Work In Progress

The Secret Musical Self: Nostalgic Reification of Music According to Adorno

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This article fails immediately in the following ways: (1) to contextualize Adorno's theoretical interpretation of reification since its illumination by Lukacs; and (2) to offer an ideological critique of Adorno's blatant and sometimes humorous assaults against the various practices of music in modern society. With these failures in mind, however, this article succeeds in the following ways: (1) as a hermeneutic extraction of the concept of reification which Adorno rarely makes explicit in his vast musicological writings; and (2) at contextualizing Adorno's attacks against music with a more explicit historical accuracy.

It is an honour to have this work published by *Alternate Routes*, for it serves as a platform for my future research into the concept of reification as it can be applied to music, and the potentials of de-reification that may exist in a musical experience.

Ideology

The purpose of my research is to identify intersections between nostalgia as evoked by music and the process of reification according to Adorno. While the subjective content of a nostalgic experience is legitimate according to one's identity and social position, the affective *essence* of nostalgia as evoked by music is a vehicle of reification to ideological categories of authenticity and tradition, partly responsible for the construction of modern and postmodern social realities. In the context of research I do not reconstruct the nostalgic moment through the rose-tinted glasses characteristic of the state itself. Rather, here I consider nostalgia as intimately connected with social and technological forces

responsible for constructing such resultant ideological categories as authenticity and tradition.

Accordingly, the significance of nostalgia in music as a social construction over the significance of its psychological attributes takes precedent, and the social construction of nostalgia is considered in a *material* context. The ideological perspective here is not intended to trivialize the necessary human aspects of nostalgia in modern society – as I will demonstrate below, psychological and sociological literature argue that nostalgia is a crucial facet of human existence and memory, enabling people to face threats to the continuity of self while maintaining a consistent identity. My intention is to merely allude to the ideological aspects potentially underlying a nostalgic experience, an experience that Adorno himself would have considered ideological. That nostalgia is itself such a regressive state and that music is theorized to evoke pre-linguistic signification suggests that the music industry intentionally used nostalgia as a principle compositional method in the process of commodifying music.

Secret Selves

Nostalgia is an emotional state that is intertwined between emotion, memory, and identity, and is difficult to identify objectively because it is so intensively subjective. It is not a direct psychological referent to the totality of a past experience but a form of fantasizing the positive perspectives of one's self within that experience's context, an allusion to a particular time that resembles and contextualizes the self in the present. According to Davis (1979: 34), nostalgia resembles the optimistic fantasy. He states:

> [While nostalgia resembles the optimistic fantasy] of a better time, it is a time we have already known. It reassures us of past happiness and accomplishment and, since these still remain on deposit, as it were, in the bank of our memory, it simultaneously bestows upon us a certain current worth, however much present circumstances may obscure it or make it suspect.

Davis argues that by semi-alienating the self from the present nostalgia guarantees the preservation of identity, enabling a person to over-

come present social discontinuities with an adherence to the self's 'superior' ability to survive past experiences – nostalgia, in other words, is the optimistic thread of continuity in the sewn fabric of identity. A person recognizes this alienation with optimism because overcoming past stressful situations equates a triumph of the self, which (1) guarantees the continuation of identity, and (2) allows the person to confront discontinuity so that identity may become however necessarily malleable. By focusing so strongly on the self, nostalgia becomes a necessary human function of self-individuation and a cognitive technology for qualifying the self as autonomous and unique. From this emerges what Davis (1979: 43) calls the "secret self," which "gives testimony to one's prescience, to a heightened sensitivity and oneness with the deepest impulses of an age."

If nostalgia guarantees the survival of the secret self, these secret selves inevitably share experiences with one another to be recontextualized as members of society in presently experienced conscious time, for it is the appreciative stance of the self in confrontation with *social* adversities and *social* relationships that will guarantee the survival and preservation of identity. The exposition to another person of the secret self occurs within what Davis calls a "nostalgic memory exchange", which exposes "the wonderment of the revelation of how much more alike than different our 'secret' pasts are" so that people experience multiple shared memories "*ad infinitum* in paradoxical regress" (1979: 43).

For the purposes here, nostalgia can be conceived of as a subjective state of awareness that appears as social relationships between people who perceive their interconnecting personal biographies as significant to the state of awareness itself. However, I argue that the nostalgic experience and exchange is a process of reification in which subjects mistake material for social relationships; this is a problematic that has thus far remained unrealized. That the nostalgic exchange is exposed once subjects have realized the base of their experiences occurs through a shared relationship with material reality suggests that such a moment of exchange is reified as a social relationship when it is actually a material one. This is the predisposition which, in my mind, justifies the industrial Marxist approach of my research.

Extracting Reification from Adorno

There is perhaps nobody in the history of music studies who considered popular music as blatantly ideological as Adorno or who scrutinized with such cynicism. His infamous attacks against the music industry to some may prove he knew very little about the genre, for his generalizations often appear lacking the knowledge of culturally specific improvisational and compositional methods that lend popular music its own dimensions of interest and sophistication. Indeed, it would be an expected reaction of open-minded post-structuralists to dismiss Adorno as exemplifying elitism, especially in statements expressing his prediction that Jazz's decline in popularity will be due to "its own stupidity" (1933: 497). However, Adorno's arguments become far less benign and dismissive than immediately perceived because they are legitimated by his anxiety over the perpetuation of fascism, of which he considered many forms of music to be legitimate agents of its potential facilitation.

Music, according to Adorno (1945: 384-86), possesses the potential of perpetuating the fascist state in industrial society by adhering to four general rules: (1) that "art is essentially a force of manipulation" and follows a "set ideological pattern"; (2) that the guaranteed consumption of standardized commodities "amounts to the line of least resistance against big business"; and (3) that the trend toward collectivism for its own sake exemplified in neo-Classical composition (and likely today in postmodern musical references to 'the past') will (4) facilitate the artificial preservation of historical pre-industrial quaintness of life.

In general, Adorno (1941a: 440-50) regards the genre of popular as characterized by its difference from and opposition to 'serious' music because the former is *standardized* as a commodity whereas the latter succeeds in transcending its alienated subjectivity by challenging and expanding upon standardized musical practices; popular music is merely valued in terms of its exchange, turned into a thing. Assigning music such an exchange-value (what an object's labour is worth in relation to other objects) in place of use-value (what an object's use is worth to the survival of a social group) stems from the Marxist concept of material production and the rise of the commodity, for according to Marx human history and consciousness is bound with its material context.

Indeed, according to Marx himself (1887: 257), human survival relies on material offered by the earth, for even when we build a table out of wood, "the table continues to be that common, every-day thing, wood";

within a capitalist context, however, the labour invested in the table's construction determines its level of value in relation to other commodities. According to Marx, the commodity is a "mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appear to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as social relations, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour."

In other words, the labour invested in the production of an object disappears as it is fetishized with exchange-value, commodified, and existing in social relationships of value with other commodities. As social relationships of labourers themselves are misrecognized within the relationships between things, these things in turn govern the consciousness of the labourer. As Marx expands, "the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things" (1887: 258). Even the labourer becomes a commodity, for it is the labour that he or she sells which is valued in relation to other commodities, rendering self-perception of value as being that of exchange.

Ergo, the consequence of this social process of fetishization is that of being governed by commodity with the illusion of your actions and existence resulting from free will and autonomous consciousness; the state of existence as dictated by the relations of material objects remains unrecognized, unconsciously internalized, and perceived as natural. The labourer here indeed undergoes the most dangerous aspect of capitalism, the process of reification, which governs, according to Petrovic (1991: 412), "the worker's 'soul', and more broadly, human consciousness." Reification, or "the act of transforming human properties, relations and actions into properties, relations and actions of man-produced things which have become independent ... of man and govern his life" (1991: 411), can be understood as the consequence of fetishizing commodities, alienating labourers from each other and from those outside their class. Reification is a process that presents alienation as a natural human state while perpetuating the illusion that material relationships are actually social ones, and operate every day.

According to Adorno, music as a commodity is reified through the technologies that exist in everyday objects such as the phonograph and

the radio. That these objects are instilled with a magical power over people's consciousness is compelling in Adorno's understanding of the phonograph record, which when drained of the illusion as a transcendent cipher of musical experience, appears as a "black pane made of composite mass which these days no longer has its honest name" as a product of human labour. The phonograph record is just one agent of musical reification, for even while it can be considered the "first of the technological artistic inventions," he states:

> ... it already stems from an era that cynically acknowledges the dominance of things over people through the emancipation of technology from human requirements and human needs and through the presentation of achievements whose significance is not primarily humane; instead the need is initially produced by advertisement, once the thing already exists and is spinning in its own orbit (Adorno 1934: 277).

The radio, meanwhile, as a commodity guarantees to facilitate the reification of musical processes as being naturally predisposed to technological dissemination, as offering a 'unique' experience to the listener, when in actuality the music is so tailored to the technological parameters of the radio that its authenticity is trivialized. For example, Adorno argues (1941b: 252-61) that when a Beethoven symphony is mediated through the radio it offers "optimum conditions for retrogressive tendencies in listening" by reducing the intensity, concentration, and spatial uniqueness of symphonic architecture whose purpose is to give rise to a "suspension of time-consciousness" to a trivial mechanization of "empirical time", the technical and sonoral limitations of the radio.

For reification to occur, music must sound natural and unobtrusive. All technologies of its mediation, including its composition and distribution, must disappear in the act, presenting music as a natural system of sounds. The very compositional method in popular music is the basis upon which the chain of reification is initiated, according to Adorno, by employing formulae that follow the listener's first experiences with music experienced in early childhood; the psychological grip of popular music thrusts the listener into a comfortable state from which escape seems both impossible and undesirable. Adorno offers (1941a: 444):

> ... popular music is the sum total of all the conventions and material formulaism of music to which [the listener] is accustomed and which he regards as the inherent, simple language of music itself, no matter how late the development might be which produced this natural language.

The listener here embodies a state of existence through popular music that appears more optimistic and fantastic than the present, which is evidenced, according to Adorno, by the fact that part of popular music's minimum requirement be that it communicates through "baby talk", or "unabating repetition of some particular musical formula comparable to the attitude of a child incessantly uttering the same demand" as well as "the limitation of many melodies to very few tones, comparable to the way in which a small child speaks before he has the full alphabet at his disposal" (1941a: 450). The regression to an optimistic fantasy appears to resemble Davis's discussion of nostalgia as a regression into positive perspectives of past experiences.

The use of 'children's music' for Adorno is an especially important manipulative tool of the music industry because it is children's music that is understood in relatively autonomous melodic units, units which stand on their own or in relation to any permutation of units within the corpus of popular music. When these units are combined, they communicate in such a manner that disallows the listener to perceive a whole musical structure, arguably a child's perspective of the world. Adorno argues that inattention to the whole is indicative of the process of reification, where the listener is in fact suffering from regression unable to perceive the alienation of the units when they are entirely substitutable, appearing complex and structurally fixed. Reification here, however offensive it may seem in Adorno's conception, is achieved because the childlike experience seeps into the listener's unconscious, rendered undetectable in objective reality, and borne by the manufacturing process of the compositional methods of popular music (Adorno 1938: 306). Further, instrumentation itself is an important medium in popular music for instilling the childlike state. For example, while the abundant ubiquity which Adorno sees of guitar, banjo, and accordion is evident of the simplicity required for it to be communicable (whether banjos and accordions were really as common as he claims remains uncited, which

is a common problem in Adorno's writings), simplicity further has an effect on the complex history of notation: "rationally comprehensible notes are replaced by visual directives, to some extent by musical traffic signals" which "confine themselves to the three tonic major chords and exclude any meaningful harmonic progression" (1938: 307).

That music is a form of regression, that this regression is the state within which reification occurs, suggests that Adorno's insights into popular music were contingent upon the intentional use of nostalgia in popular music production from the beginnings of the music industry.

It should be noted that Adorno does not lay any sort of blame on the listener, which may increase for some the opinion that he is patronizing. The rise of capitalist society, according to Adorno, resulted largely in a re-entering of dominant beliefs and the centrality of religion was displaced by the logic of capitalism. The ability to sell and buy labour became the medium to retribution and salvation. Traditionally, with religious centrality, art was a facilitator of dominant beliefs, but as it lost its religious centre, its central truth value, it was thrown into a "vacuum ready to absorb the arbitrarily superimposed doctrines of totalitarianism", which has further implications. He states:

> The fact that [the listener] has never been swept away emotionally by the tragic forces of [pre-commodified] music bereaves him somehow of the very life phenomenon of the humane. It is this lack of experience of the imagery of real art, partly substituted and parodied by the ready-made stereotypes of the amusement industry, which is at least one of the formative elements of that cynicism that has finally transformed the Germans, Beethoven's own people, into Hitler's own people.

Standardization

According to Adorno, music in the industrial context induces "relaxation because it is patterned and pre-digested" which "serves within the psychological household of the masses to spare them the effort of that participation" thus "permit[ting] an escape from the boredom of mechanized labour" (Adorno 1941a: 458). Through such musical processes as rhythmic obedience and emotional evocation (more strongly the focus here), popular music reinforces in the former the mechaniza-

tion of the labour process, the essence of machinery represented through rhythmic predictability, in the latter, the point of emotional misdirection, where the anxiety over social alienation as produced by capitalist society is displaced by the emotional world uttered by the sentimental cultural expressions in industrial society. On the subject of rhythmic obedience, Adorno (1941a: 461) offers this eloquent summary:

> The cult of the machine which is represented by unabating jazz beats involved a self-renunciation that cannot but take root in the form of a fluctuating uneasiness somewhere in the personality of the obedient. For the machine is an end in itself only under given social conditions – where men are appendages of the machines on which they work. The adaptation to machine music necessarily implies a renunciation of one's own human feelings and at the same time a fetishism of the machine that its instrumental character becomes obscured thereby.

While rhythmic predictability is arguably reified into a person's consciousness by the material form of muscles and movement, emotion is reified through a form of misdirected fulfillment of wishes. Speculative as this may seem, historical research reveals that the music industry's success relied upon the production of sentimental ballads, whose formulaic ingredient, according to Shepherd (1982), was the inclusion of a particular emotion, *nostalgia*.

Tin Pan Alley referred to an area of New York City between 28th Street and 5th Avenue near Union Square which employed songwriters and music publishers in the late 19th century disseminated popular songs on sheet music for vocal and simple instrumental arrangement. Because of the intensely hot summers, Tin Pan Alley arrangers were forced to leave open their office windows, out of which bled onto the streets the sounds of their pianos as they sat arranging, which resembled the sound of tin pans clashing together, thus the title of the era. This was a very productive business; Harry van Tizler, one of these arrangers, wrote 3000 songs in 11 years, most of them written in efficient time.

Charles K. Harris, a native of Milwaukee, in 1892 wrote the first popular song, a ballad entitled *After the Ball*, that could arguably be called

the first 'mass consumed' hit as it sold an astronomical 10 million copies generating $25,000 per week. Following the song's initial success Harris moved to New York and published compositional methods in his instructional booklet, *How to Write and Sell a Popular Song*, successfully epitomizing the sentimental ballad as "the staple of the popular music industry" (Shepherd, 1982: 5). The proven success of the sentimental ballad, according to Harris, rested on the criteria that it was written in a 'fashionable musical style' while either (a) appearing topical or (b) appealing to mass emotion, using nostalgia as its platform for emotional evocation.

That nostalgia was a common technology in the fabric of American life is further exemplified in Key's analysis of Stephen Foster's compositional methods in his sentimental ballads, which, according to Key (1995: 145), achieved a "special resonance" that "beckons to our own more cynical time and becomes a valuable tool for understanding the cultural forces at work in the first century of American national identity." According to Key (1995: 145), the national identity appears idealistic in the sentimental ballad. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the sentimental ballad's evocative effects appeal even to those for whom it is under scrupulous analysis.

That nostalgia evokes a longing for this idealization was by no means co-incidental to the context in which the sentimental ballad was consumed; the domestic sphere, performed most often by women on the family piano who read sheet music arranged for vocal line and piano accompaniment (Vallee, 2002). That sentimental ballads communicated nostalgic affect within the home embodied within consumers the synechdochal nature of both the musical form and the emotion that arose from it, that of living in the present and the past simultaneously; the textual method for ballad construction was to "offer fertile ground on which to express feelings of loss and alienation" while living in the experience of the present, allowing the listener, performer, and (however at a distance) the 'author' to experience simultaneously the "throes of nostalgia" (Key, 1995: 149). This was ideal music for domestic consumption, to long for an idealized home while in the presence of the home.

According to Key, the musical material itself employed within the sentimental ballad had the purpose of being communicable, and therefore functioned properly only by communicating simply and effectively, contingent with Adorno's argument that popular music relies on its use

of 'children's musical formulae.' Key argues not that the simplicity resembles children's music, but that it resembles the folk-like characteristics of nationalities representing the heterogeneity of 19th century American heritage. For example, Foster's use of step-wise melodies, pentatonic melodies, and clear phrases were symptomatic of the Celtic and folk sounds of Scottish and English music, suggesting that the Celtic sound within the structural formations of music such as Foster's would communicate to a listener with ancestry close to the 'home' that was being alluded to far away. According to Key (1995: 160), alluding to the past in the context of the present has further implications in Foster's use of the chorus: "[t]he last iteration of the chorus brings the past into the present and achieves a nostalgic, rather than dramatic, goal. One might look at this structure as an 'interrupted narrative' where progress is inevitably interrupted by backward glances."

Such regressive standardization indicates that Adorno's speculations are more legitimate than they originally appear. The question of why the music industry considered nostalgia to be a profitable emotion could stand analysis in its own right: the purposeful misdirection of anxiety, the reification of the alienated state of modernism, even the legitimate exchange of musical knowledge through its material realities. However, the use of a positive emotional experience that ensures the survival of the self in an industrial context is likely what Adorno would have argued as the purpose of nostalgic evocation. This form of standardization above is not so much an escape as a moment of re-energization that guarantees an optimistic outlook toward the anxieties of present day realities such as alienation and exploitation.

The point of the ideological escapism suggested here as socially constructed ideas of authenticity and tradition are symptomatic of the nostalgic experience. This is exemplified in the historical preservation and quaintness of life expressed in neo-classical composition, the context of contemporary historical simulations and the anthropological preservation of musical tradition.

Authenticity

That Adorno's critical stance against popular music appears myopic is no surprise as his arguments tend to lack the empirical ground that could otherwise support them. If he seems narrowly focused on the popular music industry in isolation, it should be noted that there is very little

sacred in Adorno's crosshairs which includes many forms of 'classical' music; Adorno argues that classical music is equally guilty for causing the regressive state of nostalgia for the purposes of escapism into the ideology of authenticity. The main culprit of such a state, according to Adorno, is neo-classicism that attempts to perpetuate illusions of community and folklife. Meanwhile, it is the challenging and difficult music of Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School that represents emancipation from the modern ideology. This music in particular subverts the hierarchical musical powers that command music of the neo-classical and popular music tradition. The individual psyche in Schoenberg's music, for example, *struggles* against convention, is isolated, and aware of its own alienation from the mode of production whereas Stravinsky attempts a temporal escape from alienation into the quaintness of the past. Adorno argues that while Schoenberg offers a "serious shock to the listener" in a moment of self-reflexive constitution, Stravinsky exemplifies the complete opposite. He states:

> [Stravinsky is] an exact antithesis to the master of Schoenberg and his school; here the game is opposed to the absence of illusion; the seductively arbitrary change of masks, whose wearers are consequently identical but empty, is set against responsible dialectics, the substratum of which transforms itself in sudden changes (Adorno, 1945: 403).

Objectivism and its utopian community-based alienation provides for the average listener a temporal sort of revolution that deters their actual ability to execute an emancipation, according to Adorno. The people are so entertained by the music of the folk as much as by popular music that they begin to feel disdain for the intellectual, failing to challenge progressive music with ideas but instead dismissing it as nonsense, assuming in a culturally nostalgic moment that Beethoven's music must have *always* been beautiful when in its historical context it was considered at times difficult to follow.

Neo-classicism stands at an idealistic distance from history, offering the listener a form of culturally dominant memory or, more properly, nostalgia. It is, according to Adorno, a technological function which facilitates the notion that 'historical' music is in need of preservation, a preservation that trivializes the history and power of classical music to

the status of knobs and buttons (as mentioned above). Under such strict parameters, even the 'mighty' Beethoven is subject to commodification:

> If an early Beethoven piano sonata were to be played today as 'freely,' with such arbitrarily improvisational changes, for example, the changes of the basic tempi of individual movement as it was, according to contemporary reports, by Beethoven himself at the piano, the apparently authentic manner of interpretation would strike the listener as contradictory to the meaning of the work in the face of the constructive unity of such movements (Adorno, 1945: 415).

In the 'postmodern' context the preservation of classical music history is a result of conflicting simulations of traditional life contemporaneous in a socially impossible context which manufacturers authenticity and tradition. For example, Brennan (1999) argues that a "nostalgic frame of tourism" is responsible for the success of trendy music festivals who choose rustic outdoor settings as their concert venue. At the Chamber Music Festival at Washington's Olympic Peninsula, where the success of chamber music is dependent on the nostalgia for pre-industrial quaintness of life, conflicting narratives guide attendees through a manufactured authenticity of nostalgic experience. According to Brennan (1999: 12), "nostalgia and narrative work together with idealized visions of farm life to distinguish people" and "to put some in their places while asserting the superiority of others," thereby constructing a dichotomy between the people who live off the rural land where the festival occurs and the urban people who use the environment as an escape to idealized life. Indeed, the attendees, the consumers, are exposed to authentic aspects of rural life, except to the labour of manufacture that remains alienated from them. Brennan (1999: 18) states:

> Farming labor is not completely ignored at the festival, for the nostalgic idealization of a farm necessarily includes plowing, milking, and weeding. The audience never actually sees any of this activity occur on the grounds, nor does it *ever* occur to the extent necessary to maintain an actual 'working' farm. However, the festival's barn, pigs, donkeys, and vegetable garden all suggest that some sort of farming

> takes place. But *the labor required to maintain this ideal farm is left out of the nostalgic frame of tourism* (emphasis added).

The chamber music itself was known to have been played outdoors in such environments as the London Pleasure Gardens of the 17th century for aristocratic diversion and pleasure, but on the farm chamber music offers a historical authenticity that conflicts with the reality of farm life. As Brennan argues (1999: 21) "The tourist's nostalgic frame, which excludes the actual toil and dirt involved in farming, regards the farm setting as 'right' for classical music because that setting enhances the conceived timeless nature of such music, providing an escape from the noise and work of the city." The alienated nature of this context is further exemplified when local rural residents who curiously invest interest are pitied and scrutinized for lacking the 'proper social etiquette' required for the event. Brennan (1999: 14) has a humorous example, where some of these locals:

> ...walk towards the back of the barn, where a door left unguarded by ushers allows surreptitious access to the concert. I often use it to sneak in and out during the concert. I think, "Aha! They must have done this before!" I wonder if they like chamber music. The executive director of the festival, who also owns the farm and usually is onstage with his viola, stops them before they can enter. I observe as he talks to them quietly and as they turn around and walk off the property. The festival director strides towards me, shaking his head and tells me that they had no tickets and couldn't pay for them even if they had wanted to. "They're like donkeys," he says to me, looking from the animals in the pasture to the people walking out of the grounds, "Human donkeys."

The context is arguably reified through naturalizing traditions that contradict each other and perpetuate the only truly living tradition, that of the class system. As Brennan (1999: 26) says:

> For many audience members, listening to chamber music in a barn on the Olympic Peninsula provides an escape from the noise and work of the city. Many of the images constructed around the festival speak of an imagined past before one had to commute from a house in the suburbs to a nine-to-five job in an office building in the city.

That nostalgia through music is a medium to the ideology of authenticity becomes even more clear upon the examination of how folklorists preserve historical traditions of pre-literate cultures who are feared to be on the brink of 'extinction.' The traditional folklorist's approach has often preserved not a history in the reconstruction of authentic music, but an interpretation of 'tradition,' something that has always been but cannot be identified by written historical record. Cassia (2000) argues that as tradition is represented through the selection of texts for preservation, these texts technologize the listener to experience tradition that is, in fact, mediated by the folklorist's interpretations (interpretations, *pace criticism*, with best intentions). Such is the case with folklorists preserving the Mediterranean singing practice of *Ghana*, traditionally a form of teasing song performed by men in duel with one another, later replaced with more Westernized and passive versions on the topic of cultural history, which was inscribed by the folklorists who wanted to 'save' their tradition from industrialization. Today, this calmer culturally preserved musical expression is perceived as authentic exchange of Maltese culture.

Because folklorists considered the teaching songs of *Ghana* as offensive against their mission to preserve cultural continuation and the harmonious survival of identity, they organized festivals in rural areas that (a) depicted the pre-industrial farm life of Maltese culture, and (b) asked performers to pick musical themes out of a hat instead of improvising the usual vulgarities at one another. As Cassia says, "The subjects of the songs were influenced by images the elite themselves had of the *poplu* (e.g., spendthrifts, henpecked husbands) according to an agenda unconsciously influenced by their perception of what would amuse the poplu as public spectacle" (2000: 290). Indeed, the decision to eliminate the vulgarities from the cultural practices of a people is the decision to provide a history without consequence, guaranteeing cultural survival under superstructural supervision. Tradition is, according to Cassia (2000:

291), "neither self-evident nor transparent. It needs to be identified, packaged, and made the subject of discretion and taste."

If tradition and authenticity are ideological, then they are represented in material reality through reified processes, and must, by the rules of nostalgia, express an optimistic sense of the past, a history without consequence, without depravity, for the constitution and preservation of subjective and cultural identity. Likewise, if 'tradition' implies continuity, and nostalgia is necessary for the preservation of identity through the subjective and social challenges of discontinuity, then nostalgia appears to be the technologizing medium of tradition. Nostalgia here affirms what is natural, in other words, what is reified, and acts as an agent upon human consciousness.

Ideology Revisited

Pasts are revisited daily, relived through photography, mythology, radio, in bars, at home, with strangers, media, and family. Nostalgia is such an important force that it acts as a medium for entire generations to re-experience their collective pasts, and music plays an important role in embodying a person's distance from the past in a moment of positive self-reflection. But tell that to Adorno. The ideological aspects of such a positive self-reflection could endure expansion and analysis by anyone interested in the social psychological aspects of nostalgia and reification. This here is merely meant as a brief illumination.

It could be said that music continues today to not face up to the challenges of modern society and reification, as 'postmodern' compositions remain unchallenging to ideology making claims for hybridity, thus representing cultural and historical quaintness as ideological. For example, Stocken (1989: 536-37) describes this quaintness that exists in postmodern music as motivated "not for the sake of duty to the past, or for historical research, but because in the act of performance, which necessarily exists in the present, the music is able to speak to a modern audience." This alludes to Adorno's warnings against the preservation of historical quaintness for its own sake, and for the sake of a guaranteed consumption by a passive audience. As it was the modest and well-intentioned attempt in the composition of neo-Classicism and in the preservation of cultural tradition, today the concerns seem to be the temporal visit to the exotic, idealized, and individualized, alluding to the conflicting simulation of tradition in a fruitless search for the authentic.

To turn once again to Adorno, what lies at the centre of his idealisms is that auratic art expresses not an intrinsic beauty but an unconscious playing out of social relations. What we hear as beauty is, according to Adorno, in actuality kitsch, the contemporary cultural facilitator that assumes the character of a model, or a sketch. It is ideology characterized by being devoid of any kind of significant artistic power. According to Adorno (1932: 442):

> [Kitsch] is assigned the task, above all, of eliciting the impression of collective commitment by means of the preservation of old and superannuated formal types; of employing individual means of express—such as romantic harmonies and today, already, impressionist harmonies—at a moment when they have come loose from their original formal contexts and can circulate like a kind of musical small change; of utilizing melodic arcs that still bear traces of their former emotional significance conventionally, as mere phrases.

A philosophy of truth lies at the centre of ideal music, expresses an awareness of its socially constituted self and the problems associated, and Adorno would argue that industrial musical production is not philosophical but ideological, as it is a discursive category of entertainment. Music, according to Adorno, in the humanistic context, operates to its powerful potential only when associated with the expression of truth—a rational logic underlies the music of enlightenment that also underlies the positivistic quest for rationality and progress. In the industrial era, however, through mass mediated dissemination of multiple conflicting musical realities presented as authentic and traditional, the logic of musical production only benefits the preservation of commodification. Music serves as an escape from, as opposed to an understanding of, social reality and is, indeed according to Adorno, a force of social control – it is "what makes for fascism."

I hope to have conveyed that while nostalgia is a legitimate form of human experience, the music industry historically constructed emotional subjectivities with precise compositional methods: as music is theoretically a form of regression itself, its coupling with nostalgia creates a dangerous situation that alienates the listener from social realities and

relations. Not to make nostalgia a troubling experience for those who consider themselves outside of ideology's grasp, but perhaps now some nostalgic experiences will have greater significance. As Sir Paul McCartney once said, "Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away."

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