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Author(s): Michael J. Thompson
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Th. W. Adorno Defended against His Critics, and Admirers: A Defense of the Critique of Jazz

Michael J. Thompson
Department of Political Science
William Paterson University
300 Pompton Road
WAYNE, NJ 07470, U.S.A.
E-mail:
thompsonmi@wpunj.edu

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Abstract - Résumé
Critics of Adorno's critique of jazz have often alluded to his inherent elitism leading to his dismissal of jazz. I argue here that critics of Adorno's essays on jazz are mistaken since they fail to read his critique properly through the lens of his entire social and aesthetic theory. I will argue here that Adorno's emphasis on the formal dimensions of art works is the only way to begin to understand his critique. Even more, it is in how Adorno utilizes the formal analysis of art works and connects this the shaping of consciousness of individuals which is most important in his analysis. In this sense, art works mediate the consciousness of the listening subject which in turn mediates his relation back on to the social world. It is therefore crucial to see how Adorno's sociology of music and his aesthetics of music intersect. Only by seeing how the formal dimensions of jazz are able to regress listeners and erode the capacity of musical experience to illuminate a critical consciousness can we begin to appreciate Adorno's jazz-critique and formulate a more socially and politically relevant form of aesthetics.
Keywords: Adorno • Popular culture • Jazz • Critical theory

I

It has now become almost a total commonplace to view Adorno's critique of popular culture with disdain, and his critique of jazz even more so. The assumption remains that his critique is tinged by what many consider to be his inherent elitism, one which sought to protect »old world« high culture against the emergence of more popular forms of culture. But Adorno's cultural criticism as well as his aesthetic theory hinges upon the basic categories of art and music that he brings to bear in his critique of jazz, the one area of his thought that has fallen into disrepute even as it has become his most easily identifiable critique. But the argument I would like to put forth in this essay is not a crude defense of Adorno's critique of jazz. I want to argue that Adorno's critique is not only relevant and insightful in its own right, but that it can only be properly understood within the context of his broader critique of musical and cultural production as well as his understanding of the way cultural products relate to

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society and to individual consciousness. What is new about this approach is that we can see how Adorno's cultural theory is defined by a Hegelian conception of consciousness and society and, as a result, that his aesthetic theory is much more embedded in his broader social theory than previously thought. Only in this way will his critique of jazz take on renewed significance and be read properly.

I will argue that it is not simply a sociology of musical production and reception that Adorno offers in his extensive writings on music, but rather a *social psychology* of musical production and reception. In this sense, a social psychological approach studies the ways that social phenomena—in this case the musical structure of jazz—shape the internal structure of thought and feeling of subjects. In so doing it presents us with a more insightful concept of aesthetics than has previously been attributed to Adorno and his musical writings as well as a defense of his analysis of popular culture and music. Adorno wants to explore the ways that the formal aspects of art affect the life-world of individuals; the ways in which either the simplification of form or its complexification have the ability to transform the ways that we receive what art works try to communicate to us and, as a consequence, whether they lead toward a critical engagement with society or reconciliation with it. For Adorno, this was a crucial dimension to his critique of cultural production under capitalism, and the critique of jazz is an important case study in this methodology, one that can re-contextualize his conception of musical and cultural criticism in the face of the charges of elitism.

Adorno sees a crucial link between the form that art works take and the ways that this impacts, or more specifically shapes, the consciousness of individuals in terms of the way that they think about their social context. For Adorno, in true Hegelian fashion, art in general, and music in particular, are not simply cultural products, they are also forms of cognition (*Erkenntnis*);[1] and this needs to be read in the proper understanding of the way that art and culture play a role in the process of human personal and cultural development, of *Bildung*. Adorno's ideas are influenced and, in a certain sense derived, from his assumption that culture plays a formative role in the process of human growth. Human beings also develop *in relation* to the forms of culture that are available to them. Since art works are not simply cultural products but also possess a cognitive character (*Erkenntnischarakter*), they are also ways of knowing: they are other means by which we obtain social knowledge (*soziale Erkenntnis*), or insights into the contradictions engendered by modernity. Cultural criticism takes a primary place in Adorno's thought precisely because art works have the capacity to either enhance or erode the

[1] This idea goes back to the work of Baumgarten in German aesthetics and becomes a major theme of German aesthetic philosophy. Baumgarten argued that art was a form of cognition and had a place beside rationality. For an important discussion, see Kai HAMMERMEISTER, *The German Aesthetic Tradition*, 3-13 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

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capacity of individuals to possess insight into the political nature of their social relations. Although under capitalism, social life may breed conformity and a sense of passivity with respect to the contradictions it engenders, »[a]rt vehemently opposes this tendency; it offers an ever-sharper contrast to such false clarity. ... Art is able to aid enlightenment only by relating the clarity of the world consciously to its own darkness.«[2]

In this sense, music and social theory are closely related, different in their implications, but still similar in that music possesses the capacity to reveal the contradictions within society by communicating to the listener a way of relating to the objective world. More to the point, Adorno's sociology of musical reception is very much about the way that musical *form* affects aesthetic reception and, in turn, modes of experience (*Erfahren*) and modes of consciousness. The latter two are connected since it is only through the experience of »true« works of art and the illusion that they impart to us as listeners, readers, viewers, that we are able to resist the assault of reification, of technological rationality, instrumental reason, and of alienation.[3] »Good« works of art have the ability to resist the status quo by revealing it as false; they carry within them a *promesse de bonheur* but only through the revelation of the world as a place which should not be as it is. True art, good art, acts to »negate the existing social order.«[4] This capacity of an artwork to provide an oppositional tendency to the reified world Adorno refers to as its »truth content« (*Wahrheitsgehalt*), and it is precisely Adorno's project in his aesthetics to provide criteria for judging when and how artworks possess this »truth content« as opposed to that art which does not and thus fails to provide that specific experience. In this sense, I think it is necessary to read Adorno's critique of jazz not only on the basis of his aesthetic philosophy—it is more important to read it within the context of what we could call his social-psychology of musical production and reception. What I want to bring out in this essay is the way this argument works with respect to jazz: how it fails to have »truth content« in Adorno's sense and therefore acts to form an agreement with the world rather than a critical orientation toward it.

What is crucial, then, is to show how Adorno's sociology of music relates the formal nature of musical works and the individual's relation to the world. Far from being »critical« in Adorno's sense of the term, jazz becomes representative of a type of musical form that produces a cultural mindset which appears to go

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[2] Th. W. ADORNO, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, 15 (New York: Continuum Press, 2003).

[3] For an excellent discussion of this theme, see Stephen Eric BRONNER, *Of Critical Theory and its Theorists*, 137-55 (New York: Routledge Press, 2002); as well as Gillian ROSE, *The Melancholy Science*, 27-51 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979). For an extension of these themes into Adorno's reading of popular culture, see Douglas KELLNER, Theodor W. Adorno and the Dialectics of Mass Culture, in *Adorno: A Critical Reader*, Nigel Gibson and Andrew Rubin (eds.), 86-109 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

[4] Th. W. ADORNO, *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, 42 (London: Verso Books, 2002).

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against the grain of society but in fact does precisely the opposite. For Adorno, this is not an issue of prejudice, as many have claimed. Rather, it is inherent in the formal characteristics of jazz music itself. Therefore, it is in seeing how jazz fails to be »true« through an analysis of form that opens up the critique in a new light. Reading Adorno's critique of jazz must proceed from the technical relation between consciousness, of subjectivity itself, and musical form. It is more insightful to read Adorno's critique of jazz—which itself is an extension of his critique of popular music and culture more broadly—as an extension of the German aesthetic tradition of which he was a part. In doing so, we can see a freshness in his critical categories of music and cultural production.

But there is an inner dialectic to this critique that needs to be revealed. Much of this can be seen in the controversial interpretation that Adorno put forth of jazz as well as the reception and misunderstanding of it. For many writers, Adorno's notion of jazz has been wrongheaded, mistaken, racist, elitist; but it has rarely, if ever, been seen for what it really is. I think this is mistaken. Adorno's critique of jazz in and of itself is internally consistent as well as, in my view, persuasive once we are able connect formal analysis to the psychology of aesthetic experience and then to the relation of the individual to society.[5] The implications of his critique of jazz are far reaching, but perhaps more interesting is the many ways that this critique has been critiqued. In this sense, I feel it is true that Adorno's brand of cultural criticism is too far reaching for most defenders of popular music (jazz can be included under this heading) to be able to admit its truth content. Even more, the misunderstanding of the critique of jazz prevents the fuller critique of that culture Adorno articulated from becoming evident.

Adorno's critique of jazz sheds light not only on the musicology of jazz itself, but also provides an excellent model of engaged musical (and by extension, cultural) criticism as well. Whereas other scholars have placed emphasis on Adorno's jazz-critique from the perspective of his writings in aesthetic philosophy, I want to place emphasis on his sociological understanding of musical works and, more precisely, of the various ways that the formal structure of art works shapes subjectivity or consciousness through *mediation* (*Vermittlung*). This not only grounds Adorno's critique within the deeper mechanics of critical theory, but also of Hegelian philosophy. In so doing, I will stress three aspects of Adorno's approach to musical production and reception and re-read the critique of jazz through them: (i) the relation of music and musical production to society, i.e., the notion that musical experience and social theory are complimentary enterprises;

[5] As Max PADDISON has pointed out: »Thus sociology of music in Adorno's sense involves critique, in that it reveals the ideological moment in autonomous music—how such music also functions as a form of mystification, concealing the repressed contradictions of society and its power relations.« *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture: Essays on Critical Theory and Music*, 73 (London: Kahn & Averill, 1996).

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(ii) the way that the formal structure of musical works shape consciousness and musical sensibilities; and lastly (iii) the way that both of these themes relate to the broader notion of the culture industry and its erosion of the capacities for democratic culture, and the autonomy of the subject, i.e., the ability to have critical insight into the structure of society. In this way, I think we will have a firmer grasp and deeper appreciation of the purpose of Adorno's critical engagement with jazz and with popular culture.

II

It is wrong to assume that Adorno's reading of jazz fundamentally rests on anything other than his understanding of its formal properties.[6] It is wrong to dismiss Adorno as having not understood jazz, not heard enough of it, and so on. Adorno's reading of jazz is done at the level of form, taking the architectonics of the various factors of musical structure—melody, harmony, rhythm, etc.—and provides an analysis of their organization in the completed composition. Far from seeing music in terms of genre or in merely cultural terms, he sees musical form in objective terms. Without this objective analysis, there is no way to overcome the insuperable problem of subjectivity in musical reception. Of course, Adorno's emphasis on musical form means that any composition is analyzed internally and then dialectically through its relation to the audience, or to the listener. Thus, jazz is not simply critiqued as a genre, but first internally at the level of formal analysis. This means that Adorno wants to explore the ways that the formal structure of musical works—in the present instance, of jazz—gives expression to the various ways in which the production of culture within the context of capitalist society regresses the individual's capacity to experience an integral rationality which itself would simultaneously enable a critical awareness of society as well as awaken a full expression of the individual's emancipatory interests.

In this sense, form plays a mediating role with respect to the experience of the work of art. True art has the capacity to hint at a transformed social world, and it does this by opposing any semblance of a commodity character of art, its victimi-

[6] The number of critical appraisals—sometimes scathing—of Adorno's work on jazz are too numerous to delve into here with any degree of depth. Representatives include Theodore GRACYK, Adorno, Jazz, and the Aesthetics of Popular Music, *The Musical Quarterly* vol. 76, no. 4 (winter, 1992), 526-42; Harry COOPER, On 'Über Jazz': Replaying Adorno with the Grain, *October* vol. 75 (winter, 1996), 99-133; James HARDING, Adorno, Ellison, and the Critique of Jazz, *Cultural Critique* no. 31 (autumn, 1995), 129-58; Peter TOWNSEND, Adorno on Jazz: Vienna versus the Vernacular, *Prose Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, (May, 1988), 69-88; and William P. NYE, Theodore Adorno on Jazz: A Critique of Critical Theory, *Popular Music and Society* vol. 12, no. 4 (winter, 1988), 69-73.

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zation by exchange value.[7] The object of this experience (*Erfahrung*) is the illusion created by the work of art. The experience of this illusion ought to communicate something to the listener, some kind of claim about the nature of the social world. Form is the means, the process by which illusion is communicated to the listener. But it is also much more: it is also a feature of a work which molds consciousness as a whole. It mediates the subject's relation to the musical material which in turn mediates the listener's relation to society. Mediation (*Vermittlung*) is a Heglian category used to define the process by which the particular and the universal are connected; it is the process of connecting two things through the presence of a third moment, its opposite being any form of immediate experience which Hegel felt could only lead to the subject's uncritical relation to the object being experienced. More importantly, it is the process through which consciousness is shaped by objective forms of experience (i.e., in terms of the way in which thought is shaped by forms of life external to the subject). In this sense, musical experience *mediates* the listening subject and the social totality around him. It can either inhibit or encourage the experience of illusion—it is this that separates »good« from »bad« music in Adorno's sense. Form is the means by which this takes place, and it is here that music's critical function as art can be glimpsed:

> Music will be better, the more deeply it is able to express—in the antinomies of its own formal language—the exigency of the social condition and to call for change through the coded language of suffering. It is not for music to stare in helpless horror at society: it fulfills its social function more precisely when it presents social problems through its own material and according to its own formal laws—problems which music contains within itself in the innermost cells of its technique. The task of music as art thus enters into a parallel relationship to the task of social theory.[8]

The problem with music is that it is inherently abstract and can be easily manipulated. Here is where the central problem of Adorno's sociology of music and his aesthetics of music intersect: since form is the process by which musical meaning is conveyed, it plays a mediating role between the listener and the social context within which that listener finds himself. Hence, it is with the formal nature of the musical work that the analysis must begin since it is there that musical experience is shaped, and Adorno argues that musical form becomes distorted through the pressures of the culture industry, thereby »regressing« the capacity of

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[7] As Lambert ZUIDERVAART has argued, »By appearing to have a life of their own, works of art call into question a society where nothing is allowed to be itself and everything is subject to the principle of exchange. By appearing to be detached from the conditions of economic production, works of art acquire an ability to suggest changed conditions.« The Social Significance of Autonomous Art: Adorno and Bürger, 64, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 48, no. 1 (winter, 1990), 61-77.

[8] Th. W. ADORNO, On the Social Situation of Music, 393, in *Theodor W. Adorno: Essays on Music*, Richard LEPPERT (ed.) (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

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listeners.[9] This is one of the core elements of Critical Theory: the attempt to diagnose those forms of life, thought, and culture which regress the individual's capacity to grasp the totality of capitalist society.[10] There emerges a »commercial hardening and leveling of musical life,« and a disintegration of the capacity of music to illuminate the contradictions in society.[11] Once this occurs, the ability to comprehend more complex experiences that are capable of containing truth-content erodes, and listeners are only able to experience the most basic kinds of musical form and, as a result, music loses its ability to allow for a critical cognition of the social world, »it no longer expresses anything of social misery and contradiction, but forms rather in itself one single contradiction to this society.«[12] Music, as with other arts, possesses what Adorno refers to as a »language-character« (*Sprachcharakter*), which means that the formal properties of art are organized in order to communicate meaning.[13] It is through the formal aspects of art works, through the way that they organize their meaning to »say something,« that one can assess their »truth-content.«

It is from this point that Adorno's views on jazz can be more fruitfully understood. The analysis of jazz cannot be separated from its formal characteristics, in terms of the way it as musical language is organized. In Adorno's reading, jazz is »perennial fashion«; it is a musical form that masquerades as rebellious but which, in actuality, breeds conformity:

> However little doubt there can be regarding the African elements in jazz, it is no less certain that everything unruly in it was from the very beginning integrated into a strict scheme, that its rebellious gestures are accompanied by the tendency to blind obeisance, much like the sado-masochistic type described by analytic psychology, the person who chafes against the father-figure while secretly admiring him, who seeks to emulate him and in turn derives enjoyment from the subordination he overtly detests.[14]

Jazz represents a form of cultural production that is able to pass itself off as radical, as different and as a potent musical force for expanding the experience of

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[9] For an interesting discussion, see Chris DENNIS, *Adorno's Philosophy of Modern Music*, 82-96 (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1998). Most interestingly, Dennis points to the phenomenon of »uncomprehending inattention« to describe the regressed listening that results from the degeneration of musical form.

[10] For an excellent discussion of Adorno's analysis of distorted rationality and its relation to culture, see Axel HONNETH, *The Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory*, pp. 54-70 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

[11] Th. W. ADORNO, On the Contemporary Relationship of Philosophy and Music, 135, in *Essays on Music*.

[12] Th. W. ADORNO, On the Social Situation of Music, 425.

[13] For an important discussion, see Max PADDISON, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, 140-48 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[14] Th. W. ADORNO, *Prisms*, 122 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983).

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the individual against the culture industry. For Adorno this is simply nonsense because at the level of concrete musical structure, at the level of form, jazz is nothing of the kind. It breeds conformity no less than the most banal forms of pop music. It does this through masking its non-radical character—appearance is confused with essence. Jazz is seen as radical because it *appears* to go against the established forms of rhythm and harmony that popular music, or light music (*Leichtmusik*) engender: regular beats, clean harmonies, and so on. Jazz is perceived by many listeners as going against symmetrical forms of rhythm and harmony, of breaking conventional musical forms and remaking them anew.

But it is precisely these formal characteristics that Adorno sees as debased in jazz through this schematization. They are false to the extent that they create the illusion of arhythmicality and forms of atonality when in fact they do just the opposite: they mask an inherent banality. Rhythmically, jazz provides merely an illusion of improvisation by its reliance of syncopation which Adorno sees as nothing more than masked rhythmic regularity: »In all of these syncopations, which occasionally in virtuoso pieces yield an extraordinary complexity, the fundamental beat is rigorously maintained; it is marked over and over again by the bass drum.«[15] Adorno's critical appraisal of the formal aspects of jazz therefore centers on its predictability which is masked by the appearance of spontaneity and dynamism. The banality of jazz lies therefore in its basic structure: in its overall »schema« which the soloist simply accentuates or from which he barely deviates. What appears as variation is merely the ornamentation of a highly-determined form. The problem therefore lies in what Adorno refers to as its »stereotypology« by which he means its simplicity of rhythm, harmony and melody which reduces the musical language to a series of repeated sequences and rehashed elements. The formal dullness of jazz is therefore due to »the fact that it maintains an inexorably rigid stereotypology and at the same time does everything it can to let that stereotypology be forgotten by means of individualizing elements, which are again ultimately determined by the stereotypology.«[16] It is this that serves as the basis for Adorno's use of terms such as »banal«: the extent to which the formal dimensions of jazz actually can reproduce the mechanized nature of late capitalist society. But even more importantly, it is in the way that these predictable elements in terms of form encompass the entire structure of jazz's musical language which sets the fundamental ground for Adorno's critique.

These formal aspects of jazz are of particular importance for Adorno because he wants to point out the similarities of jazz not only to more commercialized

[15] Th. W. ADORNO, On Jazz, 470-71, in *Essays on Music*.

[16] *Ibid.*, 472. It should also be noted that Adorno's critical comments on Schoenberg were directed not at his early atonal compositions which transcended all aspects of formal organization, but at the development of his 12-tone method which attempted to organize atonal music through the imposition of a system.

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popular music, but also to the more banal tendencies in »serious« music as well *à la* Delius, Sibelius, and so on. For Adorno, jazz cannot contribute to the larger aesthetic project of illuminating human freedom and utopia since by its nature it constrains and even hinders the capacity for musical progress. Its language is not one of newness, but of recycling what is already known. But it does this, not unlike the rest of popular music, by simplifying the language of music. Using Adorno's own categories of analysis, it contributes to the »regression of listening« through its repeated »utilization of certain well-defined tricks, formulas and clichés to the exclusion of everything else.«[17] The regression of listening is a key aspect to understanding Adorno's attack on jazz and popular music more broadly simply because once musical form becomes so deeply predictable, simple, banal, then the general ability for listeners to comprehend more complex formal aspects of music diminishes. What Adorno refers to as »commodity listening« has the effect of eroding subjectivity, not highlighting it. Formal simplicity is necessary for the widest distribution of cultural products. Conformity is a necessary, not contingent, result of this process. As a result, any form of individual subjectivity itself is reified and »liquidated«:

> The sacrifice of individuality, which accommodates itself to regularity of the successful, the doing of what everybody does, follows from the basic fact that in broad areas the same thing is offered to everybody by the standardized production of consumption goods. But the commercial necessity of concealing this identity leads to the manipulation of taste and the official culture's pretense of individualism, which necessarily increases in proportion to the liquidation of the individual.[18]

It is in the »manipulation of tastes« which itself results from standardization that a regression of listening takes place. This regression means that one »listens according to formula« and without any kind of resistance to the musical material itself. Listeners lack the »capacity to make demands beyond the limits« of the music that is supplied.[19] The regression of listening is made possible by the reproduction of trite, predictable musical forms, and jazz, in Adorno's reading of it, is a central part of this process of regression. Jazz is able to do this through its »fetish character«: by giving the listener the »happiness of renewed encounter,« or offering up what is already familiar to them. Ornamented rehashing of familiar tunes, simplified rhythms, harmonic structures which constantly repeat, and so on: »Beneath the opulent surface of jazz lies the—barren, unchanged, clearly detachable—most primitive harmonic-tonal scheme with its breakdown into half- and

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[17] Th. W. ADORNO, *Prisms*, 123.

[18] Th. W. ADORNO, On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening, 280, in Andrew ARATO and Eike GEBHARDT (eds.), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: Continuum Press, 1994).

[19] *Ibid.*, 285.

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full-cadences and equally primitive meter and form.«[20] The formal aspects of jazz therefore have the capacity to shape musical listening and musical experience.

Jazz is also incapable of any real musical innovations in terms of the formal nature of musical language. The real innovations had already been made »by serious music since Brahms.«[21] Indeed, »serious music,« as Adorno refers to it, is conceived by him to be an expanding tradition with many different evolutionary paths available to it. Composers such as Debussy anticipated harmonic jazz elements in his compositions and also utilized its staggered rhythmic syncopation—that of the »cakewalk«—in some of his piano *Préludes*. Even Beethoven, in the third movement of his piano sonata op. 111 utilizes a form of syncopation anticipating jazz-like rhythms. But for Debussy and Beethoven, this was merely another dimension of musical language to be explored and used. But the aficionados of jazz must remain trapped in the presence of that musical form. Jazz is static in the sense that it does not have the same expanse of musical material to work with; its language of syncopation, harmonic structure, and so on do not allow it to move beyond a relatively tightly circumscribed musical vocabulary. Although it is by no means a simple product of the culture industry, it is unable to break out of the limitations of its own formal language. All of this poses deeper problems for Adorno's conception of culture and its relationship to critical theory more broadly. Adorno's critique of jazz ought not to be read on its own, but within the context of the Hegelian conception of subjectivity he is working with: one who is shaped, and who in turn shapes, the nature of the social world through culture. For Adorno, the analysis of a work of music needs to focus on the particular way it constructs and organizes its own meaning. This meaning, however, is not something that is looked at for its own sake; the sociology of music is just that, a sociology. What is related is the ways in which musical form mediates the subject's relation to society. »In other words, sociology should not ask how music functions but how music stands in relation to the underlying antinomies of society: whether music confronts them, overcomes them, leaves them as they are or indeed hides them. Only an immanent question concerned with the form of works will lead to this.«[22]

III

For Adorno, the overriding problem with jazz was not in the fact that it was fashionable, it was in the formal aspects of it as an art form. The link between the formal qualities of a work of art—especially when analyzing music—and individual thought were essential for Adorno because he was struggling with the

[20] Th. W. ADORNO, On the Social Situation of Music, 430.

[21] Th. W. ADORNO, *Prisms*, 123.

[22] Letter from Adorno to Krenek, September 30, 1932, quoted in Gillian ROSE, *The Melancholy Science*, 110. Also see: Th. W. ADORNO, On the Social Situation of Music, 394-97.

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central problematic of critical theory: reification. Critical theory's concern with the problem of reification was simple: the lack of critical reflection in modern society was a function of capitalism and the way that political economy had structured culture and patterns of social relations. It was not to be dismissed as merely »superstructural«—as it was by orthodox Marxists—but was to be investigated as a problem in its own right. This was a move made first by Georg Lukács who saw that the problem of revolutionary social change was dependent not merely on the structure of society itself, but also, and just as importantly, with the means of reflection that individuals used to understand that structure. Consciousness was an essential category in speaking about social critique since it was only through critical reflection that there was any possibility for political action. With the political failures of the left after the rise of fascism and the emergence of the totalitarian nature of the Soviet Union, the emphasis for those who made up the project of critical theory was centered on the issue of culture and the patterns of culture that would inhibit critical consciousness.

This was the central thesis of the »culture industry« argument from the beginning. If the function of culture, of art in particular, is to somehow preserve the consciousness of human freedom, to illuminate the repressed desire for the expansion of human liberation and the creative capacities inherent in that liberation, then any form of culture which fails to perform this function leads only to our debasement as humans.[23] Jazz is not alone at fault for this, to be sure; but the reason Adorno spent time critiquing jazz was because it masqueraded as performing this function whereas he saw in its formal structure the very opposite tendency. Even worse, Adorno's critique of jazz argues that it participates in a general dumbing down of listening capacities through the banality of its formal qualities, thereby further regressing the capacity of listeners to comprehend more complex forms of musical language. The defense against reification therefore requires the critique of those cultural forms which inhibit any sense of true subjectivity—i.e., that kind of subjectivity which is in opposition to standardization, to commodification, and the reduction of human expression to the categories of exchange value.[24] This kind of culture is a »protest against integration which always violently opposes that which is qualitatively different; in a certain sense this criticism is directed against the idea of levelling unification itself.«[25]

In this sense, it is only by connecting Adorno's concept of form and seeing how this relates to his broader understanding of the operation of culture under the con-

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[23] »Culture, in the true sense, did not simply accommodate itself to human beings; but it always simultaneously raised a protest against the petrified relations under which they lived, thereby honoring them. In so far as culture becomes wholly assimilated to and integrated in those petrified relations, human beings are once more debased.« Th. W. ADORNO, The Culture Industry Reconsidered, 100, in *Adorno: The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (New York: Routledge Press, 1991).

[24] For a more developed discussion of this in relation to Adorno's critique of jazz, see Robert W. WITKIN, Why did Adorno 'Hate' Jazz?, *Sociological Theory*, vol. 18, no. 1 (March, 2000), 145-70.

[25] Th. W. ADORNO, Culture and Administration, in *Adorno: The Culture Industry*, 116.

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ditions of late capitalism that we can properly understand the critique of jazz. The connection between musical form, subjective consciousness, and the capacity of art to provide an illuminatory function in modernity is, in my view, the most fruitful way to read Adorno's jazz critique. Adorno's ideas are in line with the tradition of German aesthetics, but it is also tied to the concept of Enlightenment which saw human freedom as possible only through the actions of autonomous subjects whose freedom was grounded in throwing off what Kant referred to as their »self-imposed immaturity.« The reason the culture industry poses a threat to democratic life is because it encourages conformity, a reconciliation with non-democratic forms of life, i.e., those forms of life which are defined by asymmetrical relations of power such as those created by the market and its imperatives. Critical consciousness is dependent upon autonomous self-reflection. It is predicated on the capacity of individuals to think for themselves. The culture industry robs people of this capacity. »It impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves. These, however, would be the precondition for a democratic society which needs adults who have come of age in order to sustain itself and develop.«[26] Musical form therefore plays a crucial role in the larger project of a democratic society by means of fostering a form of knowledge of reality itself (*Erkenntnis der Realität*). The connection between critical consciousness and musical form lies in the ways in which it mediates social reality. Jazz, in this sense not unlike other forms of popular music or art, contributes to this cultural-political dilemma.

This provides a new foundation for cultural criticism in general since now cultural production becomes tied to the very nature of social and political life. One can argue about the extent to which this may or may not be the case, but Adorno's criticisms of jazz need to be read within the context of this understanding and not dismissed as mere elitism or misunderstanding. Through its predictable, stereotyped, and therefore banal nature, jazz reconciles the listener to the social system rather than place him in opposition to it. It participates in, rather than frustrates, the mechanics of the culture industry which leads to the degeneration of musical form, and musical language, and which leads to the formation of »retarded listeners.« Adorno comes to this conclusion from an immanent analysis of musical form itself, not from cultural assumptions about jazz or popular music more broadly. In this sense, Adorno's critique of jazz takes on a new relevance with the deepening of the culture industry and its effects. The crucial task of cultural criticism therefore becomes unmasking the extent to which cultural products have social and indeed political effects. It must also concern itself with the emancipatory nature of culture, of music in particular, that »surviving message of despair from the shipwrecked.«[27]

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[26] Th. W. ADORNO, The Culture Industry Reconsidered, 106.
[27] Th. W. ADORNO, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, 133.

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Sažetak

Th. W. Adorno obranjen pred njegovim kritičarima i poštovateljima: obrana kritike jazza

Ovaj je članak analiza i obrana kritičkog stava o jazz glazbi Theodora Wiesengrunda Adorna. Adorno je tvrdio da su jazz – i drugi oblici popularne glazbe – inferiorne forme glazbe kad ih se ocjenjuje s nekih sociooloških gledišta. On konkretno kritizira sposobnost jazza da djeluje u smjeru smanjenja moći slušateljâ i tako ih čini neprijemčivima za složenije forme glazbenog jezika i izričaja. Adornova argumentacija raspoređena je po mnogo raznih članaka o različitim glazbenim temama, a autorova je namjera da u ovome članku rekonstruira Adornovu argumentaciju na temelju drukčijeg akcenta – Adornova implicitnog odnosa spram društveno-psiholoških učinaka glazbene forme na moć estetičke prosudbe u pojedinaca.

U tu svrhu analizira se Adornov pristup jazzu i potom se nastavlja s prikazivanjem toga kako njegova argumentacija ovisi o načinima na koje glazbena forma tvori jezik glazbenih djela te da formalne karakteristike svakoga djela mogu ili ometati ili proširivati spontane stvaralačke misaone procese pojedinaca. Kadgod je glazbena forma u stanju umanjiti te moći slušateljâ – uslijed strukturnog formalizma, otrcanih glazbenih 'izuma', ili bilo koje vrste predvidivosti (fetišizam) – dolazi do »regresije slušanja«: slušatelji u većoj mjeri postaju nesposobni razumjeti i shvatiti složenije i izazovnije glazbene forme. Za Adorna jazz je glavni krivac za postojanje i djelovanje takve vrste glazbene forme ne samo zbog svoje posvemašnje prisutnosti nego još više zbog toga što se skriva iza krinke spontane umjetnosti. Stoga Adornova raščlamba glazbenih forma jazza vodi s njegovih društveno-teorijskih gledišta spram kritičke ocjene jazza.

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