McClary 'Erwartung presents the ravings of a deranged woman.' Susan McClary "Excess and Frame: The Musical Representation of Madwomen," in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 104.

⁷¹ McClary "Excess and Frame," 86. McClary's position echoes Adorno's critique of the sadism he hears in Stravinsky's *Rite*, because the 'music identifies not with the victim but with the annihilating authority.' Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. ed. and intro. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 110.

⁷² Taruskin, "Psychological Realism."

⁷³ McClary "Excess and Frame," 84; 104.

important method through which to explore the authorial role, and the complexities of a co-authored work such as *Erwartung*, as a specific site of inquiry.⁷⁴ The objects of psychoanalytic analysis, unconscious and repressed pleasures, fears and prejudices, can hardly be dismissed as irrelevant to any Modernist work. *Erwartung*, with its depiction of anxiety, foreboding and isolation, coupled with its ambiguous hovering between dream-world and reality, arguably situates psychoanalysis itself as an object of exploration. Adorno's linking of *Erwartung* to psychoanalysis, a thread upon which so many later interpretations have picked up, is surely valid, even if his dismissal of the text as 'harmless' and 'dilettante' remains largely undefended.

8.4 *Erwartung* and Structural Listening

In light of the earlier discussion of Rose Rosengard Subotnik's critique of structural listening, it is important to consider how *Erwartung* might be heard with an Adornian-inflected focus on formal relationships. Given *Erwartung*'s amorphous structure, it might seem curious that such a work was so celebrated by Adorno, but Adorno's valorization of *Erwartung* (and Schoenberg's other atonal works) stands as important evidence for the interpretation of structural listening offered above.⁷⁵ Subotnik's description of structural listening (for Adorno) is incompatible with Adorno's preference for Schoenberg's atonal works. If Adorno intended structural listening to be the formalist fetish Subotnik describes, his preference would surely have been for works of the composer's serial period (which lend themselves more readily to such formalism). Considering structural listening in light of Adorno's positioning of *Erwartung* and Schoenberg's atonal works as of even greater importance than the latter's serial compositions (which he considered very important to Modernist aesthetic developments) provides important insights into precisely what he meant by structural listening. The focus here on Adorno's enthusiasm for *Erwartung* reflects back onto the argument made earlier that an open-ended, Adornian 'structural' hearing stands in stark contrast to the narrow approach described by Subotnik and others. Hearing *Erwartung* 'structurally' demands the displacement of the primacy of those musical elements that are typically taken to comprise the work's form (large-scale tonal structures, thematic development and so on), in order to include elements such as tone

⁷⁴ Adorno, of course, would insist on an immanent analysis over a purely psychoanalytic one.

⁷⁵ See chapter two.

colour and orchestration, changes in rhythm and tempo, and melody (independent of harmony), and texture – under the umbrella term of musical form.

Upon listening to *Erwartung*, one wonders whether the designation of Schoenberg's great achievement as the 'emancipation of dissonance,' might not be misplaced. By the continued focus on pitch relations, perhaps even the notion of emancipating dissonance narrows the frame for the understanding of post-tonal music, re-inscribing the precise hierarchy Schoenberg's music refuses (the supremacy of pitch relations over all other musical elements and relationships). It was not only dissonance that the composer freed from its state of dependence, but with it melody, sonority, tone colour, rhythm, dynamics and orchestration, were liberated from their subordination to the dissonance-consonance relation (a relation principally determined, of course, by pitch). If one takes the great achievement of Schoenberg's atonal period to be the liberation of *all* musical elements from their traditional state of subordination to pitch (thus assigning all elements a structural function), then the term 'emancipation of dissonance' can be seen to cloud the radicalism and scope of his project. As Schoenberg attempted this emancipation of dissonance from the requirement of resolution, he began the liberation of all musical elements from their subordination to pitch. Something of the breadth of Schoenberg's aspirations is erased by the term 'emancipation of dissonance', which, after all, continues the traditional positioning of pitch associations as the defining characteristic of all musical relationships.⁷⁶

Through the almost-thirty minutes of *Erwartung's* duration, points of tension and release, instability and stability, are created not through pitch associations, but through elements such as orchestration, melody and rhythm. Likewise, *Erwartung's* overall sense of coherence and moments of apparent resolution (perhaps better described as moments of calm repose) are generated through sonority and voicing, rather than through the statement, departure and return of tonal centers (or their attendant motivic developments). This foregrounding of elements *other* than pitch is perhaps Schoenberg's greatest achievement, and it is through an understanding of this

⁷⁶ For some critics, Schoenberg failed in this aspiration, for he neglected the serial possibilities of rhythm, dynamics and mode of attack. The result, according to Pierre Boulez, is a 'sclerosis of hybrid Romanticism,' with Schoenberg's serial works unable to free themselves of the late-Romantic syntax (particularly in terms of musical gesture and rhetoric). See Pierre Boulez, "Schoenberg is Dead," in *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, collected and presented by Paule Thévenin, trans. Stephen Walsh, intro. Robert Piencikowski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 209-214.

achievement as a leveling of music's traditional hierarchies (rather than as simply the 'emancipation of dissonance'), that provides the key to Adorno's enthusiasm for *Erwartung* (and explains his valorization of Schoenberg's atonal period more generally). As already described, *Erwartung*'s displacement of the primacy of pitch associations achieved not only a radical re-imagination of the dissonance-consonance relationship, but freed previously subordinate musical elements from their limiting niches (with sonority, orchestration, dynamics and so on functioning as mere embellishments to the tonal 'narrative'), imbuing *all* musical elements with the capacity to perform a *structural function*. This promise of the full and equal participation of all musical elements within the construction of a musical whole surely demands a structurally aware listening; without the crutch of traditional forms (which do some of the 'work' of listening by unfolding in certain codified ways), works such as *Erwartung* actually compel a structural listening in order to be rendered intelligible. Importantly, a structural listening of *Erwartung* demands not a pitch-centric approach, but listens out for the structural functions performed by all musical elements. Adorno's valorization of *Erwartung* adds support to the argument made in chapter two, that structural listening encourages the listener to consider the structural function of all musical elements, and should not be considered a slavish devotion to pitch relationships.

8.5 Coherence

Creating coherence from within a context of the newly established autonomy of all musical elements is surely one of *Erwartung*'s great achievements. Using the language of Adorno's philosophy one could term this the musical manifestation of the dialectic of universal/particular, in which the work's whole and its individual parts seek not eventual resolution (in traditional forms individual elements capitulate to the authority of the whole), but rather the intensification of the tension between the whole and its parts. This intensification of tensions, however, presents a problem of coherence: in the absence of traditional tonal relationships or thematic repetition, the relation between the universal and the particular risks total disintegration. Rather than achieving the desired intensification of the tension between the aesthetic whole and its parts, the disintegration of the universal/particular dialectic would render a work incoherent, literally 'unhearable' as music, 'mere' noise. *Erwartung* demonstrates how previously

secondary musical elements (such as sonority and dynamics) are able to perform this structural function, providing a scaffolding of ‘form’ that allows the work to be heard as a meaningful, coherent whole.

As Rosen points out, the extensive use of six-note chords (which usually include a major seventh) lend a considerable degree of coherence to *Erwartung*’s sonic landscape.⁷⁷ Indeed, Rosen suggests the hexachord has ‘replaced the triad as the basic element of composition: their presence throughout the score gives them the kind of stabilizing force previously possible only to the perfect triad.’⁷⁸ Unlike the triad, however, the unifying function of these chords stems primarily from their sonority, not from the particular pitch relations they sound. *Erwartung*’s hexachordal composition produces a recognizable sonorous landscape beyond a generalized chromaticism (the prevalence of six-note chords can be observed in many of the examples below), and thus achieves a sense of departure and return categorically different from traditional (tonal/thematic) forms. As Rosen details, there is an overall ‘seventh-feel,’ with the presence of chords containing the major seventh dominating the texture (Example 4).⁷⁹ Unlike traditional structures, which regulate the intensity of expression through distance from the tonic or theme (the further one journeys to outward-lying tonal relations or abstracted thematic elaborations, the greater the sense of precariousness and the more intense the satisfaction upon return), the sense of departure and return that sonority provides does not emulate this traditional pattern of flux resolving into equilibrium, of disorder resolving back into order. In this way, sonority unifies *Erwartung* through a process that is categorically (not just technically) different from traditional unifying devices, subverting the very relationship between consonance and dissonance, equilibrium and flux that have constituted musical expression in the Western tradition for several hundred years. Despite the many changes in mood, the sizable array of tempi (the first twenty bars, for example, contain ten directions), extreme dynamic changes (Example 5), demanding shifts in vocal range (Example 6), sudden transformations in orchestral colour and texture (Example 7), and rapid shifts in mood (Example 8), *Erwartung* achieves a state of constant heightened intensity,

⁷⁷ Richard Taruskin makes a similar point noting the prevalence of the atonal triad in Schoenberg’s musical language. Taruskin’s point is discussed above, see 8.1 *Erwartung* in the Literature. Taruskin, “Atonal Triads.”

⁷⁸ Rosen, *Arnold Schoenberg*, 44.

⁷⁹ Rosen, *Arnold Schoenberg*, 43.

suspending the listener's expectations of the ebb and flow of traditional musical expression. The liberation of all musical elements from their subordination to pitch relations (in Adornian terms, the liberation of the particular from its subordination to the universal) achieves more than the elevation dissonance to the status of consonance: *Erwartung* suspends the relationship altogether, negating the patterns flux and equilibrium, departure and return, repetition and difference, upon which traditional musical forms had been built.

Ex. 4 Note the prevalence of chords containing major sevenths (or enharmonic equivalent) in the first two bars of *Erwartung*: Arnold Schoenberg, *Erwartung*, reduction of chords in bars 1-2.⁸⁰



⁸⁰ See also, Rosen, *Arnold Schoenberg*, 43.

Ex. 5 Extreme dynamic contrast: Arnold Schoenberg *Erwartung*, bars 153-167.⁸¹

The image displays two pages of a musical score for Arnold Schoenberg's *Erwartung*. The left page covers bars 153 to 160, and the right page covers bars 161 to 167. The score is for a full orchestra and vocal soloists. A blue box on the left page highlights a section of the orchestral score, and a blue box on the right page highlights a section of the vocal and piano accompaniment. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Ex. 6 Dramatic shifts in vocal range: Arnold Schoenberg *Erwartung*, bars 37-52.⁸²

The image displays two pages of a musical score for Arnold Schoenberg's *Erwartung*. The left page covers bars 37 to 44, and the right page covers bars 45 to 52. The score is for a full orchestra and vocal soloists. A blue box on the left page highlights a section of the orchestral score, and a blue box on the right page highlights a section of the vocal and piano accompaniment. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

⁸¹ Schoenberg, *Erwartung*: *Monodram in einem Akt*, 18-19.

⁸² Schoenberg, *Erwartung*: *Monodram in einem Akt*, 6-7.

Ex. 7 Sudden change in orchestral texture at bar 248: Arnold Schoenberg *Erwartung*, bars 246-249.⁸³

The image displays two pages of a musical score for Arnold Schoenberg's *Erwartung*, specifically focusing on the period between bars 246 and 249. The left page shows the score for bars 240 through 245, while the right page shows bars 246 through 249. The score is written for a large ensemble, including vocal parts (Frau, I. Ges., II. Ges., Br., K. H., D. K. H., 1. K. H., 2. K. H., 3. K. H., 4. K. H., 5. K. H., 6. K. H., 7. K. H., 8. K. H., 9. K. H., 10. K. H., 11. K. H., 12. K. H., 13. K. H., 14. K. H., 15. K. H., 16. K. H., 17. K. H., 18. K. H., 19. K. H., 20. K. H., 21. K. H., 22. K. H., 23. K. H., 24. K. H., 25. K. H., 26. K. H., 27. K. H., 28. K. H., 29. K. H., 30. K. H., 31. K. H., 32. K. H., 33. K. H., 34. K. H., 35. K. H., 36. K. H., 37. K. H., 38. K. H., 39. K. H., 40. K. H., 41. K. H., 42. K. H., 43. K. H., 44. K. H., 45. K. H., 46. K. H., 47. K. H., 48. K. H., 49. K. H., 50. K. H., 51. K. H., 52. K. H., 53. K. H., 54. K. H., 55. K. H., 56. K. H., 57. K. H., 58. K. H., 59. K. H., 60. K. H., 61. K. H., 62. K. H., 63. K. H., 64. K. H., 65. K. H., 66. K. H., 67. K. H., 68. K. H., 69. K. H., 70. K. H., 71. K. H., 72. K. H., 73. K. H., 74. K. H., 75. K. H., 76. K. H., 77. K. H., 78. K. H., 79. K. H., 80. K. H., 81. K. H., 82. K. H., 83. K. H., 84. K. H., 85. K. H., 86. K. H., 87. K. H., 88. K. H., 89. K. H., 90. K. H., 91. K. H., 92. K. H., 93. K. H., 94. K. H., 95. K. H., 96. K. H., 97. K. H., 98. K. H., 99. K. H., 100. K. H.) and orchestral parts (1. Fl., 2. Fl., 3. Fl., 4. Fl., 5. Fl., 6. Fl., 7. Fl., 8. Fl., 9. Fl., 10. Fl., 11. Fl., 12. Fl., 13. Fl., 14. Fl., 15. Fl., 16. Fl., 17. Fl., 18. Fl., 19. Fl., 20. Fl., 21. Fl., 22. Fl., 23. Fl., 24. Fl., 25. Fl., 26. Fl., 27. Fl., 28. Fl., 29. Fl., 30. Fl., 31. Fl., 32. Fl., 33. Fl., 34. Fl., 35. Fl., 36. Fl., 37. Fl., 38. Fl., 39. Fl., 40. Fl., 41. Fl., 42. Fl., 43. Fl., 44. Fl., 45. Fl., 46. Fl., 47. Fl., 48. Fl., 49. Fl., 50. Fl., 51. Fl., 52. Fl., 53. Fl., 54. Fl., 55. Fl., 56. Fl., 57. Fl., 58. Fl., 59. Fl., 60. Fl., 61. Fl., 62. Fl., 63. Fl., 64. Fl., 65. Fl., 66. Fl., 67. Fl., 68. Fl., 69. Fl., 70. Fl., 71. Fl., 72. Fl., 73. Fl., 74. Fl., 75. Fl., 76. Fl., 77. Fl., 78. Fl., 79. Fl., 80. Fl., 81. Fl., 82. Fl., 83. Fl., 84. Fl., 85. Fl., 86. Fl., 87. Fl., 88. Fl., 89. Fl., 90. Fl., 91. Fl., 92. Fl., 93. Fl., 94. Fl., 95. Fl., 96. Fl., 97. Fl., 98. Fl., 99. Fl., 100. Fl.). The score is in German and includes tempo markings such as 'rit.', 'molto rit.', 'Brett, aber weit', and 'fließender'. A blue box highlights the change in texture at bar 248.

⁸³ Schoenberg, *Erwartung*: *Monodram in einem Akt*, 30-31.

Ex. 8 Rapid contrast in mood and repeated ostinati: Arnold Schoenberg *Erwartung*, bars 114-134.⁸⁴

Erwartung explores the newfound autonomy of many different musical elements. The large orchestral forces are infrequently called upon together, with smaller chamber-like groupings of instruments producing unusual sounds that emerge out of the sonic texture only to retreat and make way for new groupings. With the exception of the work's climax (which begins at bar 411), the orchestral texture only occasionally accumulates into a full orchestral *tutti* sound, instead working through many varied and unusual combinations of instruments and extended techniques (Example 9). Passages of rhythmic *ostinati* alternate with periods of rhythmic non-repetition (Example 10, see also Example 8), offering dramatic periods of affective change, punctuating *Erwartung* and delineating its many changes in mood. Likewise, moments of lyricism in the vocal line are contrasted with phrases of angular, violent leaps, suggesting The Woman experiences moments of coherence and understanding but also incoherence and her possible break with reality (Example 11). These effects add to *Erwartung*'s realism, absorbing the listener within this depiction of psychological disintegration.

⁸⁴ Schoenberg, *Erwartung: Monodram in einem Akt*, 14-15.

Ex. 9 Unusual instrumental combination; the clarinet plays a waltz theme whilst the tuba plays a contrasting solo; double tonguing in flute accompaniment: Arnold Schoenberg *Erwartung*, bars 29-36.⁸⁵

30 langsam (♩ = 44) Walz melody in the clarinet

1.gr. Fl. *pp*

1. Klar. (B) *sehr zart*

2.3. Klar. (A) *pp*

Bes.-Klar. (B) *ppp*

2. Fg. *ppp*

Ktr.-Fg. *pp*

1. Hr. (F) m. Dpf. *pp*

Hr. *sehr deutlich*

Frau (angstvoll) *Verwandlung* (Mut fassend, geht rasch in den Wald hinein)
Ich allein.. in den dumpfen Schatten. Ich will sin-gen.. dann hört er mich..

1. Solo-Gge. m. Dpf. 30 langsam 1. Solo Gge. m. Dpf. *N*

II. Gge. m. Dpf. *sehr leicht* *ppp*

Br. m. Dpf. *spiccato* *pp*

Ktrbss. m. Dpf. *ppp*

Double tonguing in the flutes

35 viel bewegter (doppelt so rasch)

1.2.gr. Fl. *pp*

1.2. Ob. *pp*

1. Klar. (B) *pp*

2.3. Klar. (A) *pp*

Ktr.-Fg. *pp*

1.2.3.4. Hr. (F) m. Dpf. *sehr gebunden und weich* (zart) *pp*

Bsa.-T& o. Dpf. *pp*

Hr. *pp*

1. Solo-Gge. u. I. Ggn. *pp*

II. Gge. m. Dpf. *sehr ruhig einteilen und jede Note zart klingen lassen!* *pizz.* *pp*

1. Solo Br. m. Dpf. *pp*

Br. die übrigen *pp*

35 viel bewegter (doppelt so rasch) *pp*

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⁸⁵ Schoenberg, *Erwartung*: Monodram in einem Akt, 5.

Ex. 11 Lyrical and disjointed vocal line in quick succession: Arnold Schoenberg *Erwartung*, bars 135-152.⁸⁷

The image displays a musical score for Arnold Schoenberg's *Erwartung*, specifically bars 135-152. The score is presented in two pages. The left page covers bars 135-140, and the right page covers bars 145-150. The vocal line is highlighted in blue. The word 'Lyrical' is written in blue next to bar 140, and 'Disjointed' is written in blue next to bar 145. The score includes staves for various instruments and the vocal line with German lyrics.

These alternating effects function in a way that is categorically different to traditional forms, as it is impossible to designate any given point as existing in a state of flux or equilibrium, and the musical elements actively resist contributing to an overarching sense of tension and release. The episodic and alternating organization of rhythm, orchestration and dynamics suspends the listener in a state of near-constant tension and intensity. Just as *Erwartung*'s sonority is part of a broader subversion of the relation between consonance and dissonance, this expectation of tension and repose is similarly subverted through the works use of rhythm, dynamic contrast and orchestration. *Erwartung*'s listener is held in a state of constant tension, and any sense of relaxation or satisfied return is categorically denied. The wide-ranging and dramatic uses of dynamics, the extraordinary diversity in orchestration and tone colour, and the shifting tempi, generate an intense and unrelenting musical expressivity.

Despite Adorno's endorsement of *Erwartung*'s principle of non-repetition and fragmentation, he nonetheless suggests that the work failed to live up to its own organising principle of incessant innovation. He writes: 'Even the gestures of shock in

⁸⁷ Schoenberg, *Erwartung: Monodram in einem Akt*, 16-17.

Erwartung become formulaic as soon as they are even once repeated.⁸⁸ The tensions between coherence and disintegration, communication and expression, are polarised at the point of the work's climax – and the quotation of Schoenberg's earlier song “*Am Wegrand*” – it appears that the demand for incessant innovation proves incompatible with the requirement for coherence and completion. As already discussed, *Erwartung*'s dependence upon text leads to repetition, a technique at odds with the work's governing logic.⁸⁹ Arguably, however, this aspect of Adorno's interpretation is best turned back upon itself: *Erwartung*'s ‘failure’ can be heard as an important site of the work's truth content. The manifestation of dread through the depiction of surroundings (musical and linguistic) that are simultaneously familiar *and* strange is surely one of the work's incomparable achievements. Familiar gestures, in both the music (through remnants of tonality and motivic fragments, idiomatic writing for the orchestral instruments – such as the oft-paired harp and celeste, and through quotation) and the text (through repetition), are rendered *unfamiliar* by the treatment they receive, and the result is a sense of anxiety and foreboding within a familiar sonic landscape. Though there are indeed moments of undoubted gentleness and quiet beauty (see example 12), any sense of calm in *Erwartung* is coupled with a sense of impending threat, and the familiarity the listener hears tends to intensify the work's main themes of anxiety and loneliness (rather than provide a sense of comfort).

This affective state is achieved through an avoidance (rather than destruction) of traditional musical processes, and tradition hovers in the background, an indispensable aspect of the work's tension and drama.⁹⁰ The success of *Erwartung*'s depiction of

⁸⁸ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 42.

⁸⁹ ‘Marie Pappenheim's monodrama is second-hand Expressionism, dilettante in its language and structure, and this rubs off on the music...[The music]...draws inner form from the text, and, in adapting itself to it, is forced to repeat continually the same gestures and configurations. It thus violates the postulate of incessant innovation.’ Adorno, “Arnold Schoenberg, 1874-1951,” 163.

⁹⁰ Pierre Boulez fiercely critiqued the traces of Romanticism lingering within Schoenberg's music: ‘The persistence, for example, of accompanied melody; of counterpoint based on the idea of a leading voice and secondary voice (*Hauptstimme* and *Nebenstimme*). I do not hesitate to call this one of the most unfortunate inheritances from the sclerosis of hybrid romanticism. Echoes of a dead world can be heard not only in these outworn concepts but equally in the actual technique. From Schoenberg's pen flows a stream of infuriating clichés and formidable stereotypes redolent of the most wearily ostentatious romanticism: all those endless anticipations with expressive accent on the harmony note, those fake appoggiaturas, those arpeggios, tremolandos, and note-repetitions, which sound so terribly empty and which so utterly deserve the label ‘secondary voices’; finally, the depressing poverty, even ugliness, of rhythms in which a few tricks of variation on classical formulae leave a disheartening impression of bonhomous futility.’ Pierre Boulez, “Schoenberg is Dead,” in *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, collected Paule Thévenin, trans. Stephen Walsh, intro. Robert Piencikowski (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 212-213. I am arguing, however, that these ‘echoes of a dead world’ are essential to *Erwartung*'s affective force.

anxiety is achieved through hints of familiarity (such as remnants of tonality, episodic rhythmic organisation, a sense of departure and return though at odds with traditional formations) which draw the listener in, but then subvert their expectations: it is a familiar/strange world. In *Erwartung*'s sonic landscape everything seems recognizable, but only partially so, as if distorted and dreamlike. This sense of familiarity coupled with disorientation leads the listener to hear things that are not actually there, in particular to hear resolutions that are never explicitly stated (Example 12), and this adds to the work's hallucinatory feel. Just as The Woman becomes utterly disoriented and uncomprehending within the forest she knows so well, so *Erwartung* envelops the listener in a familiar-yet-strange world, a sonic landscape full of memories of safety and tranquility now denied.

Ex. 12: Arnold Schoenberg *Erwartung*, bars 125-134.⁹¹

2. gr. Fl. 125 ruhig, aber fließend $\text{♩} = 69$ noch ruhiger $\text{♩} = 56$

2.3 Klar.(A) *pp*

Bss.-Klar.(B) Note 'pp' and 'ppp' dynamics

1. Fg. *pp*

Ktr.-Fg. *pp*

1. Pos. m. Dpf.

4. Pos. u. Bss. u. P. o. Dpf.

Hrf. Gentle writing for the voice accompanied by lush strings

IV. Scene Lyrical but foreboding mood

Frau (Mundbeschneide, breite Straße, rechts aus dem Walde kommend. Wissen und Felder (gelbe und grüne Streifen abwechselnd). Etwas nach links verliert sich die Straße wieder im Dunkel hoher Baumgruppen. Erst ganz links sieht man die Straße freiliegen. Dort mündet auch ein Weg, der von einem Hause herunterführt. In diesem alle Fenster mit dunklen Läden geschlossen. Ein Balkon aus weißem Stein. Die Frau kommt langsam, erschöpft. Das Gewand ist zerrissen. Blutige Risse an Gesicht und Händen.) (Schauer, Leuschen)

Er ist auch nicht da... Auf der gan-zen, lan-gen Stra-ße nichts Leben-di-ges... und kein Laut... Die wei-ten blassen Fel-der sind oh-ne A-tem,

125 ruhig, aber fließend noch ruhiger

I. Gge. m. Dpf. *pp* ohne express.

Br. m. Dpf. *pp* ohne express.

1. Solo Vcl. *pp*

alle Vcl. m. Dpf. *pp*

130 Cadence like, hints at a resolution to B major noch etwas langsamer $\text{♩} = 50$

1.2. gr. Fl. *ppp*

Bss.-Klar.(B) *ppp*

1.2. Fg. *ppp*

Ktr.-Fg. *ppp*

Hrf.

Cel. *pp*

Frau (sieht die Straße entlang)

wie er-stor-be... kein Halm führt sein. Noch im-mer die Stadt.. Und die-ser fah-le Mond... kei-ne Wol-ke, nicht der

130 noch etwas langsamer

I. Solo Gge. m. Dpf. *pp* trem. am Steg auf der G-Saite

I. Solo Gge. m. Dpf. *pp*

Solo Brn. m. Dpf. 1. Solo Br. m. Dpf. Flag. *pp*

Br. m. Dpf. 2. Solo Br. m. Dpf. Flag. *pp*

1.2. 3. Solo Br. m. Dpf. Flag. *pp*

1.2. Flag. *pp*

3.4. Flag. *pp*

5.6. Flag. *pp*

alle Vcl. m. Dpf. *pp*

Alle Vcl. m. Dpf. *pp*

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⁹¹ Schoenberg, *Erwartung*: Monodram in einem Akt, 15.

8.6 Conclusion

As argued here, Adorno's interpretation of *Erwartung* has been influential, even when his conclusions (significantly, that the work is both atonal and athematic) have been challenged. This chapter has argued that the high esteem in which Adorno held *Erwartung* adds evidence to the argument advanced in chapter one: that structural listening (for Adorno) is a far more open-ended process than many critics have allowed for. Adorno's valorisation of *Erwartung* reinforces the arguments advanced in chapters five and six, as his enthusiasm for the work encourages an open-ended notion of musical becoming, not a straightforward requirement for thematic development (as is often supposed). This chapter has also considered the place of Marie Pappenheim's libretto, and questioned the cursory criticism Adorno offers. Finally, the question of *Erwartung*'s coherence (and the ever-present threat of disintegration) was considered through the prism of Adorno's ideas.

As Bryan R. Simms argues, *Erwartung* is indeed 'a paradigm of Modernism.'⁹² The work explicitly meditates on the themes of anxiety, loneliness, and the darkness of our unconscious desires. *Erwartung* brings the reverberating 'shocks and traumas' experienced by The Woman into the listener's experience, with her psychological fragmentation rendered through both the text and the music. As Adorno describes, 'the musical language is polarised into its extremes: on the one hand, into gestures of shock – almost bodily convulsions – and on the other, into the brittle immobility of a person paralysed by anxiety...undisguised, corporeal impulses of the unconscious, shocks and traumas are registered in the medium of music.'⁹³ *Erwartung* is certainly a study of psychological disintegration, but it is also an allegory of the modern individual: alone, fractured and at the mercy of unconscious desires. Schoenberg's break with tonality is mirrored in *Erwartung*'s narrative by The Woman's break with reality, but unlike the heroines of traditional opera, The Woman is not redeemed through death or love, there

⁹² Bryan R. Simms, "Whose Idea Was *Erwartung*?" in *Constructive Dissonance: Arnold Schoenberg and the Transformations of Twentieth-Century Culture*, eds. Juliane Brand and Christopher Hailey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 100.

⁹³ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 37; 35.

is no reconciliation with society, no return to equilibrium. As Adorno describes, ‘wrong life cannot be lived rightly.’⁹⁴ *Erwartung* captures the impossibility of living a right life in a wrong world.⁹⁵ Through its method of fragmentation (rather than development) *Erwartung* projects a vision of the modern subject marked by a gaping void: it is not reason and mastery upon which subjectivity is built, but rather repressed and unconscious desires. In eschewing all certainty, comfort and sentimentality, *Erwartung* epitomises the high-Modernist preoccupation with the lonely and damaged individual’s search for meaning in a broken world.

⁹⁴ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 39.

⁹⁵ Explaining Adorno’s position, J. M. Bernstein writes: ‘there is no true living in a wrong world, and there is no right living in a wrong world.’ J. M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 398.

Chapter Nine

Milton Babbitt *Philomel* (1964)

*The artwork is not only the echo of suffering, it diminishes it...Art thereby falls into an unsolvable aporia.*¹

9.0 Introduction

*Musicians are usually truants from maths classes; it would be a terrible fate for all of them to end up in the hands of the maths teacher after all.*²

Milton Babbitt's capacity for causing affront and offence is certainly beyond doubt. From his mechanical characterisation of the performer and listener as 'transmitter' and 'receiver',³ to his diminution of interpretation to a limited process of deciding about precise compositional elements (such as dynamics or attack) that the composer failed to specify,⁴ it seems Babbitt offers artists, audiences and academics (in fact, anyone who is not a composer) many and varied grounds for affront. Reduced to slavish attempts at understanding the composer's intention, Babbitt's depiction of the work of interpretation, performance and reception arguably drains away the creativity that theorists, artists and audiences find to be a central and satisfying spark that animates their musical engagement. Babbitt's own reticence to discuss matters outside the rational, verifiable elements of his music (such as matters of emotional or musical meaning), however, need not form a basis for the experience or interpretation of his

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997), 49.

² Theodor W. Adorno, "Vers une musique informelle," in *Quasi Una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1998), 269. Milton Babbitt's compositional style, of course, owes much to mathematics. Babbitt was an accomplished mathematician, and during World War II he pursued mathematical research in Washington DC and at Princeton University. See Elaine Barkin and Martin Brody, "Milton Babbitt," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/subscriber/article/grove/music/01645?q=Milton+Babbitt> (accessed 12 November 2015).

³ Milton Babbitt, "The Composer as Specialist," in *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*, ed. Stephen Peles (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 49. This is the controversial essay initially published in *High Fidelity* magazine under the title "Who Cares if You Listen?"

⁴ Milton Babbitt in *Soundpieces: Interviews with American Composers*, Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras eds. (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1982), 48-49.

music. As argued in chapter four, listeners are free (in Adorno's mind, even obliged) to listen to music without deferring to the composer's accompanying polemics. Although the composer's stated intent is of undoubted interest, there are unconscious and social processes that inhere in their music which might not accord with intentionality. In this chapter, Adorno's insight that musical meaning escapes authorial intent forms the basis of an engagement with musical works that rejects the authority of the composer in making enduring and comprehensive claims over the meaning of their work.

Milton Babbitt's *Philomel* (1964) retells the Greek myth of Philomela, a story of abuse and transcendence in which the gods intervene to miraculously transform the human protagonists into birds. Babbitt commissioned poet John Hollander (through a Ford Foundation grant) to write the text for *Philomel*, with the text derived from Ovid's version (from *Metamorphoses*, Book VI) of the rape and dismemberment of Philomel.⁵ According to the myth, sisters Procne and Philomel (daughters of the Greek king Pandion) are to be reunited after an absence of many years. Procne sends her husband Tereus, king of Thrace, to collect her sister Philomel. On the return journey, Tereus rapes Philomel, cutting out her tongue to silence her accusations and threats of revenge. Tereus then abandons the speechless Philomel in a cabin in the woods, where she weaves a tapestry telling of her abuse and sends it to her sister. Reading the tapestry, Procne rescues Philomel and brings her back to the palace. The two sisters then murder Tereus' (and Procne's) son Itys in revenge, cooking up the corpse and serving Tereus the boy's body during a feast. Presented with Itys' severed head after the meal, the sisters' cannibalistic revenge dawns on Tereus, who pursues them into the forest intending to kill them. In their desperation to escape Tereus' revenge, the sisters pray to the gods to be transformed into birds. Procne becomes a swallow, Philomel a nightingale and Tereus is made a hoopoe.⁶ The myth of Philomel has featured in the work of a number of important modernists (T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*), surrealists (Jorge Luis Borges' poem *To The Nightingale*) and feminists (Margaret Attwood's novella *Nightingale*).

⁵ John Hollander, "Notes on the Text of *Philomel*," *Perspectives of New Music* 6, no. 1 (January 1967): 134-141.

⁶ Ovid's setting of the story here differs from the original Greek myth, in which Philomela becomes a swallow and Procne a nightingale. See Victoria Adamenko, *Neo-Mythologism in Music: from Scriabin and Schoenberg to Schnittke and Crumb* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendagon Press, 2007), 82-83.

Through a close listening to Babbitt's serial monodrama *Philomel*, this chapter reflects on Adorno's assertion that 'there is more joy in dissonance than in consonance.'⁷ Instead of hearing 'difficult' Modernist compositions as purely ascetic gestures, which fetishise the denial of resolution, one might begin to hear *Philomel* in an 'Adornian' mode, alive to the many *simultaneous* demands of sense *and* intellect, pleasure *and* work, thought *and* feeling. The first part of this analysis consists of an overview of the main compositional processes operating within *Philomel* and includes consideration of a number of important analyses which have informed this chapter. The second part consists of the exploration of three interlocking themes: violence and suffering, ugliness and natural beauty, and technology. Each of these themes is explored in relation to Adorno's aesthetics, showing how Adorno's ideas might be brought into the interpretation and analysis of such a work. Listening for the musical and social meaning embedded within *Philomel*, this analysis confirms not only the importance of interpretation for the full experience of the work, but also the sensual pull of ugly Modernist works.

9.1 *Philomel*

Set for soprano, recorded soprano and synthesised sound, *Philomel* was initially commissioned for the renowned (and perfect-pitch-endowed) soprano Bethany Beardslee.⁸ Poet John Hollander's text for *Philomel* shapes the work into three clearly defined sections. The first section depicts the moment of metamorphosis followed by a prolonged recitative in which the tongue-less and incoherent Philomel expresses her outrage at the pain and suffering inflicted upon her by Tereus. The second section, an echo-song, depicts Philomel's efforts at coming to terms with her new existence in the world of the birds, she seeks recognition from the forest birds (who reply with grim syllable-plays upon the words that she sings). Finally, an aria of the nightingale in full voice in which Philomel, according to Hollander, 'reigns over a kingdom of sound.'⁹ The taped synthesised music employs twelve-voice canons,¹⁰ and is 'almost totally

⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 51. See chapter seven for an exploration of dissonance and ugliness in Adorno's thought.

⁸ Hollander, "Notes on the Text of *Philomel*," 134.

⁹ Hollander, "Notes on the Text of *Philomel*," 136.

¹⁰ Richard Swift, "Some Aspects of Aggregate Composition," *Perspectives of New Music* 14/15 (Spring/Summer – Fall/Winter, 1976): 241.

pointillist in its splintering of all musical elements.’¹¹ The vocal part employs a wide range (from an F# below middle C to a B above the staff), and demands highly virtuosic technique from the singer.

Babbitt did not give titles to the three clear sections into which *Philomel* is divided. The titles given to the sections below are drawn from John Hollander’s description in his “Notes on the Text of *Philomel*.”¹²

9.1.i “Recitative and Arioso”

After a ‘clunk’ suggesting the moment of metamorphosis, in the opening bars of *Philomel* the taped voice is heard retuning repeatedly to the vowel sound /iy/ (‘eeee’), tentatively departing and then returning to the repeated note E as if feeling about in the dark. Each departure from the note E signals a more extended foray out into the unknown, with the vowel sound ‘eeee’ (a play on the note E) eventually revealed to be the core of the first phrase, ‘I feel.’ As Richard Swift has noted, through the first seven bars of the piece, the taped voice returns to the note E (note that in the matrix below 0 = E), making use of the other eleven pitch-classes of the corresponding row (read left-to-right in the matrix below) down through the accompaniment (Example 1a and 1b).

¹¹ Larry Sitsky, *Music of the Twentieth Century Avant-Garde: A Biocritical Sourcebook*, ed. Larry Sitsky, foreword Jonathan D. Kramer (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002), 20.

¹² Hollander, “Notes on the Text of *Philomel*,” 136.

Ex. 1a: Matrix for Milton Babbitt's *Philomel* (as numbers).¹³

	I ₀	I ₁₁	I ₁	I ₉	I ₄	I ₆	I ₃	I ₂	I ₇	I ₈	I ₅	I ₁₀	
P ₀	0	11	1	9	4	6	3	2	7	8	5	10	R ₀
P ₁	1	0	2	10	5	7	4	3	8	9	6	11	R ₁
P ₁₁	11	10	0	8	3	5	2	1	6	7	4	9	R ₁₁
P ₃	3	2	4	0	7	9	6	5	10	11	8	1	R ₃
P ₈	8	7	9	5	0	2	11	10	3	4	1	6	R ₈
P ₆	6	5	7	3	10	0	9	8	1	2	11	4	R ₆
P ₉	9	8	10	6	1	3	0	11	4	5	2	7	R ₉
P ₁₀	10	9	11	7	2	4	1	0	5	6	3	8	R ₁₀
P ₅	5	4	6	2	9	11	8	7	0	1	10	3	R ₅
P ₄	4	3	5	1	8	10	7	6	11	0	9	2	R ₄
P ₇	7	6	8	4	11	1	10	9	2	3	0	5	R ₇
P ₂	2	1	3	11	6	8	5	4	9	10	7	0	R ₂
	RI ₀	RI ₁₁	RI ₁	RI ₉	RI ₄	RI ₆	RI ₃	RI ₂	RI ₇	RI ₈	RI ₅	RI ₁₀	

¹³ The matrices for Examples 1a and 1b are modelled on Richard Swift's table found in Swift, "Some Aspects of Aggregate Composition," 243.

Ex. 1b: Matrix for Milton Babbitt's *Philomel* (as note-names).

	I ₀	I ₁₁	I ₁	I ₉	I ₄	I ₆	I ₃	I ₂	I ₇	I ₈	I ₅	I ₁₀	
P ₀	E	D#	F	C#	G#	A#	G	F#	B	C	A	D	R ₀
P ₁	F	E	F#	D	A	B	G#	G	C	C#	A#	D#	R ₁
P ₁₁	D#	D	E	C	G	A	F#	F	A#	B	G#	C#	R ₁₁
P ₃	G	F#	G#	E	B	C#	A#	A	D	D#	C	F	R ₃
P ₈	C	B	C#	A	E	F#	D#	D	G	G#	F	A#	R ₈
P ₆	A#	A	B	G	D	E	C#	C	F	F#	D#	G#	R ₆
P ₉	C#	C	D	A#	F	G	E	D#	G#	A	F#	B	R ₉
P ₁₀	D	C#	D#	B	F#	G#	F	E	A	A#	G	C	R ₁₀
P ₅	A	G#	A#	F#	C#	D#	C	B	E	F	D	G	R ₅
P ₄	G#	G	A	F	C	D	B	A#	D#	E	C#	F#	R ₄
P ₇	B	A#	C	G#	D#	F	D	C#	F#	G	E	A	R ₇
P ₂	F#	F	G	D#	A#	C	A	G#	C#	D	B	E	R ₂
	RI ₀	RI ₁₁	RI ₁	RI ₉	RI ₄	RI ₆	RI ₃	RI ₂	RI ₇	RI ₈	RI ₅	RI ₁₀	

Beginning in the top left-hand corner of either matrix above, the taped vocal line makes use of the 0-diagonal of the set matrix, using the notes that come before it (those that appear to the left of 0 in the matrix above) in each new row. The remaining notes of each row (drawn respectively from P₀, P₁, P₁₁, P₃, P₈ and P₆) are sounded vertically in the synthesised accompaniment (Example 2). The repetition of a single note in the

voice clearly reflects the text (in Babbitt's words, the 'programmatically suggested reiteration of a single pitch'¹⁴ that the 'eee' sound plays upon), but also generates a sense of fragility and tentativeness as the voice makes successively more confident forays out into the sonic space, returning each time to the E as if to draw strength. Though analysis reveals the manner in which each row is employed in the opening bars, the absence of an easily identifiable row form in the vocal part could be interpreted as a sign of Philomel's initial incoherence and disorientation.

¹⁴ Milton Babbitt, "Responses: A First Approximation," *Perspectives of New Music* 14/15 (Spring/Summer – Fall/Winter, 1976): 7.

Ex. 2: Milton Babbitt, *Philomel*, Section One, bars 1-5.¹⁵

PHILOMEL

Milton Babbitt

(♩ = 64)

I. **P0** **P1** **P11**

1, 0 in the taped voice (first two notes of row P1)

11, 10, 8 in the taped voice (first three notes of P11)

0 (E) in the taped voice the remainder of the P0 aggregate appears vertically down through the texture

The remaining notes of P1 appear vertically down through the texture

The remaining notes of P11 appear in the accompaniment

P3 **P8**

3, 2, 4, 0 in the taped voice (first four notes of P3 in the taped voice)

The pattern continues using P8

Reaining notes of P3 appear in the accompaniment

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¹⁵ Milton Babbitt, *Philomel* (New York: Associated Music Publishers, 1964), 1.

Andrew Mead notes that the piece opens with ‘a soft but intense attack, a *clink*, of synthesised sounds, pitched across a wide range. The effect is like a short gasp of astonishment, leaving the voice frozen alone in a vast registral space.’¹⁶ Philomel’s disorientation is thus expressed spatially, and the moment of her metamorphosis is signalled through this opening percussive sound that is definite but elusive; the ‘clink’ is heard with rhythmic certainty, but the sound remains difficult to identify. Mead describes these opening measures as a ‘fishing expedition’ as if the voice were ‘retriev[ing] its own notes,’ with ‘the voice first feeling its way into musical space, then carving out for itself a place to make music.’¹⁷ The voice gathers together the dispersed notes as if they had been dropped, as if Philomel were collecting (repossessing) the raw sonic materials necessary for her self-expression through music that is to come. The disembodied tape-voice hangs precariously in these new and unfamiliar surroundings, as the initial stasis of the accompaniment in the first two bars gives way to the complex, twitching rhythms from the third bar onwards. The enormous registral distance encapsulated in the two bars contracts considerably for the following three bars, with the synthesised sounds ranging from occasional very low notes to an uncomfortably high E that is sustained through the entire opening (the first seven bars). The movement of the fast-moving synthesised sounds follow coherent shapes; the third and fourth bars display complex poly-rhythms over repeated notes, in bar five are descending quavers, and in bar seven two lines of fortissimo semiquavers (grouped into eleven) sound in contrary motion. After these opening bars, the accompanying synthesised sounds become less predictable in their motion, sometimes creating clear ascending or descending lines, but often moving in motions that are difficult to predict or give shape to.

Though Babbitt completes the opening (taped) vocal line with the remaining pitch-classes of each vertical aggregate down through the accompaniment (thus maintaining the coherence of his serial technique), the repeated return to note the E in the vocal line nonetheless challenges the autonomy of tones usually demanded under total serialism, imbuing the note E with the capacity to unify the entire first phrase. Not only does the taped voice return to the note E after successively greater excursions away from the

¹⁶ Andrew W. Mead, “One man’s signal is another man’s noise: Personal encounters with post-tonal music,” in *The Pleasure of Modernist Music: Listening, Meaning, Intention, Ideology*, ed. and intro. Arved Ashby (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 263.

¹⁷ Mead, “One man’s signal,” 263.

note, the sustained synthesised high E that enters with the voice at the very beginning of the piece is sustained for the entire duration of the opening seven bars. This high-pitched sound generates a sense of urgency and anxiety, but is also the same pitch-class to which the taped voice repeatedly returns as a source of familiarity and comfort. This hierarchical organisation of pitch could be taken as an homage to tonality, creating the sense of a somewhat distorted reality in which two systems (tonality and serialism) are in tension. This could be understood to be analogous to the tension between dreamworld and reality into which myth invites entry, and is an effective device for drawing the listener into the sonic world *Philomel* creates. This opening gesture of unfolding and return encourages the listener into an awareness of the tensions between systems played out though *Philomel* (in particular the tension between nature and technology, the made and the un-made, on which the juxtaposition of the text and the music – voice and synthesiser – throws light) and implicitly invites the listener to consider the resonances and tensions operating between the systems of tonal and non-tonal music,¹⁸ as well as those between electronic and acoustic sound-worlds.

David Lewin suggests that Babbitt's use of the matrix operates as a metaphor for the loom, with 'the tape voice enter[ing] this structure in the act of beginning to weave a tapestry...*Philomel* [is] speaking through the web of the serial matrix, through those painstakingly interwoven threads.'¹⁹ Lewin goes on to connect the word 'matrix' with 'mother,' inferring upon the matrix maternal qualities, 'Philomel's loom, as matrix, gives birth to her tapestry, the fruit of her horrible union with Tereus.'²⁰ Emily J. Adamowicz extends the gendered metaphors of weaving and procreation, noting that Philomel and Procne exact their revenge through highly gendered, domestic means (namely, Procne's cooking of her son Itys). Adamowicz links the metaphors of weaving and cooking to the cool, detached rage of the two women noting that Philomel and Procne 'are using traditional domestic activities to exact their revenge. The fruits of domestic labor are transformed into weapons of justice and punishment.'²¹

¹⁸ Babbitt himself invites the listener to consider the opening of *Philomel* in these terms, writing that serialism is analogous not with 'the specific features, methods or techniques of tonal music but its unfolding richness and depth of strata can be inferred.' Babbitt, "Responses: A First Approximation," 8.

¹⁹ David Lewin, *Studies in Music with Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 393-94.

²⁰ Lewin, *Studies in Music with Text*, 395.

²¹ Emily J. Adamowicz, "Subjectivity and Structure in Milton Babbitt's *Philomel*," *Music Theory Online* 17, no. 2 (July 2011): 3.

<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.11.17.2/mto.11.17.2.adamowicz.html> (accessed 16 November 2015).

Once the taped voice has cycled through all of the twelve available notes, the texture is released from the high-pitched synthesised E, and it is at this point that the live soprano voice enters the piece. There is a flurry of activity in the synthesiser that precedes the entry of the live voice, which sings in brief semiquavers (and then staccato quavers), bird-like notes on the vowel sound ‘ee’. The taped voice continues its own experiment upon the same sounds, though with longer, more legato phrases. The splitting of Philomel’s voice into two seems to signal her psychic distress, as if the violence she has endured and the revenge she has exacted have fragmented her (the text goes on to suggest this also, ‘I feel a million filaments’ and later ‘As if a new self could be founded on sound’).²² However, the high level of activity in the accompaniment at this point, coupled with the brilliance of the live voice (in contrast to the more muted tones of the taped voice), resists the perception of the split voice as a state of pure anxiety (or act of violence). The entry of the live voice signals a sense of excitement and anticipation, as Philomel explores the new vocal possibilities granted to her by her metamorphosis into a bird. However, for the next few bars (from bar 8 to bar 12) both vocal lines contribute to the vertical expression of each aggregate, and during these measures all voices are inter-dependent, relying upon one another for the full expression of the rows employed. Here, the combination of the taped and live voices with the accompanying synthesised sound gives the impression, if not of birds specifically, then certainly the busyness of the forest setting. From the anacrusis to bar thirteen onwards, however, the live vocal line begins to deliver recognisable hexachords horizontally (see Example 3a below: R1 second hexachord, P7 first hexachord, P8 first hexachord and so on), whilst the taped line continues to depend on the accompaniment for the completion of its own hexachords. This relative autonomy of the live voice from the other two lines reinforces the perception of the live performer as the embodiment of Philomel herself, and confirms the primacy of the live voice as a soloist with accompaniment (rather than three equal ‘instruments’). After having only expressed ‘Ee’ sounds until this point (with the exception of, ‘Fee’ in bar 23) the solo voice finally articulates a full sentence at bars 25-26, singing, ‘I feel. Feel a million trees.’ The tentativeness of the earlier,

²² Lacanian psychoanalysis (after Freud) argues that the traumatic subjective splitting of the self (which occurs as the infant comes into language and realises her separation from her mother) is constitutive of the subject itself. ‘The splitting of the I into ego (false self) and unconscious brings into being a surface, in a sense, with two sides: one that is exposed and one that is hidden. Though the two sides may not ultimately be made of radically different material–linguistic in nature—at any given point along the surface there is a front and a back, a visible face and an invisible one.’ Bruce Fink, “The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance,” (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

staccato entries is contrasted with a more expansive sound thanks to legato phrasing and large dramatic leaps (contrast staccato attack and short note values in Example 3a above with legato phrasing in Example 3b below). With the words ‘I feel,’ Philomel comes into her own voice to tell of the violence she has endured, but also her transcendence as the *Arioso* ends with her declaring, ‘I am becoming / my own song...’

Example 3a: Milton Babbitt, *Philomel*, Section One, bars 11-16.²³

The image displays three systems of musical notation for Milton Babbitt's *Philomel*, Section One, bars 11-16. Each system includes staves for Tape, Voice, and Piano. The first system (bars 11-12) features a blue box labeled "R1 second hexachord" in the Tape staff and a blue box in the Voice staff. The second system (bars 13-14) features a purple box labeled "P7 first hexachord" in the Voice staff. The third system (bars 15-16) features a red box labeled "P8 First Hexachord (vocal line is missing first pitch-class which occurs in synthesiser)" in the Voice staff. The Piano part in the third system has a red box around a specific chord. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *mf* and *f*.

²³ Babbitt, *Philomel*, 3.

I-

²⁴ Babbitt, *Philomel*, 4-5.

Handwritten musical score for Tape, Voice, and Piano. The Tape part has a 2-measure rest. The Voice part has a 2-measure rest. The Piano part has a 2-measure rest. The Piano part has a 2-measure rest.

Handwritten musical score for Tape, Voice, and Piano. The Tape part has a 5-measure rest. The Voice part has a 5-measure rest. The Piano part has a 5-measure rest.

Legato phrasing contrasts previous solo vocal line

Handwritten musical score for Voice and Piano. The Voice part has a 4-measure rest. The Piano part has a 4-measure rest. The Voice part has a 3-measure rest. The Piano part has a 3-measure rest. The Voice part has a 7-measure rest. The Piano part has a 7-measure rest.

9.1.ii “Echo-Song”

The second section of *Philomel* takes place after Philomel’s transformation into a bird, ‘and consists of a dialogue with the various birds of the air, in which she implores them to support her in her new identity.’²⁵ As Hollander explains, the echo-song was a device employed through the seventeenth and eighteenth century in satiric verse; ‘the point was to use the echoing last word of a question for a debunking answer... “Say what can keep her chaste whom I adore?” “A door.”’²⁶ Hollander is right to describe the effect as ‘horrific in a kind of baroque way.’²⁷ as Philomel’s imploring questions, her efforts to make sense of her new environment are met with the bird’s cruel humour. The bleak cleverness of Hollander’s poetry creates an unsettling effect, as the playful poetic form, coupled with the incoherence of the bird’s replies, creates simultaneous feelings of familiarity and humour together with disorientation and incomprehension. Philomel’s new world is populated by birds speaking through her own (taped) voice in riddles, conveying a strange synchronicity between Philomel at once in conversation with herself, and with the forest around her. Whilst Adamowicz takes this to be a tension between two different affective states at work in the music and the text (‘Hollander proposes that the dialogue is external [however] the aesthetic effect conveyed in Babbitt’s music is of self-dialogue’),²⁸ the listener could also take this simultaneous internal/external dialogue to represent a single, precarious affective state expressing Philomel’s incomplete incorporation into the kingdom of nature.

The repetition of rows RI7 and P0 (according to the matrix above, in which $E=0$) through the texture of tape and voice mirrors the echoing of the words spoken in the text, lending a sense of simplicity and predictability to the musical texture. Like Hollander’s ‘horrific...baroque’ reinterpretation of the echo-song, however, Babbitt’s technique of ‘mutual partition’²⁹ employed throughout this section creates a similar sense of the uncanny in the musical texture; the apparent simplicity of the repetitions of the musical surface (mirroring the apparent simplicity of the poetic form) is problematised by the interconnectedness of the underlying relationships that are revealed upon analysis (mirroring the troubling of the humorous echo-song form by the

²⁵ Hollander, “Notes on the text of *Philomel*,” 136.

²⁶ Hollander, “Notes on the text of *Philomel*,” 136.

²⁷ Hollander, “Notes on the text of *Philomel*,” 136.

²⁸ Adamowicz, “Subjectivity and Structure,” 4.

²⁹ Babbitt, “Responses: A First Approximation,” 7.

weight of the emotional content of the text). On the surface, the music of the echo-song presents complete statements of the rows RI7 and P0 respectively up through the texture. As Adamowicz explains, however, Babbitt partitions these two rows into three ordered pitch-class sets, which through their repetition results in a blurring of the distinction between the two row forms.³⁰ Though when taken in its entirety, the three-part texture (voice and two lines of synthesiser) voices vertically the full statement of each row (RI7 and P0), each horizontal line presents repetitions of the partitioned sets, making it impossible to deduce from the horizontal line which of the two rows is being used. Though this sharing of identity between these two row forms blurs the distinction between them, no other ordered partitions could be inferred from these particular sets,³¹ reinforcing the primacy of the P0 relations. The ‘centrality, even centricity’³² expressed through such partitioning is achieved through the reiteration and return to a specific set of relationships (in this case the row P0), thus reflecting a highly ordered and self-referential system.

9.1.iii “Strophic Aria”

It is not until the final section that the live soprano voice delivers entire twelve-note rows alone (Example 4).³³ Over the first five bars of the concluding aria, over the final thirteen bars, and in a number of other prominent places the live vocal line sings the complete statement of P0.³⁴ The prominence of horizontal statements of un-partitioned rows in the final section unites the work. Each of the rows beginning on the note E (P0, I0, R2 and RI10) are declaimed one after another in the live vocal line (Ex. 4), suggesting a re-congealing of Philomel’s self and identity. As Hollander describes, the final aria represents the ‘fully realized singing of the fully formed nightingale...[who]

³⁰ Adamowicz, “Subjectivity and Structure,” 4-5. My analysis is indeed indebted to Adamowicz’s insightful commentary, I have nonetheless followed Swift’s convention of taking E=0, which Babbitt himself employs in his discussion of *Philomel* in “Responses: A First Approximation,” 7.

³¹ Babbitt writes ‘RI7 and So are represented by the mutual partitions: (9 2 5 10) (11 4 3 8) (0 1 6 7), a partition with a minimal possible number of parts, in terms of which no other set form can be interpreted.’ Babbitt, “Responses: A First Approximation,” 7.

³² Babbitt, “Responses: A First Approximation,” 7.

³³ Graham Hair and Milton Babbitt, “Some Works of Milton Babbitt Reviewed,” *Tempo* 90 (Autumn, 1969), 35.

³⁴ Jessica Payette gives a useful map of symbols showing the various uses of a number of important rows in the final aria of *Philomel*. See Jessica Payette, *Seismographic Screams: ‘Erwartung’s’ Reverberations Through Twentieth Century Culture* (PhD diss, University of Stanford, 2008), 300-01. Payette also notes that complete statements of rows in the vocal line are ‘noticeably absent in the third segment of this section when Philomel dwells on her shattered voice and anthropomorphic death.’ Payette, *Seismographic Screams*, 300.

reigns over a kingdom of sound,'³⁵ unaided by the taped voice. It is only in the refrain ('Thrashing, though/ The woods of Thrace') that the live and taped voices sing together.³⁶

The presence of complete twelve-note rows and the coherence of the text in the final section suggest that Philomel not only reclaims her voice and a sense of unity, but she also achieves a degree of mastery over her new surroundings. From the fragmented presentation of the pitch (and phonic) materials early in the work, Philomel gradually gathers her necessary materials (both musical and linguistic) and shapes them into her own expression. Contesting the traditional operatic narrative of female destruction, Philomel overcomes the suffering inflicted upon her to reign over the kingdom of birds: 'Suffering is redeemed in song. Feeling takes wing: /High, high above, beyond the forests of horror I sing!'

³⁵ Hollander, "Notes on the text of *Philomel*," 136.

³⁶ 'I felt that the tape should join her [Philomel] (as an audible voice, of course) only in the refrain.' Hollander, "Notes on the text of *Philomel*," 136.

Ex. 4: Milton Babbitt, *Philomel*, Section Three, bars 1-21.³⁷

III - 1 (♩ = 80)

mf > p
P0→ LIVING, f > pp GROW-ING, ff > p CHANG-ING,

BE-ING in THE HUM AL-WAYS 10→ of pain!

THE PAIN OF SLOW CHANGE BLOWS IN OUR FA- CES LIKE UN-FELT WINDS THAT THE SPIN-NING

R2→

³⁷ Milton Babbitt, *Philomel*, 34-35.

Handwritten musical score for a song, featuring vocal and piano parts. The score is written in treble and bass clefs, with lyrics and dynamic markings.

First System:

- Vocal: *ff* WORLD *mp* MAKES *ff > mf* IN ITS *mp* TURN- *< mf* ing
- Piano: *ff* *mp* *ff > mf* (10) 13 *mf* 3

Second System:

- Vocal: *ff* *mf* *f* *mf* *ff* *pp < mf* *ff* *pp* *mf* *ff*
- Lyrics: Life AND FEEL- ing WHIRL ON BE- LOW THE THRESH-
- Piano: *ff* *mf* *f* *mf* *ff* *pp* *mf* *ff*

Third System:

- Vocal: *ff* *mf* *f* *mf* *ff* *pp < mf* *ff*
- Lyrics: HOLD OF BURN- ing
- Piano: *ff* *mf* *f* *mf* *ff* *pp* *mf* *ff*

Dynamic markings include *ff* (fortissimo), *mp* (mezzo-piano), *f* (forte), *mf* (mezzo-forte), *pp* (pianissimo), and *< mf* (diminuendo mezzo-forte). Performance instructions include *3*, *10*, *13*, and *5*.

9.2 Suffering and Violence

*Suffering remains foreign to knowledge...Suffering conceptualised remains mute and inconsequential.*³⁸

As argued in chapter seven, one of the primary purposes of Modernist ugliness is to bring suffering into the domain of aesthetic experience. This process is nonetheless vexed, because suffering is not only resistant to discursive communication, but resists conceptual thought more generally. As Adorno argues, art (which operates outside discursive communication and conceptual thinking) is a privileged domain though which suffering can enter into communication and shared experience. In order to avoid folding over into the sadistic enjoyment of the suffering of others (and thus remaining ‘mute and inconsequential’), the depiction of suffering in art must be refracted, the audience must experience something of the suffering in order to bring that pain into the realm of shared experience (and possibly, knowledge). Importantly, successful works of art achieve this gesture by generating empathy, and facilitating audience identification with the suffering depicted.³⁹

Susan McClary’s well-known essay “Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition” considers Babbitt’s *Philomel* in relation to academic Modernism and the prestige attached to ‘difficult’ Modernist music. In her discussion of how audiences might interpret mythological heroines such as Philomel, so often depicted in states of emotional turmoil, McClary cautions against reading such tales as ‘simple expressions of misogyny,’ and hints at the possibility of forsaking Babbitt’s restrictive prescriptions in favour of a more emotionally and ethically engaged approach to interpretation:

There are ways of interpreting the literary and musical content of many Modernist pieces that would argue for the artists’ sensitivity with respect to the female victims represented. To take what may be an especially sympathetic instance, Babbitt’s *Philomel*...can be read quite straightforwardly as an *anti-rape* statement, in which the victim is

³⁸ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 24.

³⁹ Adorno argues that Stravinsky’s work does not succeed by this measure, because his ‘music identifies not with the victim but with the annihilating authority.’ Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. ed. and intro. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 110.

transformed into the nightingale to sing about both her suffering and her transcendence.⁴⁰

McClary goes on to briefly explore the ways in which the ‘violent distortions and ruptures of the singer’s voice...bear witness to Philomel’s rape’ and dismemberment, serving to ‘acknowledge the horror of the crime and yet the possibility of survival.’⁴¹ Just at this point of insight, however, McClary defers to Babbitt’s authorial authority, cutting short her own analysis on account of his preference for discussions of ‘sterile’ compositional techniques over matters of musical and emotional meaning:

Yet Babbitt’s writings discourage one from attempting to unpack his composition along these lines. Indeed, he warns us not to get hung up trying to map the events of pieces onto the “mundane banalities” of real life, for it is in this objective, unsentimental attitude that prestige resides. But if content is really not an issue, why such horrendous subject matter? Many of my female students have trouble listening passively to *Philomel* as yet another instance of serial and electronic manipulation: they have difficulty achieving the kind of objective intellectual attitude that would permit them to focus on considerations of sterile compositional technique. For to most women, rape and mutilation are not mundane banalities that can conveniently be bracketed for the sake of art: especially an art that attaches prestige to the celebration of such violations.⁴²

Importantly, McClary is confronting misogyny and the social acceptance of violence against women. However, she is also taking the opportunity to chastise Babbitt for his excessive (Modernist) ego, his attitude towards the purity of serial procedures, and his disdain for all matters that fall outside the objective and verifiable parameters of compositional process. Adorno, of course, would remind us that the composer’s intentions are in no way the final word on musical meaning, and that Babbitt’s own approach need not circumscribe the limits of possible interpretations. Surely the fact that McClary’s students ‘have difficulty achieving the kind of objective intellectual

⁴⁰ McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 74-75. Linda Kouvaras has conducted a similar investigation into the self-empowerment through voice of an operatic character. Linda Kouvaras, *Sweet Death: Strategies of the Feminine Grotesque in a Contemporary Australian Opera* (PhD diss, University of Melbourne, 1991).

⁴¹ McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 75.

⁴² McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 75.

attitude' towards *Philomel* recommends the work; it has drawn her students in, suggesting they have found it meaningful and arresting. Both the narrative and musical content of *Philomel* draw the listener into Philomel's experience of suffering: the shattered language and cruel humour of Hollander's poetry, coupled with the jagged contortions of the live voice and pointillist synthesised accompaniment, together draw the listener into Philomel's experience. Philomel's suffering is not laid out for our enjoyment (or lamentation), but rather the listener becomes Philomel, and something of her experience is communicated and shared. Babbitt's own words may discourage the listener from pursuing interpretations that foreground Philomel's suffering and the violence that animates the story; Babbitt's music, however, gives voice to Philomel's pain, and does so in a way that draws the listener into an identification with Philomel's distress.

More troubling than McClary's deference to Babbitt's own habits of interpretation, however, is her suggestion that the depiction of suffering in art leads necessarily to a celebration of abuse. In the first passage of "Terminal Prestige" quoted above, McClary denies that the depiction of rape and violence necessarily amounts to 'the celebration of such violations,' but by the end of the page she has reversed her position. Not only does McClary suggest that the portrayal of sexual violence lends *Philomel* Modernist prestige, she goes on to suggest that the work itself ultimately celebrates the actions that it depicts ('especially an art that attaches prestige to the celebration of such violations'). Whilst it is certainly true that the operatic tradition abounds with (often violent) narratives of female demise,⁴³ it is absurd and dangerous to suggest that all artistic depictions of violence, abuse and war are engaged in a celebration of the events they portray. When one *listens* to Babbitt's *Philomel* (rather than reading the composer's polemics), there is no suggestion that the rape and mutilation depicted have been 'conveniently ... bracketed for the sake of art,' and nor are the events celebrated. Instead, as McClary initially suggests (but from which she then retreats), Babbitt's work offers a moving depiction of the moment of Philomel's transformation after a terrible series of violent events. *Philomel* tells of a woman's survival after rape: far from being

⁴³ Catherine Clément argues that the entire tradition of opera is an extended exploration of the 'undoing' of women, with heroines often being driven to murder, suicide or madness. Catherine Clément, *Opera, or, The Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing, foreword Susan McClary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). Carolyn Abbate also explores these themes, Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

‘bracketed out,’ trauma permeates the music and text. The violence of the narrative is matched with fractured text and dissonant, pointillistic music. Arguably, the listener is plunged into Philomel’s place, and it is this positioning of the listener in sympathy with Philomel that allows the work to offer a critique of sexual violence. Regardless of what Babbitt might say about the meaning of the work, *Philomel* can be straightforwardly heard as an ‘anti-rape statement.’

McClary’s interpretation seems to be perilously close to what Nathan Ross (after Adorno) describes as the ‘sadistic misdirection of hostility,’⁴⁴ whereby the subject mistakes the depiction of suffering for the source of suffering.⁴⁵ Adorno notices such a response often accompanies new art and music: ‘in the writings of the Marquis de Sade, it stands...that it is only beautiful to hurt someone who is already suffering. And something of this form of reaction seems to be present in people’s response to a foreign image or an unaccustomed piece of music.’⁴⁶ McClary’s response seems close to such a misdirection, with the musical ugliness and linguistic incoherence so essential to the depiction of Philomel’s suffering taken to be a provocation to scorn the work (rather than reflect upon the suffering it explores). Adorno is well aware that artworks are unable to do justice to the suffering they depict,⁴⁷ and it is this insufficiency of art in the face of existence that Adorno describes as ‘the shame of art.’⁴⁸ This shame, however, is in no way assuaged by avoiding the depiction of suffering in art, an approach that would only compound the inadequacy of art itself.

The overt distinction McClary makes between (sentimental) emotional and (objective) intellectual approaches to understanding *Philomel* is obviously motivated by her desire to destabilise the authority of a mode of analysis concerned exclusively with compositional procedures. McClary is right to argue that Babbitt’s own formalist preoccupations (his focus with compositional procedure) fail to fully account for *Philomel*’s emotional force. The problem with opposing such a system with its own

⁴⁴ Nathan Ross, “On Truth Content and False Consciousness in Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory,” *Philosophy Today* 59, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 280.

⁴⁵ See also 7.3 Ugliness for Adorno.

⁴⁶ Adorno, from his lectures on aesthetics, cited in Ross, “On Truth Content and False Consciousness,” 280.

⁴⁷ ‘The artwork is not only the echo of suffering, it diminishes it...Art thereby falls into an unsolvable aporia,’⁴⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 49.

⁴⁸ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 405. Describing the poetry of Paul Celan, Adorno writes: ‘his poetry is permeated by the shame of art in the face of suffering that escapes both experience and sublimation.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 405.

logic (by affirming that sense and intellect may be rightfully divorced from one another, but choosing the side of sensation rather than intellect) is that McClary falls into a purely reactionary position and leads to an interpretive dead-end, equally as restrictive as Babbitt's own self-imposed rejection of hermeneutics. The inadequacy of both positions is clearly apparent; sensual and emotional responses to a work are of undoubted importance, but the listener cannot complete the experience of the work without attending to both emotional *and* intellectual responses, by completing sensory perception with thought. The reality that all experience is mediated demands that neither sense nor intellect are fetishised, for both are essential to the full experience of a work of art.

9.3 Ugliness and Natural Beauty

Philomel is undoubtedly concerned with sexual violence. Tereus' rape of Philomel is the story's catalyst and the source of much of the urgency and psychic energy of the work. Many analyses of *Philomel* rightly focus on the ways in which rape and violence are framed through the work.⁴⁹ Arguably, however, *Philomel* also explores other important themes that can be underscored when one listens to *Philomel* through the prism of Adorno's aesthetic theory. Adornian ugliness occurs on a number of other levels in *Philomel*, as each of the work's various musical elements are de-naturalised and de-familiarised.

The shattered, pointillist splintering of all musical elements makes it difficult for the ear to find anything familiar to hold onto. The absence of an audible pulse upsets the perception of both time and space, with the elongation and contraction of time destabilising the listener, immersing them in the work's unpredictability. The vast range of synthesized sound stretches auditory capacity, with some notes feeling almost painful to endure (such as the high-E in the synthesizer which persists through the first seven bars of the work). Dispensing with tonal relations, the serial compositional process de-familiarises from the outset, forcing the listener to call into question the self-evidence of the auditory environment. Despite a sense of confusion and disorientation, however, *Philomel* draws the listener into a new aural landscape that challenges us to hear, feel and think in new ways.

⁴⁹ For example, Adamowicz, "Subjectivity and Structure"; and McClary, "Terminal Prestige".

Philomel renders the ‘natural’ beauty of the human voice ugly, as the live voice leaps around in virtuosic, but also awkward and apparently ‘unnatural’ ways. The voice is often left hanging, as if cut off, contorted, dismembered. The virtuosity of vocal technique required is turned back in on itself, in order to produce ugly, disquieting effects. The beautiful sonority of the soprano voice, the necessarily perfect pitch and immaculate control that the work demands, are turned towards an ugly end, laying bare the disciplining that the voice undergoes (the innumerable hours of labour, practice, repetition) in order to produce such a faultless and apparently ‘natural’ singing voice. Unlike traditional beautiful works, the live voice in *Philomel* exposes the disciplining and regulation that the body endures in the name of art. Unlike traditional understandings of aesthetic beauty, which conceal the discipline and labour of the artist behind a cloak of immediacy, *Philomel* lays bare the reality of the beautiful singing voice, and the price for this honesty is ugliness.

Though the narrative of *Philomel* rests comfortably within the tradition of opera and monodrama, which typically draw on strictly gendered depictions of madness, hysteria, anxiety and subjective fragmentation for narrative energy, the voice itself characteristically (in traditional operatic works – even many from the twentieth century, such as Berg’s) remains beautiful, with the often wild and unbelievable plot lines depending upon the portrayal of the voice as natural and unmediated. Given the difficulty of singing serial compositions in general, and the particularly extravagant demands *Philomel* makes of the singer, the beauty of the trained voice is rendered unavoidably ugly, the apparent naturalness of the singing voice is positioned next to its aestheticised limit – the absolute mediation and submission to technique of the beautiful trained voice is exposed. The cruelty of this revelation is essential to the force of modernity that *Philomel* depicts. Whilst the narrative-content of *Philomel* positions the work comfortably within the operatic tradition (though *Philomel*’s transcendence also defies traditional operatic narratives of female destruction), the treatment of the voice – its self-reflexivity in exposing its own mediation – also places the work in opposition to that tradition.

9.3.i Technology

Adorno’s description of reason as an impulse towards demythologisation, in which the terrors of nature are assuaged through its control, captures the full force of the dialectic

between progress and the domination of nature. Considering *Philomel* in this light foregrounds not only the subject's relation to reason and myth, but also brings to the fore the ways in which sensory perception itself is conditioned by the technologies around us.

The instrumentation of *Philomel* is the first way in which the competing themes of nature and technology are brought to the listener's attention. The Mark II synthesizer for which Babbitt scored the piece plays an interesting role, providing a background 'landscape' against which the live voice stages the representation of Philomel herself. Curiously, the most mediated instruments (the synthesizer and taped voice) represent the natural environment such as birds, and the rustling and movement of the forest. *Philomel* explores the intensifying tension between nature and technical progress by juxtaposing a mythic story from antiquity with some of the most advanced, highly mediated and technologically determined sounds available at the time. It is curious that the most mediated sounds occupy the narrative space of nature, and that the less technologically-mediated live voice occupies the mythic and magical space of Philomel.

A particularly arresting aspect of listening to *Philomel* from the vantage point of the twenty-first century is the nostalgic quality that the synthesised sound now lends the work. Although cutting-edge at the time, the synthesiser dates *Philomel* in a way that the live voice does not, adding another layer to this interplay between immediacy and mediation, nature and technology. The contemporaneity of the live voice, sounding very much up to date (even post-post-modern)⁵⁰ contrasts with the now-archaic quality of the synthesiser, something out of the golden age of space exploration. The dated quality of the technology contrasted with the avant-garde currency of the live

⁵⁰ Linda Kouvaras argues for the following periodisations (which also carry certain aesthetic sensibilities) in the domain of sound art: Modernist experimentalism (from the late-1940s to the late-1970s), Postmodern sound art (from the late-1970s to the late-1990s), and 'altermodern' for more recent developments (from the late-1990s onwards). The use of the term 'post-post-modern' above could be substituted with Kouvaras' 'altermodern.' Linda Kouvaras, *Loading the Silence: Australian Sound Art in the Post-Digital Age* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 47-48. Mark Carroll, "Out of the Ordinary: The Quotidian in the Music of Graeme Koehne," *Music & Letters*, 95, 3 (2014): 429-451. For Carroll, theories of Postmodernism do not adequately account for, describe, or respond to, the social, economic, intellectual or aesthetic situation in which we find ourselves today. He argues that Postmodernism is neither an antidote to, nor the antithesis of, Modernism. Rather, Carroll proposes notions of supermodernity and the hypermodern as more adequate descriptors for the paradoxical and contradictory contemporary social situation.

voice produces a startling effect, as the work is *affectively* pulled in opposite directions, as if splintering apart under its own centrifugal force.

And so *Philomel* frames two of the most pressing concerns of our times, within a narrative exploring sexual violence and the gendering of domination itself, whilst the musical material explores the notion of progress through the intensification of humanity's domination over nature. The analyst could, of course, extend these metaphors into a single more complex one to consider the ways in which nature itself is gendered female precisely in order to facilitate its domination (certainly an avenue for further exploration).⁵¹

9.4 Conclusion

Though perhaps (consciously) inaudible on first hearing, the intricate web of serial relationships weaved through *Philomel* arguably (re)orders the listener's sense of hearing in a radically new way. The apparent disorder of the senses that registers as displeasure in the face of serial composition recedes after repeated careful listening, as the ear begins to hear the unfamiliar patterns as a web of interconnected relationships (even if the listener is at a loss to describe what is heard in words). *Philomel* foregrounds (indeed, polarises) the paradoxical situation in which aesthetic Modernism finds itself: the work simultaneously tends towards total integration (particularly in the music) and disintegration (particularly in the text). This threat of decomposition (evidenced through both the highly ordered serialised sounds that are at risk of being heard as pure chaos, and the fractured broken language which resists communication) is arguably the very crux of Modernism for Adorno.⁵² Perhaps, then, Adorno might (posthumously) agree that *Philomel*, through its ugliness and dissonance, and through its precarious polarisation of order and disintegration, is an exemplary Modernist work, capable of bringing suffering into the domain of aesthetic experience.

⁵¹ This issue is addressed in relation to the music of Anne Boyd, Moya Henderson and Sarah Hoping in Sally Macarthur, "Women, Spirituality, Landscape: the Music of Anne Boyd, Sarah Hopkins and Moya Henderson," in *The Soundscapes of Australia: Music, Place and Spirituality*, ed. Fiona Richards (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 51-74.

⁵² As J. M. Bernstein argues, 'Adorno makes those hermetic, disintegrating works of late modernism exemplary for his conception of modernism in general.' J. M. Bernstein, "'The dead speaking of stones and stars': Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory* (ed.) Fred Rush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 155.

As argued here, *Philomel*'s critical force is derived from its refusal of beauty at every turn; the cruelty of the narrative is matched by the dissonance of the music. The beauty-refusing synthesised sound, the automation of the taped voice – jarring in contrast with the voluptuousness of the live voice, the contortions and strain of that voice, all of these elements work together against the structural logic of traditional music (which is usually taken to be the production of beautiful sounds). *Philomel* arrests the listener in a state of Adornian ugliness: the work not only refuses but repels beauty. Returning to Adorno's dictum, that there is more joy in dissonance than in consonance, one might consider the role of pleasure in Modernist art more generally. Making sense of Modernist music undoubtedly demands that the listener work, and through their very existence, serialist works such as *Philomel* oppose that categorical separation of work from pleasure that marks the contemporary cultural landscape. The joys that *Philomel* affords are indeed difficult ones, as the immediacy and easy enjoyment one might imagine as the natural order of music are strictly resisted. By pursuing the mediation of music to its very limits, *Philomel* reveals the illusion of music's apparent immediacy. In its cruelty, and through its refusal of consolation, ugly Modernist works such as *Philomel* fulfil the universalising promise of dissonance: the shared experience of suffering.

Chapter Ten

A Mirror to the Mind: Listening to Eliane Radigue

Genuinely liberated music, music conscious of itself and reconciled with the passage of time, yearns to shake off all repetition. But the facts of the matter justify a dialectical treatment because that yearning suffers almost as much from contradiction as does the method it resists. By whatever methods music succeeded in articulating meaning, its internal logic was tied to open or latent repetitions. It is difficult to conceive of musical form in the absence of resemblance or difference. Even the postulate of non-repetitiveness, of absolute difference, calls for an element of sameness without which the different cannot be seen to be different...this stifles the absolutely new, the unrepeatable, the utopia of music, the utopia of open-ended and irreversible time.¹

10.0 Introduction

To an unfocussed listener, Eliane Radigue's *Transmorem/Transmortem* (1973) might sound like sixty-seven minutes of white noise; the sonic surface of the work is so static as to appear almost unchanging. Attentive listening, however, reveals a complex world of detail submerged beneath this surface of apparent homogeneity, an all-enveloping sonic landscape of slowly shifting details. Cold and static, *Transmorem/Transmortem* unfolds at a glacial pace, yet transfixes the listener: echoing the sublime experience of nature, one is compelled by both fascination and fright to attune the ears to its hushed electronic soundscape.

Transmorem/Transmortem is considered here in light of Adorno's music writing and aesthetics. As already argued, Modernism heralds a fundamental shift in the way music is organised, with *all* musical parameters becoming the bearers of musical form

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, "Form in the New Music," trans. Rodney Livingstone *Music Analysis* 27, no. 2-3 (2008): 205.

(‘because no forms exists any longer, everything must become form’).² Taking into consideration Adorno’s understanding of musical form, time, mimesis, and the dialectical tension between universal and particular, this chapter shows how each of these elements can be theorised in relation to electronic drone works such as *Transamore/Transmortem*. This chapter argues that Adorno’s aesthetics provides a useful theoretical framework through which to analyse experimentalist, non-score-based works, thus offering new pathways for the analysis and interpretation of experimentalist and Postmodernworks. As detailed in chapters two and three, the musicological reception of Adorno’s thinking has at times portrayed it as rigid and immobile. In contrast, this chapter suggests the flexibility and suitability of Adorno’s aesthetics to a range of musical styles.

10.1 Background to *Transamore/Transmortem*

Scored for the ARP 2500 modulator synthesiser, *Transamore/Transmortem* is a study in stasis: the finest, most infinitesimal details are intensified, manipulated and elongated, bringing out the tiniest details of sound into the realm of audibility. Beginning with the most reduced elements of sound, Radigue introduces singular sound waves which are then gradually layered. The oscillating drone sounds and pulsating beats that emerge from this layering form the detail of the work. From 1973 until the turn of the twenty-first century, Radigue worked exclusively with the ARP 2500, an instrument with which she enjoyed a great affinity, speaking about it in anthropomorphic terms: ‘I think he [the ARP 2500] has a very special sonority. He has a quality, he has a voice.’³ Foregoing the keyboard that accompanies the unit in order to work directly with the potentiometers, Radigue’s interest lay in exploring the minute details of sounds, the pulses, beats and sustained tones she was able to develop with the analogue synthesizer,⁴ bypassing the keyboard in order to achieve the greatest stability and control of sound.⁵ Radigue paid careful attention to the placement of speakers in the performances of her work, going to great lengths to ensure that every location within the performance venue enjoyed full and detailed (though always monophonic) sound,

² See 4.3.iv Form and Material.

³ Eliane Radigue, quoted in Tara Rodgers, *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 56.

⁴ Radigue quoted in Rodgers, *Pink Noises*, 55-56

⁵ Richard Glover, “Minimalism, Technology and Electronic Music,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music*, eds. Keith Potter, Kyle Gann and Pwyll ap Siôn (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 171.

a practice which often landed her in conflict with the traditional approaches of audio technicians.⁶

Transamorem/Transmortem begins with the most reduced elements of sound; singular sound waves are introduced and gradually layered, the most audible elements at the very beginning are the high-pitched frequencies, to which lower frequencies are gradually added. The precise point of introduction of each new sound is difficult to pinpoint, as each new frequency is brought in very quietly. By the time the presence a new sound is audible, one has the sense that it was there all along, with change ‘often perceived not as taking place but as *having taken place*.’⁷ The high-pitched, tinnitus-like sound, which is notably audible through the entire piece, engenders a sense of anxiety, and the polarisation of sound (towards very high and very low frequencies with very little in between), introduces a disorienting, even physically uncomfortable, soundscape. There is little here that feels familiar, with the frequencies beating sometimes closer together and sometimes further apart, but never coalescing into a recognisable pattern. Though everything (to begin with, at least) feels much the same, there is no repetition in any conventional sense, no pattern that one could commit to memory. At around nine minutes into the work, the slowly pulsing low-frequency sounds have come to the fore, providing a sense of stability and safety within this unfamiliar soundscape. By this point, the listener has likely given in and become immersed in the sonic bath (or given up and rejected the experience altogether). By around ten minutes into the work one feels submerged and, having passed through an initial stage of resistance, begins to hear more clearly the tiny changes in sound. At around this time, one becomes aware that the parameters of aural perception have changed, with the elongated and slowly shifting sounds generating a state of heightened perception.

Radigue’s exploration of electronic tape and synthesised sound is undoubtedly indebted to the European and American avant-gardes, as well as (early) American minimalism. Radigue cites the influence of composers such as Pierre Schaeffer and John Cage,⁸ who pursued the expressive potential of many non-traditional sound sources, and Radigue

⁶ Eliane Radigue, in “A Portrait of Eliane Radigue (2009)” produced by the Austrian IMA (Institute for Media Archeology), accessed March 3, 2015, <https://vimeo.com/8983993>.

⁷ Dan Warburton, “Into the Labyrinth,” *The Wire* 260 (October 2005): 30.

⁸ See Warburton, “Into the Labyrinth,” 26-31.

studied with Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry (eventually becoming Henry's assistant) at the Studio d'Essai at Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (RTF) in Paris during the late 1950s.⁹ The avant-garde and experimental elements of Radigue's approach could be said to be indebted to the principles of *musique concrète*; however, Radigue broke away from Henry and the Studio Apsome in 1968 to pursue her own interests,¹⁰ leaving France in 1970 for New York in order 'to have access to a real synthesizer.'¹¹ Radigue's focus on barely shifting surfaces, and the radical reduction of musical materials, aligns her work with the drone music of La Monte Young (who is 'now widely recognized as the originator of the most influential classical musical style of the final third of the twentieth century.'¹² Radigue's suggestion that her exploration of synthesized sounds employs a 'simple vocabulary: pulse, beats, sustained tones. And then evolving form there inside, you know?'¹³ echoes Young's desire for 'getting inside sound.'¹⁴

As argued below, Radigue's work can be framed in a number of different ways, sitting as it does on the borderlines between several intersecting traditions (incorporating aspects of both Modernism and Postmodernism, experimentalism and early minimalism). In *The Ashgate Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music* Radigue's work is positioned alongside composers such as La Monte Young and Alvin Lucier who express a shared interest in drones and the elongation of simple sounds (acoustic and/or electric).¹⁵ The ascetic, non-discursive and formalist qualities of *Transmorem/Transmortem* align it with the modernist tradition, whilst its exploration of new technologies and its status as an early piece of sound-art align it with emerging Postmodern concerns.

Transmorem/Transmortem certainly displays a number of modernist attributes: a focus on the new (Radigue's use of technology offers new ways of generating and organising sound), and an uncompromising stance towards the audience (the work's length and its radical sound-world demand a certain commitment beyond easy

⁹ Rodgers, *Pink Noises*, 54.

¹⁰ Rodgers, *Pink Noises*, 54.

¹¹ Radigue, quoted in Rodgers, *Pink Noises*, 55.

¹² Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 122. This is not to conflate Radigue's approach with minimalism, her meter-less electronic soundscapes are undoubtedly of an entirely different order to the maximal repetition of pulse-based American minimalism (exemplified by composers such as Philip Glass, Terry Riley and Steve Reich).

¹³ Radigue, quoted in Rodgers, *Pink Noises*, 56.

¹⁴ Keith Potter, "Mapping Early Minimalism," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music*, eds. Keith Potter, Kyle Gann and Pwyll ap Siôn (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 23.

¹⁵ Glover, "Minimalism, Technology and Electronic Music," 169.

enjoyment from the listener). Whilst *Transamorem/Transmortem* cannot be heard as a Postmodern work in any straightforward sense (there is no pastiche or quotation, nor stylistic eclecticism), it arguably exhibits a number of (proto)Postmodern traits. As Linda Kouvaras argues, ‘sound art is arguably *the* Postmodern genre *par exemple*: sound entrenches itself in the creation of meaning, while remaining elusive to signification – and sound art makes the foregrounding of this aspect one of its most compelling, acutely Postmodern conceptual cornerstones.’¹⁶ Whilst certain qualities might align *Transamorem/Transmortem* with modernist concerns, the focus on sound production, the new listening possibilities generated by electronic means, and its performance as a sound-art installation also align it with an emerging Postmodernism.

Radigue uses metaphors of light and water to describe her work, suggesting that the sounds can be thought of as light playing on the surface of the river, as well as reflections on the bottom.¹⁷ This reflective quality of Radigue’s works suggests both the primacy of the sonic surface and its textures, but also hints at the expressive potential of her works, which she suggests act as a ‘mental mirror,’ reflecting (and perhaps amplifying) the listener’s own internal processes.¹⁸ The metaphor of water seems particularly apt in describing *Transamorem/Transmortem*. The work envelops the listener, drawing them from the world above down through the water’s surface and into the depths. The unfamiliar soundscape generates something like an aural equivalent to the deep sea, a place full of strange and unthinkable life. The journeying quality to *Transamorem/Transmortem*, the listener submerged within the work and then delivered to the surface again, is, for Radigue, tied to her practice of Buddhism, which she adopted in the 1970s.¹⁹ This mystic quality links her work to both the American and European minimalist traditions, and the many composers who cite Eastern (and Western) mystic traditions as a source of inspiration.²⁰

¹⁶ Linda Kouvaras, *Loading the Silence: Australian Sound Art in the Post-Digital Age* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 40.

¹⁷ Radigue, in “A Portrait of Eliane Radigue (2009).” It is interesting to note that Adorno also discusses art through the metaphor of light, in particular ‘refraction.’ See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997), 5.

¹⁸ Radigue’s term. See Radigue, in “A Portrait of Eliane Radigue (2009).”

¹⁹ Rodgers, *Pink Noises*, 54.

²⁰ See David Dies, “Defining ‘Spiritual Minimalism,’” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music*, eds. Keith Potter, Kyle Gann and Pwyll ap Siôn (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 315-335.

10.2 Analytic Approach

There are many possible approaches to the analysis and interpretation of sound-art and non-score-based music, and the application of different listening strategies will naturally produce differing results.²¹ As Leigh Landy has noted, there is at present no ‘reasonably accepted *sound classification* system for use beyond the systems that have been created for a specific purpose.’²² As Linda Kouvaras has argued, the lack of a clearly defined sound-art analytic paradigm from which to proceed has led to scholarship that ‘frequently gloss[es] over the technical dimension and excludes musical analysis,’ with research tending to ‘concentrate on the nuts and bolts of sound art’ and (given the absence of agreed parameters of study) having to advance on a ‘work-by-work basis.’²³ The practical and technical difficulties of approaching a non-score-based work such as *Transamorem/Transmortem* are indeed myriad; however, the intention here is to consider the work in relation to Adorno’s aesthetic categories. In particular Adorno’s categories of form, time and mimetic exchange are considered here, illuminating some ways in which Adorno’s aesthetics can be fruitfully used in the interpretation of non-score-based works.

This approach may indeed be highly speculative; like the earlier analyses of Schoenberg’s *Erwartung* and Babbitt’s *Philomel*, my intention is to generate interpretations that unfold with reference to Adorno’s aesthetics. The lack of a score, and my own limited knowledge of the workings of the ARP 2500 modulator synthesiser, undoubtedly restricts the discussion of technical details here. The main aim, however, is to explore the possibility that Adorno’s aesthetic categories might bring valuable insights to the analysis and interpretation of experimentalist and Postmodern (as well as modernist) works.

10.3 Form, Material and Technology

As discussed in chapter four, Adorno takes the breaking down of the traditional separation of form and material to be a fundamental predicament facing all modern

²¹ Leigh Landy gives an overview of many important (and divergent) approaches to listening to and writing about what he calls ‘sound-based music.’ See Leigh Landy, *Understanding the Art of Sound Organization* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2007). See also, Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

²² Landy, *Understanding the Art of Sound Organization*, 190.

²³ Kouvaras, *Loading the Silence*, 13.

works of art.²⁴ For Adorno, the dissolution of the distinction between form and that-which-is-formed is essential to successful modern works, and giving voice to this paradox an essential task of progressive works: ‘an emancipated music contains nothing which is not the bearer of form...Because no forms exist any longer, everything must become form.’²⁵ This dissolution of the distinction between musical forms and materials not only leads to the becoming-formal of all musical elements, but foregrounds the changing relationship between resemblance and difference, permanence and change, stasis and dynamism, that had sustained the entire Western musical tradition by articulating (through a myriad of means) identifiable patterns of tension and release.

Julian Johnson (explicitly drawing on Adorno) hears ‘the inability to proceed, to develop through time’ as ‘the mark of unfreedom in both the individual and in society as a whole.’²⁶ Johnson argues that ‘static’ music exists ‘only in the present; it has no memory and no history. It demands no real attention and no thought...[it] caricatures the dream of the perpetual present.’²⁷ Lamenting that classical music ‘does not fare well in the context of contemporary technologies,’ Johnson writes that ‘when music becomes a static ambient object, it loses its central category of form. Form in music arises from temporal unfolding.’²⁸ Johnson’s assessment suggests that an Adornian hearing of a static, synthesised work such as *Transamore/Transmortem* might necessarily result in a negative judgement, however, a number of qualities of the work discussed here refute such an interpretation. Reflecting upon Johnson’s critique provides an illustration of how conservative readings of Adorno have construed his thinking (and listening) as essentially closed to new compositional approaches and procedures.

Arguably, Johnson has underplayed the important dissolution of form and material that Adorno notes is a central quality of progressive new music. For Adorno, time may become a musical material (which undoubtedly contributes to the overall form of the

²⁴ See 4.3 Theory of the Artwork, especially 4.3.iv Form and Material.

²⁵ Adorno, “Form in the New Music,” 213.

²⁶ Julian Johnson, *The Subjects of Music: A Theoretical and Analytical Enquiry into the Construction of Subjectivity in the Musical Structuring of Time* (D. Phil diss., University of Sussex, 1993), 209.

²⁷ Johnson, *The Subjects of Music*, 223.

²⁸ Julian Johnson, *Who Needs Classical Music? Cultural Choice and Musical Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 56. Johnson’s argument that the ‘loss’ of the ‘central category of form’ is at odds with Adorno’s notion that, in modern music, all musical parameters perform a structural (formal) function. See 2.1 Adorno and Structural Listening, and 2.3 Discussion: Structural Listening.

work), to be manipulated and shaped along with other musical materials. Whilst Johnson's views concur with Adorno's understanding of traditional musical forms (in which form 'arises from temporal unfolding'), the emergence of form in new music is (for Adorno) arguably more complex: with all musical elements taking on a formal or structural function. In the case of *Transamore/Transmortem* there is a process of unfolding, of becoming: rather than producing a perpetual present *Transamore/Transmortem* can be heard as a study in temporal perception and an exploration of temporal elongation pushed to the limits of audibility. *Transamore/Transmortem* undoubtedly takes time as one of its musical materials; temporal perception is made an object of investigation, with time itself subjected to manipulation – a technique that arguably sets the work in critical opposition to empirical reality.

The incorporation of emerging technologies into new music is of certain interest from an Adornian perspective: the progression of musical techniques and materials is an essential (if sometimes misunderstood) aspect of Adorno's notion of progressive works of art.²⁹ The possibilities for technical progress, along with the roles of technique and technology in an era marked by the collapse of traditional procedures, receive repeated consideration throughout Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*. For Adorno, progress is best understood to be the advancement in technique brought about by the progressive domination of historically determined materials.³⁰ As ever, Adorno's thinking is dialectical and progress should in no way be taken as an ideal, but rather as a paradox: 'there is some progress and yet there is none.'³¹ In other words, we *can* speak of progress in terms of technique and technology, however, this should only be taken to constitute human advancement in a dialectical sense – with the inescapable adverse consequence: the encroachment of the creeping alienation of the human subject, and the domination of nature in the name of human advances.³² *Transamore/Transmortem* arguably gives voice to the paradoxical quality of progress in a critical fashion by both promising both new modes of experience *and* subjective alienation.

²⁹ See 7.3 Ugliness for Adorno, and especially 7.3.iii Progress and Primitivism.

³⁰ See Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 276-7.

³¹ Theodor W. Adorno, "Progress," in *Critical Models*, trans. Henry W. Pickford, intro. Lydia Goehr (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 158.

³² See also 7.3.iii Progress and Primitivism.

Richard Glover notes the painstaking process through which Radigue's electronic works are realised:

Radigue mixes the full length of the work in whole takes for each single layer (often there are at least 15 layers): hence the reason why compositions take months, or even years, to complete...This is a clear indication of an approach that mirrors the minimalist relationship with technology: utilizing existing technology that, through sustained use, allows deep inspection of perhaps just a single phenomenon over an extended duration.³³

The clearly synthetic sounds upon which *Transmorem/Transmortem* is built invite the listener to consider the work's obviously 'made' quality, and in turn reflect upon the constructed quality of modern life and our dependence upon the tools of technology (which promise both freedom and alienation). As Linda Kouvaras has explored, advances in technology have not only facilitated the development of new sounds, but also instituted new modes of listening and relating to music.³⁴ Far from asserting the immediacy of aesthetic experience, *Transmorem/Transmortem* arguably dwells on its own technological and social mediation, and the paradoxical quality of the idea of progress.³⁵ As Kouvaras explains: 'Many sound art examples...present a Postmodernist dialectical position where both the positive and negative effects of technology are highlighted.'³⁶ *Transmorem/Transmortem* embodies this double-sided quality of much sound art, promising new sounds and new expressive potential whilst also generating a sense of alienation in the listener. There *is* progress (in the development of new sounds and listening strategies), yet the listener is forced to question the idea of progress itself (through the experience of disquiet and alienation).

Adorno expressly extends the undecidability between what constitutes a work's form and its materials to the domain of temporality, arguing that time itself is becoming part of the composer's 'palette' of materials: 'Today music rebels against conventional temporal order...As questionable as it is that music can ever wrest itself from the invariant of time, it is just as certain that once this invariant is an object of reflection it

³³ Glover, "Minimalism, Technology and Electronic Music," 172.

³⁴ Kouvaras, *Loading the Silence*, 31-34.

³⁵ See also 4.3 Progress and Primitivism.

³⁶ Kouvaras, *Loading the Silence*, 33

becomes an element of composition and no longer an apriori.³⁷ Within *Transmorem/Transmortem* time is both form and material, contributing to the radical rearrangement of the traditional musical relationship between change and permanence, difference and repetition.

10.4 Time and Stasis in *Transmorem/Transmortem*

*The concept [of form] is not to be taken literally. Every piece of music with a beginning and end in time has a minimum of form and unity by virtue of that fact, and ultimately by virtue of the reality of a musical time which has burst free of empirical time.*³⁸

10.4.i Temporality and Immediacy

Radigue's slowly unfolding electronic soundscapes based on gradually shifting drones emphasise elongation and stasis. In *Transmorem/Transmortem*, single frequencies and pared-backed sounds are gradually layered creating shifts that are almost microscopic and inaudible, and it is the radically reduced quality of her work that aligns it within the minimalist tradition.³⁹ *Transmorem/Transmortem* employs a radically reduced pallet of musical materials and colours, very gradual (almost imperceptible) change over time, harmonic stasis due to the limited pitch selection and rate of change, and an emphasis on the affective qualities of the sonic surface. The absence of a clear meter (or indeed *any* recognisable or repeated rhythmic patterns) throughout *Transmorem/Transmortem* separates Radigue's work from more canonical minimalist practice.⁴⁰ *Transmorem/Transmortem* not only achieves the displacement of pitch relations, but also undermines the expectation that music should exhibit identifiable patterns of meter or rhythm, and so that the work arguably functions explicitly as an exploration of sonic stasis. In relation to *Transmorem/Transmortem* the designation

³⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 30.

³⁸ Adorno, "Form in the New Music," 208.

³⁹ Radigue's inclusion in a survey such as *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music* also confirms the suitability of the designation 'minimalist.' See, Glover, "Minimalism, Technology and Electronic Music," 171-172.

⁴⁰ Keith Potter notes that there seems to be 'at least two rather contradictory views of musical minimalism in circulation.' He describes the two streams of minimalism as 'radical' and 'mainstream'/'conservative.' See Potter, "Mapping Early Minimalism," 21-25. Potter's distinction echoes the work of Linda Hutcheon and Charles Jencks, who distinguish between the radical and conservative (or complicit) strands of Postmodernism. See Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989); Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977).

‘static’ is appropriate, as the work explores how elongation and the radical reduction of means might be applied to all musical parameters.

In perhaps the most sustained musicological investigation of musical time and temporality, Johnathan D. Kramer’s *The Time of Music* considers the conceptual and philosophical foundations of nonlinear (or nonteleological) music:

Throughout history, time has been regarded as being and/or becoming by various philosophers and cultures. The arts have reflected these concerns. In music the strongest representative of becoming is tonal progression, though any movement through time, whether goal-directed or not, exemplifies becoming. I identify becoming with temporal linearity. Nonlinearity is more like being. Nonlinearity is a concept, a compositional attitude, and a listening strategy that concerns itself with the permanence of music: with aspects of a piece that do not change, and, in extreme cases, with compositions that do not change.⁴¹

Kramer describes such temporalities as ‘vertical time,’ for him such compositions are ‘temporally undifferentiated in their entirety. They lack phrases (just as they lack progression, goal direction, movement and contrasting rates of motion)...The result is a single present stretched out into an enormous duration, a potentially infinite “now” that nonetheless feels like an instant.’⁴² As Kramer explains, this focus on being (rather than becoming) is achieved through non-linearity, the avoidance of tonal progression, and a reduction in the rate of change.

Unlike Adorno’s critique of Wagner (in particular, the regressive politics inherent in Wagner’s spatialisation of time and his production of a perpetual present),⁴³ Kramer’s description of vertical music as pure presence, his argument that ‘vertical music... simply is,’⁴⁴ asserts the immediacy and non-climactic music.⁴⁵ Assertions of the immediacy of vertical music recur throughout his analysis, and Kramer’s idealism is symptomatic: ‘vertical music does not create its own temporality but rather makes

⁴¹ Jonathan D. Kramer, *The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1988), 388.

⁴² Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 55.

⁴³ See 6.3 In Search of Wagner.

⁴⁴ Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 57.

⁴⁵ ‘Vertical time presents music of utter concreteness, unhampered by referential meaning or symbolism.’ Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 56.

contact with a deeply human time sense that is often denied in daily living (at least in Western cultures).'⁴⁶ Leaving aside the rather Orientalist implications Kramer's position (that non-Western might cultures 'still' have access to this more 'authentic' temporality), 'vertical time' is taken to be 'predictable, undeviating, inevitable.'⁴⁷ Kramer notes the distortions of the subjective experience of time that minimalist works can engender,⁴⁸ but underplays the extent to which such works are *about* time as an objective and subjective category. Throughout Kramer's account, temporality is *the* key element through which the 'immediacy' of 'vertical music' is asserted. From an Adornian perspective, however, the suggestion that 'vertical music' somehow bypasses mediation is, of course, absurd. For Adorno any experience that appears to escape the universality of social mediation is illusory (for 'immediacy...is a function of mediation.')⁴⁹ Arguably, *Transmorem/Transmortem* foregrounds its own mediation: the unfamiliar sound-world (electronic sounds, extended duration, extreme pitch, glacial rate of change) refuses reconciliation and comfort.⁵⁰ Adorno's aesthetics demands a reconsideration of the apparent 'immediacy' of any work of art, but in exposing its own mediation *Transmorem/Transmortem* arguably fulfils the pursuit of a self-critical autonomy so central to Adorno's formulation of the progressive work of art.

Transmorem/Transmortem takes the category of time as an object of exploration: far from enacting an 'originary' temporality, in which the subject experiences themselves as pure nature, *Transmorem/Transmortem* invites the listener to note the many external (social) stimuli that determine our own sense of time. The expansion of time through the focus on the smallest aural details certainly indicates that an exploration of the subjective experience of time is a central feature of *Transmorem/Transmortem*. Importantly, however, time is no longer chiefly a condition through which the work is made manifest, but is itself a compositional element.

Transmorem/Transmortem's eloquence lies in its capacity to give voice to the paradoxical quality of time: time is irreversible yet can only be grasped through the

⁴⁶ Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 394.

⁴⁷ Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 389.

⁴⁸ Kramer discusses his experience of Erik Satie's *Vexations*: 'After what felt like forty minutes I left. My watch told me that I had listened for three hours.' Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 379.

⁴⁹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 318.

⁵⁰ See 7.4 Pleasure and Asceticism in Adorno's Aesthetics and 4.5 Hegel, Mediation and Immediacy.

recurrence of the same.⁵¹ *Transamorem/Transmortem* brings this enigma into the domain of experience, and it does so critically by disallowing subjective comfort. From an Adornian perspective minimalist works (like all modern works) achieve success not by producing an (impossible) ‘immediacy,’ but by calling into question the very concepts of difference and repetition, of disintegration and integration, that are the frames through which we understand art as art.

10.4.ii Reduction and Repetition

The radical reduction of musical materials in *Transamorem/Transmortem* links it with minimalism in music (and the plastic arts). As Ian Quinn describes, minimalist music is typically considered to have ‘high redundancy and low information content,’⁵² with works unfolding through the repetition of small phrases (usually in carefully organised permutations). This repetition of motivic fragments means that much minimalist music itself performs the usual function of analysis (the identification of a work’s raw materials or musical ‘building blocks’). The repetition of small, identifiable, perhaps even interchangeable, melodic fragments is entirely absent in *Transamorem/Transmortem*, which demands the listener submit themselves to its elongated processes. *Transamorem/Transmortem* differs in relation to the high redundancy of repeated musical phrases of early works of both American and European minimalism (from Glass’s *Music in Twelve Parts* (1971-74) to Stockhausen’s *Stimmung* (1968) or Pärt’s *Tabula Rasa* (1977)). Despite *Transamorem/Transmortem*’s static surface, the pacifying effects of repetition (the sense of inevitability that Adorno argued constrains repetition and renders it essentially regressive) are not present.⁵³ Arguably, *Transamorem/Transmortem* operates upon precisely the inverse principle; despite the *apparent* redundancy of the work (the ‘sameness’ of the sonic surface) careful listening actually reveals an abundance of informational content, with the slightest changes in sound generating a salient effect (within the context of the work).

⁵¹ Adorno refers to ‘the dual character of time’: ‘its irreversibility [is] something which can be grasped only by a recurrence of the same, in other words, by something in conflict with itself.’ Adorno, “Form in the New Music,” 210.

⁵² Quinn, ‘Minimal Challenges,’ 292. See also Kramer ‘Analytic interlude: *Les Moutons de Panurge*,’ in *The Time of Music*, 388-394

⁵³ As detailed in 5.6 Repetition, the possibility for a self-critical repetition remains open in Adorno’s later work.

Whilst *Transamore/Transmortem* cannot be said to be a developmental work in the traditional sense, it arguably unfolds in a way that strictly avoids the domineering quality of repetition. If the repetitive minimalism of Reich and Glass evokes a sense of sameness within gradual change (difference), then *Transamore/Transmortem* evokes difference within an apparently uniform sonic surface. In Adornian terms, repetitive minimalism does indeed sacrifice the particular (typically, the melodic or rhythmic fragment) to the universal (the gradually changing, accumulating, whole). In *Transamore/Transmortem* by contrast, the whole works in the service of the particular: the primary function of the uniform sonic surface is to reveal the minute changes in sound, making audible the many tiny details from which the work unfolds. Perhaps, then, *Transamore/Transmortem* could be considered a determinate negation of sameness (repetition), and thus a work of significant critical potential.⁵⁴

10.5 Universal-Particular

Jonathan W. Bernard suggests that minimalism in music and the plastic arts can be identified through the adoption of three main strategies ‘(1) the minimization of chance or accident; (2) and emphasis upon the *surface* of the work...; (3) a concentration upon the whole rather than the parts.’ As Bernard argues, minimalist music shares with minimalist practices in the plastic arts a number of familial resemblances: the ‘drastic simplification or reduction’ in aesthetic materials,⁵⁵ an ‘emphasis upon on the *surface* of the work,’⁵⁶ and ‘a concentration upon the whole rather than the parts.’⁵⁷ Despite the difficulty in situating *Transamore/Transmortem* alongside contemporaneous minimal musical exemplars (such as Terry Riley’s *In C* of 1964, Steve Reich’s *It’s Gonna Rain* of 1965, Philip Glass’s *Music in Twelve Parts* of 1971–74), the extreme reduction of musical materials, the emphasis on sonic surface, and the immersion the work demands, do link it to minimalism in music, but also (and perhaps especially) to minimalism in the plastic arts. Bernard suggests that minimalist music (like its counterparts in the plastic arts) challenges traditional modes of perception. In particular, minimalism challenges aesthetic perception by frustrating the expectation of the hierarchical ordering of musical (or pictorial or sculptural) elements. In minimalist music, this non-

⁵⁴ See also 5.6 Repetition.

⁵⁵ Bernard, “The Minimalist Aesthetic in the Plastic Arts and in Music,” 91.

⁵⁶ Bernard, “The Minimalist Aesthetic,” 95.

⁵⁷ Bernard, “The Minimalist Aesthetic,” 95.

hierarchical quality can be seen through non-teleological, non-progressive time structures, and through a displacement of the importance of pitch relations (which in traditional musical forms have primacy over other musical elements). As already detailed, temporality plays a particularly important part in establishing the *non-goal-oriented* quality of minimalist music. The extended length of and infinitesimally small changes of *Transamore/Transmortem* invite the listener to take note of the changes to their own perception through the duration of the piece.

Bernard observes that: ‘The sheer, vast size of many works of minimal sculpture, besides precluding one from taking them in all at once, may also serve to menace the viewer.’⁵⁸ This quality of overwhelming (even dominating) the aesthetic subject seems of particular relevance to *Transamore/Transmortem*, as the extended duration of the work, the extremity of the ongoing high-pitch sounds, and the lack of any familiar musical parameters, certainly engenders a sense of anxiety when listening to the work. The character of taking a work in from multiple perspectives links minimalist music to minimalist sculpture in particular, which often demands that the viewer approach the work from a number of different perspectives (often owing to the impossibility of finding a place in which the entire work fits into one’s field of vision). Bernard suggests that this focus on the subjective perception means minimalist music permits, or even invites, audience distraction: ‘No longer is the assumption made that one will listen intently, with undivided attention, from the beginning to the end of a work; allowance is made for minds that will wander, or even for people who will wander right out of the hall in the middle of a performance.’⁵⁹ Similarly, Kramer argues that: ‘We can listen to it or ignore it. If we hear only part of the performance we have still heard the *whole* piece.’⁶⁰

This question of the possibility of partitioning minimalist works invites consideration of the Adornian dialectic of universal-particular. What is the relation of the whole to its parts in the context of *Transamore/Transmortem*, and are such categories useful for an analysis of the work? Adorno’s understanding of the artwork as inherently processual is an aspect of his thinking that resonates with minimalist composers making

⁵⁸ Bernard, “The Minimalist Aesthetic,” 118.

⁵⁹ Bernard, “The Minimalist Aesthetic,” 125.

⁶⁰ Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 57. Kramer also argues for the affinity between vertical music and sculpture. Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 57.

musical processes the very subject of their music.⁶¹ For Adorno, aesthetic process is an expression of the relation between the particular and the universal: ‘The artwork is a process essentially in the relation of its whole and parts. Without being reducible to one side or the other, it is the relation itself that is a process of becoming.’⁶² The expression of the dialectic of universal-particular is one of the primary categories through which Adorno interprets works, and it is those works that intensify this dialectic that he ranks the highest. In progressive modern music this tension is intensified, as the disintegration of traditional forms renders the antagonism between the universal and the particular even more apparent. Thus it is non-repetitive, open-formed and often fragmentary works that Adorno asserts as reflecting the highest maturity, works which achieve coherence despite disintegrating forms and fractured materials.⁶³ For Adorno, such works exhibit the greatest capacity for the aesthetic expression of modern social truths. The most progressive modern works express the truth of their social situation, exhibiting a simultaneous tendency towards integration *and* disintegration, an intensification of the universal-particular dialectic:

In the impulse of every particular element of an artwork toward integration, the disintegrative impulse of nature secretly manifests itself. The more integrated artworks are, the more what constitutes them disintegrates in them. To this extent their success is their decomposition and that lends them their fathomlessness. Decomposition at the same time releases the immanent counterforce of art, its centrifugal force.⁶⁴

For Adorno, the unprecedented regulation of all modes of life under modernity properly manifests in the sphere of art as the intensification of the tension between a work’s parts and its whole. In art the pull of the particular achieves what the individual in society cannot: the capacity to threaten the coherence of the universal (the social whole). Without this threat of disintegration and decomposition, modern works fail to critically

⁶¹ ‘The artwork is both the result of the process and the process itself at a standstill.’ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 237. In his famous 1968 essay “Music as a Gradual Process,” Steve Reich asserts the importance of the self-evidence and audibility of musical processes to his style: ‘I am interested in perceptible processes; I want to be able to hear the process happening throughout the sounding music... I don’t know any secrets of structure that you can’t hear... The use of hidden structural devices in music never appealed to me.’ Steve Reich, “Music as a Gradual Process,” In *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, eds. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2007), 304-5.

⁶² Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 235

⁶³ Adorno considers Schoenberg’s *Erwartung* to be a work of great maturity. See chapter eight ‘Loneliness as Style’: Adorno’s *Erwartung*.

⁶⁴ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 68-69.

reflect their social situation. Though the threat of disintegration is not specific to modern works (Adorno notes that at times Bach's fugues threaten to dissolve under the weight of their own construction),⁶⁵ this polarisation is essential to progressive modern works. Works that fail to intensify the tension between the parts and the whole (in Adorno's eyes this includes jazz and pop as well as Wagner and Stravinsky),⁶⁶ tend towards the uncritical celebration of the domination of the whole over the parts, performing a regressive gesture of capitulation to power. Whilst such works undoubtedly reflect a social reality, they do so uncritically.

As interpretations such as Bernard's and Kramer's suggest, the temporal continuum of non-climactic music is taken to be essentially unstructured, and the lack of clear temporal signposts (such as beginning, climax, ending) is understood to diminish the significance of the ordering of musical events. This understanding of the interchangeability of parts within the structure, and of the availability of the whole within a single part, is a feature of the reception of minimalist music. Even in relation to the more repetitive minimalism of composers such as Reich and Glass, such assertions seem questionable, as surely the full experience of works of repetitive minimalism demand a complete hearing. In relation to *Transmorem/Transmortem* in particular such an approach is certainly misguided; the work's full effect is *only* available when one has heard it from beginning to end, and listened as it unfolds. Though the form of the work cannot be articulated by reference to traditional musical structures, the parts are certainly carefully ordered and in no way interchangeable. Indeed, *Transmorem/Transmortem* demands precisely the opposite of passive or interchangeable listening: the parts make absolutely no sense without the whole, and the experience of the work demands a full hearing. The most 'submerged' moments of the work are *only* available if one has gone through the process of immersion into the piece; such pivotal points within the work are *actually inaudible* when heard alone and out of context. Without the gradual 'recalibrating' of the aural environment (which seems to be the primary purpose of the first ten minutes of *Transmorem/Transmortem*), the listener is simply unable to hear the detailed changes

⁶⁵ For Adorno, the Bach fugue is 'an art of dissection: one could almost say, of dissolving Being, posited as a theme, and hence incompatible with the common belief that this Being maintains itself static and unchanged throughout the fugue.' Theodor W. Adorno, "Bach Defended against his Devotees," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), 139.

⁶⁶ See chapter six Killing Time II: Time and Temporality in Adorno's Music Criticism.

in sound that follow. Arguably *Transamore/Transmortem* is *less* open to partition than even the most traditional works, which through the division of movements and the formal structures within movements make parts of the work identifiable and even partially coherent in the absence of the whole.

Whilst the extremely pared back and ephemeral quality of the musical elements employed in *Transamore/Transmortem* might inhibit traditional modes of analysis, consideration of the relation between the work's whole and its parts is certainly possible. The exceptionally gradual rate of change in *Transamore/Transmortem* makes the parts actually inaudible in the absence of the whole. Each 'line' of music (frequency) emerges so gradually from the sonic surface, that one has the sense that it has been there all along: the whole and the parts are not only mutually dependent, but almost indistinguishable. This mutual interdependence could perhaps be considered a reconciliation of universal and particular (something that would obviously diminish it, from the perspective of an Adornian analysis); arguably, however, the tension between the whole and the parts is audible in *Transamore/Transmortem* owing to the continued state of openness the work engenders. *Transamore/Transmortem* undoubtedly demands the listener submit to the logic of the work, to enter into its sensorium. However, unlike the sense of reconciliation with power (which, of course, Adorno argues is achieved in the works of Wagner and Stravinsky) the heightened perception *Transamore/Transmortem* engenders demands a constant questioning – and questing – from the listener. Because so little in the soundscape of *Transamore/Transmortem* makes immediate sense and the aural environment feels so alien, one is constantly searching for traces of recognition and moments of connection or familiarity: here, to listen *is* to analyse.

10.6 Shudder and Mimetic Exchange

A sense of being overwhelmed by the work is essential to Adorno's formulation of aesthetic shudder and the moment of mimetic exchange,⁶⁷ in which the subject perceives their own threshold: 'the I...shaken, perceives its own limitedness and finitude.'⁶⁸ Through the mimetic exchange, Adorno hints that even the most affirmative works have the capacity to unmask domination by 'speak[ing] the truth about

⁶⁷ See 6.4 Shudder and 6.5 Mimesis.

⁶⁸ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 319.

untruth.’⁶⁹ Provided the subject experiences this shudder, a loss of self that undermines the power and coherence of the I, then even affirmative and domineering works (Adorno returns to the example of the ‘affirmative violence’ of Beethoven’s Ninth),⁷⁰ have the capacity to be considered progressive. Domineering works that fail to elicit a shudder (works that affirm the subject and their identification with power – *The Rite of Spring* might serve as an example here)⁷¹ distract the listener from the reality of their own fragility, a posture that (for Adorno) inevitably folds over into regression. The epic scale of *Transmorem/Transmortem*, which, coupled with the lack of familiar musical parameters, lends the work a somewhat menacing quality, certainly generates this response in the listener. Unlike the sublime experience of nature (which, for Kant, confirms the coherence and power of the subject),⁷² the looming quality of *Transmorem/Transmortem* denies the uplifting experience of subjective power and coherence, eliciting the aesthetic shudder.

The incessant iterations of the almost-the-same, which are the hallmark of repetitive minimalism, mean that gradual changes emerge out of an emphatically repetitive setting: the unrelenting motion of the music’s surface conceals stasis beneath. *Transmorem/Transmortem* stages this tension between difference and repetition inversely: the undoubted stasis of the sonic surface arguably conceals a very slow-moving, but unceasing, unfolding motion. The polarisation of this tension between difference and repetition (or particular and universal) is, for Adorno, the task of modern composers, with works being judged on how profoundly they are able to stage this tension. As the quotation that opens this chapter attests, Adorno understands this as a dialectic, not as a problem to be ‘solved’ through resolution at either pole.

The status of repetition within *Transmorem/Transmortem* (like drone music more generally) remains rather unclear: the work exhibits an undoubted uniformity, and a sense of cyclic return, yet there is no repetition of familiar motivic elements (either pitch or rhythmically based). Even after repeated listening, it is difficult to say whether

⁶⁹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 319.

⁷⁰ See Adorno, “Progress,” 146, and Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-1965*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 146.

⁷¹ See 6.2 Temporality in *Philosophy of New Music* and 7.3.iii Progress and Primitivism.

⁷² For Kant, the sublime experience of nature can ‘raise the forces of the soul above the heights of vulgar commonplace, and discover within us a power of resistance of quite another kind, which gives us the courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature.’ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith, revised, ed., intro., Nicholas Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), §28, 91.

the frequencies employed correlate to familiar pitch classes, and an internal recollection of the work is almost impossible owing to the difficulty in committing the unfamiliar sounds to memory: the listener scrambles to find anything familiar for the ear to latch onto here, our ‘understanding’ of the work is assembled from a place of extreme vulnerability, even discomfort. The very relationship between resemblance and difference is challenged, and the articulation of change is achieved from within a sound-world of apparent permanence. The flow of sounds is made meaningful and audible from within an apparently static sonic surface. The subjective uncertainty that *Transmorem/Transmortem* engenders is key to understanding its radical critical potential. *Transmorem/Transmortem* arguably challenges the security and coherence of the subject through lack: the absence of any familiar musical parameters places the aesthetic subject in a position of profound exposure, the presumed unity of the ‘I’ is called into question.

From an Adornian perspective, the alienation the subject experiences in a work such as *Transmorem/Transmortem* is key to its critical potential, with the state of subjective vulnerability being an inoculation against the subject’s identification with power. The regressive quality Adorno hears in Stravinsky’s repeated ostinati or Wagner’s unending melodies stems from the use of repetition as a coopting device:⁷³ through the misplaced identification (and reconciliation) with power the subject fails to recognise their own alienation. Conversely, the alienating quality of *Transmorem/Transmortem*, achieved via the absence of familiar musical parameters, invites the aesthetic ‘shudder’ that is mark of a ‘progressive’ work (for Adorno).⁷⁴

The notion that drone music pacifies the listener, encouraging them to zone out and ‘go with the flow,’⁷⁵ might seem politically alarming, encouraging the passivity and pleasure in submission to authority that Adorno riles against in his critique of Stravinsky. As already explored in chapter six, Adorno’s most negative judgements take aim at those works that deny history in favour of pure presence, works that situate the listener within a perpetual present, suggesting a state of ahistorical Being without past or future. The association of minimalist and drone music with altered states of

⁷³ See 6.6 Repetition.

⁷⁴ See 6.4 Shudder.

⁷⁵ See Robert Fink, “Going with the Flow: minimalism as cultural practice in the USA since 1945,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music*, eds. Keith Potter, Kyle Gann and Pwyll ap Siôn (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 201-218.

mind is ubiquitous,⁷⁶ with listening often likened to meditation, hypnosis, drug-use and even schizophrenia.⁷⁷ Such approaches reinforce an understanding that certain musics are more (or less) of the body than of the mind, and that the corporeal or libidinal appeal of music might itself constitute an immersion in a perpetual present.

As argued in chapter five, Adorno's understanding of mimetic exchange locates the body – and the senses – as the source of aesthetic experience.⁷⁸ In the spontaneous 'assimilation of the self to its other'⁷⁹ the mimetic exchange is always perilous because of the precarious proximity between a progressive loss of self and a regressive retreat into identity thinking. Adorno's concept of mimetic exchange explicitly subverts not only the Cartesian method,⁸⁰ but also the implied dualism of the Cartesian split between mind and body, thinking and feeling. In Adorno's aesthetics, the corporeality of the mimetic exchange is intertwined with the thinking required to complete aesthetic experience, the two are mutually interdependent. Therefore, from an Adornian perspective, the presentation of certain musics as more or less cerebral, or corporeal, is a misnomer – any work is always both of the body and the mind. The task of interpretation reveals the quality of the work – good or bad, progressive or regressive, radical or affirmative – and can only advance on a work-by-work basis.

⁷⁶ Minimalism has long been linked to psychological degeneration and libidinal gratification. Wim Mertens makes precisely this association: 'Repetitive music can lead to psychological regression. The so-called *religious* experience of repetitive music is in fact a camouflaged erotic experience... The drug-like experience and the imaginary satisfaction it brings about are even more obvious in disco music and space-rock, the popular derivatives of repetitive music.' Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1983), 124. And from Pierre Boulez: 'I think that today's type of minimalist and repetitive music appeals to an extremely primitive perception... If an audience wants to get high with the kind of music rather than with another product, that's OK with me. But I don't consider that a very high level of enjoyment.' Pierre Boulez, cited in Ian Quinn, 'Minimal Challenges: Process Music and the Uses of Formalist Analysis,' *Contemporary Music Review* 25, no. 3 (2006): 285. Peter Kivy: minimalist music 'must be listened to whilst "stoned," in which state you are supposed to have something like an orgasmic (is it fair to say?) "aesthetic" experience.' Peter Kivy, 'Making the codes and breaking the codes: Two revolutions in twentieth-century music,' *New Essays in Musical Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), 65.

⁷⁷ Kramer, *The Time of Music*, see 'Modern Values, Time and Schizophrenia,' 375-378. The use of mental illness as a metaphor for describing and interpreting music is lamentable. This approach (employed by Adorno himself, and many others since) requires a thorough critique which is beyond the scope of this study.

⁷⁸ See 5.5 Mimesis.

⁷⁹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 416.

⁸⁰ Lisa Yun Lee explains that Adorno subverts the four fundamental points of the Cartesian method. Adorno 1) insists upon uncertainty, 2) refuses 'Descartes' contention that an object is a whole that can simply be broken down into its reciprocal parts,' 3) refuses to conduct his inquiry beginning with that which is simplest (moving on to more complex problems in a step by step fashion), and 4) demands 'discontinuity and incompleteness' where Descartes seeks to ensure nothing is omitted. Lisa Yun Lee, *Dialectics of the Body: Corporeality in the Philosophy of T.W. Adorno* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 87-88.

10.7 Conclusion

In the face of drone, experimentalist and even minimalist musical works the validity of interpretation itself is called into question: the possibility of producing knowledge through analysis (reducing complex musical structures to their basic building blocks) appears redundant. Kramer argues that ‘music cast in vertical time can scarcely be analysed, in the usual sense of the term...it is essentially pointless to explicate a holistic, timeless experience in terms of sequential logic.’⁸¹ Similarly, Bernard wonders if the radical reduction of means forces one ‘either to declare the music beyond analysis owing to the inadequacies of theory or to dismiss the music as unworthy owing to its inability to stand up to analysis.’⁸² Within such a discourse, a work such as *Transmorem/Transmortem* might seem incompatible with analysis. Arguably such approaches perpetuate a representation of music divided by genre into the cerebral and the sensuous, as if the experience of music could be split along Cartesian lines.⁸³ Adorno’s insistence upon the inescapability of mediation demands that we reject the sensual/cerebral dichotomies of popular and academic music criticism. Surely, music is always cerebral *and* sensual, and the insights of analysis should in no way be taken to ‘contaminate’ our corporeal or ‘drastic’ enjoyment of music.

As detailed in this chapter, Adorno’s aesthetics has much to offer the analysis and interpretation of non-score-based, post-tonal works. As I have demonstrated, Adorno’s aesthetics offers compelling pathways for the interpretation of works outside his own time, and in particular, offers a framework for analysis when conventional approaches have been exhausted. Indeed, listening to *Transmorem/Transmortem* brings this thesis

⁸¹ Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 388.

⁸² Jonathan W. Bernard, “Theory, Analysis, and the ‘Problem’ of Minimal Music,” in *Concert Music, Rock and Jazz Since 1945: Essays and Analytical Studies*, eds. Elizabeth West Marvin and Richard Hermann (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1995), 266. Ian Quinn also concedes there is an impasse, but suggests analysis be re-routed rather than done away with entirely: ‘the model of analyst-as-codebreaker is not useful for process music, since the composers have already short-circuited the gap between cyphertext and plaintext.’ Ian Quinn, “Minimal Challenges: Process Music and the Uses of Formalist Analysis,” *Contemporary Music Review* 25, no. 3 (2006): 291.

⁸³ Carolyn Abbate’s call for a renewed focus on music’s ‘drastic’ (as opposed to ‘gnostic’) qualities echoes earlier critiques calling for a greater focus on the sensual qualities of music (such as Susan McClary, “Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition,” *Cultural Critique* 12 (1989): 57-81). Abbate’s essay risks reproducing the divisions between sense and intellect, the carnal and the cerebral, that it apparently seeks to challenge. See Carolyn Abbate, “Music – Drastic or Gnostic?” *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (Spring, 2004): 504-536. This tendency enjoys continued relevance (and embellishment) within musicology, with left brain/right brain dichotomies (usually uncritically) introduced from neuroscience, see for example, Kyle Gann ‘A Technically Definable Stream of Postminimalism, Its Characteristics and Its Meanings,’ in *The Ashgate Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music*, 39-60.

full circle: as argued here, to listen closely to this work is to follow the function and meaning of each musical parameter, to hear the ways in which all the work's materials are simultaneously elements of its form. For *Transamore/Transmortem* to be heard as music (and not simply be experienced as chaos), the listener must attune themselves to the many tiny variations in sound which contribute to the work's form. To listen to *Transamore/Transmortem* is to follow these details as the intrinsic and necessary unfolding of these particular sounds, which find justification for their succession within the composition as a whole. In other words, failure to listen for the structural function of each musical parameter results in the work falling mute: its descent into noise. To hear *Transamore/Transmortem*, then, is to pursue a structural listening.

Chapter Eleven

Conclusion

You must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on.

- Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*¹

11.0 Thesis Conclusions

This thesis began by raising several interlocking issues and problems which emerged from the consideration of the place of Adorno's aesthetics within the discipline of musicology. As argued throughout the thesis, Adorno's philosophy is of ongoing significance for the study of Modernism and Postmodernism in music, providing an important theoretical frame through which to understand the changes and developments in music.

First, I considered the place of Adorno's aesthetics within musicology, tracing the musicological response to his concepts of structural listening and aesthetic autonomy. As my research showed, the reception of Adorno's ideas has been mixed, and arguments advanced by a number of prominent musicologists have distorted important elements of his aesthetics. The early chapters of the thesis critiqued the existing literature surrounding structural listening and aesthetic autonomy. Importantly, I also proposed a new approach to structural listening and sought to apply this approach in the later analysis chapters. Chapter two argued against Rose Rosengard Subotnik's presentation of structural listening, proposing a more nuanced understanding of the process. I argued that modern music demands a structural listening because all modern works are by definition engaged in a process of radical self-making (because the validity of traditional forms has eroded), rendering all musical parameters of structural

¹ Samuel Beckett, 'The Unnameable,' In *Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnameable* (London: John Calder, 1959), 418.

significance. Chapter three explored the reception of Adorno's formulation of aesthetic autonomy, noting that an implicit critique of Modernism advanced alongside critiques of aesthetic autonomy in the work Susan McClary, Richard Taruskin, Georgina Born and Peter Bürger. This chapter argued that far from proving a barrier to the socially grounded study of music, an understanding of the process of aesthetic autonomy lies at the heart of socially aware critique.

Second, I considered some of the theoretical lacunae within the musicological literature in relation to Adorno's formulations of aesthetic autonomy, time and ugliness. The primary aim of these chapters was the elucidation of Adorno's thinking; the clarification and elaboration upon underexplored themes and ideas. Chapter four considered the development of absolute music in relation to the emergence of ideas of aesthetic autonomy, and explored in detail Adorno's theory of the artwork. The argument made was that musicology should not attempt to take a position 'for' or 'against' aesthetic autonomy, but proceed from an understanding of autonomy as a material and social process that facilitates the separation of art from other forms of life in an age where this is no simple matter. Chapters five and six considered Adorno's understanding of musical time and temporality. Chapter five noted the key influences upon the development of Adorno's understanding of musical time, arguing that his championing of musical becoming (over static being) is related to his concept of history. Through the figure of musical time I noted that repetition and its negation have been key paths of exploration in music during the twentieth century and beyond. I then played Adorno against himself, arguing that his understanding of mimesis subverts his presentation of musical repetition as hopelessly regressive. Thus, chapter five raised the possibility for the determinate negation of musical repetition (through an Adornian lens). Chapter six argued that a coherent critique of musical time and temporality lies at the heart of each of Adorno's most notoriously unsympathetic works of music criticism. The chapter highlighted a notable consistency in operation within the disparate critiques in question; Adorno's formulation of musical regression is at its core a question of the satisfactory or unsatisfactory treatment of musical time. Chapter seven explored the key Adornian themes of ugliness and dissonance, themes which are of central importance to our understanding of Modernism in music. The chapter argued that through his valorisation of ugliness, Adorno stages a radical reversal of Kant's aesthetics, locating the promise of human agreement in ugliness and pain (rather than

beauty and pleasure). The utopian dimension to Adorno's thinking is apparent in his theorisation of the possibility for universal assent, but his is a melancholy utopia,² for it proceeds from the shared experience of suffering. The related issue of pleasure was also considered, and the chapter argued against the division of the sensuous from the cerebral in musical experience and music criticism.

Finally, the thesis sought to develop an Adornian approach for the analysis and interpretation of musical works. The insights gained through critical reflection upon Adorno's ideas were brought to fruition through analyses of Arnold Schoenberg's *Erwartung* (1909), Milton Babbitt's *Philomel* (1964) and Eliane Radigue's *Transamore/Transmortem* (1973). Chapter eight argued that not only has Adorno's interpretation of *Erwartung* been influential, but that his valorisation of the work (in its untrammelled formal freedom and polarisation of expression it is arguably *the* Modernist musical exemplar for Adorno) lends weight to my earlier argument for a reappraisal of structural listening. Chapter nine considered *Philomel* in light of Adorno's understanding of ugliness, dissonance and pain, speculating that through its capacity to bring suffering into the domain of experience the work stands as another pinnacle of (Adornian) musical Modernism. Chapter ten listens to *Transamore/Transmortem* through a number of Adornian categories, arguing for the applicability of a range of themes detailed in the earlier exegesis chapters: the challenge of understanding and theorising musical form in the absence of inherited norms, the role of time and repetition, the dialectic of universal-particular and the nature of the mimetic exchange. Each of these chapters illustrated the relevance of Adorno's aesthetics for Modernist and Postmodernist music, suggesting the applicability of his ideas beyond Modernism into the domain of post-tonal, non-score-based musical works. In developing an Adorno-inspired analytic (and interpretive) approach, my method constitutes an original application to traversing new pathways and possibilities through which to advance understanding of not only Adorno's aesthetics, but also Modernism and Postmodernism in music.

11.1 Contribution to Surrounding Literatures

² Jorge Luis Borges, 'Utopia of a Tired Man,' in *The Book of Sand*, trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni (New York: Dutton, 1977), 89-96. A central theme of Borges' story is the erasure of difference when the universal is emphasised at the expense of the particular.

This thesis contributes to the existing literature on Adorno's music criticism on two fronts: it challenges the musicological consensus surrounding structural listening and aesthetic autonomy, and presents exegeses upon important Adornian concepts which have thus far remained relatively neglected. Insights from the thesis have generated research relevant to musicologists outside Adorno-studies; the concepts and ideas developed here examine a number of important theoretical questions which have received only sparse engagement within the discipline thus far. The thesis also contributes to literatures surrounding the analysis and interpretation of Modernist and Postmodernist musical works, suggesting the flexibility and usefulness of Adorno's aesthetics across these two periods. The original contributions made here have emerged from the illumination of Adorno's ideas anew, and the application of those insights via explicitly Adornian interpretations.

The works and ideas explored here are diffuse, and there may even be a degree of uncertainty surrounding the precise object of inquiry: Was the main focus Adorno's ideas themselves? The reception of those ideas? The musical works in question? For the author, it was impossible to attend to Adorno's thought without a degree of ambiguity, for in observing the clear boundaries of discipline and systematic scholarship one inevitably loses the breadth and speculative quality that distinguishes Adorno's work. It is not only Adorno's intellectual virtuosity that makes his work so compelling, but his absolute conviction that the study of music reveals important truths about our social situation. The interpretation of music (and art) as an avenue towards understanding the structures of power we inhabit is surely a most intellectually exciting conceit for any musicologist. No doubt the scope of this thesis is also its primary limitation. Nonetheless, it is my hope that the inevitable partiality of the research presented here illustrates essential Adornian insights: the temporal na .2

Future Research

The research presented here points to possible avenues for further study. My investigation into the place of time and temporality within Adorno's aesthetics turned up several lines for further inquiry: the shifting conception of musical time and temporality from Modernism through to Postmodernism deserves more detailed attention, as does a more general philosophical investigation into the ways in which the conception of time changed through the twentieth century, as philosophy gave way to

science in claiming authority over this domain (an exploration of Babbitt's work through this frame would be particularly interesting, for example). The status of repetition within twentieth and twenty-first-century art-music also deserves more thorough investigation, and there are no doubt many other musicologists and philosophers whose ideas could be drawn upon within such a study. The study in the foregoing on the relationship between ugliness, dissonance and pleasure could certainly be extended upon, and a project situating Modernist ugliness within a broad historical context would be invaluable. There has been much discussion into the politics of aesthetics in recent years,³ and the incorporation of these new theoretical developments into musicology would also prove valuable for the discipline.

In an era of unprecedented political, cultural and economic uncertainty the prescience and contemporary relevance of Adorno's thought is striking. Adorno's foregrounding of culture reminds us of the significance of music and art; the aesthetic promises a space for freedom and spontaneity outside the confines of conceptual thought, and it is through the experience of art we can begin to bring to light our unconscious and suppressed fears and desires. Adorno proposes a politics of absolute commitment to exacting theoretical endeavour, even in the face of impossible conditions. Through the very act of 'doing' philosophy in spite of the overwhelming impossibility of the task (the inevitable failure, the intellectual uncertainty, the financial strain, the personal strife, the ubiquitous charge of 'social irrelevance') the potential for thinking and experiencing non-identity is preserved. This study has advanced through the specific framework of Adornian aesthetics and twentieth-century art music, but it signals an effort towards something more fundamental: the ongoing search (via music and philosophy) for the utopian promise of structuring of difference without domination.

³ See for example Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabrielle Rockhill (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

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