# ADORNO ON MUSIC AND POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to discern and assess Theodor Adorno's theories on music as an 'art' and how it impacts both the political and social landscape of society; more broadly, the purposes of this paper is to identify, and determine the significance of, the relationship between music and politics – that is, whether or not, and how, music can emancipate society from capitalist enslavement. In juxtaposing Adorno's theories, the opinions of Herbert Marcuse will be discussed as well. As both theorists are considered integral to the creation and development of critical theory of the Frankfurt School, it is only logical to examine their theories and ideologies in detail to determine the role of music as an 'art' in the overarching scheme of political scaffolding within which society resides.

*Keywords*: Adorno, Marcuse, critical theory, music, art, Marxism, emancipation, Frankfurt School, culture industry, bourgeoisie class, mass deception, mass enslavement, class conflict, 'autonomous' art, jazz music, 'pop' music, swing bands, 12-tone scale, 'extremes', 'high art', 'low art', capitalism, modernity, modernism, mass consciousness, propaganda, conformity, anti-conformity, culture, liberation, false consciousness, false needs, 'dark' art, commercialization, commodification, commodity fetish, fetish of music, technique, tonality, atonality, Mahler, Schoenberg, 'art for art's sake', critical reflection, status quo.

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Declaration of Academic Achievement

I have written this entire thesis. All words and phrases, unless cited, are my own. I have conducted the research, and compiled arguments based on said research, myself.

# SETTING THE STAGE – AN INTRODUCTION

## Critical Theory as a Paradigm

At first glance, it would not be absurd to assume that the terms 'politics' and 'music' are not often used in the same sentence; generally speaking, and particularly, in a theoretical sense, politics, and everything to do with it, is usually not thought of as the most 'creative' realm of scholarly pursuit. While traditionalist modes of political theory (i.e. realism) tend to shy away from 'artsy' ideals or creative notions, opting instead for a highly structured and rather scientific method of analysis, critical theory does precisely the opposite.

With the prevalence of critical theory and the Frankfurt School of Thought, it has come to light that politics and 'art' *do* affect one another; there is a distinct and significant relationship between the two. The question is not, therefore, *whether* the two realms coalesce, but *how*—this study, then, aims to illustrate the ways in which the two go hand in hand, and the effects of music, or more broadly, 'art', has on the political realm, and effectively, society as a whole. The lens through which the relationship between music and politics is most evident is in critical theory, that which, evidently, is much more permissive of a rather creative view of the world than more traditional paradigms of political theory. Critical theory, in a nutshell, allows for a much more expansive and encompassing outlook, that which is significantly more abstract. The theory itself is influenced significantly by principles of Communism, Marxism, and Socialism, arguing that capitalism is one of, if not *the* most, debilitating threats to society. Critical theory ascertains that the current social order of society is fundamentally wrong; it views modernity in and of itself as the true culprit behind the

prevalence of capitalism, which is propelled by the continuously overwhelming domination over the masses by the bourgeoisie.

To stifle this, change on a societal level (whether through rebellion, revolution, social upheaval, et cetera) is not only necessary to free the masses from enslavement, but also to enable 'enlightenment' amongst the masses, to remove inequality, and to achieve *true happiness* (Adorno, 2002: 12, 248; Marcuse, 1991: 250-251). Critical theory argues that current society is muddled by modernity insofar as it enables it; modernity (i.e. capitalism) perpetuates the disparity between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie class whilst 'dumbing down' the masses into accepting the circumstances through the 'culture industry' (that which spreads propaganda amongst the masses and generates 'false needs'); humanity's understanding of reality is therefore inaccurate and corrupt, and as such, happiness (misrepresented by the 'culture industry') is nothing but a sham. The aim of critical theory thus becomes evident: to reflect on and change the social order of current society (Marcuse, 1969: 72).

Critical theory, generally, is geared towards enabling an alternative mode of thought that is both critical and reflective of the situation, what led to the situation, and previous theories before it; it, clearly, embeds within it the need for criticism; it does not accept the previous, 'comfortable' ways of the world. Instead, it looks toward change; while this may seem to be perpetuated on somewhat exalted claims, it should be stressed that these ideals, though abstract, allow for a more expansive, 'clearer' picture of things; hence, because critical theory calls for change (and on a rather grand level), it enables for meaningful reflection to take place to *determine* why and how the current social order needs to reform (Paddison, 10-16). Until capitalism is abolished and social equality is restored (and effectively, true, unadulterated happiness), this will be a continuous, collective struggle for all of humanity.

It should be stated that the behavior of humanity as a collective is fueled continuously by political evolvement, not least of which social and psychological advancement has played a role. Human nature may be observed in a multitude of settings, but to limit it *only* to the playing field of the 'hard science' that is traditional dimensions of politics is absurd. Put succinctly, the *political* is not strictly political – it is far more than that, and critical theory recognizes this. Critical theory suggests that the 'political' can be observed in a variety of different realms to get the 'full picture' and to enable meaningful reflection (and potentially change on a societal level). As such, it is only logical to assess the effects of 'art', and in particular, music, on politics (i.e. the potential for emancipation). Art, of course, may be intellectually stimulating or act as a form of entertainment—the details of these nuances (i.e. what constitutes different types of 'art', the effects on the potential for emancipation) will be examined in regard to Theodor Adorno and juxtaposed against Herbert Marcuse, arguably some of the most influential theorists of the Frankfurt School.

**The Issue**

Both Adorno and Marcuse are of the opinion that with modernity comes capitalism, and with capitalism comes mass production (i.e. quantity over quality, standardization, and commodification), deception (i.e. the true situation of society is 'sugar-coated' and effectively hidden; 'false needs' take precedence over *real* needs, and *true* happiness is but a mere façade) , and domination (i.e. the masses are manipulated and controlled by the bourgeoisie class in nearly all aspects of life)—all of which are products of the 'culture industry' (an idea that will be expanded upon in the latter portions of the study); art, of course, is no exception to this quandary. Art that is manufactured and propelled by capitalism works to achieve the capitalist 'ends' of the

bourgeoisie whilst distorting the 'truth' and keeping the masses content; art, then, acts as a vessel through which capitalism and the bourgeoisie class can continue to manipulate the masses into being content with the current social order – or, it can bring to light the problems of society and elicit the 'people' to seek change. Music, as a part of 'art', therefore, can either make or break the situation; how it impacts the masses, then, becomes the topic in question. Evidently, specific *types* and *styles* of music (i.e. jazz, 'pop'/dance music, classical) all play a role in the political schema. Adorno maintains complex stances on the effects of different music as an 'art' on the potential for human emancipation; it is my aim to explicate his views and assess them in relation to Marcuse's.

**Purpose of Research**

This study, fundamentally, seeks to discern the nature of the relationship between music and politics through the lens of critical theory (and the Frankfurt School of Thought); in so doing, it will be determined how different types of art (i.e. 'high' art and 'low' art, with focus on music) affects society, and ultimately, enables or disables the potential for emancipation. In an effort to provide an expansive analysis on the matter, Adorno's views on art and politics will be discussed contra Marcuse's. In so doing, we may be better able to determine the effects of 'high art' that Adorno favors, and the degree of threat that 'low art' produced by the culture industry poses for society on a general scale.

**Why Adorno and Marcuse?**

It is of merit to briefly touch upon both thinkers' backgrounds in an attempt to clarify their relevance to their research (and simultaneously, my own). In addition to producing complex

political works, Adorno dabbled in music journalism (Leppert, 1-18); that, coupled with the fact that he had composed pieces himself, illustrates the substance and legitimation of Adorno's work. Eventually, he joined the Institute for Social Research at Frankfurt University, where Marcuse, too, had secured a position, and the rest, as they say, was history (Leppert, 1-18).

The Frankfurt School offers a vast array of different theorists that work with aesthetics (or untraditional fields of thought that encompass 'critical theory') and politics; however, the focus is placed on Adorno in particular for a multitude of reasons, the most obvious being that the sheer magnitude of his theories and the multi-faceted reflections imbued in them, that which brazenly goes where not many theorists dare tread (that is, the nitty gritty of it all—the harsh truth), is unmatched in quality. Adorno's work is undoubtedly different—it is controversial (and incredibly interesting), but also revolutionary; Marcuse's, though more liberal than his counterpart, is too; there is a reason both remain such integral figures in critical theory.

Adorno and Marcuse weave together two distinct realms of society: 'art', or broadly, 'aesthetics' (which can be viewed as cultural and sociological products, or measures, of humanity's advancement), and the traditional and conceptually 'scientific' (and arguably, drier) field of politics and political theory. The mixture of the two disciplines is no easy pill to swallow; Adorno's and Marcuse's ability to transcend traditional boundaries of previously acceptable frameworks of study (i.e. the 'hard science' that is politics, generally) brings forth a number of benefits; by imploring unorthodox methods of assessment, i.e. looking at the ways in which one expresses herself in day-to-day activities, and by the same token, how one *understands* the world around her (often through *non*-political means i.e. 'art') generates a more *complete* picture of the implicitly-founded structures ingrained in society.

Put simply, 'art', being that of the more abstract and creative realm, and one that is clearly far from the type of traditional science that political theory (and even early stages of critical theory) is most often associated with, amounts to a fairly limiting view of the world, and subsequently, any analysis of it. This would, indubitably, make for a less than fruitful endeavor; taking into account different faculties of human development vis a vis assessing the psychological and social patterns in human life through creative expression, and *how* that creative expression is received, and ultimately, how it translates into class consciousness—gives way to the truth behind the matter, and, quite frankly, is very telling of society's struggles and the real issues at hand—those of which are, in effect, political. Both theorists look toward the realm of 'art' for simply this reason: to form a more complete understanding of the world, and potentially, to change it—being that Adorno and Marcuse both value art as indispensable to human life, and more specifically, more than adequate means of studying society and offering the potential for societal improvement, it is only fitting that they be discussed.

# MODERNITY

The literature argues that capitalism, as an extension of modernity, has created an ideological chassis through which preconceived social norms are implicated; these social norms, evidently, are based on the notion of sugar-coated ideals that are both corrupt and false. Class consciousness, then, is manipulated by capitalism vis a vis the 'culture industry' to conform to these molds of 'false happiness' produced by the exchange system, which leads to the continuous enslavement and ultimately, the deterioration, of society as a collective. It is imperative that, for Adorno and Marcuse, society must undergo change to be socially, and psychologically, liberated. (Adorno, 1975: 237; Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 127). This 'change' would ultimately necessitate a broadening of the horizons, so to speak, which would, indelibly, constitute a shift in focus onto music—ostensibly, meaningful change in praxis would require a theological change first; this is where 'art', and more specifically, music, comes into play.

## The Problem

The problem at its core is the fact that modernity, and more specifically, the 'culture industry', has eroded class consciousness through its mass produced, easily accessible, highly sugar-coated forms of 'art', and specifically in the context of the research, music. Music often produced by the culture industry, the likes of which are usually easy on the ears, tends to lack potential for meaningful critical reflection on the current state of society, and effectively, hinders the possibility for change (Leppert, 96-97; Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 134; 136).

The literature suggests that music that tends to appeal to the masses, appears to continue to propagate the masses into being content with the current and *corrupt* order of society. Adorno

(and similarly, Marcuse) argue certain styles of art, to varying degrees, manipulates the masses into a state of passivity and acceptance, causing the public to 'tune out' (Adorno, *The Culture Industry,* 134, 136) the true nature of society; congruently, Adorno argues that the masses *themselves* become ignorant of this occurring and of their own manipulation (and effectively, their role, in the process). This, the literature suggests, results in a diminished sense of motivation to change the current social order, due, mainly, to the fact that society is essentially blind to the underlying issues within and of society, and to their own role as enablers of the situation. The masses, thus, are rendered passive and immobile in enacting change, an issue that proves very threatening to Adorno, in particular.

Modernity is thus the culprit of society's descent into a capitalistic state of inequality and domination, and effectively, it's downfall. With the bourgeoisie class controlling the reigns of this 'project of modernity', the capitalist endeavor continues to flourish; capitalism, under the guise of 'improvement', 'advancement', and 'progress'—dictates the ways of the world – the capitalist market allows for products and services to be mass produced and monetized vis a vis the system of exchange, reducing both the value and individuality of said product, service, and the individual herself (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 95, 97; 104, 108).

As highlighted in most of the literature consulted, the problem at large remains to be the fact that the masses, as a collective, are blinded by the so-called 'false reality' that modern society (vis a vis the culture industry) perpetuates; to best understand this line of thought, it would be of merit to dissect the ways in which modernity has manipulated society into wanting—more accurately, *needing* (this 'need', though, is a 'false' equivalency, of course), easily-reproducible, standardized products and services, and how *that,* in turn, has ultimately distorted society. Adorno and Marcuse both go to great lengths to delineate the reproduction

process of goods and services in the modern, technologically-advanced day and age of current society; the 'sameness' that Adorno speaks of refers to, essentially, everything that is produced by the 'culture industry'—even our identities and expectations (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 125, 134, Thus, it is adamant we expound upon the theory of the culture industry (as put forth by the Frankfurt School) *itself* before going forth with our exegesis of the highly-mechanized format of 'needs/wants', 'mass-production', and ultimately, 'falseness', that exist in modern society.

**Capitalism**

Capitalism, of course, is an invention of modernity; this is not a surprising factor, nor *should* it be—modernity, hailed for its perceived 'open-mindedness', 'newness', and 'betterment', insists, for lack of a better word, that everything be improved—whether or not this 'improvement' is necessary, or for that matter, actually an *improvement* at all, is debatable. The point being made here is that the so-called improvements that modernity is laced with are highly complex and nuanced, not only for the fact that they are multi-faceted, but more significantly, for the simple reason that they carry with them a variety of 'side-effects', those of which arguably outweigh the perceived 'benefits' modernity has to offer.

With modernization comes technological advancement, enabling "...reproduction processes [that] which inevitably lead to the use of standard products to meet the same needs at countless locations…" (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 95) which, at first glance, does not seem to be an entirely horrible thing. However, despite the fact that these products and services are said to be based on what *we* want, our needs, Adorno suggests that these are not actually what we want, but what the culture industry *tells* us we want, and these reproduced, standardized products actually *corrupt* the masses:

> "[T]he standardized forms, it is claimed, we originally derived from the needs of the consumers: that is why they are accepted with so little resistance. In reality, a cycle of manipulation and retroactive need is unifying the system ever more tightly. What is not mentioned is that the basis on which technology is gaining power over society is the power of those whose economic position in society is strongest. Technical rationality today is the rationality of domination. It is the compulsive character of society alienated from itself…" (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 95-96).

This is Adorno's (and Marcuse's) claim in a nutshell—that is, modernity promises easier access to things that are seemingly necessary to live better and more 'advanced' lives, or more 'pleasant' ones, at the very least, but underneath the 'easy' and 'accessible' features of the 'means of exchange' model of capitalism lies a much darker truth; while capitalism advertises itself as a benefit for society, offering things that are 'desired' by the population and *needed*, the truth of the matter is far less easy to stomach.

Thus, Adorno's theory of mass propagandization and collective passivity that which stems from the culture industry brings to light the issue that genuine, individual thought and consciousness is almost totally, if not entirely, suppressed. Modern society, according to Adorno, enables the culture industry vis a vis capitalism to entrap the masses into a collective, propagandized subconscious that is both distorted and corrupted by the bourgeoisie in control.

The issue at large remains to be the fact that humanity in its entirety is inveigled into molding itself into an incredibly prejudiced social order that befits the bourgeoisie class and the bourgeoisie class *only*; in configuring itself to fit these predetermined, rigid, morally debasing 'norms' of modern society, humanity not only continues to deceive itself into following these norms, but it inhibits itself from producing any meaningful thought—thought that can enact change, thought that can liberate itself from this unruly mass deception and bourgeoisie enslavement.

**The 'Culture Industry'**

A large part of modernity is the birth of the 'culture industry', a term made popular by Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002)—that is, the system set in place in modern society that which is fuelled by capitalism and controlled by the bourgeoisie class; the 'culture industry' produces mechanized and standardized products and services, manipulates the masses into believing they *need* these products and services, and ultimately, has set in motion a never-ending cycle of mass-production that claims to fulfill the 'false' wants and needs of society (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 95-96). However, before delving into the throes of the different facets of the culture industry, it is imperative that we discern the term 'culture industry' *itself.*

The term 'culture industry' was utilized prominently in the text, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002), wherein Adorno and Horkheimer referred to the phenomena of the turn to mass deception and collective submission to the bourgeoisie in control of nearly everything. It should be noted that Adorno mentions that the term 'culture industry' was initially referred to as 'mass culture' in the previous drafts of the work, however, to eliminate confusion surrounding the belief that 'mass culture' may insinuate, that is, that the masses *choose* said culture to suit their collective needs, echoing the notion that, perhaps, the whole aspect of 'culture' is something malleable and voluntarily (and knowingly) adopted by the masses. This is precisely not the case, as Adorno explains that culture is *not* something the masses choose willy-nilly (Adorno, 1975: 12); 'culture' (specifically, in the *modern* sense) is not dictated by the interests or needs of the masses—inversely, 'culture' actually dictates what the masses want, not the other way around. If one were to take a step back and assess the relationship between 'culture' and society, the image could potentially become quite murky; it is a confusing, if not multi-faceted

apparatus that exists in contemporary life. However, in the following section, my aim here is to dissect, through and through, the exact nature of this 'cycle'.

As established previously, the relationship between the culture aspect of 'culture industry' and the masses (or, society) is not dictated by what the masses 'want'; the 'wants' of the masses are dictated by the culture industry. The aim of capitalism first and foremost is to produce more for less, and this undoubtedly results in the quality of products and services deteriorating in favor of their multiplicity. Not only does the quality of the product suffer, but so do we—this, of course, is not to be understood in the sense that we suffer *physically,* (though, that may occur too in some way)—the 'suffering' here refers to the notion that society, as a collective, falls victim to manipulation and exploitation (much in the same way that Marxism paints the picture of the never-ending struggle of the proletariat class), and, our subconscious, our intellectual faculties, and our abilities to *think* for ourselves, in turn (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 95-96; 125-126; 200). This 'cycle' entails within it the conundrum of 'quantity over quality', which presents itself as the so-called 'trend' of modern society time and time again. Arguably, the idea of 'quantity over quality' within the scope of modernism (and by virtue of modernism, the culture industry) cannot be more perfectly ascribed to any analysis than this one that Adorno puts forth:

> [A] cycle of manipulation and retroactive need is unifying the system ever more tightly. What is not mentioned is that the basis on which technology is gaining power over society is the power of those whose economic position in society is strongest… For the present the technology of the culture industry confines itself to standardization and mass production and sacrifices what once distinguished the logic of the work from that of society. Any need which might escape the central control is repressed by that of individual consciousness. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 95-96).

The culture industry produces more for less, sacrificing quality over quantity, all the while exploiting the masses into 'buying-in' into their propaganda. Nearly *everything* is

automated, standardized, and more accessible; people are reduced to mere 'workers', everyone is alienated from their fellow man, and quality is overlooked or disregarded entirely; the culture industry produces services, products, and mindless entertainment for all to enjoy, regardless of the *truth* that actually exists—the horrors of reality are brushed under the carpet in favor of more pleasant things, however artificial they may be; society is essentially 'manufactured' into constantly wearing rose-tinted glasses and succumbing to the propagation that the culture industry generates. We, as society, are thus blinded by the culture industry and the 'false reality' that is perpetuated by it, and *this,* Adorno argues, is the current situation of modern society as it stands. As Adorno puts it, "the mentality of the public, which allegedly and actually favors the system of the culture industry, is a part of the system, not an excuse for it (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 96).

Adorno's claim here rests on the notion that this standardization and commercialization that modernity is enveloped in leads to a loss in identity, individualization, and meaningful critical reflection to reconsider the world and the situation therein, that which could potentially be reformed for the better. Essentially, the erasure of identity and individualization, that which can be thought of as the ability to 'think for one's self', or the *desire* to do so, negates even the *potential* for reflection, for change, for anything. We now arrive to the concept of 'conformity', which plays an exceptionally significant role in the schema of the culture industry and, as a whole, modernity.

So now, the question of how capitalism permeates culture so much, and by extension, how it is possible that the prevalence of commodification reverberates to social degrees, can be considered more analytically. The previous discussion evidently points to the fact that society's needs, *en masse*, are manufactured by the culture industry and, as a result of the flourishment of

capitalism, the masses are essentially slaves to the 'system'; critical theory continuously attests to this being the case. The culture industry produces things, we are told we want them, we buy them, and the cycle continues. Everything is *mass produced* – capitalism, concomitantly, thrives.

Marcuse shares much of Adorno's views on modernity, though he describes the issue(s) of modernity as being birthed from the dissolvement, or social disinterest (urged, of course, by the bourgeoisie class and the turn to commodification), in 'higher culture'. Marcuse makes clear that the high culture, or 'high art' (that which can lead to critical reflection to assess the situation and consider alternative ways of life, etc.), is not completely obliterated in modern society, but it is brushed under the carpet, and the 'conflict' between 'art' and 'reality', that which always exists and will continue to, is diminished, lending humanity into a passive and unresponsive state, wherein individuals submit themselves to the pre-determined social orders (that which we know are wrong, by nature), and refuse to call upon their mental faculties to reflect on the situation and *imagine* different potentials, see the other side of the coin, and consider new possibilities. As Marcuse puts it,

> Today's novel feature is the flattening out of the antagonism between culture and social reality through the obliteration of the oppositional, alien, and transcendent elements in the higher culture by virtue of which it constituted *another dimension* of reality. This liquidation of *two-dimensional* culture takes place not through the denial and rejection of the "cultural values," but through their wholesale incorporation into the established order, through their reproduction and display on a massive scale. (Marcuse, 1991: 60-61).

Thus, as the conflict between the 'real' and the 'potential' weakens, so too does one's motivation and *imagination.* Through modernity, Marcuse suggests that the capability and the willingness to imagine a different social structure in place (which in itself is an act of rebellion against the faulty norms of society), is effectively undermined, and thus, the so-called 'gap' between what is real and what is not becomes more narrow, and not only becomes less

achievable, but almost incorporeal. The potential for individuality and critical reflection is almost entirely negated by the culture industry, forcing society to cease all reflective thought and completely submit itself to the threshold of capitalism. Intertwined in all of this, we can see that society's inability to meaningfully reflect on itself and the social structures embedded within it, is fortified by the collective disengagement from what can be broken down to essentially 'creative intellectuality', or, in Marcuse's work, the 'second-dimension'.

In *One-Dimensional Man* (1991), Marcuse puts forth a riveting account of the 'first-dimension', which can be considered in terms of the present situation, and the 'second-dimension'—the 'alternative', or more specifically, the 'possible'. With capitalism, Marcuse argues the 'gap' is closing; the 'gap' between the two dimensions (the first dimension, which represents 'reality', or 'what is'—the current situation; the second dimension represents the 'possible', so, essentially, the two dimensions constitute of 'what is' and 'what *could* be', respectively). In blatant terms, the 'gap' between the two dimensions acts as fertile grounds for critical reflection, or, in other words, 'imagination'—critical thinking can flourish in this 'gap' between 'what is' and 'what is possible', allowing the masses to consider alternative ways of life and potentially spur change (Marcuse, 1991: 64).

Capitalism (and consumer-culture) has steadily narrowed this 'gap'—the culture industry essentially infiltrates the 'private' lives of the masses and manipulates then in skillfully subtle ways; through the culture industry, 'public' opinion (that is, the opinion of the domineering forces i.e. the culture industry) stealthily slides into almost every part of the 'private' lives of the masses. So, the corrupt norms and standards of which current society is based on finds its way into every crevice, nook, and cranny, of 'private' domains of life (i.e. at home, for example) (Marcuse, 1991: 8-10).

The ‘second-dimension’ encapsulates the notion of culture as critique (1964); Marcuse suggests that culture (which includes the focal point of this paper, that being, art), can fight against the one-dimensional life that capitalism and the culture industry has caused—culture (art) lets you rebel against said creative/intellectual repression, but with modernity, the ‘gap’ between the first dimension and the second widens, which poses a great threat to Marcuse, and as previously shown, Adorno. The ‘gap’, Marcuse explains, refers to the ability to consider different ways of life that are *not* enmeshed within the sameness of modernity, the conformity of mass-produced culture, the prevailing order of society.

Individuals lose the motivation and the interest to consider alternative modes of life, or to look at the ‘bigger picture’, or to even enact their more creative mental faculties, in favor of the more structured expectations and ‘cut-outs’ modern society provides for them. The ‘potential’, then, becomes just a pipe dream that seems futile to even consider, and the endless cycle of propagation, deception, and inevitably, domination to the social order, shows no signs of dwindling (Marcuse, 1991: 84-85; 248-251).

It appears that both analyses overlap, here; Adorno views modernity as being the all-consuming cloud of domination and degradation for humanity, and while Marcuse’s viewpoint seems perhaps a little less daunting, it too sheds light on the fact that humanity is deprived of critical reflection, and the notion that the possibility of things being different is clouded by the propagation and mass deception stemming from modernity *vis a vis* the culture industry and technological advancement.

Following this line of thought, modernity can be thus labelled as not only the catalyst for ultimate domination and oppression of the masses, but also, the instigation for it. Therefore, the fate of humanity is almost guaranteed to end in travesty, as the masses are, and continue to be,

dominated over by the capitalist, bourgeoisie pigs that run the so-called 'show'—that being, the social structures and norms of society at large. The social norms of society, argues Adorno, is founded on pre-determined norms and standards that society as a collective are expected to follow; these 'molds' are so deeply embedded in the foundational aspects of modern society that it seems almost impossible to escape them. Humanity, then, at its current state, is so hypnotized by the propaganda the culture industry spews out, that it is accepting of, and comfortable with, its own enslavement. This renders the problem to be two-pronged; not only is the Bourgeoisie-led culture industry a danger to society, but the masses, blinded by 'false reality' that society itself perpetuates, willingly conform to, and are complicit in, the reign of capitalism.

***Order and Conformity – the Clasp of False Consciousness***

The misconception surrounding the culture industry is often that it merely provides a social order amidst the madhouse that is reality; in this way, it can be understood that society acknowledges the 'order' the culture industry places upon them, but refuses to see it for what it really is: deception. Adorno explains, "in a supposedly chaotic world it [the culture industry] provides human beings with something like standards for orientation, and that alone seems worthy of approval," (Adorno, 1975: 235).

However, this, in essence, is one of the finest examples of a society in shambles, or, to use Adorno's colorful terminology, a society entrenched in "false consciousness". In *Culture Industry Reconsidered* (1975), Adorno expertly crafts an exposition of the type of 'order' that the culture industry offers, and why, contrary to popular assumption, the so-called 'order' within the culture industry provides no relief from the chaos of the world at all; in fact, it does the complete

opposite. Adorno actually suggests the idea of any functioning 'order' is completely distorted by the culture industry.

> The idea of an objectively binding order, huckstered to people because it is so lacking for them, has no claims if it does not prove itself internally and in confrontation with human beings. But this is precisely what no product of the culture industry would engage in. The concepts of order which it hammers into human beings are always those of the status quo. They remain unquestioned, unanalyzed, and undialectically presupposed, even if they no longer have any substance for those who accept them.
> (Adorno, 1975: 17).

And,

> T]he categorical imperative of the culture industry no longer has anything in common with freedom. It proclaims you shall conform, without instruction as to what; conform to that which exists anyway… [t]he power of the culture industry's ideology is such that conformity has replaced consciousness. *(*Adorno, 1975: 17).

Adorno states that, because of the capitalist-encrusted structures of society that capitalism is enthralled in, class division and domination by the bourgeoisie flourishes; those that accept this 'order' (or fall victim to it) relinquish the ability to question the norms and standards thrown at them; clearly, for Adorno, the so-called 'order' of modernity only perpetuates the status quo. In a similar vein, Marcuse suggests that the structure of an 'industrial', capitalist-driven society, and the so-called 'order' that stems from said industrial society, enables such a firm and corrupt system of organization that the 'order' it brings with it is not order at all, but an exercise in authoritarianism and totalitarian leadership masked under deception (Marcuse, 1991: 5).

Marcuse explains, too, that this 'wrong' structure of industrialized, advanced society, that which demands ultimate conformity and disregards alternative modes of thought, manifests itself in a never-ending cycle of cause and effect, stating, "this false consciousness has become embodied in the prevailing technical apparatus which in turn reproduces it," (Marcuse, 1991:

149). Therefore, the 'order' of society not only causes the subjugation of the masses to its debased ways, but it also continues to cement the false notions of conformity within itself.

To further delve into Adorno's notion of conformity that the culture industry instills, it would be useful to look at Marcuse's thoughts on 'order' and deceit; in *One-Dimensional Man* (1991), Marcuse provides a valuable breakdown of the 'needs' of society, those of which are 'false', curated by the culture industry, and those that are 'true', or 'vital'—real, *actual* needs:

> "False" are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice… Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs (Marcuse, 1991: 5).

Here, Marcuse is suggesting that the influence of the culture industry keeps society enthralled in its control; it perpetuates these false needs (those of which are curbed by propaganda of all sorts), and society becomes enmeshed in them, and once it is ensnared in this web of deceit, the line between 'false' needs and 'true' needs are blurred, and the 'false' needs become one in the same as reality. The idea of societal 'order' spawned by the culture industry resurfaces through the acceptance of long-standing social norms that fit in with the status quo and are fed to the masses on repeat, shoving it down their throats like there's no tomorrow, thereby manipulating 'reality' to serve the bourgeoisie agenda. The 'order' of society is distorted into being the order of the culture industry, and the masses accept it:

> [T]he irresistible output of the entertainment and information industry carry with them prescribed attitudes and habits, certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumers more or less pleasantly to the producers, and through the latter, to the whole. The products indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood. And as these beneficial products become available to more individuals in more social classes, the indoctrination they carry ceases to be publicity; it becomes a way of life. (Marcuse, 1991: 16).

The fact that the prevalence of the culture industry's influence establishes itself and is ultimately socially accepted, as part of normalcy, a "way of life," (16), illustrates the severity of the hold that the bourgeoisie have on the masses vis a vis the culture industry. In this sense, connections between Adorno's assays of society being duped and accepting the norms that the culture industry upholds, and Marcuse's views, which highlight, similarly, the notion of society conforming to the norms of modernity and the products of the culture industry indoctrinating society; this correlation is made all the more interesting when further scrutinized.

It can be argued that both theorists see it that society is manipulated by the culture industry as a vehicle of conformity induced by modernity; we can see, also, that humanity is so blinded by the 'benefits' of the culture industry and, with the ease of its accessibility (coupled with the underlying factor that is the historically embedded web of socially-constructed norms, categories, and expectations)—it seems rather logical that society would adhere to these said norms, and accept them as a foundational aspect of life. This is all to say that, as proposed by both Adorno and Marcuse, manipulation, conformity, and deceit all become, and continue to be a part of, modern life.

**Entertainment, Amusement, and the Culture Industry**

The culture industry is often synonymous with the 'entertainment industry'; after all, the culture industry acts, sometimes with and without knowledge of 'the people' involved, as a form of distraction from reality. This much is evident. However, as highlighted by much of critical theory, what the people want is not *actually* what they want, or, to put it more precisely, perhaps they want it, but those instincts—those desires—are ungenuine. No, perhaps not exactly ungenuine—they *are* genuine insofar as capitalism and the culture industry fuels these desires

and engrains them in humanity. The masses are told what they want, when they want it, and how, and, lured by the accessibility of these products and services that are promised to them, and of course, their cheap price tag and the fleeting moments of satisfaction they may offer (again, not genuine, according to Adorno), the masses happily jump at the chance to have them headfirst. On this, Adorno explains:

> The phrase, the world wants to be deceived, has become truer than ever intended. People are not only, as the saying goes, falling for the swindle; if it guarantees them even the most fleeting gratification, they desire a deception which is nonetheless transparent to them. They force their eyes shut and voice approval, in a kind of self-loathing, for what is meted out to them, knowing fully the purpose for which it is manufactured. Without admitting it they sense that their lives would be completely intolerable as soon as they no longer clung to satisfactions which are none at all.
> (Adorno, 1975: 16).

Adorno here suggests that the masses choose to be deceived because it is the 'easy thing to do'; it is more comfortable, it is more pleasant, it is relaxing—deception (and more broadly, capitalism) offers relief to the masses from the daily hardships of life. Of course, this is entirely his point—that *because* it offers relief, the masses fall silent and passive; however, despite this, the fact remains that the masses *choose* to be deceived in modern, capitalist led society not necessarily because they are 'dumb' (although, they may be that, too), but because they *want* the comfort capitalism has to offer. Capitalism so curtly proclaims 'don't think, we'll think *for* you,', and the masses, perhaps aware of this subtle form of manipulation, accept it, and *want* it.

Adorno often notes that, despite the image the culture industry crafts of itself (namely, that it is by and for the masses), the nature of the relationship between the culture industry and the masses maintains no semblance of truth to this idealized image whatsoever. In *Culture Industry Reconsidered* (1975), Adorno explains, "the culture industry… speculates on the conscious and unconscious state of the millions towards which it is directed," and, more specifically, "the masses are not primary but secondary, they are an object of calculation… [part]

of the machinery," (Adorno, 1975: 232). The 'machinery' is the key word in this passage as it illustrates the economic paradigm through which the culture industry functions and continues to maintain its status as overarching controller of society.

In further statements, more detail gives way to the structure of this system, particularly in Adorno's suggestion that, "the customer is not king, as the culture industry would like us to believe, not its subjects but it's object" (Adorno, 1975: 232). Adorno, by using the term 'customer' to describe the masses that which the culture industry, it's services and it's goods, are allegedly produced for, already alludes to the nature of the relationship between the two facets—that being, the masses are the 'customer' or 'client' and the culture industry *controls* the customer in what is essentially a fully calculated, economic 'formula', based entirely on the principle of 'exchange value'.

The 'falsehood' of society soon becomes 'fact', or, more precisely, the culture industry, with its firm hold of the masses, steers the direction of thought to suit specific, vested interests of the bourgeoisie; what is not reality—what is not *true*, can actually *become* reality if thrown onto the masses in a convincing manner, which is exactly the case in modern society. 'Fact' becomes 'fiction', 'fiction' becomes 'fact', in this strange, modern world.

This phenomenon is inflamed by the hearty role of propaganda and , of course—seen in a variety of forms, some subtle and some less so, entertainment (cinema, television, music, anything that is produced by the culture industry and that which offers a form of 'relief', or distraction, from reality), is embedded with false notions of society that lie cloaked in a veil of 'newness' and 'innovation', or, what the culture industry markets as being something to desire, to want, to look up to, are prime examples. We know now that just because it is labelled as being 'good' or 'useful' or 'pleasant' does not make it so, and similarly, those concepts and images and

products and beliefs that are repeated consistently and are collectively viewed as 'reality' is more often than not, *not* actually reality. However, the continuous manipulation of the masses by the bourgeoisie through the guise of the culture industry indicates that, in tandem to this overwhelming influx of propaganda onto the masses, humanity garners a certain level of *dependence* (under duress, of course) on the ideology (and accompanying products, services, images, and standards) manufactured by the culture industry. Adorno on this matter suggests:

> If the culture industry is measured not buy its own substance and logic, but by its efficacy, by its position in reality and its explicit pretentions; if the focus of serious concern is with the efficacy to which it always appeals, the potential of its effects becomes twice as weighty. This potential, however, lies in the promotion and exploitation of the ego-weakness to which the powerless members of contemporary society, with its concentration of power, are condemned… [i]t is no coincidence that cynical American film producers are heard to say that their pictures must take into consideration the level of eleven year olds. In doing so they would very much like to make adults into eleven-year-olds (Adorno, 1975: 237).

Adorno delves further into the effects of manipulation through seemingly 'harmless' forms of entertainment (or 'low' art, if using Adorno's terminology) and the ways in which it permeates mass consciousness to distort reality and encourage dependence on the glitz and glamor of the culture industry to merely 'get by'; this is all to say that, because the culture industry is so embedded in the roots of modern society, the masses are plagued with an overarching and almost inescapable need to depend on the promises and modes of thought pushed onto them by the culture industry. The culture industry provides mindless entertainment that which is veiled in and embedded with propaganda and "false happiness"— it tells us how good these products and services are, how much we could benefit from them, how happy they could make us feel; instead of listening to the news, for instance, we indulge in romantic comedies to make ourselves feel better, to make us forget about the hardships of the long day of work, to *distract* ourselves—but in so doing, we become apathetic to reality, to what really

matters—we let others worry about the important things, so we sit back and relax with popcorn and a cheesy flick to 'turn off our brains' for a while, or we listen to whatever is on the radio and bop along to the repetitive lyrics of the current 'hits', or spend our hard-earned cash on a new product that is far from necessary, but that which provides a little bit of entertainment or makes for an 'easier way of life' (often, it does neither). Entertainment is but a vehicle for propagandization and, in tandem, domination. Adorno explains:

> To be entertained means to be in agreement. Entertainment makes itself possible only by insulting itself from the totality of the social process, making itself stupid and perversely renouncing from the first the inescapable claim of any work, even the most trivial: in its restrictedness to reflect the whole. Amusement always means putting things out of mind, forgetting suffering, even when it is on display. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 115).

It is also important to note that the culture industry is so concerned with commodifying its products and ideology that the use of the so-called 'star-system' is used excessively and at the behest of the masses, which, undoubtedly, acts as another form of manipulation. Adorno further explains,

> Even if its messages [the culture industry's] were as harmless as they are made out to be—on countless occasions they are obviously not harmless, like the movies which chime in with currently popular hate campaigns against intellectuals by portraying them with the usual stereotypes—the attitudes which the culture industry calls forth are anything by harmless. If an astrologer urges his readers to drive carefully on a particular day, that certainly hurts no one; they will, however, be harmed indeed by the stupefaction which lies in the claim that advice which is valid every day and which is therefore idiotic, needs the approval of the stars (Adorno, 1975: 237).

The industry thus ingrains within society norms and standards that are so objectively useless or problematic (i.e. beauty standards) that the masses become concerned with their looks, rather than their lives, and yet another form of distraction and relief is birthed. Domination therefore crystallizes through entertainment produced by the culture industry, and the masses continue to be enslaved:

> The fusion of culture and entertainment is brought about today not only by the debasement of culture but equally by the compulsory intellectualization of amusement. This is already evident in the fact that amusement is now experienced only in facsimile, in the form of cinema photography or the radio recording. In the age of liberal expansion amusement was sustained by an unbroken belief in the future: things would stay the same yet get better. Today, that belief has itself been intellectualized, becoming so refined as to lose sight of all actual goals and to consist only in a golden shimmer projected beyond the real… Amusement itself becomes an ideal, taking the place of the higher values it eradicates from the masses by repeating them in an even more stereotyped form… (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 114-115).

Here, we can see that the masses are essentially a vehicle through which the culture industry simultaneously establishes itself as the dominant, overarching, if not *sole,* consciousness of society (in that it effectively creates an imbroglio of heavily manipulated, or 'false' values and norms, which, theoretically, us less-informed, lowly peasants foolishly believe to be our *own* values and norms, desires, and consciousness), and maintains its position as the 'brains' of the entire schematic. Hence, the culture industry labels us as the 'main act', for lack of a better term, but underhandedly is *itself* the 'main act' (just behind the scenes), and it flourishes.

### *Money, Money, Money—It's a Rich Man's World: The Culture Industry and Profits*

We all know that with the onslaught of the culture industry, the quality of products is severely overlooked in favour of quantity (despite marketing strategies i.e. propaganda telling us otherwise); we know, too, that the culture industry flips the entire paradigm on its head and turns the focus to commercialization, commodification, and profits—the culture industry and capitalism, essentially, become two distinct parts of the equation; how does it work? And, more importantly, how and why does it resonate with us? The following section will serve to discern this conundrum, aiming to specifically correlate it to the relationship between the culture industry and the masses.

Adorno provides insightful prose on the functions and effects of the 'commodification' aspect of the culture industry; let us dive in:

> The culture commodities of the industry are governed… by the principle of their realization as value, and not by their own specific content and harmonious formation. The entire practice of the culture industry transfers the profit motive naked onto cultural forms," (Adorno, 1975: 232).

This can be correlated to the phenomena of standardization, which Adorno himself ties to the capitalist undertones of the culture industry and modernity. The idea of quantity over quality again resurfaces; in an effort to produce more for less, literally *everything* is commodified—parts of culture, art, and with that, feelings, emotions, and intellectual stimulation, are all commodified into 'sellable' and 'buyable' entities. Now, before we further our analysis here, it would be of merit to assess what 'culture' itself actually is; culture is many things. In its 'pure' form, it ought not be something of commercial value, something that can be traded for money or seen in terms of its economic qualities; commodification does the exact *opposite* of this. Culture in most, if not all, of its forms, is commodified and mass produced, deemed valuable for its price tags, and lacks any sort of 'autonomy'. Encrusted in this issue is the fact that the culture industry sets all of this up to enable mass production, which in turn, controls the collective interests of the population, which then cements the bourgeoisie class behind the culture industry as having power over the masses (Adorno, 1975: 232).

Returning to the issue of 'commodification' once again, we come upon the notion of 'standardization', which goes hand in hand with the turn to profits and the focus on mass production. Adorno explains that, "culture, in a sense, did not simply accommodate to human beings; but it always simultaneously raised a protest against the petrified relations under which they lived, thereby honoring them" (Adorno, 1975: 232). Evidently, culture in its most pure form, aided in the fight against injustice (that which is embedded in the social norms and

constructs of modern society). However, with culture being distorted into a money-driven venture, its purpose, and effectively its meaning, becomes tainted.

***Technique and Mechanical Reproduction of the 'Industry'***

Now, we know that everything is mass produced with little to no regard for the quality of the products or services, or whether we, as society, actually need these products or services at all; however, the actual production of the objects, of the *ideology,* (that which can be nicely attributed to the 'industry' part of the term itself), where the corruption of culture and domination of mass consciousness is fundamentally embedded, deserves to be assessed. Adorno states that, "…the technique of the culture industry is, from the beginning, one of distribution and mechanical reproduction," which, again, correlates to the notion of 'sameness' and 'standardization' that we see so often pop up in much of Adorno's (and Marcuse's) literature.

The thing here is that, when the culture industry becomes such a large, dominating part of society (which it long since has), technology only acts to ensure more, *cheaper* production, and with it, standardization occurs. Standardization, of course, is enmeshed in *everything.* We know this. *Sameness* is enmeshed in everything. We know this, too. But the level of which this permeates is not only the products and services that the culture industry churns out, but the mentality, the conscious and subconscious innerworkings of our brains—it permeates us to our very souls, so much so that, collectively, we becomes 'soul-less'; Marx's theory of alienation can aptly be brought to the forefront of this analysis of what can only be described as a modern-day mare's nest.

We, as mere 'parts of the machine' (i.e. the capitalist-driven 'machine' that is the culture industry), are alienated in every which way possible; from each other, from our work, from what

we produce, and from ourselves—we are so alienated, so downtrodden, that we often are not even *aware* of it, or, if we *are* aware, we are simply too broken to do anything about it, and we, perhaps unconsciously, retreat to a detrimental state of passivity. Aside from clear correlations to Marx's theory of alienation, we can see, too, that Adorno's viewpoint on the passive humans that encapsulate modern society ring true. The point to be made here is that all parts of the equation, us, what we produce, what's around us, are all tarnished with deception, falseness, passivity, and injustice. Our entire lives are soaked in this toxic pool of nothingness at the behest of the bourgeoisie class that stand at the top of the social structures set in place.

This is all to say that, while the idea is not novel (Adorno's work is very heavily influenced by Marx, as is much of the Frankfurt School's), nor is it singular (it has been rehashed and utilized in different mediums, and has influenced countless other works—it remains so significant (and, quite frankly, accurate) that it renders a strong, analytical assessment of its efficacy; thus, the latter portion of this study will be devoted to assessing the details of Adorno's theories of 'art', as the real thrust of his arguments live in his abstract (if not sometimes obtuse) proclamations of different art and their effects on society. To do this, we shall turn to a comparison between Adorno's views and Marcuse's views of art.

## 'ART'

'Art', of course, involves a vast array of 'types' and 'mediums' and fields of work, all of which are, essentially, one form of expression or another. The different mediums wherein art may 'live', for lack of a better word, are many; paintings, film, theatre, literature, music, and more, consist of 'art' in at least some sense of the word. The focus of this study, however, will be on *music* as a form of 'art', and in tandem, Adorno's (and Marcuse's) views on the relationship

and effects of different music on social, and political, society. To begin with, a discussion of 'art' merits an in-depth look at what, for Adorno and Marcuse, constitutes of the social function of art—that is, what art does in the context of society and its effects.

**The Function of Art**

Art, in its most basic sense, was always a 'social' endeavor for Adorno; in *Aesthetic Theory* (2002), Adorno discusses the various facets of the social implications of art and the different types of art, and *their* respective social implications; it is in this text that the notion of art's *autonomy* makes its entrance. The autonomy of art, and effectively, whether art should strive to be autonomous or not, and the effects of both (autonomous and non-autonomous art, respectively), are of importance here. It should be noted that, to define art as a singular, precise thing, is hardly possible—the term is so expansive and abstract that it includes anything and everything; however, the point here is not to determine the various definitions of the term 'art' itself; it is to discern the role and effects of 'socially-influenced art' (non-autonomous) or 'art for art's sake' (autonomous art) (Adorno, 2002: 5-6**,** 242; League, 66-67).

As mentioned previously, art can either enable or disable the potential for critical reflection and, effectively, change; this is because art influences society (i.e. the people) into either accepting the situation (submitting to it) or reflecting on it to consider issues and alternatives (think about it, and potentially, change it). For Adorno (and much of the Frankfurt School), art can either be 'autonomous', which Adorno describes as essentially being "independent" from society (Adorno, 2002: 241)—that is, it is independent insofar as it is not influenced by the norms and standards society has in place, nor does it work to appease to those norms—and therefore, it has the potential for which to be a proper vehicle for expression and

reflection; or, art can be non-autonomous (i.e., it is influenced—even in part—by the status quo, or similarly, works to fulfill it). If art is autonomous, there are, of course, many benefits to be reaped; inversely, if art is not autonomous, it simply fuels the capitalist-driven machine of domination in modern society. It is in this very sense that art is 'social' (Adorno, 2002: 241-242).

O'Connor (2000) suggests that Adorno's notion of 'autonomous art' has its Marxian roots in that, in this ideal, this concept of art being 'autonomous', there occurs a "division between intellectual and physical labour…" (O'Connor, 240), and, something of which appears to be a fundamental element of what Adorno describes as "oppositional" (242) to society's pre-determined expectations, norms, and prejudiced ways. There is, in this sense, a distinct line between the artwork and its surroundings. An examination of this concept will provide to be more than helpful in delineating the nature of the relationship between art (a closer assessment of music, specifically, will be conducted shortly), and politics (or, the social situation, in general). O'Connor provides a riveting account of Adorno's theory here:

> Adorno argues that the great art of the bourgeois era is characterized by its apparent independence from society: it is not created for the purposes of public utility nor does it serve what Benjamin called a 'cultic function'. For these reasons, bourgeois art has been criticized by other Marxist theorists who believe that art should, on the contrary, be politically committed. By its elevation, they say, bourgeois art fails to engage in a socially progressive critique of society. It thereby aligns itself with the forces of domination… we see Adorno reject the idea of committed art… It is Adorno's contention that committed art is no better than political theory in that it has no specific aesthetic quality, merely political aspirations. Art loses its essence when it concedes heteronomy, in this case the heteronomy being political propaganda. (O'Connor, 239).

According to O'Connor, Adorno dismisses the commonly accepted, Marxist view that art ought to be *inherently political* to be of social importance; the *goal* of art should be political in all aspects to be useful. Political art, or 'committed' art, entails an intrinsic political message or 'meaning', which, Marxists often argue, is what makes it socially useful. Adorno, however, is

decidedly against this perception, arguing instead that art ought *not* to be inherently political as the goal of art should not be a political one—in fact, it should not have a goal, at all—art should, on the contrary, be a separate entity, one that contains a multitude of meanings and understandings; in this way, art is autonomous—because it is not *attached* to anything.

As O'Connor puts it,

> Art is not autonomous in the sense that it is metaphysically removed from and independent of society. It is autonomous in that it is not reducible to the requirements of society, namely the presentation of a harmonious and meaningful whole… Adorno holds that each artwork is a coherent entity constituted by a dynamic force field of meanings. Furthermore, no artwork is reducible to any particular message (unlike, for example, committed art). Yet each is a cipher of society awaiting the appropriate interpretation (240).

When art becomes a political thing through and through (it's 'end', essentially, is political and political *only),* it loses its *artistic* baseline—its foundations— it is no longer really an 'artwork', rather, it is a form of propaganda for Adorno (O'Connor, 240), devoid of any *true* meaning, only that which is pushed onto it to ascertain its 'political-ness'. Adorno argues that art should be composed of multiple meanings and understandings; Adorno appears to be of the opinion that art ought not to be *only* political, or political at all for that matter, for it tarnishes the entire point—art should simply be *art.*

Adorno himself suggests that art is "socially useful" (2002: 242) in that, "it stands opposed to society," (242). Now, art being 'oppositional' to the norms of society is quite an interesting (if highly abstract) concept; the Frankfurt School, of course, favors things that are in conflict with the status quo and or are capable of enacting some sort of change on a societal level. This is true in what Adorno describes as 'oppositional' art (which is 'social') in that it is autonomous, mainly in the fact that is it not attached to any preconceived norms or standards of society, nor does it seek to fit into them. In Adorno's words,

> [A]rt criticizes society just by being there. Pure and immanently elaborated art is a tacit critique of the debasement of man by a condition that is moving towards a total-exchange society where everything is a for-other (Adorno, 2002: 242).

And,

> The truth content of artworks, which is indeed their social truth, is predicated on their fetish character… the counterpart of fetishism, is the principle of exchange, and in it, domination is masked. Only what does not submit to that principle acts as the plenipotentiary of what is free from domination… Artworks are the plenipotentiaries of things that are no longer distorted by exchange, profit, and the false needs of a degraded humanity. In the context of total semblance, art's semblance of being-in-itself is the mask of truth. (Adorno, 2002: 227).

Thus, for Adorno, art rebels against the norms of society by just *existing*—autonomous art ought not to be utilized in a specific role other than being a means of expression; additionally, autonomous art ought not to abide by the rules of commodification and be seen in terms of exchange value, like much of capitalist-produced art is. While this is a difficult task to undertake, Adorno believes it is possible and fruitful to enable critical reflection and for the emancipation of society. Autonomous, socially useful art must *resist* society and avoid being commodified (Adorno, 2002: 242).

Adorno explains,

> Art will live on only as long as it has the power to resist society. If it refuses to objectify itself, it becomes a commodity. What it contributes to society is not some directly communicable content but something more mediate, i.e. resistance. Resistance reproduces social development in aesthetic terms without directly imitating it (Adorno, 2002: 242).

Therefore, art is a part of society whilst simultaneously being in conflict with it. It is not something to be merely *understood*—it is something to be reflected upon. Moreover, he states,

> [T[here is nothing in art that is directly social, not even when direct sociality is the artist's express aim… whenever art tries to copy social reality it is all the more certain to become an as-if… What is social about art is not its political stance, but its immanent dynamic in opposition to society. Its historical posture repulses empirical reality, the fact that art works *qua* things are part of that reality notwithstanding. If any social function can be ascribed to art at all, it is the function to have no function… Its social essence calls for a

> twofold reflection: on the being-for-itself of art, and on its ties with society. This dual essence of art comes out in all artistic phenomena; they change and contradict themselves (Adorno, 2002: 243).

For Adorno, art's ability to be *just art* enables within it the ability to be oppositional to society, to be *different,* and, with that, it provides an outlet through which critical reflection can take place. Zuidervaart (1990) expands on the idea of art's autonomy and its social factor, suggesting,

> Adorno holds that a work of art is both independent and dependent towards society. It is internally consistent as well as inconsistent. It both has and lacks its own identity… [autonomous] 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. And by appearing to be useless, works of art recall the human purposes of production that instrumental rationality has forgotten. Autonomous works of art follow their own path in their own way, but the path itself and the impetus for traveling come from the surrounding society (Zuidervaart, 65).

This is, then, precisely how art is social—it is social because it objects to the norms of society by being *art,* it is different in that it does not abide by society's rules (stylistically or otherwise), it is not limited to simply one meaning or understanding, and it provides a window for expression and reflection (Adorno, 2002: 243). Adorno consistently heralds playwright Samuel Beckett's works as being a prime example of 'art for art's sake' (Adorno, 2002: 243).

***Marcuse on 'autonomous art'***

It would be helpful for our analysis here to mention that Marcuse, too, believes that art is autonomous "vis a vis the given social relations. In its autonomy art both protests these relations, and at the same time transcends them. Thereby art subverts the dominant consciousness…" (*The Aesthetic Dimension,* ix). Marcuse also puts forth a description of the ways in which art can potentially be revolutionary, which paints a similar picture to Adorno's views on the social factor of art and its autonomy:

> Art can be called revolutionary in several senses. In a narrow sense, art may be revolutionary if it represents a radical change in style and technique. Such a change may be the achievement of… anticipating or reflecting substantial changes in the society at large… Beyond this, a work of art can be called revolutionary if, by virtue of the aesthetic transformation, it represents, in the exemplary fate of individuals, the prevailing unfreedom of the rebelling forces, thus breaking through the mystified (and petrified) social reality, and opening the horizon of change (liberation) (Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension,* x-xi).

Marcuse also puts forth a useful account of art's 'truth', it's 'message'—Marcuse, like Adorno, argues that art ought to be independent of the social structures around it, and should, as a result, be unencumbered by any preconceived social norms or implications consisting within society; the role of art, it's social element, or, more broadly, the *relationship* between art and politics in general, is evidenced through how Marcuse views the 'ends' of art, the *point* of it—in regard to social change and liberation of the masses:

> The truth of art lies only in its own aesthetic dimension. Its relation to praxis is inexorably indirect, mediated, and frustrating. The more immediately political the work of art, the more it reduces the power of estrangement and the radical transcended goals of change (Marcuse, *Aesthetic Dimension,* xiii).

Already, in the opening pages of *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1978), it is clear that Marcuse shares Adorno's opinion on the potential efficacy of art in enabling political change; It seems that, according to both, the more direct a work of art is in its message, the more *political* that message is, the less effective an artwork may be in inciting the 'right' response, for lack of a better word—essentially, if a hypothetical work of art is intent on spreading a specific political movement or ideology, it ceases to become a work of art at all—it degenerates into propaganda; it's political agenda is forced onto whomever views it or whoever is privy to it, and this, whether intentional or not, actually diminishes the potential for critical reflection and or social transformation; it merely aids in the bourgeoisie endeavor of domination over the masses. In addition to the overview of autonomous art and its efficacy, Marcuse (and Adorno) suggest that a

work of art be judged only on the basis of its ability to be art—that is, the 'message' a specific artwork may have (one that is not inherently political, yet seemingly resonant with whomever views it in a more grand sense), ought not to be influenced or judged in relation to the artist, the background of the artist, the environment wherein the artwork was produced, or the social implications surrounding it; to do so would miss the point entirely of the argument of 'art for art's sake'.

Marcuse provides a strong analysis of this line of thought when he discusses the work of Baudelaire; he suggests that, despite Baudelaire himself being of the bourgeoisie class, his work actually consists of subtle (yet permeating) criticisms of the bourgeoisie (Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension,* 19-21). Marcuse, in *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1978) actually utilizes a quote from Walter Benjamin to illustrate the argument, which I believe will be more than helpful in delineating the theory that art ought to be viewed separately from it's producer or its environment, in order to fully grasp its potential and artistic qualities:

Marcuse even offers an example of this, saying,

> …there may be more subversive potential in the poetry of Baudelaire [that of which is not inherently political] and Rimbaud [also, not inherently political] than in the dialectic plays of Brecht [those of which are *extremely* and *inherently* political; Brecht's work is often about and geared toward the proletariat class] (Marcuse, *Aesthetic Dimension,* xiii).

As a result of Marcuse's focus on language and politics, many of his examples are to do with literature; however, being that literature is as much an art as music (that is, both are fundamental pieces of 'artwork' in the general sense) much of his claims lay true to the overarching argument of autonomous artwork (Marcuse, *Aesthetic Dimension,* 19).

## ‘HIGH’ ART vs. ‘LOW’ ART

### Adorno on Music as a ‘High’ Art

Adorno discusses music as a high art through an analysis of a variety of different genres and composers; to best illustrate the criteria Adorno (and in tandem, Marcuse) has on differentiating ‘high’ art ‘low’ art in regard to music, it is imperative to examine their views, first, on ‘high’ art—the next section, as such, is concerned with, primarily, Adorno’s assays on Beethoven, Wagner, Mahler, and Schoenberg; interspersed with this, when applicable, Marcuse’s accounts on the topic will be addressed in relation to Adorno’s.

Recall that high art strives (preferably, for both Adorno and Marcuse, subconsciously so) to refrain from conforming to the norms and expectations of society; high art does not seek to inherently appease the masses—rather, its purpose is to simply ‘exist’, which is where the factor of ‘autonomy’ materializes most clearly. High art, as such, ought to contain no specific political agenda, for that would render it as a form of propaganda.

Furthermore, high art is not meant to be inherently understandable, or even necessarily aesthetically pleasing (at least in the most general sense)—it ought *not* to act as mere entertainment, not a form of distraction—rather, it must do the opposite and provide a means through which critical reflection on society can take place; for that to occur, the artwork may need to venture into the ‘dark’ realms of reality, which would, undoubtedly, make for a less ‘appealing’ work of art—particularly at first glance, and a less ‘accepted’ one. Acceptance, of course, has to do with conformity—high art rejects conformity. It does not abide by the social norms of the day and seek to appease them—it rebels against them and illustrates the real issues at hand (Adorno, 2002: 220-227).

The notion of music as a form of 'art' (that is, what may be commonly thought of as 'proper', 'intellectual' art) may bring to mind the genre of classical music. Classical music, generally, is often associated with elegant, complex symphonies, often performed live with a professionally trained orchestra, led by a skilled conductor—all of which is accompanied by a rather stoic, though relatively prestigious and intellectual audience. Though this is typically based on inaccurate stereotypes, some factors do hold water here—classical music is, after all, considered a 'high-end' genre of music for a variety of reasons; Adorno provides an insightful account of *how* and *why* certain classical pieces may, indeed, be a 'high' form of art. However, Adorno is selected in what he views as 'high' art—in classical music alone, Adorno valorizes specific composers over others; let us examine this more closely. For the purposes of this study, focus will be placed on mainly Mahler and Schoenberg as 'high' art.

***Mahler***

Adorno views Mahler as one of the most prolific composers of the early twentieth century; Mahler's unorthodox approach to writing music (that of which will be discussed in detail shortly), his ability to evoke certain feelings within the listener, and effectively, generate an opportunity for the listener to reflect on what she hears, the *truth,* pegs Mahler as a genius of his time. Adorno suggests that Mahler's true mark of succession as a form of 'high' art is the fact that his music consists of extremes. Mahler merges traditional, "the past" (Adorno, 2003: 540-541) and the modern, the "not-yet-past" (Adorno, 2003: 540-541); the text states that Mahler's pieces work with *and* against society—it refuses to abide by the socially accepted norms (the traditional, the "past") by looking at it "squarely… brushing history against the grain," (Leppert, 540).

This notion of art being an integral part of society and yet, rebelling against it, can be correlated to Marcuse's theory of high art—as discussed in *Aesthetic Dimension,* Marcuse is of the same opinion; the work of art for Marcuse "re-presents" society through a different lens, and at the same time, "accuses it" (Marcuse, *Aesthetic Dimension,* 8). Here, the idea of critical reflection resurfaces in the idea of 're-presenting' society—by doing so, introspection on behalf of the viewer of the artwork can take place, and in tandem, *because* the artwork allows for critical reflection, the viewer may experience a sense of enlightenment (or, in other words, societal issues and struggles would be illuminated through the artwork), and thus, said art both acts as a *part* of society and *criticizes* it (Marcuse, *Aesthetic Dimension,* 8).

Furthermore, the literature suggests that Mahler's work brings to light a sense of "otherness" (Leppert, 540); keeping in mind the idea of 'extremes', Mahler is able to bring forth the notion of possibilities and hope (change); the other side of the coin, an alternative understanding. Mahler estranges the "familiar", he pushes it into the far depths of discomfort—Adorno refers to this as "positive negation" (Leppert, 540). The concept of the 'otherness' can once again be correlated to Marcuse's notion of the 'second dimension', the 'alternative', what *could* be (Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man,* 64-65; 248-251). In this way, perhaps, as gleaned from the studies, perhaps Mahler's music acts as a means through which to bridge the "gap" between the 'first' and 'second dimension' (Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man,* 248-251).

Mahler's "estranging of the familiar" and development of the 'otherness' manifests in the "musically banal and vulgar" (Leppert, 540). Mahler often forces instruments to play notes and chords outside of their comfort zone, which would not only create a harsh, potentially discomforting sound to the ears, one *not* commonly evoked in traditional schemes—it would also allow for the potential for introspection on behalf of the listener (and perhaps, the musician that

has to work considerably harder at achieving that certain sound he is required to produce). In fact, to produce a certain sound, whatever it may be, Mahler would *deliberately* write it for an instrument that, by nature, is not *meant* to make that sound. The instrument(s), according to Mahler himself, would be successful in producing the unnatural sounds he demanded "…only by forcing itself and exceeding its natural range," (qtd. In Leppert, 540). This appears to be the epitome of the term 'non-traditional'.

Evidently, Mahler's manipulation of sounds through unorthodox means (i.e. forcing instruments to play notes they shouldn't) is another way in which the "extremes" in Mahler's music (here, specifically in the techniques and composition methods) are embodied; this factor is non-conformist in itself. The 'otherness' is thus crystallized in what Adorno suggests is the "banal and vulgar" (540) in Mahler's work. In terms of the "vulgar and banal" (Adorno, 540), Adorno states, "his [Mahler's] symphonies shamelessly flaunt what rang in all ears, scraps of melody from great music, shallow popular songs, street ballads, hits" (Adorno, 540). Mahler produces the 'unsavoury' amalgamation of 'light' and 'serious' music, which in itself is highly untraditional (and perhaps often not well-received). This is done through incorporating non-traditional techniques (i.e. the usage of certain instruments for certain sounds that they are nt meant to produce) in 'traditional' fields of music, mixing different styles, genres, ideals, evoking a sense of the familiar while pushing it past it's limits.

According to Adorno, the polarizing extremes that Mahler makes use of emboldens the *tension* between 'light' and 'serious' music, the "past and the not-yet-past" (540), the socially conformist, traditionalist norms, and the non-conformist, *vulgar* ones; it is the tension between the two facets that renders Mahler's music as new, original, and modern. In *On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening* (1978), this is precisely Adorno's

argument—Mahler's ability to mix light and serious music without valorizing or negating either, and his ability to utilize that tension between the two extremes to effectively transform "regressive listening" into new music, is what, Adorno suggests, categorizes Mahler as an original artist (541). Leppert (2003) suggests,

> Tone is stretched to the limits; Adorno cites score markings, such as *'kreishand'* (screeching) for a woodwind passage in the scherzo of the Seventh Symphony. Harmonic teleology, the forward inevitability of tonality, with its cultural-musical association with progress, is achieved in Mahler only by force, some violence, rendered honest (Leppert, 542).

In this way, we can see extremes manifest once again—the harshness, the force, the vulgarity, in the music—the tone of it, exemplifies this. Similarly, Leppert (2003) explains, "harmony is made expressive against its own expression by being unbalanced" (542).

Mahler's music is composed of what the text refers to as "sudden shifts" (542). The shifts between major and minor chords are both dramatic and dynamic, disrupting the traditional schematic of bourgeoisie-classical music. The shifts are not predicted, according to the literature; they are often not expected at all, for that matter, and producing such shifts "undermines the hegemony of one or the other" (major and minor scales) (Leppert, 542). It appears that Mahler's music is not to be acquainted with 'smooth-sailing; the flow, the direction it seems to be going in, is completely intercepted; the major becomes minor, the more becomes major, all in an incredibly short amount of time—so much so that it may feel abrupt. It seems a chaotic mess of surprises and contradictions between and of the notes themselves. Adorno, on the topic, states, "Mahler's minor chords, disavowing the major triads, are masks of coming dissonances" (Adorno, 543).

Finally, Mahler's music refuses to simply brush under the carpet the 'victims', the struggles and suffering of the masses in current society, it refuses to the let the culture industry

leave these concerns on the backburner, deeming it useless or "unworthy, mutilated," (Leppert, 543). Instead, Mahler's music, as an artwork, "chained to culture, seeks to burst the chain and show compassion for the derelict residue; in Mahler each measure is an opening of arms" (Adorno, 38-39). Adorno finds in the 'otherness' a reflection of the struggle, an image of those suffering, the victims of "progress" (us); "Mahler identifies with them" (542). Evidently, not only does Mahler bring to light the 'otherness', but he illustrates and identifies with those suffering, those alienated from society, the downtrodden, the victims cast away by the culture industry. For example, Mahler's music contains an inherent sense of 'Jewishness', says Adorno, himself a Jew; Mahler provides an outlet for expression for the individual on the outskirts of society—often the Jewish people throughout history, and his music, a deviation from the norm itself empathizes with these struggles of the Jewish individual, and, arguably, all the masses (Adorno, 1998: 88).

***Schoenberg***

Adorno argues that Schoenberg, like Mahler, incorporates extremes at every corner in his music, producing much of the same effect as Mahler does:

> Rarely does he form simple, continuous, unbroken themes, and in their construction, he disdains the comfortable expedient of easily comprehensible sequences. Usually the themes, in themselves, are already forged out of contrasting elements bound together by means of relations among motifs (Adorno, 2003: 635).

This is, of course, marked by dissonant chords, the likes of which, too, reflect the vulgarity of reality, the harshness—the *truth*, that which allow for introspective reflection. Major and minor chords are thrown into the mix unconventionally as well, stirring within the listener a sense of discomfort that is essentially a reflection of the music's ability to push itself to the limit and beyond, much like Mahler's compositional methods.

Extremes resurface, too, in Schoenberg's 'rejection' of traditional tonality—again, we have previously seen this in Mahler's work. Adorno actually provides an incredibly insightful comparison between Schoenberg and Richard Strauss, the latter a more traditional composer, the former, a genuinely unorthodox one:

> He was not, like Richard Strauss, for example, satisfied with startling effects in the sequence of chords… he rewrote tonality; he achieved the effect of keys by constructive harmonic means, which ever-fresh, powerful intervals… the tonal relations are stretched to the extreme; it is they that recreate the principle of tonality, afresh, purely from within the compositional events. But with this the events are rendered so powerful that soon they actually no longer need the points of tonal contact at all… in the end, every sound became autonomous, all tones enjoyed equal rights, and the reign of the tonic triad was overthrown. (Adorno, 2002: 636).

Notice how Adorno uses the words 'rewrote' and 'recreate'—these terms evoke a sense of newness, a sense of difference; it is these words precisely that emphasize Adorno's views on Schoenberg, his admiration for the unique ways Schoenberg rebels against the norm by throwing traditional structures of tonality out the window, the ways dissonance becomes the foundational aspect of his music. This is not to say that Schoenberg's work is not musical; in fact, it is quite the opposite. By virtue of the fact that Schoenberg's music essentially takes the entire scheme of musical composition and flips it on its head, it is musical—it may sound uncomfortable, or it may seem 'off', but this is the beauty of the artwork—it abides by no rules and simply creates new ones.

Schoenberg's music may sound so chaotic, so absurd to the "untrained" ear (the kind that does not expect such banality, such *truth* in what it hears, i.e. the masses, by and large), it essentially "shocks" the listener, and in this way, not only defies the norm in structure, but also in its ability to jolt the masses awake, to expose the truth, and to enable reflection (636). Adorno explains that Schoenberg's music is imbued with 'freedom', that which is particularly exhibited in his methods of composition. Adorno says, "the scale of expression expands, Schoenberg finds

sounds and shadings for experiences of the strange, the untrodden," which was unreachable in traditional structures of music and it's composition, the possibility of even considering such was slim—it was "unavailable to the congealed emotional stereotypes of previous music" (Adorno, 637). The sense of 'freedom' here is particularly evident in the Schoenberg's *Second String Quartet*, where Schoenberg literally abandons convention, shedding any notions of conformity in the process, opting for "atonality" (637), lending itself to be an autonomous piece of work, and in that, a 'free' one.

However, be that as it may, Schoenberg's 'atonality' is not, by definition, a complete and utter rejection of tonal principles; rather, it crystallizes through his development, and usage of, the twelve-tone technique. The twelve-tone technique, an undoubtedly unique approach to music composition, "does not recognize a single free note," (Adorno, 640) or, in other words, equal attention is payed to *all* notes on the scale—one note ought not to take precedence over another, "every tone is equally determined, equally thematic," (Adorno, 187). Evidently, this is far from typical, but is precisely how, Adorno believes, Schoenberg solidified himself as a composer of high art, not only through his development of the technique, but in his application of it—abandoning traditional modes of thought in an effort to essentially produce an original, authentic, and emancipated method of composition, is no easy task.

Finally, Adorno's argument in favor of Schoenberg as a high art culminates in the fact that it (the music) offers no "false hope", no "reified truth" (638), it merely exists as a work of art that does not seek to provide any sense of comfort (doing so would be negating the whole project in my opinion); Adorno states,

> The music denies the very thing we have been accustomed, since Shakespeare's days, to expect from music as the magical art: consolation. It claims to be nothing more than the voice of truth, without the crutches of the familiar, but also without the deception of praise and false positivity (Adorno, 638).

Because Schoenberg's music expresses the truth of reality and nothing more, it in itself deviates from the norm, and as such, is anti-conformist in nature. The truth, however, is not easy on the ears—it never will be; both Schoenberg and Mahler embrace this fact with elegance and are exemplary of the type of 'high' art that Adorno (and Marcuse) praise. Both composers' works have the potential to embolden the masses to liberate themselves; the problem, though, is that the masses, sometimes through no fault of their own, refuse to listen.

## 'LOW' ART

### *Fetish Music*

Adorno posits that modern, contemporary music (i.e. that which is produced by the culture industry) is saturated, completely standardized, repetitive, and lacking in quality; it is modern music, mainly, that he equates with 'low' art—anything that, according to him, prevents critical reflection on behalf of the listener, is unoriginal, and or succumbs to the norms set-out by society. The main 'genres' of music that Adorno focuses on in regard to 'low' art are pop music, or dance music, and jazz. Low art, for Adorno, consists of anything commercialized and therefore 'false' (Adorno, 2003: 288). The following section will discuss Adorno's theory on music's 'fetish-character'—its commodification, commercialization, and effectively, its role in the bourgeoisie domination over the masses.

We know that, based on previous analyses of the literature above, Adorno is of the opinion that 'light' music, i.e. low art, appeals to the masses through heavily-calculated propaganda; marketability is crucial for Adorno's argument; the fact that the masses prefer light music is not indicative of their actual taste—it is, actually, a reflection of the culture industry's

success (Adorno, 2003: 293). The mass-produced music itself (low art) may in truth have virtually no redeeming qualities, yet the culture industry markets it as something 'new', something enjoyable, entertaining, relatable, even—and caters it to unsuspecting (sometimes suspecting) fans. In fact, the relatability popular music promises to its fans is based on lies; the individuality fans may experience are nothing more than false ideals that are 'prescribed' to them; Adorno says on the matter, "[t]he liquidation of the individual is the real signature of the new musical situation" (Adorno, 2003: 293).

Adorno brings up the function of the 'hook' in songs, which he regards as "pseudo-individualization" (Adorno, 2003: 339). Leppert (2003) states, "Whatever the detail, it [the hook] never threatens the iron-clad model on which its based," (Leppert, 339), suggesting that the model of composition that popular music is based on employs both a mask of originality (it never strays far from the path, so to speak, of pre-determined outlines of popular music) and a form of advertisement of that unoriginality (the 'hook' is what is supposed to capture the interest of the listener, which, if considered at face value, it technically does—but it captures interest through 'false advertising' and essentially perpetuates further propaganda onto the listener) (Leppert, 339). In addition to utilizing the 'hook' in popular music, other elements, such as 'tried and tested' formulas, are also used; the text suggests that, in pop music, if one technique or stylistic element works, it will be used over and over and over again—sometimes under the guise of being 'new' or otherwise it may be marketed as 'improved'; if composing music involves following the same techniques and or melodies, it is bound to sound similar to one another (Adorno, 2003: 339).

Popular music is, however, well-received by the masses; Adorno argues that the even pop music's *reception* is false, calculated, and an extension of manipulation.

Moreover, Adorno puts forth the idea that popular music is mandated by what he terms the 'star principle', a form of propaganda that generates reactions from fans that are completely unrelated to the music being played; for Adorno, 'star principle' refers to the celebrities, essentially, that, in effect, diminish the focus on the music itself, distracting the 'fans' from the less-than-acceptable quality of the music (Adorno, 2003: 340). Leppert (2003) explains:

> Adorno's examples are big-band leaders of the time; better examples today are the personality promotions for virtually all forms of popular music that appear in magazines like Teen People, on one end of the spectrum, or, say, Rolling Stone or Spin, on the other, which market themselves as less adulatory and more critical but which depend on precisely the same techniques of star worship as do their less prestigious teen-mags. This is to say that the cult of personality is alive and well and of far greater social import in popular music than in it is in the classical world, whose "real stars" are comparatively few and whose fans are negligible by comparison with the pop world (Leppert, 340).

Clearly, standardization and commercialization works in numerous ways here; it succeeds in manipulating the masses into believing they are being 'catered to' in the sense that pop music is written for them and for them only, that it empathizes with their 'struggles' and that it provides them with a sense of individuality that is otherwise repressed by society (again, Adorno claims none of this is true); further, popular music makes use of the fact that the masses are easily swayed and forces upon them a 'face' to idolize, an image, a thing—to distract from the music it produces, and, in effect, to distract from the issues it so carefully tries to hide.

***Jazz***

Adorno's 'The Perennial Fashion—Jazz' (1981) and 'On Jazz' (2003), are concerned primarily with the composition and performance of jazz music, specifically in regard to its effects on society; O'Connor (2000) explains that Adorno argues against the notion of jazz being spontaneous or original (particularly in contrast to traditional classical music). Commonly-held

views suggest "[t]he jazz performer is given license to improvise," says O'Connor (2000), but, in Adorno's opinion, jazz consists of "repetition of formulae" (O'Connor, 267), and it actually restricts and limits "possible expression within rigid syncopation" (O'Connor, 267). Adorno, as such, views jazz music as being "intellectually regressive" (O'Connor, 267) as it essentially, for him, does nothing to enable critical reflection (being that it is repetitive and standardized), and effectively, offers no means through which emancipation can occur.

Before delving in further, it should be noted that Adorno's understanding of jazz, as discussed in 'On Jazz' (2003), refers to 'dance music' (i.e. the 'jitterbug'), or, the music of the 'big-bands' of the '30s and '40s (O'Connor, 268; Leppert, 349, 455-466)—the likes of which include Paul Whiteman, Guy Lombardo, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, etc. (Leppert, 349-354), all of which were the rage in both the United States and in Europe (Leppert, 349). Jazz music of the time was undoubtedly popular on a mass scale and, the literature suggests, with its "slick arrangements" (Paddison, 93), was rather marketable, echoing, clearly, notions of what today would be deemed as 'pop music'.

Jazz music, as a genre, is often associated with improvisation; despite this being the case, Adorno argues against the commonly-held impression that jazz music is 'new', or, as a matter of fact, original (Leppert, 350); for Adorno, as stated by Leppert (2003), it is "an old costume with shine new buttons" (Leppert, 350). This phrase is particularly apt for describing Adorno's relationship with jazz, I find, because it illustrates, rather clearly, the way that Adorno views jazz's supposed 'newness'; jazz, for Adorno, under a thinly-veiled disguise, markets itself as 'new' or 'modern' (sound familiar? This is exactly Adorno's argument in regard to popular music produced by the culture industry), without actually being either. Leppert (2003) explains:

> [J]azz does not break free from the history that enchains it musically, and it fails to do so precisely because it is in complicit historical relationship with commodity culture… he [Adorno] regards jazz as ideological through and through. (Leppert, 351).

It is in this sense that Adorno delineates jazz as being ideologically repetitive in its origins as well; while Adorno concedes the origins of jazz music may be tied to "slave music" (O'Connor, 268), and as such, may contain elements of originality and intellectual themes— "this original authentic expression of the slaves is now the possession of the culture industry which markets jazz as the music of the autonomous subjects" (O'Connor, 268).

Moreover, according to Adorno,

> [The] extent to which jazz has anything at all to do with genuine black music is highly questionable; the fact that it is frequently performed by blacks and that the public clamors for 'black jazz' as a sort of brand-name doesn't say much about it, even if folkloric research should confirm the African origin of man of its practices (Adorno, 2003: 477).

As Adorno sees sit, jazz music, perhaps in its inception, may have potentially been founded on African American ideals—in its modern form, it has, however, been "whitened" (Leppert, 353). In considering Duke Ellington, for instance, Adorno is of the opinion that in Ellington's music, his performance, is influenced a great deal by traditionalist composers like Debussy (Leppert, 353); this provides interesting comparisons to Adorno's perception of, say, Mahler, whom he greatly admired and believed was new and original in every sense of the words, and above all, did not "owe debt" (Leppert, 353) to traditionalist composers preceding him.

Adorno, more abstractly, also critiques jazz as being 'falsely new' in the sense that, despite jazz's claims to project "individuality and liberation" (Leppert, 354), it's 'ability' to do so, i.e. improvisation, does none of the sort;

> Improvisatory moments are pre-planned to fit comfortably into the composition's preestablished character… [t]he free moment of improvisation, which may momentarily create the desired effect of breaking free from the standardized event, in the end-rather… only certifies the grip of both the commodity form and the social formation upon which the commodity form ultimately depends. Adorno sees jazz functioning as a certification

> of the European bourgeoisie. It's played in the chic clubs and danced to by people who have time to learn the steps… [t]he social function of jazz dance music for Adorno is the aestheticization of privilege by means of colonizing otherness and making it one's own. This is the point of Adorno's remark that dance band jazz is a Western urban 'manufacture'… for Adorno, the fact that European jazz eventually became all the rage across the social spectrum marks a more general identification with the aggressor. (Leppert, 354-355).

Clearly, Adorno views jazz music as being yet another 'false' manifestation of newness, or more specifically, individuality. As the above passage highlights, Adorno's opinion here is along the lines of 'jazz tries, but it fails… does it *really* try, though?' and to that, the answer is debatable. Following Adorno's line of thought, jazz is a mere commodity, something solely based on its marketability and appeal—that which is high on both accounts; in that, too, is the factor of *perceived* emancipation from the dominating bourgeoisie class, but that is all it is—it is perceived, not true; jazz music for Adorno is a vehicle through which racism lives, it is a subtle form of colonization, of disengagement with the 'other', of a broad, mass-marketed lie. Adorno states:

> The wild antics of the first jazz bands from the South, New Orleans above all, and those from Chicago, have been toned down with the growth of commercialization and of the audience and continued scholarly efforts to recover some of this original animation, whether called 'swing' or 'bebop', inexorably succumb to commercial requirements and lose their string. The syncopation principle which at first had to call attention to itself by exaggeration, has in the meantime become so self-evident that it no longer needs to accentuate the weak beats as was formally required… [c]ontrariness has changed into second-degree 'smoothness' and the jazz-form of reaction has become so entrenched that an entire generation of youth hears only syncopations without being aware of the original conflict between it and the basic metre. Yet none of this alters the fact that jazz has in its essence remained static, nor does it explain the resulting enigma that millions of people seem never to tire of its monotonous attraction. (Adorno, 2000: 68-269).

Jazz, for Adorno, is nothing but a pre-determined set of false promises, false identities, and false 'newness'; it essentially ends up conforming to the capitalist restraints set before it. Adorno's views are, of course, never straight-forward however, and always ladened with

counterpoints (those familiar with his work will attest to the fact that Adorno is infamous for constantly changing, or tweaking, his opinions); on the subject of jazz, Adorno concedes that jazz is not a travesty in its entirety, stating, for instance, "hot jazz" is "relatively progressive" (Adorno, 2003:, 475), and, more specifically,

> Within pop music jazz has its unquestioned merits. Against the idiotic derivatives from the Johan Strauss-type operetta it taught technique, presence of mind, and the concentration which pop music had discarded, and it developed the faculties of tonal and rhythmical differentiation. The climate of jazz freed teenagers from the stuffily sentimental utility music of their parents… time and time again, however, jazz became a captive of the culture industry and thus of music and social conformism (Adorno, 356).

In this way, it could be argued that Adorno does not equate jazz with all things horrible—he simply views it as a disappointment—albeit, a grave one. However, Leppert (2003) states that Adorno's assays on jazz are not completely 'off the hook', so to speak, since there are, in fact, inconsistencies that, potentially, question its credibility; one such instance is in regard to the jazz musicians during the 'big band era', i.e. Louis Armstrong. In Leppert's (2003) own words, "Adorno seems to have missed the fact that a great deal of jazz was not mass marketed; indeed, its lack of marketability was analogous to that of the musical avant-garde" (Leppert, 356).

Turning to the structure of jazz music itself, let us consider Adorno's views regarding compositional methods and structural techniques; Adorno suggests that, despite its status as a 'new' and 'different' style of music, it is decidedly neither. He explains, structurally, 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 sadomasochistic type describe 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. This propensity accelerates the standardization, commercialization, and rigidification of the medium (Adorno, 2000: 270).

It appears that Adorno regards jazz as being outwardly opposed to domination and oppression, but inherently, submissive to it; its "rebellious gestures" (270) seem spontaneous, non-

conforming, but in actuality, Adorno believes jazz music abides by the implicit structures set in place, evidenced by the fact that, as jazz musician Paul Whiteman declared, "[T]he modern jazz orchestra is an efficient arrangement. Every member knows exactly what he is to play every minute of the time. Even the smears are indicated in the music" (Whiteman and McBride, *Jazz,* 211). Though at first glance, this statement (and the notion altogether that jazz music is 'spontaneous' insofar as its spontaneity is calculated beforehand) may seem less than convincing; jazz, after all, is known for its improvisation. Still, Adorno argues that improvisation in jazz is calculated, or rather, its spontaneity is, even if indirectly so.

### *Calculated Spontaneity in Jazz*

Adorno puts forth a rather controversial argument against the notion of jazz's interpretation and spontaneity, stating that, in its inherent structure, it is calculated to its very core, which, in itself, is mediated on pre-determined formulas, the ones that are 'tried and true', conventionally accepted, and above all, marketable—just as popular music generated by the culture industry is. Adorno provides a worthwhile comparison between fashion (i.e. the current 'trend'), and jazz music, and suggests the two are essentially one in the same in that they both follow a similar set of 'limitations' that are dictated by the culture industry and that which often 'change', despite not actually being different from their predecessors.

> As with fashions what is important is show, not the thing itself; instead of jazz itself being composed, 'light' music, the most dismal products of the popular-song industry, is dressed up. Jazz fans, short for fanatics, sense this and therefore prefer to emphasize the music's improvisational features. But these are mere frills. Any precocious American teenager knows that the routine today scarcely leaves any room for improvisation, and that what appears as spontaneity is in fact carefully planned out in advance with machinelike precision… the so-called improvisations are actually reduced to the more or less feeble rehashing of basic formulas in which the schema shines through at every moment. Even the improvisations conform largely to norms and recur constantly. The range of permissible in jazz is as narrowly circumscribed as in any particular cut of clothes (Adorno, 2000: 270).

This, of course, circulates back to the notion of the culture industry and marketing, specifically in the fact that the culture industry, by nature, produces products that are labelled as 'new' or 'improved' or 'different' from what was produced before, despite the product itself retaining the same quality as what came before it, and as such, not actually being different than other products at all—it, perhaps, merely looks different, but serves the exact same function, and acts the same, as its competitors. All of this, Adorno notes, is a means through which to market jazz music to the masses.

***Production and Standardization of Jazz***

Adorno explains that the production of jazz, i.e., it's patterns, techniques, and procedural elements, are all determined beforehand; in so doing, the producing jazz music becomes a rather simple endeavor, utilizing tried and tested techniques to gain the 'best responses' from the audience, the listeners—sounding the way it ought to sound to remain appealing to the masses, to appear catered specifically to the listener, despite it not being so. Adorno says that jazz music is "actually factory-made through and through" (Adorno, 2000: 271), and it's production is so carefully planned and thought-out that it automatically garners audience approval—audience approval, is, of course, manipulated by the culture industry itself—and, because the production of jazz music follows a specific 'regimen' of sorts, jazz musicians, performers, and bands, are guaranteed to be successful through "scientifically engineered propaganda" (Adorno, 2000: 271).

The mechanical production of jazz music is, for Adorno, another way in which the masses are manipulated into believing jazz is an original, 'spontaneous' genre of music, and that they *enjoy* it—the culture industry, of course, tells the masses what they ought to enjoy, when,

and how; jazz music, apparently, is no exception. Jazz music, Adorno suggests, is standardized in its entirety—from its production to its reception; standardization here, for Adorno, means,

> The strengthening of the lasting domination of the listening public and of their conditioned reflexes. They are expected to want only that to which they have become accustomed and to become enraged whenever their expectations are disappointed and fulfillment, which they regard as the customer's inalienable right, is denied (Adorno, 2000: 272).

Standardization, for Adorno, remains to be a prominent issue—with jazz music, in particular, Adorno is of the opinion that its standardized production and calculated reception instills a sense of false individuality in the listener, a 'pseudo-individuality', that which aids in the manipulation of the masses and, more specifically, further cements the loyalty (which in itself is ungenuine) of so-called 'jazz fans' (Adorno, 2000: 273).

Again, we arrive at the notion that jazz fans perceive jazz music as being something wholeheartedly new and exciting; they see it that jazz speaks to them on a personal level, so much so that they can identify and relate to it, which, Adorno proclaims, is entirely not the case; "the more strictly the listener is curbed," says Adorno, "the less he is permitted to notice it. He is told that jazz is 'consumer art', made specially for him" (Adorno, 2000: 273).

Adorno then puts forth a strikingly blatant explanation for how jazz functions as a product of the culture industry, and, more specifically, he suggests that it's 'deviations' are in and of themselves a caricature of *real* deviations, of real difference—deviations in jazz, much like spontaneity, are calculated:

> For while it [jazz] must constantly promise its listeners something different, excite their attention and keep itself from becoming run-of-the-mill, it is not allowed to leave the beaten path; it must be always new and always the same. Hence, the deviations are just as standardized as the standards and in effect revoke themselves the instant they appear… jazz sets up schemes of social behaviour to which people must in any case conform. Jazz enables them to practise those forms of behavior, and they love it all the most for making the inescapable easier to bear (Adorno, 2000: 273-274).

It is evident, then, that Adorno views jazz as a 'false' notion of 'the new', of deviation, of spontaneity, of unpredictability; it is not, based on the passages highlighted above, any of those things; rather, it is all but a ploy to continue to propagate and manipulate the masses. Jazz music retains no sense of autonomy, clearly, as it works solely toward achieving the goals of the bourgeoisie, that is, dominating over the masses, and keeping them 'happy' (of course, we know that this 'happiness' is not true happiness by any means, rather, it is a product of propaganda); to better grasp Adorno's views of the capitalistic tendencies of jazz and popular music (and, in essence, its status as a form of 'low' art), it is worthwhile to assess his theories on radio.

***Radio***

Radio, in addition to being, for Adorno, a vehicle through which the culture industry can spread its propaganda and infiltrate the lives of the masses at every which way—is also problematic in the fact that it distorts and corrupts classical music. For example, Adorno states that classical, symphonic music (here he is referring to composers he favors, like Mahler, Schoenberg, or Beethoven)—contains an element of absorption; for Adorno, Leppert (2003) explains,

> To "enter" into a symphony means to listen to it not only as to something before one, but as something around one as well, as a medium in which one "lives". It is this surrounding quality that comes closes to the idea of symphonic absorption. All these qualities are radically affected by radio. The sound is no longer "larger" than the individual. In the private room, that magnitude of sound causes disproportions which the listener mutes down. The "surrounding" function of music also disappears… what is left of the symphony even in the ideal case of an adequate reproduction of sound colors, is a mere chamber symphony. If the symphony today reaches masses who have never before been in touch with it, it does so in a way in which their collective aspect and what might be called the collective aspect of the symphony itself, are practically eliminated from the musical pattern—which becomes, as it were, a piece of furniture of the private room (Leppert, 258).

It appears that Adorno's fondness for symphonic, in-person musical performance stems from the fact that he believes it is better able to 'absorb' the listener, to stimulate the intellectual faculties of the listener, to stir up emotion within her. Radio, for Adorno, replays the music to the listener and replays it alone; it fails to achieve the same level of 'permeation' that an in-person symphonic orchestra does. All the sounds are mutilated by the knobs and buttons on a radio that dictate the volume of it; Adorno uses Beethoven as an example, suggesting that, "the first bars of the Fifth Symphony, if rightly performed, must possess the characteristic of a 'statement', or a 'positing' (Leppert, 259), meaning, essentially, the first notes ought to be bold in sound.

Leppert (2003) adds, though, that the sounds are so nuanced in the performance and are thus built on dynamic cues and various, smooth intensities, the likes of which are difficult, if possible at all, to replicate through radio's speakers (Leppert, 259). As such, the literature suggests that, according to Adorno, radio not only corrupts music, but renders it 'low' art. Leppert (2003) explains,

> The transformation of the symphonic process into a series of results means that the listeners receive the symphony as a ready-made piecemeal product which can be enjoyed with a minimum of effort on his part. Like other ready-made articles, radio symphony tends to make him passive: he wants to get something out of it, perhaps to give himself up to it, but, if possible, to have nothing to do with it, and least of all to "think" it… it is highly doubtful if the boy in the subway whistling the main theme of the finale of Brahm's First Symphony actually has been gripped by that music (Leppert, 268).

Here, we see again the issue of reflection on behalf of the listener (or, lack thereof), and the problem lends itself to being one of passivity and submission, acceptance, to the dominating forms. Radio, for Adorno, diminishes the intensity, the strength, of the music's power to grip the listener, to intellectually stimulate, to, effectively, aid in emancipation.

While this may be true, it is difficult to assess this theory without considering the fact that, yes, it may not permeate the souls of the listeners to the same extent that symphonic music

conducted by a live orchestra may, but, nevertheless, is it not worthwhile to consider the fact that, through radio, the masses can at least be *aware* of this music? Well, yes and no—Marcuse's opinion on the matter appears less rigid and overall more open-minded; he seems to agree with the notion that accessibility is not *all* bad, at least in part; he suggests that, with the advent of radio, "it is good that almost everyone can now have the fine arts at his fingertips, by just turning a knob on his set," (Marcuse, 1991: 65)—clearly, mass-accessibility to the higher arts is may not be entirely harmful. Still, Marcuse is not fully convinced himself, conceding that, "In this diffusion, however, they [the masses] become cogs in a culture-machine which remakes their content" (Marcuse, 1991: 65). Similarly, Marcuse sees it that modern technology distorts the music it relays to the listener, though he seemingly argues this in a tone that does *not* evoke a sense of eternal doom.

More specifically, Marcuse maintains a less myopic opinion on what Adorno considers 'low' art; for Adorno, recall that low art refers to most, if not all, of the culture industry's products—this, Adorno argues, includes jazz music (as it negates any sense of spontaneity, and it is not only highly commercialized, but essentially inauthentic in both its production and performance, rendering it incapable of inciting meaningful change, and therefore, 'low' art); for Marcuse, this is hardly the case.

In *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972), Marcuse's opinion proves to be multi-faceted; he values 'black music' (i.e. jazz) as being meaningful and reflective of racial inequalities and social struggles, explaining that the hardships of slavery resonate through the music (Marcuse, 1972: 114):

> In this music [what Marcuse terms 'black music'], the very life and death of black men and women are lived again: the music *is* body; the aesthetic form is the "gesture" of pain, sorrow, indictment. With the takeover, by the whites, a significant change occurs: white "rock" is what is black paradigm is *not,* namely, *performance* (Marcuse, 114).

Evidently, Marcuse sees in jazz what politically-centric art fails to do; a reminder of humanity's flaws, of its evils—in jazz, Marcuse recognizes an underlying element of social injustice and domination, that which he believes is properly expressed and successfully spread to the listener; in turn, the listener *feels* this sense of inequality that percolates through the notes, the sounds, and is able to not only relate to the music, to identify with it—but reflect on it. Under this definition, then, jazz music can arguably be categorized as a 'dark' art, and in effect, a 'high' art, for Marcuse; it bridges the 'gap' between the 'first' and 'second' dimensions, and as such, offers a means through which the 'otherness' can be brought into focus. Marcuse's views, then, prove to be less 'all-or-nothing', showcasing the grey areas in what Adorno would deem to be pop culture (and therefore a 'low' art), allowing for a substantially more progressive analysis of art's role and potential in society.

## CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to delineate Adorno's theories on the relationship between art (i.e. music) and politics. The distinction between what Adorno deems 'low' art and 'high' art have been made evident; where applicable, Marcuse's views have been assessed in relation to Adorno's in an effort to provide an expansive overview of Adorno's convictions on the matter.

Dissecting Marcuse's views next to Adorno's (particularly on the topic of 'black music') has gleaned insight; Adorno's less-than positive outlook on the function and effects of jazz music seems incomplete when pitted against Marcuse's more developed assays on the ways in which jazz reflects the long-standing, deep-rooted struggles of African American individuals (and, more broadly, minorities, marginalized groups, etc.) Adorno's apparent dismissal of the genre appears unwarranted, his viewpoints narrow-minded. In my opinion, his arguments on jazz, in

particular, hold less water when placed side-by-side with Marcuse's. This is not to say Adorno's theories fall flat—not at all; in fact, I would go so far as to argue that they are built on some of the most revolutionary beliefs of the twentieth century. For the few limitations existent in Adorno's theories, there are double the strengths.

His contributions to the field are far and wide; his views on the role of 'art' are incredibly thought-provoking; his differentiation between 'high' and 'low' art are in and of themselves incredibly sharp and pertinent to both the discipline and outside of it; his notions of the culture industry, his perceptions of pop music and his admiration for the works of Mahler and Schoenberg ring particularly true to 'the way of the world' as it stands.

Adorno's views on 'high' and 'low' art are very telling—they have, in their inception, 'struck a chord'—they did what many theories before them have failed to do—bridge the two 'realms' together, and successfully so. For this alone, Adorno deserves acclaim. Adorno has, arguably, ventured outside of the discipline's comfort zone and brought into focus the role of art; it is my hope that this study has aided in that project and contributed to the field further; it has illuminated the nature of the relationship between art and politics—that is, the ways in which art (music) truly impacts and, perhaps dictates, the masses—and, it has displayed the long-term effects of modernity (capitalism, the culture industry) on humanity.

It is clear that society, in its current state, is on its last leg; though perhaps unavoidable, modernity has undoubtedly created numerous obstacles in the production and distribution of art, or at least, 'high' art; perhaps we must consider, though, not *only* 'high' art (i.e. serious music) of Adorno's preference, but 'low' art as well. This is not to diminish the effects of 'low' art on society—its effects are immeasurable but devastating. Rather, perhaps we ought to consider re-assessing *what* is categorized as 'high' or 'low' art in our modern times, taking into account

contemporary genres of music and various artists—to fully grasp the entire picture. To do this, though, the discourse must be *willing* to branch out of traditional realms of thought and venture even *more* deeply into the depths of 'art'; to that end, this study has hopefully aided in taking 'art' off the backburner and placing it neatly within the framework of political theory. There is always room for improvement—after-all, that is, in fact, the purpose of critical theory, is it not?

If we have learned anything, though, it is that music as an 'art' is 'political' in more ways than one— the relationship between music and politics contains multitudes of potential; it is evident that music *can* aid in our collective liberation; the fact that we have prevented it from doing so is our burden to bear.

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