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CAN WE STILL LEARN ANYTHING FROM ADORNO'S AESTHETICS TODAY?

My paper has two parts. In the first part I shall offer a reading of Adorno's aesthetics which, I hope, will make his philosophy of art appear more relevant to contemporary art and art criticism than many of his critics have been willing to concede. In the second part I shall point to some blind spots of Adorno's aesthetics; although I believe that these blind spots will not invalidate his basic insights, they may still force us to reconsider some of the conceptual framework in terms of which Adorno has articulated his insights.

I. ADORNO'S PHILOSOPHY OF ART IN CONTEXT

1. In his *Negative Dialectics* Adorno has said that genuine philosophy "would be nothing but full, unreduced experience in the medium of conceptual reflection." (ND 13, 25) This sentence is like a motto guiding all of Adorno's reflections about the adequate form of philosophical theorizing, not least his reflections about what philosophical aesthetics can and should be. The consequence which Adorno draws with respect to aesthetic theory is that philosophical aesthetics and art criticism are inseparable from each other; Adorno considered his material analyses of literary and musical works to be "integral moments of aesthetic theory rather than some application of it." (ÄT 494, 539) What Adorno postulates is an interdependence of philosophical aesthetics and art criticism, without which –that is what he wants to say– philosophical aesthetics would be empty and art criticism would be blind. While any philosophy of art needs a critically articulated experience of artworks, particularly of those of contemporary art, art crit-

icism is in need of a moment of philosophical reflection, not only because there is no fixed conceptual framework on which it can rely –so it needs to reflectively account for the concepts in which it articulates itself– but above all because the very concept of art, which art criticism implicitly presupposes, has become notoriously controversial and problematic in the context of modern art.

Adorno's thesis of the necessary interdependence of philosophical aesthetics and art criticism also shows something more general about his idea of aesthetics. The thesis is formulated from the standpoint of modern art, which in Adorno's view has only made the necessity of this interdependence clearly recognizable, corresponding to the principle that "from the most recent artistic phenomena light is to be shed on all art, rather than the other way round." (ÄT 491 f., 533) "Putting it bluntly", Adorno says, "we can say that Hegel and Kant were the last philosophers who were able to write great philosophies of art without understanding much about art." (Frühe Einleitung, ÄT 458, 495). Adorno`s aesthetics, in contrast, is, as I think, together with that of Walter Benjamin, to whom Adorno refers again and again, the first aesthetic theory which, as a philosophical one, lives from a profound and critically articulated knowledge of contemporary art, the first one also which takes contemporary artworks not merely as examples for independently developed aesthetic categories, but as keys for the development of such categories and, at the same time, for a critical reappraisal of traditional art.

One of the questions the organizers of this conference have suggested as topics for discussion in their letter of invitation has been whether philosophical aesthetics "has been surpassed by art criticism and art history" and, as one might also ask, by cultural studies. From what I have said so far it should have become clear that Adorno's thinking about art, if it does not pose this question explicitly, nevertheless moves, as it were, within the horizon of this question. In his essay "Ohne Leitbild" he has written that he believes that a general, normative philosophical aesthetics today is impossible. (10.1, 291) Such a general, normative Aesthetics would be, as Adorno puts it in his essay on "Art and the Arts", a basically conservative endeavor, aimed at "reducing art to invariant categories which are openly or latently modeled after the art of the past and are apt to defame contemporary and future art. " (10.1, S. 442) Adorno alludes here to the normative force of a socially established canon of great artworks, which tends to become socially effective by defining criteria of what genuine art is and should be; criteria which may become operative in a restrictive way not only in processes of artistic production and reception, but also institutionally concerning legislation, the public funding of art and the professional education of artists. The normative force of established art, however, always threatens the production of genuinely new art; for each genuinely new work of art –if it really is one– is *critically* related to a given world of aesthetic norms. This is particularly true of modern art, for which a reflection on the very concept of art and a critique of socially established conceptions of what art is, has become an integral moment of artistic production itself. The aesthetic normativity defined by a given body of artworks is therefore constantly put into question and transcended by art itself. "Authentic new artworks", Adorno says, "are criticisms of past ones" (ÄT 492, 533); the concept of art, therefore, cannot be captured by a definition, but is something evolving historically. (Cf. "Die Kunst und die Künste", 10.1, p. 448)

If, however, this were all that can be said, a philosophy of art obviously would have lost its object. The only thing one could say in general about art would be something like *anything goes* or *art is whatever establishes itself as art* which, however, means that genuine art criticism which always involves aesthetic judgement would lose its raison

d'être together with the philosophy of art. Adorno, in contrast, believes that it is precisely the revolutionary developments of modern art that make a new philosophical reflection on the *idea* of art possible and necessary. His *Aesthetic Theory* is an attempt to develop a normative idea of art, not in the sense of prescribing specific norms to art which would reflect what so far has established itself and is socially recognized as art, but rather to account for what makes the transgressive force and potentials of art as *artistic* ones thinkable and necessary. At one point Adorno has called such a conception of art a *negative* one. The term "negative" is to indicate that such a conception of art can only spell out a minimal core of what distinguishes artistic productions as objects of aesthetic evaluation from whatever else we encounter in the world of empirical reality or symbolic formations. This minimal core of what is common to the arts is for Adorno still a normative one, but normative not in the sense of prescribing specific norms to the production of artworks, but only in the sense of spelling out an idea of *authentic*, of *gelungene* art. Since it is Adorno's claim that it is precisely modern art which should give us a clue for spelling out such a philosophical idea of art, he locates his philosophy of art from the beginning in the field of debates about modern and contemporary art; he takes a stand in this field of debates, and this also means, that arguing about his aesthetics is inseparable form arguing about artistic phenomena as well as about their place in a wider social context. Later on I shall point to some specific blind spots in Adorno's aesthetics, blind spots which, as one might say, show that his aesthetics after all has some traits of a normative aesthetics in the sense in which he himself was critical of such a normative aesthetics. The question, then, will be whether what should be taken as the core of Adorno's philosophy of art can survive the legitimate critique of some of his substantial art-critical judgements.

Of course, to talk about a "core" of Adorno's philosophy of art is not without problems. But this time the problems are of a hermeneutic

kind. To interpret texts is always to sort out what, in the interpreter's view, is true and what is false, what is illuminating and what is problematic in a text. This is what Adorno himself always did when he interpreted, for instance, the great philosophical texts of Kant or Hegel. Consequently, if I talk about a productive core of Adorno's aesthetics, my interpretation will be selective and critical: I shall try to make the best of his aesthetics –I shall illustrate what this means in a moment. First let me come back to Adorno's thesis that, philosophically speaking, only a negative conception of art is possible today. This thesis contains, paradoxically speaking, a positive thesis about art, for it is, at the same time, a thesis concerning art's antithetical relation to empirical reality, that is, a thesis about the negativity of art itself. Authentic art for Adorno is "negative" in a threefold sense: It is (1) negative, antithetically related to empirical reality through its autonomy, that is as a sphere of validity sui generis not reducible to those of the true, the morally good or the socially useful. Art is (2) negative as being critically related to a given social reality, and art is (3) negative as transcending any given aesthetic normativity. Since I have already spoken about the third aspect of art's negativity, I shall, in what follows, only say something about the first two aspects of art's negativity –as Adorno conceives it. As I said already, my reading of Adorno will be selective; and this means above all that I shall neglect those passages of the *Aesthetic Theory* in which Adorno "instrumentalizes" Hegel's conception of art as semblance of the idea in the service of an emphatic-utopian interpretation of authentic art. I think that this interpretation of art results from a quasi-metaphysical residue in Adorno's philosophy –not only in his Aesthetics– which I do not want to discuss here; what I believe is that Adorno's emphatic-utopian interpretation of great artworks amounts to an illegitimate philosophical overinterpretation of emphatic aesthetic experiences which Adorno otherwise, and phenomenologically more adequately, describes in terms like "apparition", "rupture" (Plötzlichkeit) or "being over-

whelmed".

2. In what follows I shall discuss Adorno's conception of the negativity of art by focusing on his thesis concerning the "double character of art as autonomous and as *fait social*." (ÄT 6, 16) I start with the controversial concept of aesthetic autonomy, which has been used and criticized in many different ways. With Adorno I am using it here to specify the point of view from which works of art can be evaluated *as* works of art – as opposed to, say, philosophical treatises, political action, social behavior, technical devices or tasteful objects or arrangements. Of central importance for Adorno's characterization of art's autonomy are those passages of his *Aesthetic Theory* in which he describes the work of art as a "split object" – as "thing" and "sign" or as "material configuration" and "spirit" –and in which he emphasizes the specific processuality of artworks. Works of art are, as Adorno emphasizes again and again, configurations of sensuous material and, at the same time, "spirit" or "écriture" (Schrift); in contrast to the ordinary use of written signs, however, their materiality does not disappear in the reading of this écriture; it rather always makes itself felt as recalcitrant materiality within and against their écriture-like character. This, of course, is not a profoundly new insight; it is, for instance, prefigured in Valery's characterization of lyric as an extended hesitation between sound and meaning, What is more important is, that for Adorno the double character of the artwork as thing and sign, as material configuration and spirit is the source of the artwork's specific processuality. By this processuality Adorno does not mean the processual character of the so-called temporal arts, but a processual character which belongs to artworks in general, even to those of fine art. Adorno describes it as follows: "Contrary to a widely accepted stereotype art is not synthesis; it rather dissembles syntheses with the same force with which it brings them about. " (ÄT 201, 209) In a similar vein Adorno speaks of "Homer's tale of Penelope unraveling a day's

knitting at night" as "an allegory of art, although unaware of itself." (ÄT 267, 278) It is obvious that the processuality of artworks, understood in this way, cannot be accessible to an objectifying view from the outside, but only to an aesthetic experience which experiences this processuality as being that of this experience itself. The aesthetic experience of artworks is in *some* sense always the grasping of an aesthetic configuration as a whole, a "reading together" of a manifold of elements. The processuality of the artwork therefore would have to manifest itself as a specific processuality concerning the synthesizing efforts of aesthetic experience; the "bringing about" and the "dissembling" of synthesis by the *work of art* would have its correlate in a bringing about and dissembling of syntheses in *aesthetic experience,* that is in a reflective interplay of syntheses –structural, material and hermeneutic ones– which may mutually support as well as criss-cross or subvert each other. The aesthetic configuration which is presented by a genuine artwork, therefore, would not be accessible *as* an aesthetic whole to any single synthesis or to a finite accumulation of syntheses, but would be the correlate of a reflexive interplay of syntheses without any *definitive* result; the artwork being, as Benjamin would have it, an infinite medium of reflection. Adorno has elaborated this implication of his thesis concerning the processuality of the art*work* only in a rudimentary form in the "Early Introduction" to his *Aesthetic Theory*, but hardly in its main text. In the version suggested here it has first been worked out by Ruth Sonderegger. In the "Early Introduction" one can, however, find a description of the processuality of aesthetic "understanding" which comes close to this version and which, at the same time adds something to it. Adorno characterizes the synthetic efforts of aesthetic understanding there as a pendulum-like movement of aesthetic understanding, the reason for which is that aesthetic understanding, on the one hand, must move within the interior of an aesthetic configuration –as a monad closed off from its exterior (ÄT 257, 268)– and, on the other, must move beyond the

work of art –as a monad, which in its closure, at the same time, refers to or represents what is exterior to it (ÄT 257, 268). The work of art as an aesthetic configuration is, on the one hand, disconnected from what is exterior to it, is its own context, a configuration of elements closed off from the external world, and, on the other, it is in its relationship to the outside world and to other artworks infinitely permeable. Aesthetic understanding, therefore, must be "inside" and "outside" the work of art both at the same time. (Cf. ÄT 479, 520) If, however, we take the metaphor of the artwork as a monad seriously, then it becomes clear that the dialectics of "inside" and "outside" described by Adorno implicitly already points to the processuality of aesthetic understanding as I have characterized it before. Strictly speaking we can speak of the artwork as a monad closed off from its exterior only if we neglect the fact that this monad is thought of as also referring to or "representing" what is outside of it, that is, if we do not take it as an *aesthetic* configuration. But then it is reduced to its thing-like character, to a configuration of material or acoustic elements and their structural relations. That this configuration of material elements (also) "represents" or "refers to" what is exterior to it signifies the "ecriturial" or sign-like aspect of the artwork. In the double-character of the monad, therefore, the double character of the artwork as thing and sign reappears. The being inside of aesthetic understanding would then be the "reading together" of material qualities and formal relations, its being outside the grasping of the artwork's references to the world and to other artworks. What has to be added, then, is only that the aesthetic understanding's moving back and forth between "inside" and "outside" the artwork will not come to rest in a definitive reading of the artwork's aesthetic essence.

At this point it should be noted that Adorno understands the processual character of the artwork not only as something corresponding to the processual mode of their aesthetic experience, but also as a historical one. The being of the work of art, Adorno says, is a *becoming*. The artworks themselves change in the history of their reception. Interpretation and art criticism are, as Adorno says, the site of this becoming (ÄT 277, 289). This implies a constellation of work, aesthetic experience and forms of explicit interpretation and art criticism which in my presentation so far has remained largely implicit. The point of this constellation is that aesthetic experience itself is in need to clarify and continue itself in the forms of interpretation and art criticism. Those forms, as forms of explicating works of art, are but prolongations of aesthetic experience itself, and therefore something which is always already beginning or about to begin in the relative speechlessness of a genuine aesthetic confrontation with works of art. This is also what Adorno means when he says –again in the "Early Introduction": "Aspects of art which cannot be reduced to subjectivity and immediate experience call for an effort of consciousness and hence for philosophy. Philosophy inheres in all aesthetic experience provided it is not crude and barbaric. The artwork is waiting for its own explication." (ÄT 483 f. 524)

From what I have said about the intrinsic constellation of artwork, aesthetic experience and art criticism it follows that the processual character of the artwork and its aesthetic experience would have to manifest itself in a corresponding processuality of aesthetic discourse. This implies a desideratum for the procedures of art criticism. Art criticism, as far as it deals with great art, would have to clarify and explicate aesthetic experience both in its moments of immediacy and as a reflective interplay of syntheses without a definitive end-result in its textual organization. I think that Adorno's most important interpretations of artworks are best understood if read with this idea in mind. His pornographies about Berg and Mahler are important examples.

Both books are exemplary in that in both of them physiognomic descriptions, structural analyses, descriptions of sonic characters and sonic fields, intertextual references –to other music, including forms of what Adorno has called "lower" music–, hermeneutic interpretations and references to the social context are paratactically related to each other in such a way, that Adorno's very procedure makes evident that there is neither an ultimate philosophical reference point nor an ultimate summing up of the interpretative movement. On might say therefore, that through the textual organization of Adorno's best works of art criticism –although not always in his ideas about musical analysis– the potentially infinite processuality of aesthetic experience is made explicit –which, of course, I cannot demonstrate here.

3. So far I have only referred to one aspect –as it were, the "formal" aspect– of Adorno's idea of autonomous art. What is of crucial importance is, however, that for Adorno art's being autonomous and its being a *fait social* are inseparably connected with each other. Art is a fait social not only as a possible object of sociological investigations or of cultural studies, but, above all, because of the specific way in which significant social, historical and existential contents enter into the works themselves, are reflected, confronted or thematized by artworks. When Adorno emphasizes the double character of art as autonomous and as fait social he is implying that the sort of aesthetic configuration (die eigensinnige Durchbildung der Kunstwerke), the correlate of which is the reflective play of aesthetic experience as I have described it, can succeed only where artworks reflect or confront significant aspects of the extra-aesthetic reality to which they belong. Already on the first pages of his *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno says – alluding to Kant's idea of the "disinterestedness" of aesthetic experience – that disinterestedness and the "wildest interest" must both be involved in the experience of art if disinterestedness is not to become

synonymous with indifference. (ÄT 16, 24) "The moment of historicity is constitutive of works of art. Authentic ones give themselves over completely to the experiential horizon of their time, rejecting the pretense of timelessness . . .Works of art are the more susceptible to genuine experience the more their historical substance coincides with that of the subject of that experience." (ÄT 261 f., 272) Adorno emphasizes the "temporal core" (ÄT 254, 264) of authentic artworks, he even identifies the processual character of artworks with their temporal core, and he reverses the conservative idea that "works of art are the more intelligible the more remote in time they are from the recipient" (ÄT 262, 273) – an idea which he calls a piece of bourgeois ideology; *intelligible*, then, are above all the works of the present time; the alleged intelligibility of past works is a mere semblance; only from the horizon of present art and its experience may they become intelligible again –which means both significant and enigmatic. Arguing against the bourgeois idea of the permanence and nobility of the genuine work of art Adorno even takes the idea of the temporal core of artworks quite literally: "Conceivable, and today perhaps necessary", he says, "are works that immolate themselves through their temporal core, sacrificing their own lives to the instant when their truth appears. For them, perishing does not in the least diminish their importance." (ÄT 254, 265)

In his material analyses, not least of musical works, Adorno has again and again decoded the social and historical contents which have entered into great artworks, whether it be the echo of the French Revolution in Beethoven's music or –"as in dreams"– still in the music of Schumann (Beethoven 76), the "transfiguration of the objective world into an interior musical space of images" (Mahler 219) in the symphonies of Mahler, to which Adorno ascribes traits of an epic novel (Mahler 209), or the fragmentation of the subject in Becket's work and also already in Schonberg's *Erwartung*. Superfluous to say that

Adorno did not plead for "engaged" art; not Brecht –whose intolerance of ambiguity he criticizes (ÄT 344, 360)– or Eisler as a composer for the proletariat, but Kafka, Beckett and Schönberg were his paradigmatic modern artists. "Radical modernism", Adorno says, "preserves the immanence of art, under pain of its self-annihilation, by letting society enter its configurations only in dimmed form as in dreams, to which since times immemorial one has compared works of art." (ÄT 321 f. 336)

A *fait social* is for Adorno also the "loss of metaphysical meaning" which he considered to be constitutive of modernity as such. I think he was right to argue that this loss of metaphysical meaning has been reflected in modern art as a tendency to negate meaning as well as in its fragmentary and open forms, that means, as a rejection of the idea of the work of art as a closed, harmonious or organic whole. This argument, however, is doubly coded in Adorno's writings. It means, *on the one hand*, that through the open, montage-like or fragmentary aesthetic organization of authentic modern artworks, in the "shocks of unintelligibility" to which they give rise, the loss of an all-encompassing metaphysical meaning comes to be *presented* or *articulated* in modern artworks. Since Adorno, however, at the same time *affirms* the loss of metaphysical meaning in its productive and emancipatory consequences, the argument, *on the other hand*, amounts to saying that through the meaning-subversive traits of modern art an idea of art has become conscious of itself, and retrospectively has come to illuminate even the artworks of the past, not least in *their* meaning-subversive traits. The loss of metaphysical meaning thus appears as an agent force of a more radical artistic reflection on the idea of art and, by the same token, of a critical decomposition of traditional aesthetic norms, categories and formal principles. An idea of art becomes visible for which the critical relation to any given aesthetic normativity has become a constitutive aspect.

What remains to be discussed is Adorno's thesis concerning the negativity of art in the sense of its critical relation to social reality. Adorno occasionally claims that every authentic work of art because of its "asocial" character is a "determinate negation of a determinate society". Prima facie this idea seems not very convincing, if only because it seems to be incompatible with the processual character of artworks, through which they resist any fixation upon any definite "messages" or truth. In fact, however, Adorno is quite aware of that. This becomes clear, for instance, where he speaks about the possible social impact of art. There he speaks of the "participation" of art "in that spirit that contributes to changes of society in a subterranean way and which congeals in artworks" (ÄT 343, 359). And he goes on: "Works of art affront prevailing needs by throwing new light on the familiar which is their intrinsic tendency." (ÄT 345, 361) Such formulas would have to be supplemented by others, in which Adorno speaks of the "invasion of what was tabooed before" into the artwork (ÄT 137, 144) or the world-disclosing potential of art and its power to open up new experiences (e.g. in his Eichendorff-Essay, 11,84). To be sure, these formulas suggest that the critical and the affirmative aspects of art cannot be strictly separated from each other; moreover, as far practical impacts are concerned which belong the artwork as aesthetically experienced, they must somehow emerge from the reflective play of an aesthetic experience, which, first of all, delivers itself to the processuality of the artwork. The specific reflexive relationship to the world and to ourselves into which we are put in aesthetic experience functions, as it were, as a medium of opening up new spaces of truth and of experience and therefore, indirectly –concerning extra-aesthetical impacts of art– as a medium of opening up social discourses and experiences. Works of art, without entailing definite answers to definite question, can open up new spaces of experience, of truth and of articulation, can question frozen experiential patterns

and ways of seeing the world, can shatter the familiarity of the familiar by shedding new light on it, can bring to the fore what was suppressed or what was a foreign territory in and for the subjects of experience –and thereby can initiate also extra-aesthetic processes of reflection. But what they do and how they do it can only be shown by the critique of specific works of art; my suggestion would be that this is how we should understand Adorno's formula of the artwork's "determinate negation of a determinate society."

II. BLIND SPOTS OF ADORNO'S AESTHETICS, PARTICULARLY HIS PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC

It can hardly be doubted that Adorno's aesthetics has also traits of a normative aesthetics in the sense in which he himself has criticized it. It is nothing particularly new to say that in his philosophy of music, as far as the syntactic organization of musical time is concerned, he oriented himself at the genealogical lineage Beethoven-Brahms-Schönberg, and as far as the tendencies toward an overcoming of tonality is concerned, at the genealogical lineage Beethoven-Wagner-Schönberg. This has determined Adorno's unilinear conception of a progressive development of musical material and has brought him largely to ignore genealogies of modern, post-tonal music initiated by, for instance, Debussy, or Mahler. Even in his late Kranichstein lecture "Vers une musique informelle" Adorno stuck to his conception of a dynamic-teleological temporality of music, as he saw it prefigured in the motivic-thematic procedure –or that of "developing variation"– in the German-Austrian music from Beethoven up to Schönberg. It is the idea of a music unfolding according to a temporal logic and gaining a speech-like character through this temporal logic, an idea which he saw to be threatened not only in twelve-tone-music and in serialism, but –more generally– in various tendencies toward a

"spatialization" in modern music. Adorno's critique of Debussy and Stravinsky in his *Philosophy of Modern Music* has become a notorious case in point; in the spatialization of music which he criticized in their works he saw the "testimony of a pseudomorphism of painting in music, at its innermost core, music's abdication." (PdnM 191, 174) To be sure, the late Kranichstein lecture I mentioned as well as other late essays also shows something about Adorno's ability to open himself up to new experiences and arguments; not only does he now consider musical serialism, which he had still vehemently criticized seven years earlier in a radio lecture on "The aging of new music", as a productive passageway to an informal, post-tonal music, he rather also now attempts to integrate aleatoric and static aspects of postwar music into a more elaborate version of his idea of musical temporality. Adorno's view of Stravinsky and Debussy, and to some extent his perspective on the whole panorama of modern music, has changed; even some of Cage's music, albeit in opposition to Cage's self-understanding, Adorno has attempted to integrate into his musical world-view. I think the limit concerning Adorno's preparedness for self-revision would have been reached with minimal music, with the experimental use of sounds and noise in the context of Concept Art and Fluxus and with the various contemporary forms of sound-installation. Perhaps one might say that Adorno remained open and prepared to revise his views with respect to all those forms of new music, which in one way or the other still corresponded to the traditional paradigm of the "notated" musical work of art and the forms of reception and listening adequate for it.

I am concerned here, however, with the limitations of Adorno's musical aesthetics, limitations which are certainly connected to his fixation upon the German-Austrian musical tradition which had been the source of his primary musical experiences; but it is also connected to his conception of culture industry. The chapter on culture industry

in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* describes the final phase of a history of cultural decline, a history of decline which in a certain sense has moved in a direction opposite to that of musical progress; what is more or less implicitly assumed to be the starting point of this historical development is the revolutionary rise of the bourgeois class in late eighteenth century and the culture which it brought about. French Revolution, German philosophy and the artistic culture of the revolutionary epoch of the bourgeois class coincided, as Adorno would have it, in the promise of an "association of free human beings" (DA 91, 110), a promise, to be sure, which from the very beginning was also misused to veil the true character of the emerging bourgeois class domination. "The emancipation of the bourgeois class found its musical echo. However, neither aesthetically nor in reality was this emancipation identical with that of humanity which it proclaimed. Humanity is limited by the class character of bourgeois society." (Mahler 186) So this was no golden age of culture, after all; nevertheless, in the light of the following history of decline it begins to appear as a golden age, a history of decline through which the reifying forms of instrumental and of capitalist exchange rationalities, according to Adorno, successively had turned the promises of bourgeois enlightenment and culture into their opposite. The result for him was modern culture industry: Enlightenment as mass deception. One might also paraphrase this by saying that, once upon a time, there was a period of culture in which not only great art was possible, but in which art was in concordance with the best and most advanced tendencies of its time; that is to say, in concordance not only with an imaginary future human collective –as Adorno postulates it for all art–, but in concordance with a historically real collective in its emancipatory aspirations. As long as some of this constellation survived, even "light" or "low" art –e.g. in operettas or Viennese waltzes– was occasionally still, as Adorno puts it, "decently possible." ("Introduction to the sociology of music", 14, 200) With the final victory of culture industry, however, this constellation had definitely come to an end; and the change of social constellation affected both spheres of culture, the "high" one and the "low" one. Because both are being subjected to the "dictate of profit over culture" (PdnM 10, 19), both lose their innocence. This, in Adorno's view, is particularly true of music, because the forms of regressive listening which are promoted by the culture industry, do not only pervert low music, which is produced only for the false satisfaction of false needs, but also pervert the classical works themselves: "They are depraved . . . reification affects their internal structure." (FMRH 281) Therefore, music as a form of art can only survive in a sphere which "is cut off from official culture" (PdnM 10, 19), in the sphere of the musical avant-garde whose music, as Adorno puts it at the end of the Schönberg-chapter of his *Philosophy of modern Music*, "has taken upon itself all the darkness and guilt of the world" and which "has all its beauty in denying itself the illusion of beauty . . . No one wants to have anything to do with it . . . It is the surviving message from the shipwrecked."

Naturally, one should not take Adorno's horror picture of the culture industry quite literally, no more so than the *Dialectics of Enlightenment* in general in its most radical passages. Both texts I would read rather as experimental constructions which are to make us aware of a real, perhaps a mortal danger which, although it has become quite manifest only in the terror of totalitarian systems, already lurks within capitalist society as its dark side –as a nightmare which might well become true. One could speak of a critical project which operates strategically with the devices of overstatement and over-illumination of corrupting aspects of contemporary culture. Much in Adorno's work, particularly those passages where he himself analyses countertendencies and differentiates his conception of modern culture industry, can be read as supporting this interpretation. –The same is

already true for Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.– And yet it appears that Adorno has taken his negative account of culture industry, as far as the depravation of "low" music is concerned, more or less literally. This explains his uncompromising negative verdict on Jazz and on contemporary popular music in general, which he has accused again and again of reification, fetishism and manipulative regression. What I believe is that we can learn something more specific about the blind spots of Adorno's musical aesthetics and of his aesthetics in general if we take a closer look at his verdict on Jazz (and, by implication, on Pop-Music).

As far as Jazz is concerned, Diedrich Diederichsen has pointed out that Adorno –in contrast to most conservative cultural critics– has rather accurately described the specific musical phenomena of Jazz, only to add that Adorno has drawn the wrong consequences from this description. While Adorno derives a devastating critique of Jazz from his description of the musical phenomena, seeing in the "rebellious gestures" of Jazz only "the tendency to blind obeisance, much like the sadomasochistic type described by analytic psychology" (Jazz, 122, 124), Diederichsen has turned Adorno's description against Adorno himself. "These songs and marches (in early Jazz, A.W.), precisely as ultimately depraved forms of the culture of the oppressors, became useful tools with which one could do something completely different. Out of this parodistic, in any case instrumental use of European music emerged in Jazz the specific formative employment of the basic units of theme and solo: The theme was depraved, overwraught (zugespitzte und überdrehte) European convention, the solo its negation, an escape (a way out). Here Adorno heard –certainly with some right– the <chasing>, <the persecution of the slower by blood-hounds> and <at the progrom the behavioral pattern of fun turning into cruelty>, but without seeking for the correlates of these features in Afro-American experience. Had he done it, he could have

understood the escape of the solo, the completely different musical language it began to speak in contrast to that of the theme, as the negation of the music out of which it developed." (Diederichsen 3) Diederichsen's analysis, from which I have quoted, is remarkable as a musical and sociological analysis of Jazz which is done quite in the spirit of Adorno, but with results which are diametrically opposed to that of Adorno.

Diederichsen has extended his interpretation of Jazz to an interpretation of Pop-Music, although he sees Pop-Music as a new beginning – *after* the final victory of culture industry: Pop-Music was from the very beginning integrated into the culture industry. It also has built on materials and signs, "which initially were only garbage-like remnants of what music once was, but re-signifying them with new meanings and promises of liberation." (Diederichsen 4) Because Pop-Music was from the beginning integrated into the culture industry, effects of the culture industry –like standardization, fetishism of details– had always already become part of its internal constitution; but precisely in these aspects the culture industry proved itself – contrary to what Adorno assumed– as being open for a subversive re-signification of signs. The pop-musical use of technical means "often resembles the use of fetishized sound-details and logos more than the use of signs and sign-systems for the construction of musical structures (in the traditional sense, A.W.), but pop-music has always preserved a tension between these two extremes –empty commodity character and a new, at times clandestine, subcultural artistic language– a tension which cannot be resolved in one or the other direction." (Diedrichsen 5)

Adorno has always emphasized the latently collective character of all music which, in his view, music had inherited from its magical and ritual origins: music says "We", in music a real or imaginary collec-

tive comes to express itself. However, at the time of a fully developed culture industry, an authentic We can only come to expression as a possible future We in the advanced new music which "nobody wants to have anything to do with." The advanced composer preserves the idea of a liberated, solitary humankind by uncompromisingly refusing to give in to the false needs of real listeners. In Adorno's claim, however, according to which an authentic We can find a voice under the conditions of culture industry only in the music of advanced composers who are exiled from society, a bourgeois-elitist aspect of Adorno's aesthetics comes to the fore, which has been legitimately criticized by writers on Pop-Culture, particularly in the context of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies. The critique is not least directed against Adorno's negative-totalizing concept of culture industry as a "system" extinguishing everything authentic, non-identical and local. Against Adorno some of the critics have claimed that the culture industry with its down-leveling and reifying tendencies itself generates and is dependent on counterforces acting against those tendencies; counterforces by which the creative and subversive potentials of pop-music have again and again been renewed in particular local contexts. But if this is true, a perspective on the social, the identity and community-generating aspects of pop-music becomes possible which is quite different from that which Adorno's division of the musical globe into the spheres of alienated culture industry and authentic avant-garde permits. From early Jazz up to Hip-Hop and Drum 'n' Bass Music such social aspects have been constitutive of pop-music. Through the interaction of performers and fans a (local) We is constituted, a commonality of signs and a piece of a common identity. However fragile, local and vaguely circumscribed this We may be, how much it may be again and again transformed into a reified We by the culture industry, pop-music through its subversive and innovative aesthetic potentials has again and again been the medium of a trans-subjective self-articulation of marginalized or opposi-

tional minorities, particularly of youth-cultures, in an emancipatory sense, perhaps *expressing* alienation but not being simply a symptom of it. Examples would be the forms of rock-music which were developed in the context of Pop-Art, particularly of Warhol's New York *Factory* and through which for the first time a musical culture emerged, in which deep-seated –also aesthetically deep-seated– gender-stereotypes were aggressively and playful put into question. Another example would be the Drum 'n' Bass-Music of a predominantly black youth-culture in London which Angela McRobbie has written about; McRobbie has in particular emphasized the creative and aesthetically reflexive way in which very specific experiences of discrimination and marginalization have come to an artistic expression in this music. What seems to be characteristic of these and other forms of pop-music, certainly also already for early Jazz, is that subversive and affirmative aspects cannot be separated from each other: I think one might speak of a subversive affirmation of a We that wants to find a way out of the repressive patterns of life prescribed to it by the social context and which in its aesthetic self-articulation wants to be recognized, but without identifying itself with the universal We of a liberated mankind. The collective character of art which Adorno thought to be prefigured in its magical and ritual origins, renews itself, as it were, in a subversive and decentred form, but in a real and not merely imaginary way in the culture of post-metaphysical modernity, and as an integral part of a culture industry which needs permanent innovation as much as it constantly threatens the integrity of cultural products.

The specific and often subversive We, which in the local contexts of innovative pop-music has usually formed itself, is not the universal We of a liberated mankind, as Adorno has postulated it for the authentic music of the avant-garde. It also is not, even where it has class-specific aspects, the We of a social class on its way toward

emancipation. The subversive character of this We is rather always tied to local contexts, to specific experiences and social constellations, the significance of which will always tend to get lost in the process of global distribution, if the significance of those experiences or constellations is not "transportable" or "generalizable" together with the music in which these experiences and constellations have found their expression and if not by way of a local appropriation and re-signification of the globally distributed music something new is created. The universal "We" which according to Adorno finds its expression in authentic artworks is, as it were, replaced by many "We-s", involved in the conflicts, the defeats, the experiences and the rebellions of their time and place; no universal We is prefigured in them, but a minority We articulates itself that in protest against a dominant and repressive We demands recognition.

All this suggests the idea that apart from the temporal core which Adorno claims for authentic art, this art –and perhaps art in general– also has a "local core", so that what Adorno says about the artworks of the past, would be valid also for art as being "transported" over geographical distances, perhaps being globally distributed. Nobody can say in advance how far artistic productions can be kept alive over distances of time *and* space; and yet Adorno would still be right when he claims that authentic artworks "give themselves over completely to the experiential horizon of their time" –which now should be read as: "their historical situation"; for this alone is their chance to survive aesthetically over distances of time and space even in a world which technically and economically –and perhaps some day also in its democratic and emancipatory aspirations– is about to become one world.
Even if it is conceded that pop-music has become an art form of its own, it can hardly be denied that it is a sphere of art quite different from that of concert music. Pop-music cannot be understood as a purely musical phenomenon in the traditional sense of "absolute"

music with its conventions of written scores, concert performances and concentrated listening, but only as a constellation of factors, among which elements of improvisatory performance, the specific use of voice and texts, the specifically social character, image-building, identificatory elements –stars– and the bodily involvement of the recipients –dance hall– only in their interdependence mark an aesthetic field. This means, that with regard to (traditional) concert music and pop-music one could speak of two musical cultures which are in some sense incommensurable with other – incommensurable also with respect to the difference between academic and extra-academic patterns of the musician's recruitment and professionalization. However, there have been numerous contacts and transfers between the two "systems": most significantly between minimal and pop-music in the New York avant-garde scene in the sixties. Characteristic of the contacts and transfers between musical minimalism and rock-music is that they were effective in both directions, so that at this point the distinction between "high" and "low" loses its firm basis. From now on the transfers between the two musical systems will be of a different kind than those between high and low art in the past, because –even if their incommensurability in some sense remains– transfers between them will be potentially go in both directions, as transfers between two artistic spheres, both of which can be characterized by an opposition between mainstream and avant-garde. Such transfers and mutual inspirations have not only occurred between minimal music and rock music, but at many other places: certain of Stockhausen's musical innovations were enthusiastically welcomed by pop musicians; conversely pop music has left its productive traces in recent concert music, for instance in the music of Bernhard Lang and Gene Coleman, whose compositions have opened up new fields of experience for concert music by integrating pop-musical and improvisational elements into complex musical structures.

To be sure, I think one should assume that the interaction between the two musical cultures will, for the time being, have rather the character of a productive experimentation with the transgression of boundaries and will not erase the difference between the two –at least not as long as there will be any relevant composed music in the sense of the European tradition. However, a challenge to "composed" new concert music could already emerge from the specific forms of intermediality characteristic of pop-music. After all, a tendency toward an explicit inter-mediality and therefore toward a questioning of traditional boundaries between the arts is operative in many contemporary forms of art, certainly also in the theatrical and action-oriented elements of new concert music. And yet the aesthetic primacy of so-called "absolute" music has so far not been seriously questioned. It is conceivable, however, that potentials of musical innovation today will arise much more from an intermedial "intermeshment" ("Verfransung") of the arts than the idea of absolute music allows one to think. In any case, an advanced concert music which would relate in such an elitist and contemptuous way as Adorno did to pop-music, its aesthetic potentials and the social experiences articulated by it, might be threatened by the danger of academism, that means of losing its "temporal core" - i.e. its being significantly related to the existential experiences and the social conflicts and constellations of our time.

Adorno has conceded the possibility of contacts and transfers between "high" and "low" music until late nineteenth century. Transfers from "high" to "low" music occurred through the simplifying and "standardizing" use of elements of high music in the production of music for entertainment or of dance-music. Transfers from "low" music to "high" music occurred in the sense of an invasion of "plebeian" elements and of popular music, respectively, into high music, in the sense of a current of invigorating forces from "low" to "high" music, through which occasionally high music did receive new impulses.

This, however, Adorno thought, had basically come to an end with the beginning of advanced modern music. The two halves of the musical globe, according to Adorno, had too far moved away from each other; or where, as in the case of Mahler and Berg –Stravinsky did not count any more and Bartók was a special case which could not be quite integrated in the overall picture–, forms of lower music invaded the high one, they did so either as damaged ones, as shreds of memory which either stood emblematically for the cultural mutilation of the oppressed as in Berg's *Wozzeck*, or which as damaged ones were sublated and transformed into high music with a rescuing gesture. In the funeral march of Beethoven's piano sonata in A-flat major the echo of the French Revolution can still be heard in an affirmative, heroic sense, while in Mahler's marches, according to Adorno, above all the perspective of the victims is articulated, who were "abducted" by these marches. (Mahler 309)

Nevertheless, Mahler's music occupies a singular place in Adorno's writings, because he sees the elements of low music in Mahler not only as depraved ones, but also as a sort of corrective for high music's "loss of *Stimmigkeit* (authentic aesthetic value)". "In a Jacobin way low music makes an assault on high music", Adorno says with unconcealed enthusiasm about Mahler's music; about this music he also says that it initiates "a revisionary trial against the partition of music into high and low." At this point an aspect of Adorno's position toward music, a motive of his thinking about music –and about art in general– becomes visible, which runs against the hermetic aspects of his philosophy of music; a motive, that is, which is subterraneously present in all of Adorno's writings on art, for which, however, he could find no legitimate place in his negative-totalizing conception of culture industry. Where he explicitly affirms this motive with respect to high art, he does so usually only in a future oriented, utopian sense. If, however, the culture industry is not that closed system of

alienation, as which Adorno conceived it, then this motive, or this ensemble of motives running against his hermetic elitism, gains a new significance with regard to contemporary art and music.

In the chapter on "light music" of his *Sociology of Music,* in a context where Adorno critically deals with popular hits (Schlager), Adorno, relativizing his critique, adds something about the *positive* qualities of evergreens: "One might see it in a paradoxical achievement: namely by means of a totally depraved and down-leveled material to articulate musically –and perhaps expressively– something quite specific and unique. In such products the idiom has become second nature, which admits of spontaneity, musical ideas (Einfall), immediacy. Reification accepted as something obvious in America occasionally turns in an unforced way into the semblance of something humane and proximate, and it is no mere semblance. One may sociologically learn from that something about high and low music. In light music a quality finds a refuge, which got lost in high music, but which once was essential for it and for the loss of which high music may some day have to pay a high price: that of the relatively autonomous, qualitatively different singular moment in its totality." (14, 216) Diederichsen had described standardization and the fetishization of sound-details as characteristics of pop-music; in the passage quoted Adorno suggests, quite contrary to what he usually would say, that in such traits of "low" music something essential for music might be preserved, which high music is in the danger of losing. With the right of the "qualitatively different singular moment" Adorno is also concerned in his essay on "Schöne Stellen" (beautiful details). And in his Mahler-monograph he says: "The drastic and immediately compelling character of the singular musical moment, which cannot be substituted by anything else and cannot be forgotten, the power of the name, is often better preserved in Kitsch and vulgar music than in the high one, which even before the age of radical constructivism sacrificed all that to the principle of stylization." At a different place

Adorno speaks of the "remnants of that intoxicated, orgiastic character" of more ancient forms of lower art, "which high music in the process of rationalization and logification eliminated from itself" (14, 199), only to add, that high music, "remembering the injustice it has done to the many" –an injustice which is implied in its progressive intellectualization– again and again has absorbed elements of low music into itself –a current of invigorating forces from the low to the high. Those remnants of an intoxicated-orgiastic character which Adorno ascribes to older forms of low art, had, of course, collective aspects in a very real sense. Something of this, so it seems, has been recovered by the experimental and aesthetically reflective use of psychedelia in the New York art scene in the sixties, that is in the context of minimal music, pop art and rock-music. (Diederichsen) What is remarkable is that Adorno, who certainly would have abhorred those artistic tendencies, opposes their genealogical "counterparts" – ancient forms of low art– to modernist constructivism in a way that has a striking parallel in the New York avant-garde's artistically motivated opposition to this constructivism. Maybe it is not so surprising any more that even the "regressive" type of listening to music, which Adorno usually considered to be one of the basic negative effects of culture industry, at certain places appears in a new light: "Although regressive listening certainly cannot be seen as symptom of progress in the consciousness of freedom, it might suddenly turn into something positive once society should leave the path of the permanent recurrence of the same." (14, 49) Naturally, Adorno accepts this quasi-Benjaminian perspective only as a utopian one in the future tense; but that he leaves it open as a perspective on a possible future, shows something about his way of thinking about possibilities of music and of musical experience which because of his negative-totalizing conception of culture industry he could only project into the future. In the same futuristic sense Adorno also attaches a positive place to amusement: "Amusement, totally unleashed, would not be the oppo-

site of art, but the extreme touching it. The Mark Twain absurdity, with which American culture industry occasionally flirts, could be a corrective of art. The more earnestly art takes its task to oppose reality, the more it begins to resemble the earnest of real life, that is, its opposite." (DA 142, 164) And a little later in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* we read: "The trace of something better is preserved by culture industry in those features which bring it close to the circus, in the obstinately-nonsensical artistry of riders, acrobats and clowns, in the <defense and justification of bodily art against spiritual art>." (DA 143, 165 –quotation from Wedekind).

Finally, in Adorno's *Composition for the Film*, co-authored by Hanns Eisler, a role and an experience of music is described and legitimated, which certainly would be relevant also for other forms of music being used in combination with other media, notably with respect to pop-music, which again clearly runs against Adorno's ideal of "structural" listening. "Music for films", the authors write, "is a music which is not listened to attentively." And this leads the authors to plead for a kind of music for films, "which can be apprehended if listened to absent-mindedly and without attention, without, however, moving along the outworn tracks of stereotypical associations . . . The composer, then, would be confronted by a task, which would be quite new and would open up rather peculiar perspectives, namely the task to produce something of good quality which still could be apprehended incidentally while whisking by . . . Film-music ought to flash up and sparkle." (15, 142 f.) Again Adorno –together with Eisler– conceives of musical possibilities which evidently do not fit into the negativist conception of a hermetically closed off, spiritualized new music.

At this point it should be emphasized that Adorno's remarks on the dangers which might threaten the "spiritualized" –or intellectualized– music of the European avant-garde should not be understood

as a legitimate critique of the most significant works of the European avant-garde composers after the Second World War. It would be absurd one would charge works like Stockhausen's *Kontakte* or his *Mikrophonie 1*, Nono's *Prometeo* or Kurtag's *Messages of the late R.V. Troussova*, to mention only a few, with academism or a false spiritualization. With my quotations from Adorno I was aiming at something different: I wanted to point to motives in Adorno's thinking about music –and of art in general– which clearly transcend the hermetic negativism which in his *Philosophy of Modern Music* he claimed to be the only viable option for an authentic new music after the victory of the culture industry. One might even speak of Adorno's dream of a different new music which was nourished by his most blissful musical experiences, including those of "low" music, which go back to his childhood days with mother and aunt –experiences for which in the age of culture industry he saw no legitimate place any more. In the wild, nonsensical, bodily and excessive features of pop-music he could not recognize anything resembling his dream. I think, however, that this was not only due to his negative-totalizing conception of the culture industry, but was also founded in his fixation on the tradition of German-Austrian music, which –even where "low" music is concerned– had been the source of his most blissful experiences. (Diederichsen) This has determined Adorno's musical categories, his conception of legitimate musical temporality, of authentic musical organization and its adequate reception until the end. The weight of those experiences, from which Adorno drew his most important aesthetic and music-philosophical insights, also determines the blind spot of his philosophy of music, which made him a bourgeois-elitist censor of a music to which he could not find and did not want to find an access. And I think something similar might be said with respect to other art forms which Adorno has been or probably would have been suspicious of: pop art, film, or pop-inspired new multi-media forms of theatre, for instance.

So there certainly is an element of bourgeois elitism in Adorno's aesthetics, which has made him vulnerable to a critique which sees him as a representative of a bourgeois aesthetic ideology. But this critique has often ignored that Adorno himself was the most outspoken critic of bourgeois aesthetic ideologies and, by the same token, a radical critic of bourgeois society. I do not think that the basic insights of his philosophy and sociology of art –centering about his analysis of art as autonomous and as fait social– have been surpassed by more recent theories, whether in the field of aesthetics or of cultural studies. But to see this, a productive reading of Adorno is necessary which goes beyond the limited horizon of what he was able to experience as genuine art.

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