4 Media, Mediation and 'Bildung' in Adorno's *Current of Music*

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1 The Voice of the Radio

If we share something today with Adorno's experience, it is the shock of facing a technological revolution which questions our human, social, and political dimensions. Reflecting upon a technological revolution that changes our way of communication is fatefully linked to concern about the political subjects who could seize these new media as instruments of power. Adorno dealt with the second major technological revolution after printing: the mechanical reproduction of sound (via radio and phonography). From a historical-political point of view, he was concerned both with totalitarianism in Germany and the hidden powers steering mass culture in the United States. In fact, as Hullot-Kentor suggests, Adorno's involvement with radio in the first seven months after his arrival in New York, during which he produced the bulk of his reflections collected now in *Current of Music*, could hardly have been based on substantial experience in the United States (Hullot-Kentor 2006a: 34 and 2006b: 111). In many parts of *Radio Physiognomics*, Adorno hints at the authoritarian use of the radio in Germany, but other passages reveal that, for the emigrant, the recollection of Hitler's voice on the radio still lurked behind his obsession with the authoritarian character of the 'radio-voice', and within the very idea that radio does indeed have 'a voice':

> It may be safely said, however, that this sound possesses something of the vagueness and lack of clarity of bad photographic enlargements. At the same time, it also gains a specific sort of 'expression,' which can be described as aggressive, barking, and bellowing. It resembles somewhat a political harangue, hostile and threatening to the listener.
>
> (Adorno 2006: 90. See also 151 and 193)

The experience of hearing Hitler's voice broadcast by radio has been vigorously evoked by Eric Havelock, who was born in the same year as Adorno. In his late collection of essays *The Muse Learns to Write*, Havelock recalls this experience as one of the seeds of his involvement with orality (Havelock 1986: 31–32).[1] In this context, he observes that 'Franklin Roosevelt and Adolph

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Hitler embodied power and persuasion over men's minds which was electronically transmitted and which proved functionally essential to the kind of political influence that they wielded' (Havelock 1986: 31). For both of these thinkers, Adorno and Havelock, the radio experience was, first of all, that of a 'forced marriage' (to use Havelock's term) between voice and technology, with mainly political consequences. And, of course, it opened up different perspectives regarding their intellectual paths.

Currently, amid the digital age, we are experiencing a very similar feeling of shock, in the sense that we are dealing with the obscure, ambivalent power of digital media, and are mostly concerned with its political, social and aesthetical consequences (Floridi 2014). Of course, I do not intend to suggest here that we can learn something from Adorno in order to understand our present situation. However, we can be more attentive, and perhaps more sympathetic when rereading his oeuvre, letting go of the anxiety about jettisoning Adorno's uncomfortable heritage and peremptory judgments.[2]

2 Aura and the Search for Materialistic Aesthetics

It is worth remembering that Adorno's reflections about the radio are rooted in a double intellectual context: that of his new position at the Princeton Research Project, in addition to his ongoing discussion with Walter Benjamin about the problem of technological reproduction and the decay of the aura. According to Benjamin, technological reproduction marks the shift from the hand to the eye. Here, the focus rests on the transformation of perception, on the fact that, due to photography, 'the process of pictorial reproduction was enormously accelerated', because 'the eye perceives more swiftly than the hand can draw' enabling the eye 'to keep pace with speech' (Benjamin 2008: 21). The end of the millenarian alliance between the hand and the tool, the organic and the inorganic, reconceptualizes the tool as a medium in a twofold way: radically transforming human perception and redefining the relationship between original and copy. On the one hand, thanks to technology, visual art has shifted from the status of autographic to allographic. The new techniques of photography and cinema produce copies of originals, which exist only as master copies. On the other hand, these copies have lost the quality of original production made by the artist's hand, its 'auratic', in other words, its traditional 'aesthetic' value. This shift implies a transformation of the concept of art and its fruition. Therefore, the claim raised by Hennion and Latour (2003: 93–94) about the continuity between the traditional artistic practices of replicas (as in the case of copies of statues in antiquity, as well as engraving, etching, and lithography) and the modern medium of photography hinges on a misunderstanding of Benjamin's theory of technological mediation. On the contrary, the relative autonomy of replicas from their originals, which was already a characteristic of traditional practices, does not impact the overall conception of visual art.

The transformation of human perception enabled by the new media – the eye's acceleration and the discovery of what Benjamin later in the text calls

'optical unconscious' – finds a correlation in the new condition of mass culture. In Benjamin's words, they satisfy 'the desire of the present-day masses to "get closer" to things and their equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing's uniqueness by assimilating it as a reproduction' (Benjamin 2008. 23). The increase of the sense for 'all that is the same in the world' urges one to get hold of an object as a facsimile, a reproduction, an *Abbild*, instead of as an image, *Bild*. Thus, in mass culture, an 'urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at close range in an image [*Bild*], or, even more so, in a facsimile [*Abbild*], a reproduction … Uniqueness and permanence are as closely entwined in the latter as are transitoriness and repeatability in the former' (Benjamin 2008: 23). The shift from the image [*Bild*] to reproduction [*Abbild*] describes the different sides of the ontological status of the works related to time (permanence vs. transitoriness) and identity (uniqueness vs. repeatability).

This distinction also captures a different form of mediation between object and subject. Mediation happens at the level of what Benjamin calls 'the apparatus' putting aside the role of subjectivity.[3] The *Abbild*, the reproduction, captures 'a space informed by the unconscious' instead of one informed by 'human consciousness' (Benjamin 2008: 37), whatever 'unconscious' means for Benjamin in this context. The viewer, or according to Adorno, the consumer, is both anonymous and part of a 'simultaneous, collective reception'. The reactions of the individuals 'which together make up the massive reaction of the audience' are 'determined by the imminent concentration of reactions into a mass' (Benjamin 2008: 36). On this basis, we can add that, on the contrary, the *Bild* is the result of a direct mediation of subject and object. The decay of the aura is, therefore, a symptom of the depersonalization of art; it marks the dawn of its expressive function. On the other side, reproduction (*Abbild*) seems to move towards the concept of a technologically mediated immediacy.

In his letter of 18 March 1936, Adorno's reaction to this position was, first of all, a political one, playing Lenin against Benjamin to reaffirm the mediating role of the intellectuals, and resisting the alleged assignment of a 'counter-revolutionary role' to the 'auratic art'.[4] In the same letter, Adorno was fully aware of the 'liquidation' of traditional bourgeois art, and of the urge for an aesthetical definition of post-auratic art. However, shifting from visual media to music, he let the concept of Benjamin's second technology (an ambiguous umbrella term, which includes the use of simple instruments to raise nature up to the highest developed modern technology) converge with that of the musical technique.[5] This is a crucial point because it enables Adorno to rescue the art of the past and to define the present, modern art. For him, autonomous art, the 'great' bourgeoise art, does not collapse entirely in the concept of auratic art, as a form of magic or a theological symbol; it does not belong entirely to the realm of the myth: it is 'inherently dialectical' as a mediation between a magical element and freedom (Adorno 1999: 127).[6] Non-auratic art, such as Schoenberg's music, is thoroughly

mediated.[7] It is allegoric. The second technology, also with regard to musical technique, introduces a shift or a twist in the dialectic of subject and object, which can be provisionally approached with the help of Raymond Williams' definition of mediation 'as an active process in which the form of the mediation alters the things mediated' (Williams 1985: 205). It is not a neutral process of the interaction of separate forms. Therefore, from the beginning of his aesthetical reflection, Adorno provides a complex conceptualization of the musical work of art, historically grounded and differentiated, and immanently mediated, which can hardly be dismissed as sheer metaphysics.

3 Technological Mediation in Adorno's *Current of Music*

Considering Adorno's intellectual path in the late 1930s, with his focus on the cultural industry's role in the downgrading of 'serious music' to 'light music', some themes from *Current of Music* are not surprising, notably the part concerning the consequences of radio atomistic listening prevailing in the reception of symphonic music (Adorno 2006: 86–97). What is striking is the unexpected role that immediacy plays in approaching radio as a medium from the perspective of the voice. Parts of *Radio Physiognomics* and *Radio Voice* are devoted to exploring what Adorno defines as a radio voice. This is something different from the content of the broadcast and unmasks its alleged 'illusional immediacy'. The radio as a medium is authoritarian, not only in the sense that it has become a tool for the totalitarian strategies of persuasion and control, but because – as a medium – it collaborates intrinsically with monopolistic strategies. Furthermore, it takes advantage of the combination of the power of anonymity and ubiquity, together with the effect of the personal and intimate communication of its alleged 'transparent voice'. The invention of the radio itself is grounded in the interest of controlling powers: 'Only in a mass society governed by monopolistic institutions in which the taboos of the individual have faded away has radio technique been fully developed' (Adorno 2006: 100). Therefore, technological mediation plays a totally different role than that of musical technique; it lies between live music and the listener; and, in producing a distorted copy of the live performance, deteriorates music.

However, Adorno does consider positive uses of this medium. The first one is reserved for educated people who can use radio as a prop, or as a utility to concentrate on the score, 'as if through a microscope' (Adorno 2006: 105). Although it is clear that in this case Adorno assigns a role to the radio that is later played by phonograph records, the argument as a whole points toward the construction of a culture of structural hearing. This kind of listening promotes an individual and intellectual relationship with music; and enhances analytical work, coupling it with the real sound. The phonograph, and, to a certain extent, the radio, offer the perfect conditions for separating hearing from any other perceptual stimulus. This medium suspends multimodal perception and escapes the ephemerality of live performance. In this case,

Adorno envisions a culture of listening, which will go on to characterize a trend that emerges later with HiFi. The second trend focuses on the possibility of achieving an immediacy of the medium, as opposed to the manipulative illusion of immediacy. The broadcasting of studio-produced records overcomes, according to Adorno, the false relationship between the live original and the broadcast copy. Technological mediation takes place in the studio as a part of the performance, as a mediating process: 'the conductor of the original performance could rehearse the broadcasting of the record in the studio with the sound control engineer, and together they could determine how the sound must be "steered"' (Adorno 2006: 127). To overcome the 'reification' of the medium, Adorno provides a third, radical possibility which he calls 'playing on the radio'. In other words, avoiding the double mediation of channeling the sound of traditional instruments through mechanical devices, and instead, by using electrical instruments. This would mean, in Adorno's words, 'to replace the pseudo-immediacy by genuine immediacy' (Adorno 2006: 128). Again, he is visionary in imagining what later would become actual projects of electronic compositions for the radio, which emerge (and disappear) some decades later, and in claiming certain arguments about the immediacy of studio-recorded music and the electronic instruments that would be supported by Glenn Gould in the 1960s (Brech 2000 and De Benedictis 2004).[8] At the beginning of this decade, Adorno himself came back to this topic, suggesting that some features of the most recent music of that time, such as aleatory, conciseness, absence of form development and concentration on the moment, are probably more suited to radio listening, than the 'advanced music' of Weber and Boulez (Adorno 1976 383–384).[9]

At that time, Adorno was not alone in advocating for a new culture of listening in the age of phonography and radio. Rudolf Arnheim, in his early contribution to radio theory, even praises the condition of 'blind' listening and emancipation from the body made possible by broadcasting.[10] Although the radio encourages distracted listening, because people turn on the radio to tune into the flow of existence, he reminds the reader that concentrated listening was rooted in the original use of the radio, when people gathered with their families and used to pay full attention to the radio (Arnheim 1971: 9). Moreover, he mentions the fact that, in Europe, radio has always been used more deliberately as a cultural instrument. This statement gives a real historical context to Adorno's pledge for the use of radio as a tool for experts.

Unlike Adorno's utopic project of 'playing on the radio', Arnheim, in his book about the radio, tackles broadcasting as a means of expression and does not focus primarily on the medium's capacity for diffusion and communication. Blurring the difference between art and media, he includes radio in the new group of 'aural arts' together with music, the theatre and sound-film; but encapsulates music and broadcasting as the only two arts which renounce the eye entirely and operate exclusively with the ear (Arnheim 1971: 22). It upset Adorno that he was not in the least interested in the manipulative potential of the radio, but rather in the expressive potential of the medium across sound

and voice, and music and words. The voice of the radio was, for Adorno the composer and the musicologist, an ambiguous channel for the diffusion of music, which could be vindicated for an advanced, but still utopian, musical use. For intellectuals less concerned with music, like Havelock and Arnheim, broadcasting revealed the power of the voice, as well as the difference between the written and the spoken word: 'The rediscovery of the musical note in sound and speech, the welding of music, sound and speech into a single material is one of the greatest artistic tasks of the wireless' (Arnheim 1971: 30). Even if Arnheim neglects the broad and differentiated exploration of the musical face of language being developed in poetry, as well as, increasingly in music from the 1930s (see Garda 2016 and 2020), in the introduction to the second edition of his book he quotes a passage by Michel Butor, which captures the very concept of broadcasting the book outlines:

> the experience of working for the radio where the sound qualities of language predominates, leads one to consider the text of a broadcast as a musical score. One is compelled to note not only the sequences of words, but the ways in which the sequences of words follow and overlap each other; and one must refine his sensitivity much more than the traditional theatre required, for intonation, tempi, intensities, pitches. Through the ages, musicians have done an enormous amount of work in this respect. Mallarmé thought that it was time for literature to retrieve its own from music and attempted himself to do a score-book, the ancestor of our own experiments. (Arnheim 1971: 10)[11]

In fact, beyond the pledge for 'blind' listening in music, Arnheim's book is focused mainly on the voice in radio plays, but also in the news of the day, reportage and discussions. Put in a broader context, this approach could be considered as a complement to Adorno's analysis of musical broadcasting, in addition to being the positive counterpart in a discussion about the potentialities and dangers of the medium.

4 Progressive Broadcasting

If we consider these questions within the perspective of McLuhan's (1964) distinction of 'hot' and 'cold' media, it is easy to detect Adorno's attitude towards radio as typical, for the specialist of the writing culture facing a hot new medium. For Adorno, one of radio's main consequences is that it conveys a distorted and manipulated copy of the music. As I will explain below, for him, the only countermeasure is to implement a special line of broadcasting in order to protect and spread progressive culture. It is interesting to observe that Paul Lazarsfeld, in his investigation about the radio, excluded the broadcasting of classical music. He considered it as atypical for the medium, because of its close relationship with written culture. Moving from the assumption that 'radio has broken the monopoly that print had once held

on the communication of ideas', he argued that serious broadcasts could not really reach the strata of population which have not been reached by print so far (Lazarsfeld 1940: xII and Chapter 1). Despite Adorno's diagnosis of the collusion of radio with marketing strategies, Lazarsfeld was able to understand radio as a resource for democratic communication by focusing on the broad variety of programs offered at that time: quiz shows, serial dramas, and the so-called service broadcasts, intended to give advice about house-keeping, cooking, efficient buying, home-furnishings, self-improvement.[12] Rather, he considered serious broadcasting to be a 'supplementary communication for people on higher cultural levels' more than an opportunity for a mass educational project. Lazarsfeld clearly grasped how radio in the 1930s could satisfy the new needs in matters of individual, everyday life for that group of illiterate population that was slower to catch up with the rapidly changing American way of life. Yet, he was oriented towards making empirical investigations, rather than proposing a theoretical approach to the medium.

Even if Adorno was uninterested in the kind of analysis addressed by Lazarsfeld, it would be a mistake to reduce his critical observations as relics of the writing era. Despite differences in style and terminology, Adorno was persuaded, no less than McLuhan, that a new medium radically transforms the previous one, and there is no turning back. Adorno, however, conflated the sociology of production in the form of a culture industry critique, with an analysis of the medium. This move resulted in a crude diagnosis of the risks associated with broadcasting serious music. From this point of view, serious music programs could simply not survive as 'supplementary communication for people on higher cultural levels', as Lazarsfeld suggested, but they should be integrated into an overarching project of progressive broadcasting.

There is, however, a fundamental difference between Adorno's theory of mediation and the visionary outline of media as an extension of consciousness in McLuhan's *Understanding Media.* Obviously, the time between Adorno's drafts collected in *Current of Music* and McLuhan's book spans more than twenty years, decades marked by huge developments in the media and their social functions. In his 1964 introduction to *Understanding Media*, McLuhan writes that:

> in the electric age, when our central nervous system is technologically extended to involve us in the whole of mankind and to incorporate the whole of mankind in us, we necessarily participate, in depth, in the consequences of our every action. It is no longer possible to adopt the aloof and dissociated role of the literate Westerner.
>
> (McLuhan 1964: 4)

The global extension of technology as a gigantic network was probably far from Adorno's experience in totalitarian Germany before his emigration, and that of the divided Europe he witnessed after his return to Germany. However, he neither fit into the role of the aloof and literate European, nor that of

the conservative intellectual who refuses to accept the technological shift imposed by the new media. Less prone than Benjamin and McLuhan to acknowledge the role of the media as an extension of the senses, Adorno insisted on the concept of mediation as a means to unveil the supposed transparency of the medium, as well as to enable the medium itself to critically mediate culture.

'Progressive broadcasting', as Adorno defines the overall project to overcome the illusionary and manipulative immediacy of radio, is fueled by the major concern of protecting the 'great music' of the past from the process of deterioration which threatens it in late modernity as well as a concern for the possibility of advanced, 'non-auratic' music in the technologically mediated world of the future. A political issue lurks behind the idea of 'progressive broadcasting', because it implies a democratic control of the media (still an urgent issue, which has become much more complex and unmanageable in the digital era). In a 1966 interview with Umberto Eco broadcast by RAI about media and particularly television, Adorno maintained that before the war, institutions supported by the private sector offered more freedom for critique than those organized by the state. According to him, the situation changed radically in democratic countries after the war, which gave a larger possibility for independence within public institutions. On the contrary, when private interests were at stake, the control was stricter and more rigorous, as documented by the case of the American Broadcasting System.[13] This black and white picture of the media as a public service refers to the years immediately before the diffusion of commercial and independent broadcasting. Still, it captures and defines the space in which independent intellectuals could exercise their right to critique.

5 Education as Cultural Mediation

Upon returning from his American exile, Adorno manifested trust in and engagement with both radio and television, considering his contribution to the media to be a substantial part of his intellectual engagement.[14] In fact, according to Michael Schwarz (2011: 290 and 292), over twenty years Adorno gave about 114 radio talks and conversations, most of them about music. This attitude apparently breaks the spell that his negative dialectics casts on readers, discouraging every positive individual emancipative undertaking. In the post-war era of European democracies, Adorno promoted a broad educational project involving the public, sustained by critical theory. In two well-known interviews, he defined this project as an 'education towards autonomy and responsibility' (*Erziehung zur Mündigkeit*). Education after Auschwitz focused on the urge to avoid and actively fight every possibility to fall back into a totalitarian and barbarian moral, social and political condition.[15] The reference to Kant's pamphlet about Enlightenment in the advocacy to *Mündigkeit*, autonomy and responsibility, leads to the question of how critical theory can sustain the original emancipatory project of

Enlightenment after its historical defeat; in other words, how can critical theory switch from the negative dialectics to a positive pledge of emancipatory values. Both Shannon Mariotti (2014 and 2016) and Fabian Freyenhagen (2013 and 2014) defend Adorno against the critique of elitism and quietism, to take refuge in theory avoiding political practice, and assert Adorno's ethical and democratic engagement. Yet, to understand how Adorno overcomes this paradoxical entanglement of negative theory and positive engagement, it is crucial to focus on his attitude towards education. In fact, the switch from social theory to education, from collectivity to individual consciousness, is itself a mediation, as Adorno argues in 1959: 'Education is culture from the perspective of subjective appropriation. Culture however has a double character. It refuses society and mediates between this and half-education' (Adorno 2018: 94). According to Adorno, after the failure of the revolutionary movements, culture has separated from real life and survives in a reified form as *Kulturgüter*, cultural commodities. Yet, as 'Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed, so culture preserves its critical potentiality and this is precisely the place of mediation' (Adorno 1973: 3). This double character of culture made it possible 'to stick on education, after society has removed its ground' (Adorno 2018: 121).

Music education offers a good example of 'half-education' and Adorno goes back in this essay to one of the arguments he used to criticize Walter Damrosch in his 'Analytical Study of the NBC Music Appreciation Hour': memorizing the main themes of the symphonies, instead of explaining their structural function (Adorno 2006: 255–58 and 293–294). The reference to Sigmund Spaeth's 1936 book sounds quite anachronistic in an article published in 1959, although the book had been reprinted in 1952. It shows, however, how the scrutiny he gave to the gigantic educational program issued by Damrosch in the years 1938–40 was pivotal to his understanding of a 'progressive broadcasting' as part of a larger educational project.[16] Damrosch and Adorno's assumptions about the role of radio in education could not be more different. The former was still imbued by the pioneer rhetoric of the radio as a tool giving access to culture to all the people who were excluded from it, for economic as well as geographical grounds:

> Now the first time in history, those who live on farms and ranches, in small towns and villages, in mining camps, lumber camps, and in other remote places, may come into intimate personal contact with the music of Mozart, Beethoven and Wagner. A new world has opened to them, and their response has been phenomenal.
>
> (Damrosch 1935: 91)

Moreover, Damrosch believed in the power of radio to stimulate the practice of music in a country, where a tradition of amateur musicians was still lacking:

> Most appreciative letters from music supervisors from all over the country tell me how they themselves have made up for the loss of contact with distant concert series of school broadcasts. The growth of orchestras and bands in the schools is astounding. There are now, I am told, more than 50,000 young orchestras and 75,000 bands in our schools. Already amateur civic orchestras are being formed by the graduates of these young orchestras, and thus musical centers are being established in cities and towns which previously had little or no acquaintance with the great music of the world. I'm glad that the influence of our Music Appreciation Hour has been helpful toward stimulating desire to play orchestral instruments, and that our programs have served as models for the type of music to be played by these young performers.
>
> (Damrosch 1931: 24)

Damrosch's project was consistent with the understanding of radio in its initial stage, as a tool, which could reinforce and amplify education in schools, supplying the shortcomings of the educational system with its power of diffusion. His project was rooted in a holistic pedagogy, which understood education as a sort of exercise to train children to become *useful* members of society, functional parts of the social machine:

> Music is a vital and necessary part of the education of every child. It is one of the most important means of bringing him to a civilized state from the status of a young animal which is his natural condition at birth.
>
> Our schools were established to educate the *whole* boy and the *whole* girl, not just a part of them. Physically, mentally and emotionally, this young animal must be trained for the purpose of making him a useful member of society. In the progress of the world, there has been no change in the essential qualification of the useful members of society.
>
> (Damrosch 1933: 19)

Adorno's critique of the program ranged from the 'unspecific explanations' and the 'unrepresentative examples' to the more radical jab about, what we today would call, the 'gamification' of learning. According to Adorno, training pupils and students to recognize motives and themes leads back to the regressive process of music standardization, which conveys 'a feeling of social conformity' (Adorno 2006: 297). It is grounded on a 'fetishistic concept of music' and on the authoritarian cult of personalities. The later concept of *Halbbildung* has its template here: 'These features of the *Hour* virtually produce musical pseudo-culture' (Adorno 2006: 285).[17]

Adorno's positive take on musical education in the late 1930s is illustrated in *What a Music Appreciation Hour Should be*, an essay first published in *Current of Music*. The two enterprises are, however, incommensurable; and not because of the trivial fact that the 'Music Appreciation Hour' was a program which lasted fourteen years, while Adorno's project was never

implemented. The latter was conceived as an autonomous cultural program independent from the school system, and it can be considered as an early model of Adorno's musical radio talks, together with his broadcasts for WNYC in the first half of 1940, collected in *Current of Music* (Adorno 2006: 319–398).[18]

His suspicion regarding the manipulation of the audience response, however, prevented Adorno from detecting the opportunities of the medium as a tool for community building, which was indeed the strong point of Damrosch's interactive enterprise, despite his bombastic and universalistic goals. Community (*Gemeinschaft*) was obviously a taboo concept for Adorno, affected as he was by its regressive use in Nazi Germany; on the contrary the rise of community radios was yet to come. From this perspective, the cultural mediation envisioned by Adorno is, unsurprisingly, a mediation from above, mostly directed to cultivate and reinforce the culture of focused attention, and the ascetic and intellectual approach to 'great music'.

6 Mediating Immediacy

Positive reference points can be found at the core of Adorno's critique, which was unmistakably rooted in the tradition of his German musical education. These definitions take the shape of formulations, such as 'full and mature understanding', 'fully adequate art experience', 'living relationship with music' (Adorno 2006: 263; 286; 309);[19] they play a heuristic role, and hit the mark regarding Adorno's critique on a profound level:

> In the case of fully adequate art experience, something of this sort may occur, given an *ideal listener* (my italics), his immediate apperception and the full meaning of the work would coincide. But this coincidence cannot be presumed to exist at that point from which music education has to start. In other words, the *Music Appreciation Hour* must treat its pupils as if they were ideal listeners for whom the meaning of the work of art coincides with the effect it has upon them.
>
> (Adorno 2006: 286–287)

If we set aside the pre-aesthetic musical effects, where can the trigger of a 'living relationship with the music' be located? In the introduction of the *Analytical Study of the NBC Music Appreciation Hour*, there is a brief passage that suggests listening through and possibly modulating Adorno's judgmental voice, which sounds particularly irritating in the above mentioned text:

> It may suffice to mention that a person who is in *a real living relation* (my italics) with music does not like music because, as a child he likes to see a flute, then later because music imitated a thunderstorm, and finally because he learned to listen to music as music, but that the deciding childhood experiences of music are much more like a shock. More

> prototypical as stimulus is the experience of a child who lies awake in his bed while a string quartet plays in an adjoining room and who is suddenly so overwhelmed by the excitement of the music that he forgets to sleep and listens breathlessly.
>
> (Adorno 2006: 252)

Adorno projects us into a bourgeois interior, but if we were to change the setting, the example would still work. Very close to Freud's 'primary scene', this passage depicts, in fact, an archetypal scene that enables us to grasp the role of immediacy in *Current of Music*. The trigger of the musical experience is – in the literary sense – a passion, an overwhelming power that affects the listener. In this regard, music as a performative art is rooted in the mythic past of magic: 'No matter how aloof from practical necessities it may have been, music was still something in itself and not an image of something: It was on the order of prayer and play; not of painting and writing' (Adorno 2006: 182). In Adorno's thinking, immediacy, however, is the fleeting goal of the dialectic. A brief remark from his notes for an unfinished book on Beethoven sheds light on the role of the lost, irretrievable experience of childhood immediacy in fueling the work of the concept: 'Reconstruct how I heard Beethoven as a child' (Adorno 1998: 3).

The acknowledgment of the performative side of music is at the core of Adorno's comment on Benjamin's concept of aura. Yet this acknowledgment emerges theoretically only at the moment in which 'liveness' is threatened and distorted by the radio voice; in other words, it emerges when 'the authentic original has ceased to exist, and as a category, it has fallen behind the actual state of technical development … whereas the illusion of the original is maintained' (Adorno 2006: 142).

In conclusion, for Adorno, in a very Benjaminian way, immediacy emerges ex-post as a representation of loss and, as such, it remains unavailable. In *Current of Music*, suggestions of the voice, the face, childhood experience, metaphors as they are for absolute, unadulterated presence, are ubiquitous. As expressions of a nostalgia for the future, they modulate the severity of the critical theory. Precisely as a figure of loss, immediacy still matters. The arduous task of coming of age, of becoming autonomous and taking responsibility as a music listener, as well as a citizen, dwells in the work of mourning a loss, and preserving the energy of that which was lost, as a mediated immediacy. Adorno's voice resonates from a past that is becoming remote for our living memory. In a world of escalating interconnectivity between human and non-human agencies, his dialectical humanism addresses us with its uncomfortable voice, urging us to not forget our most cherished desires.

Notes

1 Havelock is referring to Hitler's speech of 1939 directed at persuading enemies (Canada indeed was one of them) to step away from hostilities.

2 Over the last two decades, the discussion about mediation in the sociology of music has converged into a parallel effort to disentangle the concept of mediation from Hegelian dialectics and from Adorno's allegedly metaphysical conception of the work of art, aiming to 'implement Adorno's idea empirically' (De Nora 2003: 21) and to get a 'positive conception' of mediation (Hennion 2003: 3). See also Born 2005 and Born and Barry 2018.
3 Benjamin employs this term in the double meaning of technical equipment used for a particular activity and the complex structure of an organization, which functions indeed as a machine; see the use of this term at the end of chapter X of Benjamin 2003: 31.
4 For if you legitimately interpret technical progress and alienation in a dialectical fashion, without doing the same in equal measure for the world of objectified subjectivity, then the political effect of this is to credit the proletariat (as the cinema subject) directly with an achievement which, according to Lenin, it can only accomplish through the theory introduced by intellectuals as dialectical subjects, although they belong themselves to the sphere of a work of art which you have already consigned to Hell' (Adorno 1999: 129).
5 You are well aware that the question of "liquidation" of art has been a motivating force behind my own aesthetic studies for many years, and that my emphatic endorsement of the primacy of technology, especially in music must be understood strictly in this sense and in the sense of your second piece on technology [*zweiten Technik*]'(Adorno 1999: 128). For Benjamin's definition of second technology, see Benjamin 2008: 26.
6 He returned to these topics in Adorno 1973: 371–372.
7 See Adorno's letter to Benjamin, 18 March 1936 (Adorno 1999: 124).
8 See in particular two articles by Glenn Gould written respectively in 1966 and 1968: 'The Prospect of Recordings' and the 'Record of the Decade'. The second one is about the Wendy Carlos LP, *Switched-on Bach*, released in the same year (Gould 1984a and b). Carlos' LP was a milestone in blurring the borders between high art music and popular music, a perspective partly supported by Gould, but entirely rejected by Adorno.
9 After 1960 Adorno was rethinking his take on the avantgarde music from the 1950s, as witnessed by his lessons at Darmstadt in 1961, published as *Vers une musique informelle* (Adorno 1978; see also Borio 2005).
10 Rudolf Arnheim (1971), chap. VII 'In Praise of Blindness: Emancipation from the Body'. Written during Arnheim's exile in Rome, the first edition of *Radio* appeared first in the English translation in London in 1936 and in the Italian translation in 1938. The first German edition was published in 1979 with the title of *Radio als Hörkunst.* Arnheim also participated in the Princeton radio research project and published two related articles (Arnheim and Collins Bayne 1941 and Arnheim 1942–43).
11 The quotation from Butor refers to Butor 1978.
12 About the role of serial drama in broadcasting policy see also Arnheim 1942–43.
13 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WC_gz7jykaY
14 About the activity of Adorno at the radio see Albrecht et al. 1999; Boll 2004; Reichert 2010; Schwarz 2011.
15 'Erziehung nach Auschwitz' (1966) and 'Erziehung zur Mündigkeit' (1969), in Adorno 1971: 88–104; 133–147.
16 Walter Damrosch's 'Music Appreciation Hour' started in 1928 and ended in 1942. About this series of radio broadcasts together with the teaching material distributed in the schools, see three dissertations: Goodell 1973, Himmelein 1972 and Perryman 1973, with references to the archival materials preserved in the New York Public Library. More recently, see Wieland Howe 2003 and Gregory 2016.

17 About the link between Adorno's concept of 'half-education' and Dwight Mac-Macdonald's 'middlebrow', see chap. 1, p. XX and n. 13.
18 See also Hullot-Kentor's commentary in Adorno 2006: 60.
19 About the discussion on the notion of experience in Adorno's later thought and in a broader context see Jay 2004 and Crawford 2018.

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