

Adorno, Jitterbug, and the Adequate Listener¹

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Spontaneity is consumed by the tremendous effort which each individual has to make in order to accept what is enforced upon him—an effort which has developed for the very reason that the veneer veiling the controlling mechanisms has become so thin. In order to become a jitterbug or simply to “like” popular music, it does not by any means suffice to give oneself up and to fall in line passively. To become transformed into an insect, man needs that energy which might possibly achieve his transformation into a man.²

Theodor Adorno’s popular music studies have been dismissed as unsympathetic and antiquarian; in fact they are timelessly antisympathetic and in that respect appeal

¹ This paper grew out of a reading group held under the auspices of the Centre for Studies on Culture and Society at Carleton University in Ottawa. I am indebted to Jocelyne Guilbault, David Marshall, Geraldine Finn, Will Straw, Jennifer Giles-Davis, Rob Shields, Paul Théberge, Steven Purvis, and Don Wallace, who contributed to the formation of these thoughts.

² Theodor W. Adorno, “On Popular Music,” *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9, no. 1 (1941): 48. Subsequent references to this and other writings by Adorno will be made in the text with the following sigla and respective page numbers:

OPM: “On Popular Music,” *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9, no. 1 (1941): 17-48.

DE: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1991).

ISM: *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1976).

ND: *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973).

PMM: *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster (New York: Seabury Press, 1973).

PR: *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983).

afresh to current readers. This paper is a reconsideration of one of Theodor Adorno's most preferred categories in his typology of music listening, the "adequate" listener, and a study of that listener's affinity with Adorno's most pilloried category, the popular music devotee. Adorno is often accused of a Eurocentric and elitist prejudice. The basic tenets of Adorno's acerbic popular music critique do not limit themselves, however, to the case of the popular music "jitterbug," but apply all too easily to Adorno's ideal, the adequate listener, the devotee of composers such as Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg.

In the first chapter of the *Introduction to a Sociology of Music*, Adorno describes the expert listener, the first in a catalog of listening types, a listener capable of a technical "structural hearing," which Adorno equates with an ideal or at least highly competent form of listening. Adorno, however, excludes from this type (and all others) the very self-consciousness that would seem to be the goal of his critique of listening—the ability to comprehend "hearing music as a sociological index" (ISM, 2). In doing so, he reduces this adequate listener to a structural-hearing automaton remarkably like his popular music jitterbug.³ In essence, although the two listeners would seem the very antipodes, they are identical, for

³ On the double-edged nature of technique see Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 304: "A work remains unintelligible unless its technique is understood, but similarly, technique remains unintelligible unless there is some understanding of the work in nontechnical terms." The adequate listener of Adorno's sociology would seem to have misplaced one side. Rose Rosengard Subotnik's rich and ample study of structural listening is filled with insight: "Toward a Deconstruction of Structural Listening; A Critique of Schoenberg, Adorno, and Stravinsky," in *Deconstructive Variations: Music and Reason in Western Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 148-76. Compare Michael P. Steinberg, "The Musical Absolute," *New German Critique* 56 (1992): 17-18.

neither embodies the kind of consciousness—the conscious resistance to tyranny—that Adorno exemplifies in his writings. Instead his adequate listener is as much the automaton—the insect—as its jitterbugging counterpart. We are left to wonder about the ideal Adornian listener (if that is not an oxymoron) and whether all types of listening, all categories, are not equally subject to the metaphor of insect.

If one extrapolates from Adorno, neither expert nor jitterbug corresponds—wholly, without contradiction—to what would be an ideal listener; both lack the ability at hearing as “a sociological index.” The jitterbug is the product of a social order that, in the mass production of popular music, denies the individual liberty and self awareness it should propagate. The adequate listener too is the product of a social order. But unlike the jitterbug, she masters a formidable listening ability, one which takes into account, however, nothing of the self and its historical necessity, especially its struggle for liberty from tyranny. In this respect adequate listener and jitterbug possess an affinity, which lays the foundation for this investigation.

To reconcile the apparent contradiction in the affinity of expert and jitterbug, this paper concludes by articulating a new category that cuts across Adorno’s typology: the resistance listener. The resistance listener knows all acts of listening to be implicitly automatic in the worst Adornian sense. Thus she finds all Adorno’s categories, pilloried and preferred, to be alike, and she does so in resistance to Adorno’s divisive typology. For the resistance listener, the only adequate type of listening lies in a slowly creeping critical awareness of the “controlling mechanisms” Adorno refers to in the epigraph above, a growing awareness that listening—no matter to what or how (pace Adorno)—requires a tremendous en-

ergy, and that only this awareness (to paraphrase the epigraph's conclusion) achieves the transformation from insect to human.



A central tenet of Adorno's critical apparatus is the negative dialectic—that things do not correspond adequately to their conception, but leave some remainder or negative residue (ND, 5). For Adorno, Schoenberg's atonal music exemplifies the negative dialectic, a music remaindered, marginalized, excluded by the division of leisure and work.⁴ The bourgeois socioeconomic system posits music as leisure, to which it opposes work. But the object, music, does not go into the concept, leisure, without leaving behind a remainder: Schoenberg. His music "sins against the division of life into work and leisure; [and] insists on a kind of work for one's leisure that could easily call the latter into question" (PR, 150). The division of leisure and work produced by the socioeconomic sys-

⁴ Beethoven's middle period works and their historical moment would serve as a horizon against which this negative remainder could be measured. At this moment—albeit briefly—"the concept of the free individual, a self-conscious human being with the freedom to determine his or her own destiny... [became] a reality... through the coinciding of individual and social interests in a condition of human wholeness or integrity." From Rose Rosengard Subotnik, "Adorno's Diagnosis of Beethoven's Late Style: Early Symptom of a Fatal Condition," in *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1991), 17. To my knowledge, Adorno's appraisal of Beethoven's middle period and its historical moment has never been subjected to a rigorous criticism, but see Subotnik, 25-26, and footnote 37. See also ISM, 212, and Adorno, "The Late Style in Beethoven," trans. S. Gillespie, *Raritan* 13, no. 1 (1993): 104.

tem is a division that Schoenberg's music negates uncompromisingly.⁵

Negation, resistance, remainder—these byproducts of an ill-fitting correspondence all contribute to an essential self-awareness or self-consciousness. Without the contradiction posed by resistant elements, such as a Schoenberg, the socioeconomic system would fall heir to what I shall call, after Adorno, the Enlightenment error (DE, 4-6).⁶ “Patriarchal” and “totalitarian,” the system would extinguish “any trace of its own self-consciousness,” which contradiction might otherwise provide (DE, 4).⁷ “Contradiction is necessary,” Adorno notes (DE, 238). It forms the basis of his sociological evaluation of Schoenberg: through contradiction, the composer attained individuation against all the homogenizing forces of bourgeois culture. By being contradictory, Schoenberg “declared his independence from [the conventional].” For Adorno, all great music, of which Schoenberg's was merely exemplary, justified itself through the individuating force of contradiction: “since the beginning of the bourgeois era, all great music has...justified through its own individuation the conventional universal legality to which it is subject” (PMM, 39).

⁵ P. Murray Dineen, “Adorno and Schoenberg's Unanswered Question,” *Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 3 (1993): 415-427. And see James L. Marsh, “Adorno's Critique of Stravinsky,” *New German Critique* 28 (1983): 157: “[Schoenberg] is engaged in an art of negation not compromising in any way with the socioeconomic system out of which it emerges.”

⁶ On Alban Berg as a resistant element see Adorno, *Alban Berg: Master of the Smallest Link*, trans. Juliane Brand and Christopher Hailey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and James Martin Harding, “Integrating Atomization: Adorno Reading Berg Reading Büchner,” *Theatre Journal* 44 (1992): 1-13.

⁷ Compare Marsh's reading of Adorno on Stravinsky: “[Stravinsky] is practising an affirmative art that reconciles one to such an oppressive system” (Marsh, “Adorno's Critique,” 157).

Schoenberg's music, or that of his disciples, is by its very intransigence not the stuff of the masses. The adequate listener is the only one in Adorno's typology capable of grasping its audible structure, the only one who hears "Webern's Trio for Strings and can name the formal components of that dissolved, architectonically unsupported piece...hears the sequence, hears past, present, and future moments together so that they crystallize into a meaningful context" (ISM, 4).

Of all seven categories, however, the adequate listener proves the most oblique. Although the category was perhaps the very ideal he set himself in his youthful studies with Berg, the adequate listener is neglected by Adorno, who dismisses it as "quantitatively ...scarcely worth noting" (ISM, 5). Such a neglect is puzzling, since the adequate listener would seem to form the distant and ideal horizon by which we delimit the field of more usual listeners. Adorno does tell us that structural hearing is based on "concrete musical logic" underpinned by a necessity and located in technical categories. It is a type of listening confined largely to "the circle of professional musicians" (ISM, 5).⁸

Adorno excludes the adequate listener from the acerbic, negative analysis he accords the other categories, a fact that is certainly problematic. For example, a cate-

⁸ On the contradictions in Adorno's concept of structural listening see Julian Johnson's review of Adorno's *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy* and *Quasi una fantasia*, in *Music Analysis* 14, no. 1 (1995): 112-21, especially 116. A consistent, well measured analytic technique might have proven an anathema (as the twelve-tone technique of composition did). See Julian Johnson, "Analysis in Adorno's Aesthetics of Music," *Music Analysis* 14, nos. 2-3 (1995): 295-313, especially 300, and compare Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 304: "To isolate technique is false, much as it might suit vulgar convention to do so." Compare Max Paddison, "The Problem of Adorno's Musical Analysis," *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 169-71.

gory such as the “resentment listener,” the rigid, aggressive, sectarian devotee of Bach, is rife with Adorno’s negative contradiction: this listener (fleeing another of Adorno’s listening types, the crass “culture consumer”) turns in search of purity back to the noble music of Bach, back to “times which he fancies are proof against reification, against the dominant commodity character” (ISM, 10). The contradiction: “In his rigidity [the resentment listener] pays tribute to the very reification he opposes” (ISM, 10). As the culture consumer degrades Bach, the resentment listener elevates Bach and in doing so reifies Bach as a commodity. Resentment does not go gently into the concept of musical listening.

Surely Adorno’s preferred category of the adequate listener, like its resentful counterpart, is not a monolith but bears its own contradiction and leaves a negative remainder. In truth, Adorno touches on this possibility, but for reasons not at all clear, he sets aside a promising path: “One hasty assumption to guard against is that the professionals’ privilege to constitute this type might be explicable by the social process of alienation between individuals and objective spirit in the late bourgeois phase. The explanation would discredit the type itself” (ISM, 5). In effect, Adorno shuns some larger social causality that would produce this category as a remainder, the result of a bourgeois dialectic in which the individual does not fit wholly into the concept of objectivity.

There is a serious contradiction in Adorno’s adequate listener, a contradiction so flagrant that it seems only natural to have eluded Adorno. Surely the adequate listener lacks the very ability possessed by Adorno himself—the ability at listening as a “sociological index.” The adequate listener lacks the very adequacy Adorno demonstrates to us in all his writings. And by this lack

the adequate listener becomes an insect, an automaton, not only by following the technical logic of the music, but by doing so with all the forced spontaneity of Adorno's popular music fan. The adequate listener counts the tone rows, parses the tonal syntax, and takes these to be the object of study, a study ever more refined but exclusive of self-awareness and the question of liberty.⁹ To become such an insect is to become marginalized, remaindered, excluded from the sociological vehicle Adorno seems intent on inventing in his writings on music. In the late-bourgeois era, the professional—the truly adequate listener or performer—is elevated to a level of sterility not simply by the concert hall's demand for exorbitant “and, so to speak, measurable [athletic] performance” (ISM, 7) but more so by the exclusively technical and ahistorical quality of adequate listening.¹⁰

The glaring error of the “adequate” category is that it takes no account of Adorno himself (surely not out of modesty): it excludes him from the horizon—the margin—the point from which the perspective is properly drawn, thereby compromising the point of view of this and all other categories.

⁹ The limitations of an expert ability at twelve-tone composition were readily apparent to Adorno, although the relationship of the expert listener to the twelve-tone listener is unclear. Christopher Norris encapsulates Adorno's position: by its technical nature Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique and its music (which the composer thought would free him from certain compositional restraints) “‘fails’ in so far as it defeats its own object, negates the very impulse of ‘subjective freedom,’ and thus falls prey to an extreme form of reification which reflects the worst, the most inhuman aspects of present-day rationalized existence.” Christopher Norris, “Utopian Deconstruction: Ernst Bloch, Paul de Man and the Politics of Music,” *Paragraph* 11, no. 1 (1988): 24-57; see p. 45.

¹⁰ And perhaps herein lies a perspective for treating the enigma of Glenn Gould, whose method of production accounted for the historical necessity of the performer to exert some sense of control. Compare Edward Said, *Musical Elaborations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 14-15, 21-34.



Whereas Adorno neglects his adequate listener, on the other hand he subjects his jitterbug, or popular music devotee, to considerable scrutiny. He links the category to his broader critique of popular music itself. For Adorno, the fundamental technical characteristic of popular music is that the ostensibly standardized whole bears little or no necessary connection to a work's individual detail (OPM, 17). To this Adorno opposes Schoenberg's oeuvre in which every individual detail is proper to each work and defines the whole, as if writ large (ISM, 28). The source of this necessary connection between individual detail and musical whole is undoubtedly Schoenberg's division of style and idea.¹¹ Style, for Schoenberg, is the concretization or representation of a musical idea, a representation bound up with its historical moment. Conversely, Schoenberg's idea is immutable and not "susceptible to historical variation" (PR, 171).

For Adorno, however, the musical idea is susceptible to historical necessity, a necessity that mediates between music and its listening society. The idea in its given historical and sociological context necessitates a particular style of presentation. In Beethoven's day, homophony was the optimal style for presenting a musical idea, for homophony presupposed an apparently autonomous musical subject embodied in a melody, de-

¹¹ Arnold Schoenberg, "New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea," in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 113-124. See especially 121: "[The artist] will never start from a preconceived image of a style; he will be ceaselessly occupied with doing justice to the idea. He is sure that, everything done which the idea demands, the external appearance will be adequate."

veloped through variation, and to which all other voices were subordinate. Adorno calls this a “subjective melodic impulse” (PR, 157). Such a subjective presentation was historically in keeping with a society whose best “guarantee” seemed “the unrestricted interplay of subjects” (PR, 157). In Schoenberg’s (and Adorno’s) day, historical necessity demanded the dissolution of this subjective melodic impulse into an objectivity best presented polyphonically (as in the atonal works of Schoenberg and Webern), for “today [Adorno’s day],...subjectivity in its immediacy can no longer be regarded as the supreme category since its realization depends on society as a whole” (PR, 157). The state of society as a whole was reflected in the conflict and denial presented by the “objective multivocal components” (PR, 157) of polyphony. The technical matter is homophony versus polyphony (borrowed in substance from another of Schoenberg’s distinctions, developing variation versus contrapuntal envelopment).¹² The thesis is crude, but the notion of historical necessity as a mediation is nonetheless compelling.¹³

What is the historical necessity of popular music for Adorno? Popular music, in divorcing detail from whole, reflects the general condition of the disenfranchised listener. In a time of plenty, which should engender the greatest diversity of production, the goods accorded a consumer become standardized in the name of production efficiency. Access to the great potential wealth in the diversity of production is thereby denied,

¹² See P. Murray Dineen, “Schoenberg’s Old Hat: The Contrapuntal Combination,” in *Music Theory and the Exploration of the Past*, ed. Christopher Hatch and David W. Bernstein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 435-448.

¹³ “The Problem of Mediation,” and “A Material Theory of Form,” in Max Paddison’s *Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music*, 108-83, give a detailed treatment of mediation and the technical nature of music in Adorno’s thought.

and autonomy and independence in production are sacrificed to the very market forces that should guarantee them (DE, 120-21).¹⁴

For Adorno, the historical necessity of popular music is epitomized in the musical term "standard": in "a 'standard' song...pop melodies and lyrics must stick to an unmercifully rigid pattern while the composer of serious songs is permitted free, autonomous creation" (ISM, 25).

The pop song leads back to a few basic perceptive categories known ad nauseam. Nothing really new is allowed to intrude, nothing but calculated effects that add some spice to the ever-sameness without imperiling it. And these effects in turn take their bearings from schemata (ISM, 26).

Although standardization makes music available to a much greater populace, it divorces the detail from the whole, divorces style from the composer's ideational inspiration (OPM, 18). The style of the standard, the banal detail of its presentation, denies what music has hitherto sought to express—the individual compositional idea. What remains is nothing but style—no trace of idea interacting with style, an interaction basic to autonomy and independent judgment in all human endeavor (ISM, 38).¹⁵ For Adorno, this fracturing of style and idea is the product of historical conditions: the popular song is standardized under the forces of the popular music industry.

The interaction of style and idea in Beethoven's music is a symptom of a unique historical moment, a his-

¹⁴ Compare Adorno, "A Social Critique of Radio Music," *Kenyon Review* (Spring 1945), reprinted in vol. 18, nos. 3-4 (1996): 231-32, on the commodity character of music.

¹⁵ The autonomous nature of the art work—presumed in Adorno's opposition of popular and classic music production—is discussed by Lambert Zuidervaart in "The Social Significance of Autonomous Art: Adorno and Burger," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 48, no. 1 (1990): 61-77.

torical condition that successfully mediated music and society. For Adorno, the lack of such an interaction is characteristic of popular music, and reflects a social contradiction in the historical moment:

But that the mass phenomenon of popular music undermines the autonomy and independence of judgment—qualities which a society of free men would require—while a withdrawal of that music would presumably outrage the majorities of all nations as an undemocratic invasion of inalienable rights: this is a contradiction that goes back to the condition of society itself (ISM, 26).

The contradictory moment in which Adorno's jitterbug finds herself stems directly from the nature of the music:

Listening to popular music is manipulated not only by its promoters, but as it were, by the inherent nature of this music itself, into a system of response-mechanisms wholly antagonistic to the ideal of individuality in a free, liberal society (OPM, 21-22).

The jitterbug exemplifies Adorno's category of "entertainment listener" who indulges in a form of anti-listening that is addictive and somatic:

The structure of this sort of listening is like that of smoking. We define it more by our displeasure in turning the radio off than by the pleasure we feel, however modestly, while it is playing. No one knows the size of the group that will, as it has often been put, let itself be sprinkled with broadcast music without really listening; but that unknown size illuminates the whole domain. The comparison with addiction is inescapable (ISM, 15).

Adorno's description of popular music and its devotee is damning: popular music allows for no sociological awareness and demands a form of listening calculatedly set against hearing as a sociological index. It is as if Adorno, in setting forth a responsible form of listening, seized upon the most contradictory example to make his point. But where in this scenario do we find responsible listening, the adequate listener, the Webern devo-

tee? Does she not, in her own way, elude hearing as a sociological index?

To reiterate, by her inability to hear sociologically, the adequate listener becomes an automaton, following the technical logic of Webern with the somnambulant spontaneity of Adorno's popular music fan.¹⁶ Exclusively technical, ahistorical, expert listening to Webern—is there much to distinguish it from “being sprinkled with broadcast music, serious or popular, without really listening”? Where in this typology is Adorno? To what category does his sociological ability—the horizon, the point of reference in this landscape of listeners—pertain? Adorno conceived as adequate a form of listening that accounts for nothing sociological. This compromises his whole listening typology.

In coming to terms with Adorno's typology, we are forced to extrapolate. Surely the truly adequate listener is an alienated listener, self-conscious, and aware of being remaindered by Adorno—a “negative” listener, who does not go easily into any category of listening, and whose ability to hear sociologically will never allow her to be “sprinkled” with music—be it popular or Webern's. In this respect, Adorno's is a false typology. To each of

¹⁶ On account of her ability to hear technically, the insect listener is not to be confused with Adorno's “retrogressive” listener, for whom Beethoven is just so much aural wallpaper. See Adorno, “A Social Critique of Radio Music,” 283; Adorno, “Analytic Study of the NBC *Music Appreciation Hour*,” *Musical Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (1994): 325-77, especially 352-58. Compare Edward Said's discussion of Toscanini in *Musical Elaborations*, 17-21. Nor is she to be confused with the adherents of Bach as described in “Bach Defended Against His Devotees,” *Prisms*, 135-137. Compare Susan McClary, “The Blasphemy of Talking Politics During Bach Year,” in *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, ed. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 13-62, and P. Murray Dineen, “Still Life with Insects: Adorno Defended Against His Devotees,” *Criticus Musicus* 1, no. 1 (1994): 23-35.

his categories we might twin another, thereby drawing a distinction in kind between sufficient and insufficient or negative listeners. For every Adorno jitterbug, every resentment listener, every culture consumer, every devotee of the Second Viennese School, for every addict of popular music, there is a parallel figure. There is a jitterbug who would acknowledge the contradiction in the veritable famine afflicting the cultural mass production of late capitalism, a famine which she wittingly experiences as a sociological index of her times. There is a resentment listener doubly resentful of the culture consumer who has driven her to recommodify Bach. There is a culture consumer who recognizes her insatiable appetite as the crowning achievement of a culture industry she despises.¹⁷ Beside her sits the admirer of Schoenberg for whom the twinning of twelve-tone composition and the outdated forms of the eighteenth century—the giges and rondos that Adorno so despised—is the acme of the contradiction, the negative dialectic, which Schoenberg courageously embodied. And amidst them all lies a popular music addict for whom addiction is the only choice, since to choose a different musical style or genre would merely reinvent her addiction—the somnambulant, slavish devotion to music shared by Adorno's adequate listener and jitterbug alike.

¹⁷ In a letter to Walter Benjamin, Adorno describes capitalism's role linking popular and "high" art: "...a great work of art [and]...the cinema...Both bear the stigmata of capitalism, both contain elements of change...Both are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up." Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: NLB, 1977), 123. See Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991), 26-52, especially 28-34 and 40-43 (which address the terms *regressive listening* and *deconcentrated listening*), and J. M. Bernstein's "Introduction," 2-3.

If we align this extrapolation with the bitter pessimism embodied in much of Adorno's thought, we reach the following acerbic conclusions: none of these negative types is capable of altering their condition in the slightest, since all of them are sociological indices of their historical moment. And, salt in the wound, they all know this to be true, but being sociological indices, products of historical forces far beyond their control, they are incapable of self-redemption. They cannot forget and thereby obliterate their resentment, unless in doing so they let loose the thread of self-awareness that supplies them with a bare modicum of dignity. Like the unrecoverable alcoholic or heroin addict, like the deeply manic depressive, none are capable of altering their condition without falling back into the somnambulant states classified in Adorno's typology—without falling into a loathsome condition lacking in crucial self-awareness, without caving in to the tyranny of Adorno's typology itself. All are damned to listen, and all are damned by listening.



Adorno's popular music devotee is regularly rehabilitated in the critical literature of popular music, but often the attempt founders on the illusory elevation of the popular music category to some higher type, founders on the creation of an "adequate" popular music listener in the

mold cast by Adorno.¹⁸ Following Adorno's denial of a fundamental distinction between classical and popular music (OPM, 17), to elevate the jitterbug to the role of adequate listener is simply to change species, not genus.¹⁹

Adorno's critique of popular music is examined closely in Richard Middleton's *Studying Popular Music*.²⁰ From this chapter emerges the view that Adorno is locked into an antiquated, monolithic vision of popular music production, a vision proper to the 1930s or 1940s, "when, more than at any other time, the machinery of 'mass culture' worked to considerable effect."²¹ The in-

¹⁸ Much of this rehabilitation proceeds by dismissing Adorno's essays on jazz music—primarily the essay in *Prisms*—as poorly informed, as if Adorno would have come around had he studied musicians of the caliber of John Coltrane. J. Bradford Robinson's dismissive "The Jazz Essays of Theodor Adorno: Some Thoughts on Jazz Reception in Weimar Germany," in *Popular Music* 13, no. 1 (1994): 1-25, restricts the applicability of Adorno's critique to German jazz circa 1933-53, ruling out application to the present and to America. Theodore A. Gracyk elevates Beethoven, Schoenberg, and Ornette Coleman in ways that Adorno might have found distasteful if not antithetical, in "Adorno, Jazz and the Aesthetics of Popular Music," *The Musical Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (1992): 526-42. Rose Rosengard Subotnik finds that Adorno was sympathetic to Schoenberg and would not have been to "grunge or punk rock or Laurie Anderson's music...because he operated within the same set of concrete cultural assumptions, expectations, conventions, and values that Schoenberg did"; see *Deconstructive Variations*, 167. This implies that Adorno might have come to value grunge, punk, or Anderson, had he but changed his cultural assumptions.

¹⁹ It also denigrates the jitterbug, who is of extreme negative importance to Adorno. For the notion of "images [*Bilder*]," such as that of the jazz soloist who embodies the appearance of truth (becoming the locus of a kind of negative truth) in a ritual revelation of social character, see Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* (New York: Free Press, 1977), 101-10.

²⁰ Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990). See the chapter "It's all over now.' Popular music and mass culture - Adorno's theory." Compare Ulrich Schönher, "Adorno and Jazz: Reflections on a Failed Encounter," *Telos*, no. 87 (1991): 85-96, especially on the notion of resistance (92).

²¹ Middleton, *Popular Music*, 35.

dustry, Middleton argues forcefully, is “not...a monolithic bloc but a constantly mutating organism made up of elements which are symbiotic and mutually contradictory *at the same time*.”²² Most significantly, the industry has grown to involve “new kinds of mass or collective subjects” resistant to the sort of oppression Adorno posits. Adorno has overlooked the empowering, ennobling element of struggle and resistance: “What is missed is that alongside an increase in centralized control has been persistent dissent; domination—social, economic and ideological—has been maintained only through *struggle*.”²³ In this respect (although Middleton never suggests the analogy), the popular music devotee would share a struggle with Adorno’s Schoenberg against the forces of centralized artistic control.

Middleton draws support largely from the recent critical literature, primarily studies of social groups and their various resistances. To this, however, he joins not his own sociological study but rather an analysis of the tune “These Foolish Things” in which he locates resistance to the social conformity that Adorno might attribute to it. Middleton notes “the shapely overall curve” of the melody, “the way a certain simple (‘innocent?’) *pentatonic* inflection...rubs against the ‘romantic’ harmonies,” “foreign harmonies” that seem “to function as a disturbance...[of] tonal stability...a technique derived directly from the nineteenth-century *Lied* and piano character piece.”²⁴ For Middleton, Adorno’s notion of a popular tune “surely begins to crack” under the weight of a composer such as Gershwin, but curiously in this analysis it cracks under the force of certain immanent masterly

²² *Ibid.*, 38.

²³ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

qualities proper to the musical artwork itself, and not under the pressure of a sociological resistance proper to a particular social group.²⁵

Here Middleton projects an ideal type of adequacy that carries no awareness of self-contradiction, a type that would seem to contradict the awareness-in-resistance proposed in his initial critique of Adorno: "A pity [Adorno] could not have read Alec Wilder's *American Popular Song* (1972) which, using basically the same musical criteria as Adorno—derived from European bourgeois art music—could have been designed as a riposte to his view of this repertory."²⁶ To project art music criteria onto the category of popular song would seem to reinvent the adequate listener and a structural hearing as a form of matching listener to music, a form that, again, bypasses sociology and historical necessity.

To avoid submitting wholly, without contradiction, to Adorno's typology—whether as jitterbug or expert—seems the only responsible path in resistance to Adorno's immanent criteria of listening. This avoidance, however, would constitute a new type of listener, a new category to supplement, if not shatter, Adorno's typology.

With the term *insect listener*, I propose a type of listening that acknowledges a strategic elimination of choice—a listener for whom the act of listening is to be judged on technical criteria, with no pretense at sociological reflection. Both jitterbug and adequate listener would fold into this new category. To describe the jitterbug, Adorno speaks of standardization—a method of

²⁵ Ibid., 52. Compare Arnold Schoenberg, "George Gershwin," *Style and Idea*, 476-77, in which he draws the distinction between style and idea in terms of Gershwin's work.

²⁶ Middleton, *Popular Music*, 53.

production that divorces style and idea, thereby undermining autonomy, independence of judgment, and the concomitant awareness of historical necessity. Implicit in Adorno's adequate listener is a similar standardization—a strictly musical logic that stresses the contextual relation of style to idea, thus part to whole, but divorces this putative organic relation from the historical necessity of the idea. The shibboleth “style and idea” becomes unthinking credo, and autonomy, independent judgment, and historical awareness are shut out. One sub-category within this kind of structural listening would be the twelve-tone listener, the row counter, for whom perhaps Adorno would have had a disdain even greater than that accorded the jitterbug, although the implicit distinction between adequate structural listening and twelve-tone listening is unclear in Adorno's work.²⁷ When elevated to a category, then, the search for the relationship of style and idea is nothing but the cravings of a jitterbug in new guises.

To this insect category let me contrast a category of “resistance” listener, comprising the negative listening types I postulated above—alienated, self-conscious, and aware of being remaindered by Adorno. A sociological element missing in Adorno's formulation of adequacy

²⁷ The only author, to my knowledge, to attempt a critique of Adorno's position on twelve-tone music is Christopher Norris, who recognizes that Adorno's pilloried types often serve him in inverse proportion to their esteem: twelve-tone music fails (see note 9 above), “but it also succeeds—and for just that reason—in exposing those conditions [the most inhuman aspects of present-day rationalized existence], forcing them to the point of manifest self-defeat, and thus closing off the various seductive escape-routes provided by music in its other, less taxing contemporary forms.” See “Utopian Deconstruction,” 45. It could be expressed inversely that Adorno's expert listener succeeds, but also fails, again exposing the inhuman aspects of a rational musical experience, forcing reason to self-defeat, and thereby closing off all other listening types as escape routes.

would tug at these listeners and hold them from entering unselfconsciously into any of Adorno's categories. This kind of listener is mentioned obliquely by Adorno:²⁸ "The very man to whom all new music is not grey like cats in the night will eventually, on ground of identification with the matter, reject what is inadequate to its idea and therefore to his own. One is tempted to make this the definition of the expert listener" (ISM, 179). This listener resists all that is not immediately and necessarily adequate to the historical and sociological moment, resists every static thesis about listening that does not immediately inform her own musical awareness, and in doing so resists all categories, all typologies, even, perhaps especially, Adorno's.

In his sociological description of listening, Adorno could not have reified one category as ideal, for to do so would be to standardize it, to render it conventional. This would explain his puzzling silence on the nature of adequate listening, which would seem to approximate an ideal.²⁹ To specify definitively an ideal mode of listening, would be to recreate the Enlightenment error. All Adorno can do is point obliquely through and beyond his categories to a kind of constant resistance to reification. To point directly, to delimit a fixed attitude of resistance, would invalidate his sociological project; it would set up an ideal category in an exercise devoted to revealing the negation and contradiction in all categories of listening. In truth the exemplary "resistance listener" is Adorno himself; but, it goes without saying, for Adorno to establish "Adorno" as a mode of listening

²⁸ Compare Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 41-42.

²⁹ The notion of an ideal listener would be bound up with absolute music and its dependence upon the individual, not an entirely unproblematic proposition for Adorno. See Michael Steinberg, "The Musical Absolute," *passim*.

would have been a dramatic error comparable to the tyranny he saw around him.³⁰

This new category of resistance listener (unlike the insect categories posited above) embodies an awareness of Adorno himself. It stems from the following question: can one read Adorno and be convinced by his categories—or even the possibility of a sociology of music—which exclude the resistance that Adorno himself embodies? Having read Adorno, can one then as expert or jitterbug cling stubbornly to these conditions of listening, so lacking in self-consciousness?

Having read Adorno, I can no longer listen to Schoenberg with any pretense of adequacy. All the technical expertise imparted by my education is tugged away, however slightly, by the obligation to historical necessity, not Schoenberg's but rather Adorno's. I look back on my listening prior to Adorno to be almost automatic—like an insect—however much it may have fulfilled Adorno's expert category. Before I read Adorno, listening seemed spontaneous; now, to paraphrase my epigraph, spontaneity is consumed by the tremendous effort needed to maintain that insect quality, to keep to the path. Therein lies the basis for my current study of his typology, and the basis of my resistance. And therein surely lies an affinity with the popular music listener who, like myself, must resist Adorno.

³⁰ To search for an analytic method in Adorno's writings is to elevate him to an uncomfortable position, for he was well aware of the dangers of circularity in social critique: "By making culture his object, [the critic] objectifies it once more. Its very meaning, however, is the suspension of objectification.... Cultural criticism shares the blindness of its object." Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in PR, 22, 27.