1 Adorno, 'defended against his devotees'?

Introduction – music matters

Music has power, or so many people believe. Across culture and time it has been linked with persuasion, healing, corruption, and many other transformational matters. The idea behind these linkages is that music *acts* – on consciousness, the body, the emotions. Associated with this idea is another – the idea that music, because of what it can *do*, should be subject to regulation and control.

The history of music in the West is punctuated with attempts to enlist and censure music's powers. Most interesting of these centre on music's tonal properties as distinct from lyrics or libretti. The realm of sacred music offers many examples – Charlemagne's *c.*800AD 'reform' of chant, Pope Gregory XIII's call for 'revising, purging, correcting and reforming' church music (Hoppin 1978:50), the late sixteenth-century Protestant call for plain hymn singing (as opposed to elaborate polyphony), and, slightly later, J. S. Bach's dictum that the purpose of sacred music was 'to organise the congregation' are some of the better known. In the political realm, music has been mobilised or suppressed for its effects. Shostakovich's commission for a symphony to mark the anniversary of the Russian Revolution (and his later censure for writing 'decadent' music), the banishment of atonal music in Nazi Germany, and, in relatively recent times, the furore over national anthem renditions (the Sex Pistols' *God Save the Queen* or Jimi Hendrix's version of the *Star Spangled Banner*) all attest to the idea that music can instigate consensus and/or subversion. If the lens is widened to consider music in a global perspective, even more dramatic examples emerge, most recently the prohibition, as reported in the Western media, of nearly all forms of music in Afghanistan. If there is one thing the world shares, musically speaking, it is probably the recognition, at times the *fear*, of what music may allow.

Today, debates about music, morality, and pedagogy continue with vigour in and outside of the academy – discussions concerning the

so-called 'Mozart-effect', worry about heavy metal and its effect upon the young, the disruptive influence of any number of musical styles, and even, more recently a study sponsored by the British Automobile Association on the effects of music on driving safety. While it is true that in some cases music features in these discussions as a scapegoat or convenient marker of otherwise extra-musical concerns (as when music is criticised as a means of criticising its devotees or constituencies and their cultures), it would be hasty to discard the idea that music's *musical* properties may have power. For many people it is a matter of common sense that music has effects: we know this because we have *experienced* these effects, and *because* of music's effects upon us we may both seek out and avoid music. We know, in short, that music matters.

Until relatively recently, there has been a tradition within social theory devoted to the idea of music's power. That tradition can be traced at least to Plato. '[I]t seems that here in music', says the Socrates in Plato's *Republic*, 'the guardians will build their guardhouse . . . Then, from the start, in their earliest play the young will be kept to law and measure through music' (1966:72). What comes through clearly in this famous passage is the idea that social order is fostered by (and ultimately inextricable from) aesthetic, ceremonial, and moral order, and that these in turn are substantiated by ritual and by the arts. This way of conceptualising the bases of social order remained alive throughout the nineteenth century. Its legacy can be found in Durkheim's emphasis on the elementary forms – a work, albeit, in which music's role is neglected (Durkheim 1915).

One might have expected, with the rise of mechanical reproduction, the broadcast media, and the entertainment industry in the twentieth century, that the need for thinking about music's social functions would have intensified. And yet, within social philosophy after Saint-Simon, music's importance waned. As sociologists and social theorists turned to music in the twentieth century, it was typically *not* to take up the topic of music's social power. Instead, music has been posed more remotely, as a medium that 'reflects' or otherwise parallels social structure. This essentially formalist paradigm, characteristic of theorists as diverse as Max Weber, Dilthey, Simmel, and Sorokin, effectively neutralised more overt concerns with music's link to moral conduct. (For discussions of their work see Etzkorn 1973; Zolberg 1990 *passim*; and Martin 1995:75–167.) And with this neutralisation came a very different interrogative thrust: socio-musical studies moved *from a concern with what music 'caused' to what caused music*. In relation to this trend, music sociology began to develop as the sociology *of* music, a linguistic nuance within which some of the most intriguing questions about music and society, or,

more precisely, music in and as society, came to be excised. Even in the otherwise fruitful (and grounded) focus of the 'art worlds' and 'production of culture' approaches of the late 1980s and 1990s (Peterson 1978; Becker 1982; DeNora 1995) the question of music's effects remained unanswered.

As a result, within the sociology of music, the medium of music was implicitly downgraded; its status shifted, from active ingredient or animating *force* to inanimate *product* (an object to be explained). Along with this downgrading, music became, during the twentieth century, a scholarly and specialist topic, and, as with most scholarly matters, the *passion* of the subject drained away such that, today, the fissure between ordinary, everyday responses to music and expert accounts of music came to seem both normal and acceptable. In recent years, there have been signs of change (described below) and interdisciplinary studies of music have gone a long way towards redressing music, as it were, 'in action'. There is, nonetheless, still a way to go.

Enter Adorno

It is from within this context that we can begin to appreciate the unique qualities of Theodor W. Adorno and his socio-musical project. For whatever reason – his minor career as a composer, his geographical and cultural displacement, his affiliation with fellow critical theorists – Adorno did, arguably, more to theorise music's powers than any other scholar during the first half of the twentieth century. Because of this – and despite the many faults that, with the benefit of hindsight, can be found with his work and method – Adorno is hailed, rightly, as the 'father' of the sociology of music (Shepherd 2001:605).

Adorno was intimately acquainted with music; for him, music was not a topic to be considered abstractly in terms of the social forces that shaped it or in terms of its structural properties. Music was, by contrast, a living, dynamic medium. And it was, arguably, from the standpoint of his involvement with music that Adorno launched his philosophical and sociological work. As described in the next chapters, Adorno used music *to think with*. He also devoted his thinking to the ways that music could, for better or worse, transform consciousness. It is critical to recognise from the outset that, for Adorno, socio-musical enquiry provided the key to a perspective that encompassed a breathtakingly broad interrogative span – philosophy and sociology of knowledge, cultural history of consciousness, the history of social cohesion, dominance, and submission. To understand Adorno's work on music, therefore, it is necessary to lodge it within these much broader concerns.

The idea of negative dialectics

Adorno could not have been more serious. His work explored the failure of reason that culminated in the catastrophic events of the twentieth century: the rise of fascism, genocide, terror, and mass destruction. More specifically, he sought to understand what he perceived as a transformation of consciousness, one that fostered authoritarian modes of ruling. To this end, Adorno's project begins philosophically with a critique of reason. It ends, one might argue, sociologically with a psycho-cultural study of consciousness and its conditions. Both of these components of his work need to be understood as part of a wider, interdisciplinary project.

Adorno's critique of reason centres on the idea that material reality is more complex than the ideas and concepts available for describing it. Reality – by which Adorno meant not only nature but also the specificity of lived experience – cannot be fully addressed by words, measurements, concepts, and categories, all of which must be understood at best as approximations of reality, as socially constituted ideas or images of phenomena. In this respect, Adorno was, and remained throughout his life, a materialist and a philosopher of the actual. His work highlighted the disjunction between ideas and material reality, a gap within which the former might be useful, indeed, even 'effective', but never be eternally or comprehensively 'true'.

There were, in Adorno's view, grave dangers associated with equating ideas and reality. First, such an association rendered reason conformist. Second, it deprived reason of its critical, reflexive edge. Third, it built into reason an authoritarian tendency, one in which reality was made to fit reason's pre-designed containers rather than reason bespoke to accommodate reality. These dangers were, according to Adorno, compounded by modern commodity exchange and its cultural correlate – the idea of values as 'goods'. The result, in the twentieth century, was an alteration of reason's character. Reason had become both inflated and linked to an over-estimation of itself and to an under-estimation of reality. The tendency to worship science and to accept without question whatever was purveyed under the banner of science exemplified this inflation *par excellence*. The task of modern philosophy, therefore, was to point up reality's *non-identification* with reason. This task was, in essence, criticism, and it was to be advanced through the idea of negative dialectics.

Unlike both Hegel and Marx, Adorno was not interested in contributing positive knowledge 'about' reality. Adorno sought no form of 'synthesis', whether posed in terms of an ideal formulation about reality or as a philosophy of history culminating in a utopian, and thus positive, state. By contrast, Adorno sought to illuminate difference and contradiction – the

residual, the ill-fitting, non-sense, in short, anything that did not 'fit' within existing categories of thought. Through this process, Adorno sought to refine thought. This task was in turn oriented to reconfiguring reason as a form of suspended recognition, that is, as continuous moments of non-recognition between reason and reality. These moments of non-recognition in turn provided a means by which greater complexity could be revealed. Adorno's famous aphorism, 'the whole is the untrue', encapsulates this point: the idea of negative dialectics was thus a mandate for reason to engage in self-critique. In this respect, and despite the humanist estimation of reason that permeates his work, Adorno's idea of negative dialectics is ultimately about the humility of knowledge, its inextricably social – and thus moral – character.

The concern with cognition is central to Adorno's thought world. To gain familiarity with that world it is necessary to understand what Adorno meant when he spoke of reason's tendency to objectify and, along with this, to understand objectification as a social process, that is, as a form of praxis, as described in the two next sections. From there, it is possible to contextualise Adorno's views on the degraded role of both science and art as forms of knowledge in the modern world. These topics, which together highlight Adorno's *philosophical* beginnings, in turn provide the groundwork for embarking upon what, from a *sociological* perspective, may be viewed as the *core* of Adorno's work: his focus on the role played by cultural machineries in relation to objectification, the inclusion, within his philosophy, of a theory of the unconscious, and, related to this second feature, his concern with the links between aesthetic structures and styles of consciousness.

What is objectification?

An objectifying mentality led away from dialectical thinking. It posed instead an identity between human ideas (concepts) and material realities in ways that made these realities appear axiomatic – and therefore non-negotiable. It is important to note that, for Adorno, objectification was *activity* (praxis); it was the subject who, through particular habits of mind, accomplished this work. For Adorno, the subject was thus complicit in her own cognitive alienation. It was the cultural basis of this complicity that Adorno-the-sociologist sought to explore.

Objectification was simultaneously cognitive violence. (In this sense, Adorno's focus overlaps with the post-structuralist concern with discourse and its totalising powers.) For, when an objectifying mentality had come to be established as a habit of mind, the impetus to excise what did not 'fit' pre-given assumptions about the nature of reality also

became routine – part of the tacit practices of perceiving and responding to material reality. This objectifying form of consciousness – directed away from the perception of discrepancy – was, needless to say, overly, i.e., ritualistically, conservative: it was oriented to the recognition (and thus reproduction) of general categories (as opposed to a constant interrogation of those categories by material reality). As such, it entailed a generic orientation to the world, characterised, for example, by tacit assumptions about classes and categories of people and the treatment of individuals as instances of those categories. It also involved assumptions about the nature of things (aspects of the material environment) as general types, assumptions which, if acted upon, abolished proximate – intimate – experience of things.

In Adorno's view, such a consciousness was not only dehumanised (it failed to search for specific differences that would, in turn, enlarge general categories of thought); it was above all a consciousness amenable to externally imposed relations of ruling. In the identification such consciousness made between ideas and material realities, it generated *belief in* a 'reliable', i.e., *stable*, material and social world, a world that, in the oft-quoted passage from the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 'simply exists'. To speak in this way of a *belief* in 'what simply exists' is to speak of what Adorno occasionally calls, the 'ontological ideology' (Adorno 1981:62). As a habit of mind, the ontological ideology was characterised by a taste for certainty, itself a symptom, in Adorno's view, of lax cognitive functioning. And this habit was highly conducive to 'rational' administration in so far as, at the local level, actors reinforce (identify with) general concepts, modelling the particularity of their experience or action upon those concepts so as to 'fit' or make sense of the 'here and now' in terms of the 'there and then', i.e., to ideas of what is *supposed* (by actors) *to be*. To illustrate objectification as praxis (how actors 'fit' the general to the particular and thereby do violence to the latter while simultaneously aligning themselves with ruling authorities), it is worth considering how Adorno's perspective can be compared to other strands of sociology similarly concerned with the ways that 'reality' comes to be produced as an objective fact. Consider, for example, the ethnomethodological perspective on this topic.

Objectification as social practice

One of the most compelling descriptions of this process can be found in Garfinkel's classic study of the inter-sexed person Agnes (Garfinkel 1967). Garfinkel's essay ('Passing and the Managed Achievement of Sexual Status as an Intersexed Person') examines the practices 'Agnes'

employed so as to 'pass' as a generic type of human being – a 'woman'. In this work Garfinkel prefigured subsequent perspectives in performance theory (e.g., Butler 1989) with his focus on the situated practices through which cultural 'work' gets done, performances through which the 'reality' of cultural, often institutional categories (here the identity between the categories of biological sex and natural phenomena and their link to social institutions such as the family), is reproduced. To 'fit' herself into the category 'woman', for example, Agnes mobilised skills and material props (1950s pearls and twin-set sweaters, cookery skills); she subjected herself to radical techniques of body modification (hormones and surgery); and took care to avoid situations that threatened to reveal her less feminine characteristics and attributes (she would not wear a swimming costume; she avoided 'dangerous' intimate situations). In this way, and, critically, by *suppressing* aspects of her material reality, Agnes managed to 'pass' ('for all practical purposes') as a woman.

The lessons to be drawn from Garfinkel's study apply to the performance of *all* meanings, of all cultural categories *as if* they are naturally occurring. What Agnes did, so too 'real' women (and men) do – they orient to (and through their praxis attempt to reproduce) assumed features of socially constituted, generic categories. Agnes's more extreme version of this process thus serves to highlight 'normal' praxis; it illuminates how the specific is rendered in general terms; how, in this case, 'femaleness' (one could here substitute any number of other categories of identity) is achieved through interpretive and material practice – both Agnes's practice and also the practices of those who come to perceive and act towards her as 'a woman'. We also see, in this case study, how difference (that which does not fit within a category) is excised as an often-tacit matter of practical experience. Through these practices, that which is assumed to be an axiomatic feature of material reality comes to take on the appearance of what Garfinkel and the ethnomethodologists call a 'for-all-practical purposes', 'natural, normal world'.

In similar vein, the work of Erving Goffman, on self-presentation, shows us actors as they draw upon pre-given modalities, scripts, images, and other externally provided materials (this topic will be discussed in chapter 5 in relation to the theory of cultural repertoires) so as to enact meaningful social scenarios. We see Goffman's actors produce themselves as 'types' of workers, personalities, or subjects. In this respect, Goffman's actors are fundamentally conservative; they are oriented to (as they perceive them) the culture and requirements of organisations and institutions; to what it takes, in other words, to 'get the work done' and thus to perpetuate organisationally and institutionally specific arrangements.

While at first glance Garfinkel and Goffman may seem unduly remote from Adorno's concerns, their work can also be read as highlighting the discrepancy or gap between social categories and material reality. In their reports, we are able to see some of the *work* that actors do, as practical and interpretive agents, to maintain a cognitive-ritual order. And thus we see what *does not fit* as it is fitted into preconceived forms, as cognitive (and in Agnes's case, physical) violence is done to material reality. From Adorno's critical point of view, the work performed by the actors described by Garfinkel and Goffman would consist of nothing less than mistaken identity – i.e., activity that is obeisant to the authority of the object (i.e., an apparently natural category of being such as sex or a stipulated institutional category). This type of obeisance is one that does not impinge upon the shape of that object or the thought system within which it is lodged. That is, the violence done to material so as to make it conform to an idea precludes any need to refashion – recompose – the idea so as to accommodate it to reality.

Adorno was never an interactionist nor did he concern himself with work in that tradition (indeed there are few references to *any* American sociology in his work). His work diverges markedly from interactionist and ethnomethodological perspectives in that he turned away from a concern with *actual* social practice in favour of a focus on more 'macro'-cultural concerns. By this I mean that he lodged the forms of obeisance described by scholars such as Goffman in *historical* perspective and conceptualised them as modes of consciousness and cognitive praxis, that is, as *structures* of consciousness standing outside individuals and thus serving as conditions for, and of, consciousness (on this point, and for an ethnomethodological account of knowledge production that does provide a historical perspective on knowledge as mode of praxis, see Pollner 1987). In particular, Adorno considered that subjective praxis of objectification was historically specific, a hallmark of modern thought. As part of that project, he criticised the formulation of what passed for knowledge under modernity in his and Horkheimer's jointly written *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (to which, it is worth underlining, Adorno's *Philosophy of Modern Music* was intended as an extended appendix). Examining the critique of science put forward by Adorno, and the transformation of science in the post-enlightenment period and beyond, helps to highlight Adorno's views on the 'true' social role of art – as a condition through which consciousness was structured in the modern world. It is, more specifically, in his treatment of the science–art dichotomy that the groundwork is laid for his ideas about art's (music's) cognitive function, that is, music's link to the shape and tendency of consciousness under modernity, to be conjoined to the habits of mind that characterised the ontological ideology.

In the modern world, Adorno considered, art had been stripped of its status as a means for knowing and, with it, the role of the un-conscious (or quasi conscious) in knowledge formation forgotten.

Art 'versus' science

In Adorno's eyes, the post-enlightenment dualism of art 'versus' science (the impoverished role of the former; the ascendancy of the latter) was symptomatic of the debasement of *both* science and art under modernity (capitalism, cultural commodification, and authoritarian political rule). This debasement was, in turn, part of what Adorno perceived as the 'crisis' of modernity, the disconnection of subject and object, or, in Marxian terms, the alienation that is fostered when, in daily life and on a routine basis, one is required to function in a world one has had little part in making or hope of remaking. For Adorno, the post-enlightenment division of art and science led to the modern human subject's double dispossession.

Adorno's argument runs as follows: on the one hand, science, configured as the positivist pursuit of objective facts, 'progressively' accumulated, was hailed as the purveyor of patent truth. (Such formulations left no space for scientific progress to be examined as a social and cultural construction.) As such, science was rendered aloof from ordinary modes of human inquiry, sequestered as an expert realm and thus as an instrument of ruling. (This was exemplified, perhaps most immediately, by 'science' under the Nazis, but was also illustrated at a sometimes more anodyne level in the everyday understanding of expert-mediated knowledge, and today, perhaps, many of the attempts to inculcate a 'scientifically literate' public particularly when these literacy projects are linked to attempts to *persuade* the public to 'accept' particular scientific policies or practices and/or to quell controversy.)

On the other hand, the role of art, as a form of *knowledge* or, as will be described below, a way of activating consciousness, was undercut. As with science, art came to be something remote something that acted *upon* its beholders, either as allied with the subjective (i.e., 'personal' and thus, 'irrational') realm and with the romantic notion of expression (to 'move' listeners, for example), or as it was debased through being used as an agent of rhetorical persuasion. For Adorno (as will be discussed in detail later), art's link to the mobilisation of emotion and/or action was regressive, symptomatic of the same kind of (authoritarian) communicative relationship he sought to critique. In both science and art, then, the exploration of dialectical tension between form and content, concept and material, was sacrificed in favour of the production of 'effects' – sensations, imageries, findings – in short, applications.

For Adorno, nothing was more insidious than this loss of dialectical tension. Indeed, it is here that we may venture to speak of 'true' science (and perhaps also to begin to appreciate why Adorno has recently been rediscovered by feminist and ecological philosophers), namely, an investigative attitude devoted to recursive revision (negation) of itself (as in the almost ethnographic, 'feeling for the organism' of Barbara McClintock (Fox-Keller 1983)) or art's explorations of things outside the frame, the liminal or otherwise neglected aspects of material. For Adorno, these reflexive activities widened attention's span. They heightened consciousness, that is, the ability to perceive the *differences* between things; to fathom, if never contain, reality. The task of reason was to accommodate, and through formulation as knowledge, *arrange* (without suppressing) complexity, diversity, heterogeneity – to hold as much 'material' as is possible within compromised consciousness. Such a task should be the same, whether accomplished through science or art, and it is at this point that Adorno's philosophy begins to modulate into cultural critique, to a focus on how, in any cultural medium, formulation – *composition* – is accomplished. It is also at the point when Adorno becomes a cultural critic that he becomes, also, a sociologist.

That music sociology may be encapsulated as follows: Adorno was concerned with how music's *formal properties* evinced modes of praxis that in turn were related to, and could inculcate modes of, consciousness. This ability to inculcate modes of consciousness was in turn linked to a theory of the listening subject's unconscious (or quasi-conscious) relation to music, i.e., to the way in which music processing involved a sub-rational and sub-liminal dimension, an ability to elide consciousness and yet still have some effect upon consciousness and/or action. Cultural products, in so far as they evinced particular modes of praxis in their formal arrangements, could, for example, heighten or suppress human critical, perceptual, and expressive faculties. And to the extent that they were able to structure these faculties, they also fostered social arrangement. It is from this perspective that Adorno can be seen as seeking to bridge the gap between aesthetic and scientific modes of knowing and, in so doing, to restore aesthetics to its pre-enlightenment role as cognition's matrix. It is here that Adorno's concern with music in modern societies comes to the fore.

Adorno on music

Adorno was musically trained, an acolyte of Alban Berg and author of atonal compositions. Music was, as will be described in chapter 3, nothing less than Adorno's cognitive workspace; his philosophy can be understood