

Adorno and Musical Temporality:  
Painting with Music in the Mansion  
Built of Dog Shit

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## Introduction

Borrowing the words of Bertolt Brecht, Adorno described culture as a mansion built of dogshit (Adorno & Ashton, 1973, p. 366). Adorno is a figure who relentlessly attacked what he saw as the destruction of the critical potential of art. After students had staged protests disrupting his lectures, and after his close friend and fellow member of the Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse, had attempted to convince him of the value of the student revolts, Adorno continued to focus his attention on art and philosophy. In a conversation with Gerhart Richter, Adorno expressed clearly that, despite pressure from students and from his peers, he was writing a major book on aesthetics, a book that would be published posthumously under the title *Aesthetic Theory* (Richter & Adorno, 2002, p. 20). A refined taste for art had become a symbol of bourgeois 'high-culture'. Attending the theatre, listening to Beethoven, or indulging in avant-garde paintings, were part of the superficial lifestyle of the bourgeois class. Parading around works of art and the names of famous artists was a signifier of class. Amongst the bourgeoisie, the language of art, the technical language as well as the language of the art critic, was a code that when deciphered said nothing more than proud proclamations of privilege, wealth, and power. Bourgeois art had become exclusive to a particular class of people, not because of some objective standard of artistic insight, but in order to preserve the exclusivity of the ruling class. Such art was, understandably, condemned as elitist by political movements such as the student revolts of the 1960s. Since Adorno openly praised some elements of 'high-art' and in times of political action chose to remain focused on his work on aesthetics, many thinkers also condemn his work as elitist.

Jim Collins describes Adorno as sitting in a 'grand hotel' deciding what constitutes genuine culture (Collins, 1989, p. 141). For Collins, Adorno thinks of himself as outside culture looking in, condemning all that is not Beethoven, Schoenberg, or Mahler. Collins borrowed the term 'grand hotel' from György Lukács. For Lukács, Adorno, along with his fellow German intelligentsia, sat in the 'Grand Hotel Abgrund' ('Grand Hotel Abyss'). The Hotel was place built on the edge of the abyss, on the edge of absurdity, a place where Adorno can enjoy, in between his critiques of capitalism, the comforts and art produced by capitalism (Lukács, 2004). Carol Flinn argues that Adorno romanticised the past, lamenting the loss of the time when art was made, and appreciated, by experts (Flinn, 1986, p. 65). No longer was society capable of producing art to the standards of his

favourite artists, so Adorno spent his time criticising popular culture. Popular culture, for Adorno, is nothing more than commodity production for the culture industry. People who 'enjoy' popular culture are, in Adorno's words, philistines. The culture industry prescribes pleasure, administers laughter, and prevents actual thinking (Weitzman, 2008, p. 186). Commodities that masquerade as art appear to be democratic, appear to exist by popular demand, when in fact the masses that demand the commodities are nothing but an object of calculation, a body of statistical averages that inform the culture industry what elements of their output are most profitable (Adorno, et al., 2002, p. 265).

I claim that Adorno was no elitist. Art is on the one hand a bourgeois commodity and on the other hand a symbol of subjective authenticity that disrupts the bourgeois order: "the task of art today is to bring chaos into the order" (Kuspit, 1975, p. 322). Adorno uses bourgeois art against itself. He obliterates the façade of progress and 'high-culture'. Beethoven is praised by Adorno not because of some personal taste, but because, as I will demonstrate later, he took the artistic materials of his time and critiqued them. Beethoven exposed and redefined the limits of what was considered to be 'music'. The standards by which Adorno assessed the legitimacy of art has nothing in common with the vacuous notions of art promoted by the bourgeoisie. Art is measured by its ability to negate the ideology in which it is created. The 'Grand Hotel Abyss' analogy falls painfully short of an accurate assessment of Adorno's philosophy. The implication is that Adorno has *chosen* to visit this 'hotel' because of its refined and elitist exclusivity, because in the 'hotel' he can apply his philosophy only as a way of refining and justifying the interior aesthetic. Adorno thought no such thing. If we stay with the analogy of the 'hotel', Adorno was clear that he considered his place within it to be down to luck and his privileged education (Adorno & Becker, 1999, pp. 22-23; Adorno, 2001, pp. 128-129). Rather than forfeit his place in the 'hotel', or pretend that he could escape the ideological forces that structured his subjectivity, Adorno spent his time and effort exposing the contradictions, brutality, and ideology of the 'hotel' from within. Adorno does not want to preserve the 'hotel', rather he wants to bring it down from the inside. The refusal to 'step outside' of the object of critique is the core of Adorno's thought.

In this essay I will be focussing specifically on Adorno's thoughts on the relationship between musical temporality and 'actual' time. The way in which we understand and experience time is ideologically mediated. Mechanical clocks that measured time in

hours, minutes, and seconds have not always existed and do not exist in all cultures. In Europe, for example, before the development of the mechanical clock, time was conceived in relation to being. Time in agricultural communities was determined by how long a specific task took to perform, the motions of the sun, the seasons, and the demands of the animals (Abel, 2014, p. 188). Guy Debord argues that agricultural communities immersed in the cyclical movement of time had no access to the 'historical' time of the ruling class (Abel, 2014, p. 253). Within the same society there existed two different experiences and notions of time. Time divided into units independent of human activity, i.e. time divided into hours and minutes, only became 'naturalised' through the widespread use of the mechanical clock. But the measurement of abstract time was not adopted by all societies. China regarded the mechanical clock as an ingenious toy (Abel, 2014, p. 191). Only in capitalist societies that could use the division of abstract time as a measure of value did the mechanical clock find its place. Time is not constant and neither is our perception of it. In studying the relationship between musical temporality and actual time I hope to expose the ways in which our current ideological perception of time affects the way in which we compose music, and more importantly, attempt to expose the ways in which through music we reproduce and normalise the way in which the structure of capitalism informs our temporal experience of the world.

The first chapter of this essay will be devoted to understanding the mechanisms of Adorno's philosophy. Thinkers that dismiss Adorno as an elitist more often than not fail to grasp the complexity and subversive potential of his thought, specifically his theory of negative dialectics. Working from a Hegelian notion of history and through a rigorous critique of positivism Adorno conceived a theory that totally denied the possibility of taking the world at face value. For Adorno, the moment we accept the normative status of the world around us, as soon as we fail to recognise the contradictions deeply embedded in society, we surrender ourselves to the totalising power of ideology. The point of negative dialectics is not to transcend ideology, is not to 'step outside' of society, because such an act is impossible. The point of negative dialectics is to expose the contradictions of the ideology in which the subject is immersed.

The second chapter will be analysing the implications that arise from applying negative dialectics to an understanding of time. I will first show the difference between actual time and musical temporality. Although when music is played, its duration extends

through actual time, music has the ability to *express* time differently. An example of this is how the time contained within music can change speeds throughout any one piece, something that is impossible within the abstract, measured time of capitalism. Once the distinction between the two has been made, I will show how Adorno understood the different modes of expressing time within music. I will show how, for Adorno, music constructed around a constant rhythm is expressive of the administered, rationalised time of capitalism.

The third chapter will give a critique of Adorno's conclusions while trying to maintain the power of negative dialectics. I will show how Adorno's critique of rhythm is only as serious as he claims if the necessity for a musical score is maintained. Adorno maintains throughout his work that all music requires a score to work from, even improvisation. I argue that through improvisation, the need for written music is negated. I argue that the existence of a written score allows for commodification. The score can be chopped up and reified, whereas pure improvisation avoids such risks as the very existence of each piece is temporal.

## Chapter 1: What is Art for Adorno?

## What is Art for Adorno?

Reality, especially a reality constructed around the positivist thinking promoted by capitalist ideology, disguises the true nature of the world, but Adorno argues that art is a source of truth (Melaney, 1997, p. 40). To understand the liberating potential of art we must first understand why Adorno condemned positivist thinking as ideology and why he thought that truth was found in the negation of “identity thinking”.

### Adorno Against Positivism

Adorno condemned positivism for its acceptance of the actual as rational (Adorno, 2008, p. 19). By actual, Adorno was referring to *how* the world is presented to the subject; the immediate, given experience of reality. Any philosophy that accepts the actual as rational insists that despite all the horrors, such as Auschwitz and a short time later the Vietnam War, the world has some sort of meaning (Ibid). The actual specific to Adorno’s critique is modernity; the structure that promotes systematic and bureaucratised genocide, the intrinsic brutality and exploitation of capitalism, and the spread of domination (Adorno, et al., 2006, pp. 7-9). Adorno condemned positivism not only because of its acceptance of atrocities or because even by its own logic positivism is indefensible, but because positivism had become such an intrinsic element of capitalist ideology that even critique itself had become suspect (Adorno, et al., 2006, p. 23).

The logic of positivism reveals its own weakness. The primary logic of positivism is what Adorno calls “rational identity thinking”. For Adorno, thought is only possible via the conceptual mediation of identity thinking (Cook, 2001, pp. 1-5). The primal fear of nature caused the subject, by means of language, to differentiate itself from objects while at the same time to attempt to equate objects to its concepts (Ibid). Identity thinking uses concepts pragmatically to identify objects. The subject’s immediate denotation of specific properties of an object are treated as the though they represent that object fully (Rose, 1978, p. 45). Adorno did not claim that a concept could not accurately describe an object, only that concept and object cannot be identical, that there is an irrevocable gap between the two (Rose, 1978, pp. 45-47). Rational identity thinking is the illusion that there is no gap, the illusion that the subject thinks the object in itself. Rational identity thinking is therefore blind to anything that does not fit an existing concept because concepts are presented as actual (Ibid). The fatal weakness of positivism resides in its total inability to

comprehend that rational identity thinking is blind to anything outside of its own logic. Rather than attempt to expose what rational identity thinking is blind to, positivism forces objects to fit concepts, regardless of the violence caused to both the concept and the object. Positivism succeeds in controlling nature, but only at the cost of denial; a denial that there is anything other than what is immediately presented to the subject and the assertion of a non-dialectical relationship between subject and object in which the subject *dominates* the object (Cook, 2001, pp. 2-12).

Adorno's critique of positivism was heavily influenced by Hegel (Dallmayr, 1997, p. 36). Hegel developed his philosophy out of the crisis surrounding the German Enlightenment (Beiser, 2005, p. 21). Kant described the German Enlightenment as "the age of criticism", the age of reason, and announced that everything should be subject to the power of reason (Beiser, 2005, p. 22). The crisis of the German Enlightenment came from within itself. The self-reflexive nature of reason meant that reason had to be subjected to itself. Through a rigorous meta-critique, reason was found to have a number of assumptions that raised serious doubts about its legitimacy (Beiser, 2005, p. 23). The assumptions that structured reason necessitated positivity. Kant was guilty of making such assumptions by applying an *a priori* standard of knowledge to evaluate all claims to knowledge, as too was Schelling because of his mechanically applied *a priori* schemata to phenomena (Beiser, 2005, p. 160). Hegel sought a philosophy that maintained the legitimacy of reason, did not require *a priori* assumptions and, therefore, did not necessitate positive knowledge.

Hegel formulated his dialectic on the grounds that knowledge can be assessed *a posteriori*. The subject does not bring *a priori* assumptions to the object as a final measure of truth. Any *a priori* assumptions brought to the dialectic are merely an assurance of truth later to be included in the *ex post facto* investigation (Beiser, 2005, p. 161). Previous models of reason posited the assumed necessity of dividing the whole into parts as foundational to understanding. For Hegel, such an understanding is only the first step in the dialectic, something he called the thesis. The second step, the antithesis, is the recognition that objects are not in fact independent entities. The third step, the synthesis, is to resolve the contradiction in understanding, the contradiction that an object is understood simultaneously as both independent and interdependent (Beiser, 2005, pp. 167-169). The crucial part of Hegel's dialectic is that *negativity*, contradiction, is the force

that drives development (Marx & Engels, 2010c, p. 332). Marx applied Hegelian dialectics when analysing forms of emancipation. Emancipation is not *human* emancipation if it is only *political* emancipation. A claim to emancipation is contradictory if the claim is made by peoples still enchained by religion. It is possible for the State to declare itself free from religion while the population is still religious (Rose, 1978, p. 46). When analysing a concept, such as emancipation, a properly applied dialectical method exposes the ways in which the concept is neither self-evident nor stable (Singer, 2001, pp. 92-93).

Although embracing the negativity of Hegel, Adorno located an element of positivist violence in the triadic scheme of Hegel. In the famous triad of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, the thesis and antithesis are treated as identical within the synthesis. The particulars that rendered the thesis and anti-thesis to be opposite are ignored in the final movement (Adorno, 2008, pp. 26-31). In order for there to be a synthesis between the two, a violence must be enacted upon them both. On the one hand there is an obligation to maintain what is essential to both the thesis and antithesis, but on the other hand there is a blindness to that which does not fit the synthesis. The violence enacted upon concepts under Hegelian dialectics is, according to Adorno, always the intention of its own logic due to the positive nature of the whole; “in other words, the fact that the whole, the quintessence of all negations is the positive, the meaning, reason, indeed the godhead and the Absolute” (Adorno, 2008, p. 27). Adorno regarded the positive aspects of Hegel as “belly turned mind”, a mind that pretended that it was able to consume (to understand) the world in its entirety (Adorno & Ashton, 1973, pp. 22-24). The pretence of the belly turned mind relies upon the blindness of positivism which presents concepts as identical to objects, thus, the mind understands only its own concepts rather than objects in themselves. Adorno is able to avoid the traps of positivism and idealism through his theory of negative dialectics.

### Negative Dialectics

Non-identity thinking, a mode of cognition that maintains the ideal of identity while being aware and remaining constantly critical of the gap between concept and object, can provide an effective critique of positivism (Witkin, 2000, p. 149). Non-identity thinking, the foundation to Adorno’s theory of negative dialectics, allows for *difference without domination* (Rose, 1978, p. 44).

Adorno's Negative Dialectics is a post-Hegelian theory rather than an anti-Hegelian theory (Dallmayr, 1997, p. 36). In Hegel, the positive aspect of the universal continues traditional metaphysical thought in which logical priority is given to the concepts created by the epistemic subject. Adorno rejects this primarily because of the way in which the subject is elevated into a position of dominance over the object (Ibid). Negative dialectics, however, in its rejection of the possibility of perfect unity between concept and object maintains a critical eye on the gap between the two by giving logical priority to the object (Rose, 1978, p. 61). At first glance there is an obvious difficulty that logical priority always returns back to the subject. By focusing on the gap between subject and object, the non-identical itself could easily enter back into cognition and become another concept. Adorno avoids this problem by maintaining that "the mind's moment of non-being is so intertwined with existence that to pick it out neatly would be the same as to objectify and falsify it" (Dews, 1995, p. 31). Despite speaking of the non-identical, Adorno refuses any abstraction from the dialectic. To highlight this further, the apparent positive nature of the distinction between subject and object is addressed by Adorno in the following passage:

*"The polarity of subject and object may well appear to be an undialectical structure in which all dialectics takes place. But the two concepts are resultant categories of reflection, formulas for an irreconcilability; they are not positive, primary states of fact but negative throughout, expressing nothing but nonidentity. Even so, the difference between subject and object cannot be simply negated. They are neither an ultimate duality nor a screen hiding ultimate unity. They constitute one another as much as - by virtue of such constitution - they depart from each other."* (Adorno & Ashton, 1973, p. 174)

The subject is by its very nature also an object (Rose, 1978, p. 62). Giving logical priority to the object does not pretend to seek to know the thing in itself but rather removes the central importance of the epistemic subject. In this way the intention to impose concepts upon the world and then accept those concepts as true is removed (Ibid). Giving priority to the object allows for a subjectivity that maintains an awareness of the existence of objectivity within the subject, or to put it another way, a subjectivity that maintains an

awareness that human beings are a *part of* nature. Negative dialectics prevents concepts from becoming independent of the subjects which constitute them (Rose, 1978, p. 47).

An important description of how Adorno applies negative dialectics to his thinking is made by Max Paddison in his essay *The Critique Criticised: Adorno and Popular Music* (Paddison, 1982). Knowing that both concept and object are “categories which originate in reflection, formulas for something which is not to be unified”, Adorno formulates his arguments dialectically (Paddison, 1982, p. 203). As Paddison Highlights:

*The progression is always tripartite: (i) the dilemma is uncompromisingly stated; (ii) the tension between the poles leads to what could almost be seen as a kind of 'synthesis', in the best Hegelian manner; (iii) finally comes the reformulation of the initial dilemma, now inverted, and even more uncompromisingly stated than ever. (Paddison, 1982, p. 203)*

Adorno makes clear that a dialectical method is not intended to express that there are two sides to everything. His method is dialectical in order to express clearly the contradiction but also the intimate relationship between concept and object. Adorno's methodology is also typically negative. Between the exaggeration and the expression of contradiction, Adorno offers no genuine synthesis. The structure of Adorno's argument is deliberately irritating to the reader. This approach forces the reader to become actively engaged with the material (Paddison, 1982, p. 203).

In short, negative dialectics prevents “the historical dichotomy of the human condition in which the subject forgets that it too is an object with a transitory nature” (Devenney, 2004, p. 26). This transitory nature is what drives history, development, and change. Capitalist societies disguise the nature of historical change through ideology (Witkin, 2000, p. 149). Ideology, for Adorno, does not so much *mask* reality as insist that the world is nothing more than what is immediately presented to the subject (Cook, 2001, p. 11). Rather than remain contained within the limitations of identity thinking, art has the potential to provide a non-conceptual relationship between subject and object.

### The Liberating Potential of Art

Rather than attempt to copy reality, art provides an image of the different ways in which reality comes to be experienced (Melaney, 1997, p. 45). Art allows us to understand how reality is an active process rather than a fixed object. Art does this through a

relationship between mimesis and rational critique. Mimesis enables a relationship between subject and object in which the subject identifies *with* the object as opposed to attempting to grasp the identification *of* the object (Adorno, 2008, p. 92). A delicate relationship between form and expression provides the meaning of art. The irrationality of expression is mediated through the technical procedures of form (Adorno, et al., 2002, pp. 114-115). Spontaneity, ideas leaping into the minds of the artist, gives the expressive element of art. Expression is born of the chaotic contingency opposed to all order. Retrospective reflection, critical engagement with the work, provides the form, the criteria of whether or not the spontaneity was really spontaneity or simply just involuntary thoughts (Adorno, 2008, pp. 93-34). A mimetic relationship between subject and object is neither a mode of expression that transcends conceptual mediation or a support for the inescapable limit of concepts. Mimesis expresses an experience of the world other than the experience mediated through concepts. A relationship between mimesis and rational thought allows art to become the unconscious schemata of the world's transformation (Adorno, et al., 2002, p. 176). But, art cannot explicitly present utopia. If art were to do this, it would make a claim that liberation was possible in an unreconciled and oppressive world (Flodin, 2011, p. 6). Art can only *point toward* liberation by lending a voice to suffering, because "the need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth" (Adorno, 2008, pp. 17-18). Through mimesis, art opens a space that allows for an expression of suffering that escapes the order of concepts.

As Adorno argues constantly in regards to every aspect of life, abstracting art as a particular from its dialectic reproduces the logic in which positivism manifests itself. Art is not an isolated object and neither is its relation to the world (Adorno, et al., 2002, p. 176). Artworks are produced within specific moments in history, consumed under certain conditions, reproduced in different ways, and acquire new cultural meaning over time. Even the concept of art escapes verbal definition as art changes over time (Ibid). Art has an internal set of relations as well as a relationship with its outer history (Witkin, 2000, p. 149).

Due to almost half of the Adorno's writing is dedicated to music (Zabel, 1989, p. 198) I will be focusing primarily on music as art, but I will also refer to other artistic forms to help clarify some arguments. Adorno hailed artists, such as Beethoven, as fulfilling the criteria of art. Despite his adoration of Beethoven, Adorno heavily critiqued how

Beethoven is listened to in modern society (Adorno, 2001b, pp. 33-37). Beethoven's works do not contain in themselves the key to viewing the world differently. One cannot treat an artwork as though any contact with it will release the subject from their ideological shackles. The way in which a work of art is consumed under capitalist conditions reflects back onto the subject the conditions from which they wish to escape. In modern capitalist societies, works such as Beethoven's are broken down into isolated parts and repeated *ad nauseam* until consumption becomes automatic or treated as signifiers of class and status (Adorno, 2001b, p. 41). Familiarity, egoistic pleasures, and pathic consumption take precedence over an active engagement with the material. One needs to know *how* to listen to music in order for its meaning to emerge or to be aware that a piece of art is totally devoid of meaning.

The culture industry manufactures meaning through feigning the democratisation of art (Adorno, 2001c, pp. 98-99). Art that seeks to reproduce reality is sold to the masses as proof that the barrier between high and low art has been dissolved. Art is disguised as democratic, as demanded by the masses, when in fact the masses are merely an object of calculation for the culture industry. Using statistical averages, the culture industry calculates "the subjective element of reaction and establishes it as universal law" (Adorno, et al., 2002, p. 265). The narrow space in which the liberating potential of art exists is consumed by the totalising power of the culture industry and art seeks simply to reproduce reality as entertainment. The technological grip on the means of artistic production define the form of art without any say from the subject. Songs shrink to fit radio shows, melodies are repeated until they stick to the minds of the listeners, drums bang out a steady military march (Adorno, 2002a, p. 485). Technological means forced upon social life transport culture-industrial goods into supermarkets, elevators, and hospitals to be played on repeat. Song structures are reduced down to the most elementary and essential parts; just enough to keep the listener entertained but not enough to initiate any thought. Once social life is saturated by art as a commodity, the distinction between art that is thoroughly critical and commodities becomes indiscernible. Any hint towards serious art is met with accusations of elitism (Adorno, 2001b, p. 34). The expression of an alternative view on how reality can be constructed is lost, either by a reduction to the exchange value of an artwork or via the dismemberment of an artwork so that palatable sections can be repeated within the feedback loop of the culture industry (Adorno, 2001, p. 5). Music becomes part of the background noise of

advertising. The subject does not desire liberation from the shackles of capitalism, but desires to become identical with it. The subject of the totally administered world seeks to become identical with the commodities that saturate the social world (Adorno, 2001a, p. 95).

But art in capitalist societies is not impossible. As monopoly capitalism came to dominate even cultural aspects of life, modernism emerged as a response (Abel, 2014, p. 6). Modernist art is much more indirect in its expression than the realist movements that preceded it. Modernism had an ability to make the world seem unfamiliar through deviations in form and structure (Butler, 2010, p. 2). As a result, art was still able to provide a location for some liberating potential. In literature, Kafka provides a way of incorporating into his novels the form and structure of the totalising, rationalising power of capitalism yet refuses to let the subject align themselves with its logic (Melaney, 1997, pp. 46-47). The music of Schoenberg and the second Viennese school also negated standard and popular artistic forms from which they emerged by breaking with the tonal system of major and minor keys (Witkin, 2000, p. 152). As I will show later, although Schoenberg was able to negate tonal composition in music, his later serial technique was critiqued by Adorno as remaining as limited in its development as popular music.

In the next chapter I will narrow my analysis of Adorno's treatment of art and sociology by focusing only on musical temporality. Much like Adorno I refuse to place any one aspect of an art piece as the primary location for understanding the work as a whole, but for the purpose of this essay I think that a treatment of musical temporality can reveal the merits and flaws of Adorno's thought.

## Chapter 2: Adorno on Time and Musical Temporality

## Adorno on Time and Musical Temporality

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the depiction of history as linear and progressive by capitalist ideology perpetuates oppression through passivity. If music is to retain the status of art, and therefore remain part of the unconscious schemata of the world's transformation, it cannot imitate and endorse the conditions of the oppressive world. For Adorno there is a complex relationship between what he considers to be real time and the time of music, historical development and pure repetition, and art and politics (Abel, 2014, pp. 160-177). The dialectical, and non-dialectical, relationship between these ideas is the core of Adorno's thinking on musical temporality.

### Musical Time and Real Time

Real time and the time of music are two different, yet intrinsically linked, forms of time. Real time, simply put, is the actual experience of time. As mentioned before, by "actual" Adorno was referring to how the world is presented to the subject, specifically the subject of a capitalist society. Time in capitalist society has become reified. Reification, Marx argued, had emerged through commodity fetishism. Particular modes of expenditure in labour were reduced to a homogenous category of abstract labour in order to equate labour with monetary value (Rose, 1978, p. 46). Exchange-value emerges because a capitalist society needs to reconcile the total labour of workers separated by private property relations. As a result, value appears as a natural characteristic of the commodity rather than as a socio-economic relation. (Marx, 1979, pp. 163-166).

Adorno used reification to explain how time has become externalised from the subject alongside the rise of rational identity thinking. Adorno argues that time appears as an external object and through rational identity thinking, the external character of time appears natural (Rose, 1978, p. 46). Time becomes spatialized through its abstraction from subjectivity, becomes something to be *filled* with activity. Time becomes an "infinitely long, dark corridor". Drawing on the work of Bergson, Adorno argued that any sense of a temporal continuum decomposes into "shock-like" moments. Real time ceases to be time when met with "the content of experience as something mechanically divided into static, immutable units" (Abel, 2014, p. 156). The future appears as a narrow and unchangeable space to be filled with content. This spatialisation of time not only eradicates temporality, but removes the possibility of agency and change (Thomas, 1989, p. 166).

Although music moves through real time, real time and musical time do not flow together. If a passage is interrupted by the musician wanting to repeat it, musical time is unaffected by this. The temporality contained within the piece continues once picked back up and continues indifferent to the interruption (Adorno, et al., 2002, p. 138). As an art form that moves through time, music has the ability to convey processes rather than states (DeNora, 2003, p. 103). The processes expressed in music should, Adorno argues, express historical time rather than time as immediately experienced. Music should fold time into itself in order to express an experience of the world other than it is. The folding of time into itself is the expression of historical development, specifically a dialectical historical development (Abel, 2014, p. 155). In this way, music is able to retain the ability to express a new event as the emergence from, or requisite of, a previous event, rather than as a predetermined moment within a calculated frame (Adorno, et al., 2002, p. 215). The relationship between real time and musical time does not stop with musical time being contained within real time. Conceptions of musical time as being “free from” the limitations of real time are themselves a product of history emanating from the secularisation of separate theological realms (Adorno & Leppert, 2002a, p. 142). Musical time and real time exist in a dialectical relationship. Only “real history with all its suffering and all its contradiction” gives music its truth content (Adorno & Leppert, 2002a, p. 147).

In his praise of Beethoven as the Hegelian composer *par excellence*, Adorno is not, as Carol Flinn argues, romanticising the past or expressing nostalgia for pre-capitalist times (Flinn, 1986, p. 65). Only a very shallow understanding of Adorno’s thinking could result in the argument that all of his writing on music was underpinned by a nostalgia for a period when music was listened to, and composed by, experts. Adorno understood the political, cultural, and artistic practices of any epoch as structured by the same principles. Beethoven was working at the same time as Hegel and both were subjected to the same ideological forces (Witkin, 2006, p. 38; Abel, 2014, p. 155). The truth content of music being part of “real history with all its suffering and all its contradiction” says exactly the opposite of what Flinn argues. New compositions require an immanent, dialectical critique that encompasses the cultural, political, and historical, as well as the musical (Adorno & Leppert, 2002a, p. 147). Beethoven’s creative use of thematic development became formalised and degenerated into the general schema for popular music, a process that Adorno knows better than anyone cannot be reversed but only taken into consideration in new compositions (Buck-Morss, 1977, p. 43). A composition can either

be critical within any given historical moment, or submit itself to the ideological forces. If Adorno spent his time lamenting for the past he would not have praised Schoenberg in his essay *The Dialectical Composer*. Adorno argued that Schoenberg's work expressed Hegelian self-consciousness by radically refusing to sink into categories of "organic" development, a topic that I will return to later in this dissertation (Adorno, 2002c, pp. 203 - 207). Adorno did not lament the past, but rather privileged a mode of subjectivity that he saw as becoming increasingly impossible within capitalist society (Thomas, 1989, p. 175). Beethoven's work was not an ideal object, but an expression of possible experience (Smith, 2012, p. 391). Music that submits to the shock-like moments of real life, like the music of Stravinsky, reproduces and fetishizes in its temporality the powerlessness of the subject trapped within the dominant totality (Abel, 2014, p. 160).

### Painting with Music

Adorno counterposed "rhythmic-spatial" music against "expressive-dynamic" music. Rhythmic-spatial music is expressive of a society in which the powerless subject submits to the totality. The musical time of rhythmic-spatial music is spatialized, but not in a literal, physical, geometric sense. Rather, rhythmic-spatial music is spatialized in the sense that it is planned and organised from the top down "as only visual surfaces once were". Painters use a canvas onto which they manipulate colour tones to give artistic expression; composers of rhythmic-spatial music use a totally rigid frame in which they manipulate musical tones (Adorno & Gillespie, 1995, pp. 66-67). The elements of both types of composition have no power over the space into which they are manipulated. Even though composers of rhythmic-spatial music are restricted, the subject of musical material is not the composer. The subjective element of music is usually referred to as a motif or a theme. A motif can comprise of a rhythmic pattern or a sequence of notes. In rhythmic-spatial music the motifs of a composition are denied the possibility of development and denied the power to influence the piece as a whole (Witkin, 2006, pp. 29-30). In Wagner, the use of leitmotifs was in order to signal the arrival of heroes, heroines, and situations in a way that required less engagement from the audience. A crude link can be drawn between a certain sound and a person in the drama in the same way that an advertisement links a catchy jingle to a product (Witkin, 2006, p. 85). Despite this, Adorno claimed that the act of writing down a piece of music is literally spatializing and some spatialisation is inevitable. "Every written note is the image of a beat" (Abel,

2014, p. 171). The rhythmic element of music is a consequence of notation. The precondition of aesthetic freedom is the reification of text because autonomy and fetishism are inseparable (Ibid). Notation, though, has the potential, through melody, to transform spatial relations into temporal relations (Abel, 2014, p. 164). In rhythmic-spatial music, the rhythmic element is no longer an inevitable effect of notation, but the dominant figure that dictates the structure of each piece.

Structured around a regular beat, rhythmic-spatial music expresses movement without progress (Witkin, 2006, p. 148). The standardised 32-bar AABA song structure observed by Adorno in popular music creates the frame which the rest of the musical elements are permitted to fill. The eight-bar period and four-bar half period form the building blocks in which the music is allowed to craft itself around, never deviating from the regular beat (Abel, 2014, p. 149). Dance music is exemplary of rhythmic-spatial music, both in its composition and in its performance. Dancers are confined to a space, the dancefloor, and move their bodies to the regular beat in which they have no influence. Both dancers and composers submit themselves to the mechanical, circular movement of the drums as a soldier marches in a parade (Abel, 2014, p. 151). Rhythmic-spatial music has become so standardised in the culture industry that listeners can guess the continuation of a hit song after the first bars (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002, p. 99). Popular music, like mass industry, is planned. Just as the worker knows that tomorrow they will give their body to the machine of capitalism, listeners of popular music know that the chorus will follow the verse (Witkin, 2006, p. 172).

Whereas the subject of popular music cheerfully abides by the frame into which it is cast, Adorno argued that the subject (motif) of jazz music undergoes a pseudo-transformation. Syncopation, false rhythm, and breaks are modifications that never affect the fundamental beat. Even the most technical breaks that require the most extraordinary skill to perform are contained within a strict and narrow frame (Adorno, 2002a, pp. 470-471). Syncopation in jazz, Adorno argues, expresses the subject's temporary anxiety towards becoming engulfed by the totality in which it had no part in creating. The subject inevitably submits, realising that from the beginning it was always a part of the totality (Abel, 2014, p. 152). Adorno referred to lovers of jazz as the "rhythmically obedient type" and were found mostly in the youth (Abel, 2014, p. 151). In the same way in which an individual living in capitalist society is permitted to indulge in whatever fashion trend or

hobby that they like but is powerless against mode of production, the subject of jazz appears to express its freedom through decorative changes but is actually powerless against the march of the beat. Adorno argues that the impotence of the subject of jazz is precisely its appeal. Jazz expresses a glimmer of improvisational and subjective freedom within the sphere of mundane light-music (Adorno, 2002b, p. 430).

Of course, advocates of jazz disagree with Adorno's condemnation. Jazz enthusiasts describe jazz, especially jazz composed via improvisation, as "pure transmission of a musical idea", "the constant living recreation of the music", and "really reacting to the moment" (Hamilton, 2008, pp. 192-202). Jazz challenges the division of labour found in traditionally composed music. Improvised jazz is a combination of cooperation and individuality. Performers are able to express their creativity while at the same time provide a space for other musicians to express themselves. As Louis Armstrong put it, a jazz performer is "both creator and interpreter, soloist and accompanist, artist and entertainer" (Gracyk, 1992, pp. 537-538). Improvisations in jazz enable multiple meanings of the same piece, a meaning given by the performers rather than by a composer. What in one setting could constitute commercialisation, in another setting could be seen as artistic virtuosity (Harding, 1995, p. 136). The same improvisational technique changes in its meaning from performance to performance, from performer to performer. Such fluidity demonstrates why Adorno understands jazz to be a commodity (Adorno, 2002a, p. 473).

Adorno condemned the culture industry and the commodity character of popular music, but had little to say about the production process between the two. From his position on commodity fetishism, an Adornian understanding of how music from the culture industry is manufactured can be outlined. An improvised musical performance comprised of individual performers is impossible without a mechanism to bring their musical activity together. Gracyk mentions in a passing comment that "even the loosest jam session or improvisation requires an organizing schema" (Gracyk, 1992, p. 537). Commodities only realise their value in the act of exchange, thus, exchange value is accounted for during the labour process and exchange-value appears as a natural, objective characteristic of the commodity (Marx, 1979, p. 165). Just as the fetish character of a commodity appears as natural, jazz performers in their musical activity adhere to an unchanging and relentless beat as though it was a natural part of musical composition.

When learning what music is and how to play their instrument, jazz performers incorporate a regular beat into their understanding of music as though music cannot exist without it. Just as exchange-value emerges through the separation of *privately labouring* individuals, rhythm becomes the uniting schema of a jazz band in the absence of a composition. The beat, a pulse, is part of the music before a group even begins “improvisation”. Improvisation, Adorno argues, simply seeks to mask the commodity character of jazz and improve its marketability (Witkin, 2006, p. 163).

Worse still for Adorno, the rhythmic improvisation of jazz is rationalised through the same process described by Max Weber, in that an instrument can be out of tune as much as the drums can be “out of time” (Abel, 2014, p. 170). Weber famously noted that the harmonic chord system in western music was rationalised to a point that composition resembled mathematics. Whether a note was the “correct” one to be played or whether a chord was “in tune” can be comprehended via the mathematical formula  $n/(n+1)$ , with  $n$  referring to the frequency of the original note. Once a note or chord is played, the following chords must follow the logic of  $n/(n+1)$  if the song is to sound pleasant. The term “circle of fifths”, a fundamental referent in modern music, is a mathematical expression of the rationalised system of harmonics described by Weber (Feher, 1987, p. 149). For Adorno, jazz never resists the rationalisation of melody or rhythm. Jazz performers improvise within the limits of marketability, never challenging the notion that the “qualitatively incommensurable can be made quantitatively commensurable” (Jarvis, 1998, p. 118). Rather than challenge the division of labour in traditionally composed music, jazz performers embody bourgeois ideology in their quest towards individualisation.

### Time as Being

Expressive-dynamic music allows for thematic development through repetition, expansion, fragmentation, and variation (Witkin, 2006, p. 148). Adorno splits expressive-dynamic music into *extensive types* and *intensive types*. Although not adhering to a relentless beat, *intensive type* music conforms to typical classical structuration and “true symphonic time”, whereas *extensive type* music abdicates time, sets time free, allows for a negation of standardised development (Smith, 2012, p. 390). Time becomes part of the musical composition, rather than the determinant. Of course, Adorno did not create a rational system of identification in order to enable a kind of musical taxonomy. The above

terminology are part of a set of tools used to analyse and critique music. Another term favoured by Adorno, serious music, I will use from now on to describe music that met the criteria of Adorno's philosophy.

Serious music, Adorno argued, expresses liberation via its radically critical negation of musical principles. Just as with philosophy the submission to predetermined categories demonstrates conformity, serious music needs to demonstrate an obliteration of current musical principles (Adorno, 2002c, p. 203). A serious musical composition is a tireless self-renewal though its own strengths and against whatever standards the material might have (Adorno & Ashton, 1973, p. 33). Ignorance and a reliance upon an "unconscious and primitive" natural taste, a "free expression", blindly surrenders musical compositions to the socio-historical limits of its own musical principles (Buck-Morss, 1977, pp. 38-39). Philosophy and music are not identical, but both are comparable in that both philosophical works and musical compositions are not reducible to their basic elements with everything else following logically. Both philosophical works and musical composition are structured around an internal logic. The developmental form between A and B is as important as, and is *part of*, both A and B (Jarvis, 1998, p. 129).

Musical subjects (motifs) of serious music are much like real human subjects. Neither can avoid being somehow transformed through time. Just as a human subject is forever in a state of Becoming, subjects in serious music continually develop. Pure repetition has no place in life or in serious music (Abel, 2014, pp. 155-156). An isolated subject is empty and meaningless, and only through a relationship with other elements does it become filled with meaning (Witkin, 2006, pp. 46-47). The musical subject has a dialectical relationship with musical time, rather than being submitted to it as an externality. There is no beat or structure to be obeyed. In his reading of *The Archduke Trio* by Beethoven, Adorno recognises the unusual temporal structure of the piece. The retransition is made up of sixty bars before the recapitulation. The effect of such an "overly-large" retransition is, firstly, the negation of the *intensive type* development that limits an experience of time, and secondly, it challenges the relationship between memory and time. Meaning is only present retrospectively through remembrance (Smith, 2012, p. 390). The previous moments of *The Archduke* acquire their meaning retrospectively from a developed subject imbued with the historical development of the totality. By taking the musical material available to him and critiquing it through his

compositions, Beethoven crafted a new set of musical principals that challenged bourgeois notions of development. Later in the nineteenth century when the musical material developed by Beethoven was used to express bourgeois individualism, Brahms responded by extending the principal of variation over the entire form (Abel, 2014, p. 163). Schoenberg inherited the material developed by Brahms and was faced with the problem of refuting the traditional musical symmetry that stands in the way of the movement of subjective expression (Adorno, 2002b, p. 398).

“Never, in Schoenberg, does a bud unfold into a blossom”<sup>1</sup>

Schoenberg used the compositional techniques of Brahms, specifically the continual development of form, but did so without the convention of tonality (Abel, 2014, p. 164). Tonality became obsolete due to the resolution expressed via consonance that is unattainable in the alienating and hostile world of capitalist society (Abel, 2014, p. 174). A movement that emerges from a dissonant chord within a piece of music composed under traditional tonality contains the assumption that consonance, resolution, is necessary or at least possible. The atonal music of Schoenberg denies the possibility of resolution to such a radical level that “the answer destroys the question and the material from which it emerged” (Adorno, 2002c, p. 204). Later, Schoenberg developed the serial technique in order to guarantee atonality and avoid the unconscious emergence of key centres, but Adorno understood serialism as a technique that controls all thematic development and motivic material thus denying a genuine dialectical development (Abel, 2014, p. 164). Although Schoenberg had broken out of the obsolete structure of tonality, in doing so he had turned his back on time, forgotten temporality (Witkin, 2006, p. 83). Where in Schoenberg’s earlier work the subject underwent development beyond the possibilities set by Brahms, in serialism the subject was extinguished, reduced to the same fate as the subject of popular music. The omnipresence of the planned and predetermined frame of serialism removed the possibility of expressing historical movement. The Subject of the music of Schoenberg, and later avant-garde composers, dominates the piece in order to escape the totalizing force of the work only to surrender to the power of the rational system (Witkin, 2006, pp. 136-139). By returning to the undifferentiated homogeneity of a rational system for composing music, the experience of modernist and avant-garde music was the same lost, “oceanic feeling” exemplified by

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<sup>1</sup> (Adorno, 2002c, p. 204)

capitalism and popular music (Cook, 2001, p. 4). Through its liberation the subject becomes enchained. New music, both popular and modernist, had fallen to the fate of capitalist ideology. For Adorno, music has become an echo of the totalising rationality of industrial society.

In the next chapter I will be argue that the brilliance of negative dialectics should not be dismissed, but the way in which Adorno applied his own theory to music should be reconsidered. I will show that Adorno's insistence that notation is the necessary reification of musical composition opens the possibilities of the commodification of music while closing the possibilities of developing music beyond the atonal parameters set by Schoenberg. While doing so, I will be keeping in mind that Adorno was dialectical in his style and perhaps some of his overstatements were designed to irritate rather than please his readers.

## Chapter 3: Mimesis, Improvisation, and the Dissolution of the Artwork

## Mimesis, Improvisation, and the Dissolution of the Artwork

The distinction between actual time and musical temporality in Adorno's thought relies upon the objectification of music (Brodsky, 2010, pp. 69-73). There must be something that enables a separation between the time contained within a piece of music and the time in which the piece itself is contained. An art object (a piece of music), however, is not static. In this chapter I will show that despite the fluidity and contingency of art objects, using notation as the starting place for composition firstly prevents a much more dynamic relationship between musical time and actual time, and secondly, unnecessarily exposes music to the dangers of commodification. I argue that musical composition via improvisation dissolves the clear distinction between actual time and musical temporality, and prevents the possibility of commodification. I also argue that Adorno's vehement dismissal of "pseudo-improvisation" in jazz is in fact a dismissal of egoistic individuality, and a case be made for "actual improvisation" on Adorno's own terms.

### Dissolving the Artwork

For Adorno, an art object is in a constant state of change (Brodsky, 2010, p. 79). Although this may seem paradoxical, objectivity, for Adorno, is the exact opposite of stasis. Objectivity is movement and change, is history. As discussed earlier, art should express such objectivity. Like the middle works of Schoenberg (Adorno, 2002d, p. 654), in which each moment underwent a constant dialectical development, art objects are constituted by an arrangement of moments. The culture industry extracts moments from an art object and reifies them. Ideology is the force that makes reified objects appear natural, makes stasis appear to be a part of nature. What the culture industry parades as art is in fact merely a moment denied the possibility of change (Brodsky, 2010, pp. 80-81). For example, Adorno refused the term "classical music" because such a term extracts from art easily recognisable features, such as the sound of the violin or the first eight note motif of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, and perpetuates an image of them as timelessly fundamental to 'classical music' (Adorno, 1997, p. 166). Reification denies the subject the ability to follow an art object in its own spontaneous movement (Adorno, 1997b, p. 29). When listening to Beethoven's Fifth, for example, the famous motif has been reified to such a degree that hearing it as only *part of* the entire symphony is almost impossible. That motif, in the culture industry, stands in for the entire symphony. Art objects are much more than reified "culture-objects" (Brodsky, 2010, p. 80).

The reification of art, though, can only occur if there is something to reify. Adorno argued that the precondition of aesthetic freedom is the *reification of text* because autonomy and fetishism are inseparable (Abel, 2014, p. 171). At this point I would like briefly to address an issue with the word ‘object’ in Adorno’s writing. ‘Objekt’ and ‘Gegenstand’ are both German words that mean ‘object’. The German language also has two words for ‘thing’; ‘Sache’ meaning both material thing and the matter under discussion; and ‘ding’ meaning both material thing and the matter immediately at hand (Brodsky, 2010, pp. 75-76). ‘Object’ and ‘thing’ overlap with their German counterparts ‘Objekt’ and ‘ding’, but the subtlety in which Adorno interchanges all four terms is lost as there is no direct translation of ‘Gegenstand’ and ‘Sache’. The result is that where Adorno uses a sentence containing both ‘Objekt’ and ‘Sache’, for example, the English translation is unable to express which terms Adorno is using (Brodsky, 2010, pp. 77-80). When Adorno speaks of an art object, it is not necessarily a *thing*, a physical presence. A written musical score, for example, is a physical *thing*, but the *art object* would be the cultural, historical, and social mediation and interpretation of this physical thing (Adorno, et al., 2002, p. 99). To make the distinction clear in this essay, I will use “artwork” to mean the physical material of an art object. What Adorno sees as a necessity in musical composition, the writing of notes upon a score, renders music defenceless against reification in the culture industry. Creating an art object, a piece of music, without creating the artwork, protects music from commodification.

The physical document which a musician can pick up and perform offers itself equally readily to the culture industry to dismantle, extract catchy passages, and repeat *ad nauseam*. The strength of notation is also its fatal weakness under capitalism. Where a traditional score offers the ability to express a temporality *other than* the immediately experienced, it also offers the ability to chop up and sell that expression as *part of* the immediately experienced. Adorno expressed clearly that the objective development of musical material had outstripped the subjective ability to compose serious, critical music. The colossal weight of musical material developed over history combined with the culturally imposed norms of music became too much for composers to deal with. A single composer seems incapable of forgetting the social norms of composition and allowing the music to “speak for itself”, as the early modernist composers did (Adorno, 2002d, pp. 654-655). But Adorno himself never questions the presupposition that music has to be written down. Even where Adorno played with ideas of performative composition, he always

went back to notation as a representation of a final fixing of the process (Peters, 2009, p. 91). Reification is necessary for art, according to Adorno, because without an artwork, a score, to guide the music, music becomes an effect without a cause (Adorno, et al., 2002, p. 99). Only through the score does music find its autonomous genesis (Adorno, et al., 2002, p. 100).

Although the autonomous status of art is critical for Adorno, I argue that if the truth content of art is to emerge from “real history with all its suffering and all its contradiction”, we need to revisit the necessity of art to be a “windowless monad” (Adorno, et al., 2002, pp. 4-8). Autonomous art today appears to be an impossibility with capitalism’s instrumental grip forcing art to be *for* something, i.e. film scores, advertisements, etc. Rather than lament a time when the creation of autonomous art was possible, we should instead engage in art practices which make impossible the instrumentalisation of art. For Adorno, the historical development of art is impossible without the creation of material, but I argue that development in this way is an effect rather than intention of art. Clinging to a bare minimum of reification in order to preserve artistic development should not be the concern of the artist. The point of negative dialectics is that only the present conditions can be accessed, if only negatively, and the value and place of art in the future should not and cannot be predicted. If Adorno cannot imagine, and even if we cannot imagine, what art beyond the dissolution of the artwork will look like, this is no reason not to do so. Given the current conditions of capitalism, in which even the act of rebellion itself has become a commodity (Frank, 1997), I propose that improvisation enables a method of musical composition which resists reification and blurs the lines between actual time and musical temporality.

### Improvisation?

Some clarity might be needed when speaking about improvisation. There is a long history to improvisation and rarely a consensus as to what constitutes “actual” improvisation. Derek Bailey argues that any attempt to write about improvisation will inevitably be a misrepresentation; improvisation is a distinctly “non-academic” endeavour (Bailey, 1992, p. ix). Despite this claim, Bailey also describes improvisation as “a basic instinct, an essential force for sustaining life” (Bailey, 1992, p. 140). Carol Gould and Kenneth Keaton argue that all composition and performance requires improvisation and to speak of improvisation in isolation is misleading (Gould & Keaton, 2000, p. 154).

Away from such claims, improvisation is generally conceived, in one way or another, as a type of spontaneous music-making (Alperson, 1984, p. 17). Improvisation ranges from musicians working from the same musical score to “free-improvisation” in which, conceptually, there is no *a priori* guide. In free-improvisation, as Bailey notes, while there is no prescribed idiom, each musician’s musical history emerges (Sansom, 2001, p. 32). Free-improvisation spontaneously pulls together musical language in a similar way Breton’s automatic writing and Freud’s clinical method of free association does (Sansom, 2001, p. 31). The spontaneity was never supposed to access pure unconscious energy, but is rather an attempt to allow the unconscious as much expression as possible, away from the imposition of the superego. Incidentally, such techniques, properly applied to musical composition, were praised by Adorno (Adorno, 2002d, pp. 654-655). It is this type of improvisation, improvisation that does not build from a score, which I will focus on.

There are some problems with free-improvisation that need addressing. Gavin Bryars, for example, found that by merging the performance with the composition through improvisation, the performer/composer becomes a necessary element of the artwork. In his words, “it’s like standing a painter next to his picture so that every time you see the painting you see the painter” (Bailey, 1992, p. 115). For Bryars, this dynamic drags art into reality and denies the possibility of the art to develop autonomously without the control of the original composer. But free-improvisation is not like the analogy of the painter. As discussed earlier in the essay, the spatialisation that necessarily limits painting is not a necessary element of music, that is to say, there does not need to exist a finished artwork after musical improvisation. To say “every time you see the painting” does not make sense for free-improvisation when there is no “painting” to speak of.

Free-improvisation has also been described as “inherently democratic” (Niknafs, 2013, p. 30), a comment of praise from the advocates of free-improvisation, but for the argument that I am making this actually poses some problems. If, as Bailey argues, free-improvisation is “open to use by almost anyone - beginners, children and non-musicians” (Bailey, 1992, p. 83), then there is a risk that improvisation enables a platform for a false freedom. If we consider mimesis, the non-musicians welcomed into improvisation by Bailey would seriously lack the capacity to reflect critically upon their spontaneity. Mimesis has as its nature a dialectic, a working out, a process capable of expressing

negatively its own contradictions. Without the dual nature of mimesis, without the rational counterpoising the creative, the spontaneity of improvisation becomes nothing more than, in Adorno's words, involuntary thought (Adorno, 2008, pp. 93-34). Another problem with free-improvisation is the issue as to whether a group of musicians would be playing together or merely playing at the same time, but in the case of non-musicians, this problem becomes much more pertinent, as without any formal training, they are actually rendered incapable of playing together.

Musicians need to be aware of the objectivity of musical material if free-improvisation is to have any critical meaning. By working together, or even against each other, musicians give improvisation its critical, artistic character. Just as Bailey admits that through improvisation a musician's history emerges, free-improvisation would be naive to pretend that the objectivity of music, the standard patterns, clichés, and schemas, would not eventually emerge. Free-improvisation should not seek to transcend the situation, but interrupt it (Peters, 2009, p. 110). Musicians engaging in free-improvisation would need to "forget" standardised musical formula, but forgetting is not a passive act in which the subject is emptied of content (Peters, 2009, p. 84). What the musician forgets is the *way of remembering* that dictates the form which improvisation takes: improvisation "cut off from consciousness through the institutionalization of perennial sameness" (Adorno, 1997a, p. 130). To forget is to negate. Adorno's (over)sensitivity to the dangers of rationalisation (Peters, 2009, p. 101; Kuspit, 1975, p. 326) can be countered through this conception of free-improvisation. Critiquing the formulaic and interrupting the overfamiliar might require an acknowledgment that they exist. One such standard formula is a distinction between actual time and musical temporality, but improvisation allows for an active, artistic critique of this separation.

### The Beginning of a New Temporality

Starting with the premise that there is an objective musical development, we can safely say that composition through improvisation cannot start from "nowhere". Existing musical material does not provide a restriction to improvisation, rather, it provides the form through which improvisation unfolds (Peters, 2009, p. 96). A musician who naively surrenders herself to "pure feeling", who "frees" herself of theory and rules, in fact surrenders herself to the *a priori* material that guides her improvisation (Buck-Morss, 1977, pp. 38-39). One clear example of the inescapable conditions of improvisation is the

nature of beginnings. No matter how “free” the improvisation might be, the improvisation must begin (Peters, 2009, p. 34). The questions that musicians would need to ask regard how the piece begins, when the piece begins, and how will the beginning effect the piece as a whole (Peters, 2009, p. 71). Again, what appears to be an unavoidable restriction in fact enables much more artistic freedom because the dialectical struggle between silence and music, between nothingness and art, is kept on show, becomes part of the artwork itself in a way that notation is unable to capture (Peters, 2009, p. 96). It is here, the moment between silence and music, the moment that used to mark the entrance of art, that improvisation merges actual time with musical temporality. Nothing solid tells the audience or the musicians that any one moment is where art begins. With Schoenberg, colour (timbre), previously an element of musical composition taken for granted, became part of the compositional process (Adorno, 1997, p. 169). So too with improvisation does the difficulty of beginnings become part of composition.

This element of ‘beginnings’ merges musical temporality with actual time in another way. Mimesis, as discussed earlier, is the spontaneous “letting go” of creativity balanced with reflective judgment. This process takes time. Artists go over the process again and again, tirelessly working through and immersing themselves in the contingencies of the art. Improvisation brings to the surface and plays out as spectacle the contingency and contentiousness of music before it has a chance either to disappear or to solidify as an artwork (Peters, 2009, p. 50). What is brought into the piece is radical self-awareness. If we work from Adorno’s own terms, that music should embody time as the processes of history (Abel, 2014, p. 155), then improvisation, displaying the contingencies, failures, and agony of the artistic process, enables art to express itself within the expression of the processes of history. Improvisation through mimesis, through forgetting as negation, through failure, enable artistic processes and critical self-awareness to be part of the art itself. Another way of phrasing this is in Adorno’s own words: “the work of art is processual in so far as it is a relation between a whole and its parts” but, “this relation itself is a process of becoming” (Adorno, et al., 2002, p. 255). For Adorno “the artwork is at once process and instant” (Adorno, et al., 2002, p. 100), but with the artwork dissolved, through free-improvisation as composition, music simply becomes process. Taking the blurring of actual time with musical temporality to a radical point, improvisation can be approached in a similar way that Rauschenberg approached his unfinished *1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*. The *1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* has been

exhibited only at stages of its development, has been treated as merely fragments of the possibility of art (Brodsky, 2010, p. 100). The art produced through improvisation does not necessarily need to begin or end with any one performance and can span across several different spaces. Each performance, each improvisation, is merely a glimpse into the possibilities of art. Music becomes liberated from space and the necessity to spatialize literally the “finished” product. When Adorno critiques rhythmic-spatial music for its spatialisation of music, we might say that by clinging to the existence of the artwork, perhaps Adorno does in fact spatialize music in a literal sense (Adorno & Gillespie, 1995, pp. 66-67).

With the distinction between musical temporality and actual time blurred, the distinction between rhythmic-spatial music and expressive-dynamic music begins to collapse. If unconsciously, a beat was to emerge through improvisation, this in no way renders the entire performance proof of rationalisation, rather, it enables the musicians to critique spontaneously the formula and respond to the resulting development (Peters, 2009, p. 101). The use of a beat can also be understood, not as a part of the musical composition, but rather a unifying schema. The difference between using a beat, using rhythm, as a unifying schema and using a score, is that the beat is transient. Beginning an improvisation using a set beat does not mean that the entire performance needs to be dictated by it. The beat can be speeded up, slowed down, paused, and even disregarded entirely. Rather than understanding a beat as dominating a musical piece, as the reified element that strangles musical development (Abel, 2014, p. 159), the beat can be brought in and out at will. The elements of serious music, in which each moment undergoes development, can be developed even further. The rational element of tonality was displaced through atonal composition, and without the restrictions of a score, pitch is free to glide beyond notation entirely. The subject of improvised music is granted a freedom to develop beyond even the possibilities set by Schoenberg.

With the removal of the artwork from the process of musical composition, music gains many more possibilities to engage critically with itself and is able to express development beyond the boundaries set by early modernist composers. The obvious risk is that without a document of the innovations taking place within each composition, musical development itself would become impossible. But the weight of the history of art is not on the shoulders of each artist. Documentation of development is an effect rather

than an intention. Rather than worry about how art will look after the dissolution of the artwork, music should embrace the artistic freedoms granted through improvisation.

## Conclusion

Continuing to operate from an Adornian perspective, improvisation might offer a method of musical composition beyond the bleak conclusions drawn by Adorno. Adorno's conclusions, however, are understandable. Working in a post-Auschwitz world in which rational, administered, capitalism had permeated deeply into society and art, tainted Adorno's perspective on the possibilities of freedom. The pessimism felt by Adorno worked its way into, not only the content of his theory, but its application and form. As Max Paddison reminds us, Adorno not only sought to demonstrate that genuine reconciliation in capitalist society is impossible, but did so by making the structure of his theory frustratingly impossible to find a resolution (Paddison, 1982, p. 203). Gary Peter described Adorno's philosophy as containing a "frustrating degree of irresolution" (Peters, 2009, p. 90). And this is the nature of negative dialectics that should not be forgotten. By design, it is rendered useless at prescribing any alternative to the object of its critique. What negative dialectics does is illuminate contradictions and make visible the existence of contingency within any object. To go beyond this is to leave negative dialectics behind. Adorno never gave an alternative way of composing music that did not fall into the traps of standardisation because he felt that to do so would go against his own thought.

But I am not Adorno. I am not so strict with my use of negative dialectics that I cannot imagine an alternative, even if only for it to succumb to the rigorous critic of negative dialectics. The image of improvisation I present is through an exposition of the contradictions within Adorno's own conclusions. Adorno described anyone who could not see the inherent problematic of an artwork's 'thing-character' as a philistine (Adorno, et al., 2002, p. 100). He dismissed attempts to create new methods of notation such as graphic representation, yet could not see music without the artwork. By highlighting the strength of improvisation as a form of composition I hope to have demonstrated that despite his total commitment to the dialectical, to the contingent, Adorno unnecessarily maintained the inextricability of art and reification.

In relation specifically to time, I have shown that the necessity of the artwork in music falsely separates two types of representation of time: rhythmic-spatial and expressive-dynamic. Rhythmic-spatial music is structured around a regular beat expressing movement without progress (Witkin, 2006, p. 148). When writing about jazz,

Adorno claims that the beat is part of the music before a group even begins playing. The use of improvisation in jazz simply seeks to mask the commodity character of jazz and improve its marketability (Witkin, 2006, p. 163). Expressive-dynamic music, on the other hand, allows the music to unfold with no *a priori* governance. Expressive-dynamic music allows for a “tireless self-renewal” through its own strengths and does so in a way that critiques the existing musical material available (Adorno & Ashton, 1973, p. 33). Music is given the capability of expressing time as history, time that unfolds rather than follows. In regards to free-improvisation, however, rhythm can become completely malleable, completely contingent within the unfolding of each piece. What for Adorno appears to be a static divide between two types of musical expression collapses under the weight of its own contingency exposed through negative dialectics.

Accepting that art has the potential to become the unconscious schemata of the world’s transformation (Adorno, et al., 2002, p. 176), free-improvisation can allow for an exposition of capitalism’s rationalised and systematic administration of time. The documentation of music, the score, covers up its own history and working out. Confronted with an artwork, the subject is left with only traces of what processes lay behind it. The use of mimesis, the rational correcting the spontaneous, the spontaneous freeing itself of the rational, the failures and dismissals and corrections; all this is covered up by the final product. The time spent labouring over the art is lost and the presentation of an artwork evokes an impression of instantaneity. Improvisation keeps the pain of creation on display, keeps it as part of the art. Improvisation cannot hide the time it takes to achieve coherence. In this sense, perhaps improvisation can show how the immediacy of every objects hide their own history and allow for a perception of time that extends beyond the shock-like moments of capitalism.

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