



Corso di laurea in Politics, Philosophy and Economics

Cattedra: Political Philosophy

The philosophy of Theodor W. Adorno in Political Theory: Analysis and Perspectives

Anno Accademico: 2022/2023

Relatore

Sebastiano Maffettone

Candidato

Daniele Gaudino

ID: 097722

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Chapter 1: Overview of Adorno's Philosophy	8
<i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i>	9
<i>Philosophy of modern music</i>	12
Chapter 2: Culture Industry	15
<i>Standardization of cultural products and its consequences</i>	16
<i>Mass culture as an instrument of domination</i>	20
Adorno and Classical Political Theory	24
Chapter 3: Adorno and Multicultural liberalism	25
<i>Multicultural debate: rights and minorities</i>	26
<i>Problems and solutions</i>	27
<i>Cultural differences and relationships of power</i>	29
Chapter 4: A liberal perfectionist approach	31
<i>Types of perfectionism and definitions</i>	32
<i>Pluralism in perfectionist theory</i>	32
<i>Perfectionism or anti-perfectionism?</i>	33
Chapter 4: Adorno and Marxism	34
<i>Similarities, differences and Lukacs' influence.</i>	35
<i>Marxism and Justice</i>	37
<i>Conformity and Equality</i>	39
Chapter 6: Feminist Approach	40
<i>Women and Nature: Adorno and Ecofeminism</i>	41
<i>Private and Public sphere</i>	42
<i>Adorno and queer theory</i>	44
Chapter 7: Adorno and the environment	45
<i>Disenchantment and Nature</i>	46

<i>Deep Ecology and environmental ethics</i>	47
<i>Human-nature relationship</i>	49
Conclusions	50
Bibliography	53

Introduction

There are many thinkers who often are known only to the specialists in their fields, and sometimes they even struggle when confronted with those thinkers. This could be to a number of causes: maybe the thinker is deemed too difficult and pretentious, or perhaps their thought might be considered outdated and not worth exploring further. I believe that Theodor W. Adorno is one of these thinkers, and he fits in with all the previously mentioned categories. The work of Adorno is notoriously very difficult to read and analyze, as it can feel de-structured, disorganized, and sometimes even incoherent. He himself considered precise definitions to be something that oversimplified reality, and his style perfectly reflects this idea, as it is often cryptic and ambiguous. Many might also consider his work too theoretical, with not a lot of applicability in the real world, and his analysis of the world of art and music production too pessimistic, as well as outdated and snobbish, with all of his focus being put on the advanced work of art and the entire dismissal of other forms of art production. With all of this said, however, my goal with this study is to show that Theodor Adorno's philosophy has more to offer than what it looks like and could be of great help in analyzing today's society, where capitalism has succeeded in taking over the whole world as a production model and as a way of thinking.

This study is divided into three main parts. In the first part, the Theoretical Framework, I will describe and discuss the works that I deem most relevant in a discussion of Adorno's philosophy. The starting point will be the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a book co-authored by Max Horkheimer, another philosopher that lived through the same events of Adorno, with which he developed most of his thought. The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (DoE) is a very complex work. The two authors tried to make sense of the historical situation that they were living in, and they tried to explain the reasons for which Enlightened thinking failed and gave birth to the most terrible atrocities imaginable, like the Holocaust and totalitarian regimes. In the DoE, they argue that enlightened thinking started becoming the opposite of what it was trying to do in the beginning. Reason becomes only a tool at the disposal of the most powerful, and this idea comes with its big share of negative effects. The objectification of every aspect of our lives destroys the relationships that the subject can form with the external environment. Art, nature, social relationships are all reduced to things to be used and exploited. I will also focus on the *Philosophy of Modern music*, another work of Adorno's corpus that I deem important to analyze to understand better what the relationship between culture, society and power in his philosophy is. Adorno was born into a family of musicians and dedicated a lot of time to musical critique and analysis. When he moved to the US, the culture shock he had was unexplainable, and he could not conceive of music as a product or as a mere form of cheap entertainment. His analysis of popular music is highly controversial, and it is probably one of the

most contested parts of his work. I will try to show that in reality, when recontextualized, his analysis of music makes sense and can be applied, to an extent, to the contemporary world as well.

The critique of modern music is a pivotal point in the development of Adorno's most popular contribution to philosophy, that is the idea of Culture Industry. In the second chapter of this study, I will discuss this idea and what are its effects on society. The Culture Industry can be thought of as an extension of Adorno's critique of popular music to the whole cultural and artistic world. His critique is highly complex and starts with the idea that culture and art have a fundamental role in the development of subjectivity. Adorno believes that the modern art products created by the Culture Industry are objectified and standardized, ultimately resulting in the standardization of the consumers. This leads Adorno to think that in the end, the Culture Industry is no more than an instrument of domination, as the standardized art products are just an extension of the processes found in the work time, that starts to occupy leisure time as well. This critique seems to be, again, highly pessimistic, but on closer inspection it is possible to find that the Culture Industry is still present in our times and its grasp on society is stronger than Adorno could have ever imagined.

In the second part of this work, the Literature Review of classical political theory, I will discuss and analyze what are the main interpretations of Adorno's work and philosophy in the context of political theory. Although his work does not provide any instructions on how society should be run, nor provides a theory of justice, the political nature of Frankfurt's theorist is clear. The first interpretation that will be discussed is the liberal one. The focus that Adorno's philosophy puts on the individual is extremely strong, and free-thinking individuals seem to be a key feature of an Adornian society. I will first discuss the relationship that there is between Adorno's work and Multicultural liberalism, analyzing the multicultural debate on equal rights and minorities and what insights can Adorno's theory give us. Then, a liberal perfectionist approach will be discussed. Perfectionism is the doctrine of a society which strives to reach the maximum good for each of their citizens. In the perspective of Adorno, this can be easily identified as maximum freedom for the individual. However, perfectionism has been deemed by some as incompatible with pluralism, something that in an Adornian framework is impossible to conceive. I will address these concerns, as well as attempting to show how Adorno's work can be interpreted under the light of a pluralist perfectionist perspective. After liberalism, the other political theory that easily comes to mind when analyzing Adorno's work is obviously Marxism. Marxist theory has clearly a big influence on Adorno's philosophy, as well as on other Frankfurt's school theorists. However, I will address some points in which Adorno distances himself. These differences can be mostly attributed to the historical context, but also the contacts that Adorno had with other European Marxist theorists, such

as Lukacs, are relevant. I will then address Adorno's relationship with classical and modern Marxist political theory is, as well as his approach to justice.

In the third and final part of this study, the literature review of modern interpretations, I will discuss what I believe to be the more relevant contemporary interpretations of Adorno's work, namely the feminist one and the environmental one. These two aspects may not seem relevant in Adorno's philosophy at first glance, but on closer inspection there are many more points in common than one could imagine. Both issues are never confronted directly and explicitly by the Frankfurt theorist, but his philosophy has been picked up by numerous scholars in both fields. Regarding feminism, most scholars focus on the issue of how the relationships of domination explored by Adorno play a role in the status of the women in modern society. I will address these issues, as well as discussing the relationship that there is with ecofeminism. The other classical issue with which feminist political philosophy is concerned is that of the role of the interactions between public and private sphere: I will discuss how Adorno's philosophy has been explored in this field and the applications it can have, as well as exploring how it can be applied to recent queer political theory. On the issue of environmental philosophy, the focus will be the relationship that there is between humanity and nature, a topic which Adorno explores in great length in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Adorno argues that Enlightenment has caused a "disenchantment" of nature, which means that nature is devoid of every meaning except its instrumental one. While this may not seem like a bad thing, Adorno provides all the negative effects that such disenchantment can have on humanity and its relationship with the world and with society itself. I will finally address the ways in which Adorno has been interpreted by Deep ecological theory and the ways in which the relationship between mankind and nature can be re-thought.

Part 1: Theoretical Framework

Chapter 1: Overview of Adorno's Philosophy

Theodor W. Adorno is one of the major theorists of Frankfurt's school of critical theory, which included influential writers such as Herbert Marcuse, Leo Lowenthal, Max Horkheimer and Erich Fromm. Their focus was the critique of Western society, and how mass culture and communication was fundamental to relationships of domination. Before getting into the concept of culture industry and its political implications, I deem necessary a brief overview of Adorno's life, as well as his philosophy on Enlightenment and music; these elements have had a profound impact on his thought on mass culture and society and are necessary to fully understand how and why it developed.

Adorno grew up in a wealthy family in Germany and went on to study philosophy, sociology, and psychology at the University of Frankfurt¹. He was deeply influenced by his teacher's thought on Kantian philosophy during his time studying: however, he progressively distanced himself from his views, as the environment around him was intellectually vibrant and different from the cold and rigorous philosophy of his master, although some of his earlier production still reflects his influence². He developed a strong passion for avant-garde music and was a quite affirmed musical critic in that period.³ Music is a key element in Adorno's philosophy and in his conception of mass culture and relationships of domination, and I will discuss his studies of music extensively later in this study.

In the 1930s, Adorno's life was quite difficult as a Marxist with Jewish origins. His teaching license was revoked, and he started looking for teaching positions abroad⁴. After a brief period in Oxford as an advanced student, he accepted the invitation of his friend Max Horkheimer to move to the United States; there he started his writing career, with the first essays on the philosophy of music.

However, in 1944, along with his colleague and friend Horkheimer he started writing *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which has been considered their "most nihilistic book"⁵. In the next section, I will describe and analyze the main concepts of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

¹ Petrucciani, 2015, I. La formazione e il primo tempo della filosofia di Adorno section

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Habermas 1982, p.13

Dialectic of Enlightenment

The aim of Dialectic of Enlightenment, as stated by Adorno and Horkheimer, is to find why the rationalization process that started with the Enlightenment gave birth to irrational events and disasters such as the Second World War and the Holocaust. One of the primary questions the authors posit is how a society that claims to be free from the shackles of myth could follow leaders that are idealized to a point in which they become comparable to ancient sorcerers⁶. Additionally, the authors seek to examine the relationship between technical progress, capitalism and society. The combination of these three elements should have created a society free from material needs⁷, which would have been more centered on humans rather than on production. As is still evident however, productive techniques and technological means are often used to exploit and damage people. The authors acknowledge that the Marxist critique is not enough to answer these key points, identifying two key reasons: first, forms of domination were acclaimed by people, as the experience of totalitarianism revealed, and not rejected as Marx predicted.⁸ Second, relationships of domination were not limited to capitalistic system, as evidenced by the experience of the Soviet Union. The authors argue that such relationships of domination are not inherent to capitalist societies, but they existed throughout human history and would even survive after capitalism has been dismantled. Adorno and Horkheimer then deem necessary to go all the way back to the origins of civilization to discover how relationships of domination came to be, creating a sort of genealogy⁹. In this section, I will describe and analyze how this failure of enlightened thought unfolds in the eyes of the authors.

Adorno and Horkheimer assert that humanity is cursed by a principle of equivalence: each time humans manage to free themselves from a type of domination, they create a new one to which they must submit. This phenomenon is exemplified by the emancipation from material scarcity facilitated by advanced capitalism; in exchange for this liberation, individuals are compelled to adhere to trade rules, engaging in an endless quest for accumulation of material wealth, which ultimately enslaves them in a new way¹⁰. The authors pose a critical question: how was this possible in the case of enlightenment, where reason was supposed to liberate humanity from irrational forms of domination? The answer lies in the difference between critical reason and instrumental reason, and the dialectical relationship between the two. The authors suggest that only the first is truly emancipatory and seeks to liberate humanity from all forms of domination, while the second is primarily concerned with efficiency, viewing humanity and other people only as a means to an end.

⁶ Petrucciani, 2015, III. «Dialettica dell'illuminismo»: l'autocritica della razionalità occidentale section

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Adorno and Horkheimer argue that reason is not used critically, but rather instrumentally, meaning that is only used to apply domination over nature and instinct. They contend that even when reason is applied to science it is used only instrumentally, as science does not pursue theoretical knowledge anymore, but only knowledge that can be used for technological exploitation and profit¹¹, possibly also holding back scientific advance. According to the authors, instrumental reason becomes a structuring and defining principle in capitalist/late-capitalist societies, although it existed even before these¹². However, instrumental reason is not inherently inferior to critical reason: Adorno and Horkheimer consider the second as a natural evolution of the first, following the logic of Hegelian negation; in other words, instrumental reason “understands” its limits and overcomes them, giving rise to critical reason¹³. If this was not the case, the authors would have been stuck with saying that critical reason was better than instrumental reason, without properly explaining the relationship between the two¹⁴.

When the authors criticize reason however, they are not refusing science and technology; as Adorno himself puts it, the aim is not to practice a “large scale Luddism.”¹⁵ They criticize instead the relationship it has with capitalistic society that forces the use of it for profit, instead of driving technological progress into the direction of destroying relationship of dominations that technical progress itself has caused. Instead, this critique of enlightenment must be viewed as an auto-critique, as it is enlightenment itself that allowed this type of reasoning to be made in the first place¹⁶. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that even though Enlightenment was supposed to destroy “magical thinking”, it persists in modern society. People are not able to distinguish nature from culture and assume that the societal order is a natural order, while it is in fact only a human-made creation built over time: as this was built, however, it can also be destroyed¹⁷. Demythologization and enlightenment are what allow the detachment of nature from culture, and culture from nature, and it is through enlightenment that humans can recognize and dismantle unjust ideologies and institutions.

This process has been described as a “decentralization of the world view”¹⁸. In synthesis, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, Enlightenment is intrinsically opposed to domination; as such, only through its way of thinking it is possible to destroy the structures of domination it

¹¹ Rose, 2014, The Frankfurt School, 1923–50 section

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Petrucciani, 2015, III. «Dialettica dell’illuminismo»: l’autocritica della razionalità occidentale1 section

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Habermas 1982 p.22

created. According to the authors, however, the solutions to this problem cannot be found in the classical Marxist critique of the capitalist system. The Marxist critique of the ideology attempts to prove that behind a theory hides a fusion between validity claims - what is true and verifiable - and power – what is considered to be true and inevitable because it has been imposed as such.¹⁹ A straightforward example can be economic theories that assume how certain phenomena are natural, and capitalism itself which is seen as inevitable. The power element can't be admitted by a theory like this, otherwise it would lose its credibility, and it is precisely for that element of power inside it that the theory is considered correct by people.²⁰ In synthesis, the ruling class ideology is followed by people mostly due to the element of power that is intrinsic in it. At this point, Enlightenment is producing an analysis about the theories that were born thanks to Enlightenment itself, and it is reflecting on itself. Adorno and Horkheimer take this a step further, believing that such a critique of ideology is not able anymore to analyze the world in which they lived (in which we live today too), because reason itself is victim to the fusion of validity claim and power, in the form of instrumental reason²¹. Once reason becomes instrumentalized, for whatever purpose, it loses its critical ability, and it is just used as another, more powerful instrument to legitimize relationships of domination. Irrational events on an incredibly large scale, such as the Holocaust, are only possible because they have a perverted rationality behind it, and they are justified by the same reason that Enlightenment claimed that would make humanity progress further.

There are, however, some elements that could give the impression that the critique moved by Adorno and Horkheimer ignores important details of modernity, and it is too pessimistic and totalistic. To understand the reasons as why the authors built such a definitive critique, it is important to underline the historical context. Adorno and Horkheimer lived in a period in which the principal models of reference were the US and the Soviet Union. Unlike other contemporaries, they did not idealize the Soviet Union as a Marxist utopia; rather, they recognized its totalitarian elements, the homogenization of culture and opinions by the state. However, according to the authors, such elements are also found in the US, with private monopolies that do the same operation by instilling their dominant ideology into popular art²². For this reason, it seems logical that for the authors even the liberal democracies were forced by capitalistic relationships of domination into effectively becoming totalitarianisms²³.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 20

²¹ Ibid, p.22

²² Petrucciani, 2015, III. «Dialettica dell'illuminismo»: l'autocritica della razionalità occidentale1 section

²³ Ibid.

Philosophy of modern music

When talking about the instillment of ideology into art and the degeneration of it into commodity, Adorno extensively talks about music. A lot of his literary production is dedicated to musical analysis and musicology, and a clear understanding of his theory on music is necessary when talking about his views on culture industry in general. In this chapter I will describe Adorno's general view on music and what constitutes "true" music for him, as well as analyzing and understanding why he had such pessimistic views on popular music, especially on jazz music.

Adorno grew up in a family of musicians and he was considered a child prodigy: he was very active in the Frankfurt musical and cultural scene in the 1920s and 1930s, both as a critic and as a composer²⁴. His music philosophy has been very clear from the start of his production: in various essays in the 1930s, he expressed his conception of progress in music – and more generally in art – as a relationship between the composer and the historical material at their disposal. To create a progressive artwork, the artist must be able to find and internalize the most advanced material – intended both as technical tools, such as musical instruments and composing techniques, and historical ones, such as previous compositions in general – and answer to them accordingly²⁵. It may seem then that Adorno has an almost deterministic conception of music: the composer is forced to adapt to the historical conditions in which they live, and the music they produce is inevitably conditioned by the material. However, it is quite the opposite: the more an artist can interpret the material and the techniques at their disposal, the freest they are to create "true" artistic music, that opposes the dominant forces. Adorno sees the composer almost as a scientist that must be able to solve the problems that the techniques available pose to him²⁶. The artist that most represents this approach, according to Adorno, is Arnold Schoenberg, to which he dedicates a whole part of his *Philosophy of Modern music*. It is important then to understand the meaning of true art in Adorno's view. "True" music is the one that is free from any external influence and can't be guided by the necessity to bring a message²⁷: in its purest form, music for Adorno has a strong social function, even analogous to that of social theory, and acquires a meaning without external influences²⁸. The key in understanding why Adorno believes in such an important function for music lies in the conception that he has of it: the techniques and the means of expression are a byproduct of society and tradition, and as the artist interprets these forms, they also inevitably interpret society.²⁹As stated previously, music according to Adorno cannot be guided by the

²⁴ Müller-Doohm, 2015, *Between philosophy and music: no parting of the ways* section

²⁵ Petrucciani, 2015, II. *Filosofia, musica e società* section

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Paddison, 1982 p.204

²⁸ Petrucciani, 2015, II. *Filosofia, musica e società* section

²⁹ Paddison, 1982, p.205.

necessity of sending a message, as it must be a pure expression of intrinsic formal needs, and precisely because these formal needs are constructed by society, music inevitably has a strong function in understanding societal structures. The musical meaning, as intended by Adorno, is totally detached by the intention of the composer, but it is given by the relationship that the piece has with its historical context. Ultimately, music must be understood as a social fact and studied as such to fully understand its relationship with the society of the time in which it is composed³⁰. According to Adorno, however, music too has fallen victim to the laws of the market and the first distinction he makes is between music that tries to resist the dominant forces, acquiring meaning and critical ability by refusing reification, that is the objectification as something that can have market value, and music that obeys the market logic and becomes a commodity devoid of any meaning³¹.

Adorno initially identifies four main tendencies in the first category, but then focuses on two of them, which are considered more relevant and prevalent in society³². The first one is best represented by Schoenberg's avant-garde music. He was an avant-garde composer that used dissonances and experimental composing techniques: through these dissonances, according to Adorno, his music can accurately represent the contradictions happening in the modern world. Schoenberg's music is the perfect example of music that acquires meaning through its form and escapes being commodified – it is authentic music. Paradoxically, however, authentic music in a capitalist society is “compelled to deny meaning in order to preserve it”³³. Only through the negation of existing dominant structures can music preserve its critical character, as submitting to those structures would mean submitting to market laws, sooner or later. To be truly progressive, art in general must try to integrate elements that were previously ignored. In practice, authentic music must be incomprehensible in the modern age, because otherwise it becomes another object of trade. This kind of music requires active listening, where the listener must try to find relationships between the parts and the whole of the composition to make sense of it. On the contrary, according to Adorno, popular music doesn't involve the listener as an active participant at all. Historically however, according to Adorno, music did not need to be opposed to existing structures: in different historical conditions, authentic music had an affirmative element on formal structures – the example brought by Adorno is Beethoven, who composed “true” music for its time, but then has been commodified by the culture industry³⁴. However, it is wrong to think that Beethoven is “more

³⁰ Rose, 2014, The Sociology of Culture section

³¹ Paddison, 1982 p.204

³² Petrucciani, 2015, II. Filosofia, musica e società section.

³³ Paddison, 1982 p.207

³⁴ Ibid.

comprehensible” than Schoenberg; it is the society around the two composers that changed the way and the things they represent³⁵. The other composer that Adorno considers diametrically opposed to Schoenberg is Stravinsky, who represents the second tendency in music that does not submit to market laws. According to the author, Stravinsky recognized and interpreted the contradictions of his time: however, he chose to approach them in the wrong way, by using outdated stylistic structures and thinking that these structures are immune to commodification³⁶.

The second type, obeying the market logic, is just a reflection of the status quo, and lacks any critical characteristic that art in general should have. True art – in the sense I described earlier – cannot be identified in a medium that follows market logic, as it becomes a commodity.

Unreflective music identifies with old established structures rather than overcoming them. As this process unfolds, Adorno argues that music gets standardized and that “the whole is pre-given and pre-accepted, even before the actual experience”³⁷. Repetitive rhythms and structures, easy-listenable tunes and instrumental recognizability are the elements that Adorno mainly criticizes in popular music and that he argues are standardizing art. This is also reflected in the listening experience, where Adorno argues that the listener is not involved actively in the process, as they already know what they are going to experience³⁸. This derogatory sense of popular music, however, encompasses every type of music that has been subjected to commodification, even serious music of the past, as once this process starts, art loses all its meaning. These extreme views are exacerbated in the essay “On Jazz”, in which Adorno criticizes jazz music, which is probably his most hated and criticized work³⁹, and with good reasons. His criticisms are more pointed to the socio-cultural characteristics of jazz: he argues how jazz is just a fake form of rebellion, and that its alternative character is used by the monopolistic powers of the culture industry to keep people from rebelling and giving them a fake sense of individualization⁴⁰. Adorno claims that this is given by the musical elements in jazz music of the 30s and 40s, which he says is only superficially ornated with change while the underlying elements remain practically unchanged⁴¹.

These views have been heavily criticized, and have been described as “prejudiced, arrogant and uninformed”⁴². On a formal level, one of the problems with Adorno’s view lies in the fact that he does not distinguish different types in popular music, while at the same time he is very careful in

³⁵ Petrucciani 2015, II. Filosofia, musica e società section

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Adorno 1941, as cited in Paddison 1982 p.206

³⁸ Paddison, 1982 p.206

³⁹ Witkin 2000, p.145

⁴⁰ Petrucciani, 2015, II. Filosofia, musica e società section

⁴¹ Witkin 2000, p. 146

⁴² Paddison, 1982 p.201

examining even little details in what he calls authentic music. This can be attributed to the historical context in which Adorno grew up: the 30s and 40s witnessed the rise of dictatorships and the start of mass media communications. Given these factors, Adorno put a great effort in understanding how ideology works within art⁴³. It is also arguable that Adorno did not experience what we today intend as jazz music: the best works of Miles Davis and John Coltrane, as well as the more avant-garde jazz of Albert Ayler were published towards the end of Adorno's life and even after his death, meaning that he was not familiar with some of the masterpieces of the genre. Instead, it is highly likely that when he refers to jazz, he's referring to the jazz-influenced mass commercialized dance music which was all over radios in his time and reflects better his description of jazz: given these premises, Adorno's analysis can be comprehensible if not even acceptable⁴⁴. It is finally interesting to think about the implications of Adorno's theory on popular music. It seems that Adorno does not allow for what he calls popular music to develop in such a way to become serious and authentic music, as he defines the first as music that uses degenerate material of the latter⁴⁵. However, it is possible to argue that certain rock music of the 20th and 21st century could enter the definitions of serious music given by Adorno, thanks to its reflective and experimental character. In fact, once popular music had become conscious of its material and methods, some artists started taking on a self-reflective and analytical character, both in music composition and its lyrics⁴⁶. Such examples can be found in the earlier records of Frank Zappa in the 60s, but I would argue that even the German experimental rock outfits of the 70s such as Faust or CAN or some 80s and 90s experimental artists like Foetus or Vampire Rodents can enter the definition of authentic music given by Adorno.

Chapter 2: Culture Industry

While Adorno's musicology may be highly controversial, it is a pivotal element that sparked his interest in mass culture, leading him to develop the concept of culture industry. His critique of popular art spans across all fields; even what is seemingly harmless is criticized⁴⁷. He treats "popular art" seriously, as he believes that the effects are of utmost toxicity for society. However,

⁴³ Ibid. p. 209

⁴⁴ Ibid. p.210

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 215

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 216

⁴⁷ Witkin, 2003 Cultural Nemesis section

Adorno's critique is not based on taste – although it may be argued that his analysis on music specifically is biased by his taste – but it is mainly focused on the political and social interests of the ruling class behind the commodified cultural products⁴⁸. These products, according to Adorno, are produced and distributed for the interests of the producers and obey market laws⁴⁹, becoming standardized. Before exploring what this concept entails on a social and political level, I deem necessary a discussion of how culture is generally viewed by Adorno. His theory of culture makes use of various concepts from different disciplines, including sociology, philosophy, and psychology. I believe it is also important to highlight the context in which Adorno – as well as Horkheimer - thought about and developed the theory of culture, to better understand the perspective on some concepts, which may seem outdated or exaggerated. The pessimism of the two authors about modern society - which can be easily understood by reading the pages of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* – derives from their experience in Nazi Germany and their successive moving to the United States⁵⁰, in which they experienced a completely different world dominated by capitalism and corporations. The authors saw in this domination something like the one they experienced in Germany: they viewed mass distribution of cultural products as nothing more than a kind of propaganda, as these products were becoming increasingly standardized and commodified. In the next section, it will be discussed how and why cultural products become standardized, as well as highlighting what role this massification and standardization of culture has in Adorno's philosophy.

[Standardization of cultural products and its consequences](#)

The claims made by Adorno about music and popular music can be generalized and applied to art and culture in general, unlocking a more powerful and generalized meaning. Culture, according to Adorno, is always representative of the times in which it is produced, and it can't be separated from it⁵¹; however, culture and arts lost their power to interpret the world in which they are created, as they became commodified and objectified. According to Adorno, art that is commodified does not have critical interpretative power⁵².

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Müller-Doohm, 2015, *Messages in a bottle, or, How to create enlightenment about the Enlightenment* section

⁵¹ Cook, Witkin, 2014, *Philosophy of Culture*, Introduction section

⁵² Ibid.

Adorno's critique of culture has strong Marxist roots: alienation is indeed a key element in understanding how culture becomes commodified. Alienation is the process that detaches the individual from the object in the production phase. According to Marx, capitalism destroys the sense of self of individuals, as they no longer actively engage in shaping the world⁵³. Consequentially, products become "historically" disconnected from their production phase in capitalist societies, losing meaning and becoming idolized, as their qualities are assigned from the outside and are not given by the relationship between the production and society, becoming "fetish-objects"⁵⁴. As such, products tend to become standardized and the individual response to them is predictable. In this way, Adorno effectively unites and synthesizes elements of Marxian theory, along with elements of Freudian psychology, without however strictly adhering to neither theorist⁵⁵. It is argued by Adorno that this process of standardization applies generally when an object becomes marketable: as such, alienation, and standardization act together in making individuals more predictable, both in the production phase, as Marx argued, and in the consumption phase, through television, radio, and popular music⁵⁶. Adorno's relationship with Marxism will be discussed at length in later chapters. For now, it is sufficient to say that Adorno distances himself from Marxist views when talking about domination, as well as when discussing issues of identity of interests. According to Adorno, relationships of domination are inevitable in any kind of society, capitalist or not, due to the already discussed "principle of equivalence".

Adorno views art as being integral to the development of individuals: indeed, he takes it for granted. Works of art represent the condition of human life and are part of a self-understanding process that encompasses every part of human subjectivity⁵⁷. In his theory, Adorno identifies two types of art: one is critical and helps the development of the subject, while the other is dangerous and impairs such a development, and consequentially, limits freedom⁵⁸. This is because, according to Adorno, individuals are formed through relationships with others and the world around them; an individual must inevitably be the result of all their past interactions and social relations they had⁵⁹. It follows that if individuals consume art products that are standardized, they will inevitably lose their individuality and subjectivity⁶⁰. Adorno sees then the development of mass culture more as a danger than a benefit. He argues that even if mass media helps the diffusion of culture, it does not promote

⁵³ Witkin, 2003, Fetish Consciousness section

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Cook, 1996, The sundered totality, Adorno's Freudo-Marxist paradigm section

⁵⁶ Wikin, 2003, Fetish-consciousness section

⁵⁷ Witkin, 2003, Adorno's structuration model section

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Cook, Witkin, 2014, Philosophy of Culture, Introduction section

the self-development of the subject. Even if what was considered once “true art” is broadcasted, it becomes just another product of the culture industry, becoming then “pseudo-culture”⁶¹, following the same process he highlights in the philosophy of modern music. An example of this Adorno makes that is not related to music regards philosophy: Spinoza’s writings, he argues, are reduced to summaries of his ideas, which are not enough to fully grasp the ideas of a philosopher. The only way in which culture can resist commodification is to remain critically open, and to not submit to market laws⁶². The individual that consumes this type of commodified art is seen by Adorno as submissive to an Authoritarian rule.

Adorno, however, not only criticizes this type of standardized culture, but he directs his critique to the totally detached and idealized culture too. Indeed, when culture becomes self-sufficient and exists only for the purpose of existing, it actually becomes dangerous. The example he brings is relative to the Nazi period: “individuals who possessed the most refined tastes in art and music participated, willingly, in the torture of their fellow citizens, thus demonstrating the lie in all the claims of so-called high Culture to enrich the humanity of the subject”⁶³. Moreover, he highlights that totally detached and abstract culture can become a cultural product as well, as it loses its critical ability to analyze its world, which is given by the relationships with the materials of its time⁶⁴.

It is then possible to see that the two main characteristics of a work of art produced by the Culture Industry (CI hereafter) are repetition and predictability. One might argue, however, that differences in products of the CI are present, and that are meaningful enough to not group all the products under the same umbrella. Adorno and Horkheimer, however, compare such differences to those between cars produced by the same manufacturer⁶⁵: *“The schematic nature of this procedure is evident from the fact that the mechanically differentiated products are ultimately all the same. That the difference between the models of Chrysler and General Motors is fundamentally illusory is known by any child, who is fascinated by that very difference [...] It is no different with the offerings of Warner Brothers and Metro Goldwyn Mayer”*.⁶⁶ The differences between the products, is argued, are completely irrelevant: the only differentiation that happens is in the market, where consumers get divided in macro-categories – for example class or ethnicity – to sell more accurately and have the desired final effect on the consumer. As such, it is argued the relationship between the art

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Cook, Witkin, 2014, Philosophy of Culture, Culture and Pseudo-Culture section

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Witkin, 2003 Standardization of products, differentiation of markets section

⁶⁶ Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception section

product and the consumer is already pre-determined from above, and there is little to no room for a subjective relationship with the art product⁶⁷.

However, the standardized art product not only loses its relationship with the subject, as there is no longer a critical approach to be had. It also loses the “dialectical relationships” between its individual part and its general structure⁶⁸. To explain clearly what Adorno means by this, it is useful to imagine his idea of standardized art as a pre-determined container, that can be filled with different elements each time: whatever the combination of these elements is, the container will remain the same⁶⁹. The harmony that is present in a standardized art product is not given by the interaction between his parts, but it is already pre-determined. Adorno considers this process as a “*mockery of what had to be striven after in the great bourgeois works of art*”⁷⁰, that is harmony of the whole, which is different in each work of art, as such harmony is given by the relationship between its parts. Popular art’s whole is instead already pre-determined, in a way that it can have a predictable effect on the consumer, and in a way that the consumer does not have to actively engage in understanding the work of art.

Adorno and Horkheimer deliberately use the term “Culture Industry” to imply that such process comes from above, as opposed to “mass culture”, which could imply that culture is coming from the people. The customer is only a manipulated object, used to sell empty cultural products and work of arts⁷¹, while the CI profits from its products. It is arguable, however, that art and culture were always made with the intent of profit. Adorno and Horkheimer claim, instead, that there is a substantial novelty introduced by the CI. Standardized art is specifically produced with the intent of profiting off it, and it is indeed extremely efficient in it, while historically art only incidentally made profit⁷². Profit was a consequence, and not an end.

One may pose the question of how it is possible that such repetitive and standardized products create so much interest in the public and are still extensively consumed. Adorno and Horkheimer claim that the already discussed interchangeable details are the key in cultivating interest⁷³ in the individual, as these details give the illusion of experiencing something different each time. In this way, the process of critical thinking while consuming art - which for Adorno leads to the definition of the individual - is erased: instead of engaging critically with the models portrayed, consumers

⁶⁷ Witkin, 2003 Standardization of products, differentiation of markets section

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception section

⁷¹ Witkin 2003, The industry of mass deception section

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Witkin 2003, Models of submission section

limit themselves to imitate them⁷⁴, and, consequentially, erase their individuality. Adorno and Horkheimer go on to criticize some specific CI products that they consider to be representative of their theory. For example, comedy was especially criticized for the effects it had on the public, as it was seen by the authors as something that united people together in laughing of the disgrace of someone else⁷⁵. However, they approved of comedy that was spiritually true and “anarchic”, such as the one portrayed by circuses, as its meaninglessness was considered as an act of resistance against social mechanisms that tried to force reason upon it⁷⁶. This is exactly the core of the criticism by Adorno and Horkheimer: true popular art is drained of its core meaninglessness and artistic spirit, while intellectual serious art is drained of its critical power⁷⁷.

The authors go as far as to argue that this ideology of profit has become so engrained into society that the CI does not even have to pursue such profit interests, as it is impossible to avoid its products⁷⁸. Precisely for this reason, they also argue that most people know about the “mass deception” that is perpetrated upon them: at the same time however, people would be too scared to live without the cultural goods that the industry feeds them, as their lives would become unbearable⁷⁹. Indeed, in the next section I will discuss the role that culture has in society according to Adorno and Horkheimer, and what is its relationship with work.

Mass culture as an instrument of domination

Given the high importance that Adorno gives to culture and art in his philosophy, it is without a doubt that such a standardization process is seen as very dangerous and in a seriously pessimistic light. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the role of standardized cultural goods is simply to fill the leisure time of the consumers. Such leisure time is therefore viewed as an imitation of the work process⁸⁰: indeed, the cultural products created by the CI bear in them the same production process that dominates work⁸¹, and are devoid of originality and creativity. The authors assert that standardized cultural products are made to resemble alienating work, as they require no thought to be engaged with, and the succession of events in these kinds of cultural products is standardized just

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Witkin, 2003, Leisure section

⁷⁶ Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception section

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Witkin, 2003, Leisure section

⁸¹ Ibid.

as the tasks that the worker must do, offering a succession of events that are predictable and formulaic. As Adorno very clearly puts it: “*Entertainment is the prolongation of work under late capitalism. It is sought by those who want to escape the mechanized labor process so that they can cope with it again*”⁸². Here, the author is claiming that since cultural goods are consumed in leisure time, they are only used to recover strength that was used while working, essentially becoming just another part of the work process. Ultimately, even if cultural goods are marketed as being an escape to work and monotony, consuming them will lead to boredom⁸³. As stated before, cultural products’ details are interchangeable, because their overall form is already decided: therefore, the consumer’s reaction is already prescribed in the art product itself. The contradiction highlighted here by Adorno is that the consumer tries to escape both boredom and effort at the same time, trying to seek pleasure⁸⁴. However, the pursuit of pleasure is seen as a submission to authority, and cultural goods are precisely designed to make individuals accept their submission⁸⁵.

If this reasoning is contextualized in the broader horizon of Adorno’s philosophy, it is possible to recognize how CI and its products become an instrument of domination, and a totalitarian one for that matter. According to Adorno, in modern totalitarianisms it is not enough for the subject to be compliant, but it is necessary for them to erase the possibility of even thinking of resisting⁸⁶. Taking a page from dystopian novelists such as Huxley or Orwell, it is necessary for the totalitarian rulers of capitalism to instill the belief that what individuals are doing is the correct thing, and most importantly that there is no alternative. The key difference, according to Adorno, lies in the fact that in modern liberalism and capitalist societies, the subject is given an illusion of freedom to do what it wants. As the author explicitly says: “*The ruler no longer says: ‘Either you think as I do or you die.’ He says: ‘You are free not to think as I do; your life, your property—all that you shall keep. But from this day on you will be a stranger among us’*”.⁸⁷ To achieve this level of domination, it is mandatory to subject every action and experience of the individual to organization and control⁸⁸. This process regarding work was already explained by Marxist theory: the subdivision of labor in microtasks alienates the worker, who becomes incorporated into a bigger process, in which they are just an appendage: in the eyes of the authors, the more this assimilation of nature and society to a machine is present, the less the possibility of resistance is possible⁸⁹. Adorno and Horkheimer

⁸² Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* section

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Witkin, 2003, *Leisure* section

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Witkin, 2003, *Dystopian futures* section

⁸⁷ Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* section

⁸⁸ Witkin, 2003, *Dystopian futures* section

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

extend this critique of alienation also to leisure time, arguing that the CI tries, and manages, to extend the process of control and monopolization even to that realm, completely erasing subjectivity⁹⁰. If subjectivity is erased through the control on popular art and media, the authors argue that the possibility of revolt and resistance are crushed as well⁹¹, as the subject is not able to think critically about the world.

To wrap up, the products of CI are indeed masked as being an expression of individuality: the subject creates their individuality based on which cultural goods they consume⁹². However, as already discussed, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, all products of the CI are essentially the same, as they are part of the same system of control and standardization that oppresses people. The subject that results from this process is standardized and isolated. Through standardized cultural products, the system can fundamentally shape the collective subjectivity and public opinion, which are incorporated into the bigger scheme. Leisure time becomes just another commodity and another instrument of control, instead of being an avenue for socialization, which is an activity that creates subjectivity according to the authors⁹³. Moreover, the authors also believed that true art can be the last expression of resistance to the system, but the culture industry tends to incorporate that as well, as the examples of Beethoven and Spinoza brought by Adorno show.

These claims by Adorno and Horkheimer may sound overly pessimistic and outdated, and to a certain extent it is true, as their analysis must be contextualized in a time when totalitarian terror was all over Europe. However, I believe that some of the characteristics of Adorno's philosophy are still relevant today. The commodification and homogenization of art products, such as music, TV shows and movies is stronger than ever, and the role and influence they have on society is arguably the same that Adorno theorized more than 80 years ago. It seems that workers are using their leisure time from work to mindlessly consume whatever new TV show is available on streaming platform, while a new popular song or artist seems to be the same as the previous one. It seems that mass society focuses on what character can be considered inclusive in the next movie produced by the Culture Industry, while losing sight of the overarching system that oppresses it. In the next part, the political implications of Adorno's work will be discussed under the light of different theories and frameworks. Liberalism and Marxism are the theories that instantly come to mind when reading Adorno, as he places great emphasis on the freedom of the individual, as well as believing in a system of domination dictated by capitalism. However, there are some less obvious readings that

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* section

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

can come to light only after a thorough exploration of Adorno's work. These include, but are not limited to, a feminist interpretation that discusses Adornian frameworks of power and domination from the perspective of women, and an ecological interpretation that discusses mankind's problematic relationship of domination with nature.

Part 2: Literature review: Classical political theory

Adorno and Classical Political Theory

It may be challenging to specifically categorize Adorno's political thought, as he never formulated a precise political theory. However, Adorno's thought is intrinsically political, and has an important relationship with political thought. In this section I will first analyze Adorno's relationship with liberalism, following Espen Hammer's chapter on Adorno and Liberal political theory (2013). As for every other aspect of his philosophy, the historical context played a huge role in the formation of Adorno's political thinking. Like other thinkers that lived through both World Wars, those events represented the collapse of the traditional liberal order, which was replaced by totalitarianism⁹⁴. Liberalism however was always central in his thought: although he viewed the individual as the result of all the interactions – as discussed in previous sections – it is clear from his assessment of modern society that he values the freedom of the individual more than the interests of the totality. I

⁹⁴ Hammer, 2013, From liberalism to Marxism section

will then discuss the hints of multiculturalist theory that can be found in Adorno's thought, which can be compared to those of later liberal culturalists such as Joseph Raz or Will Kymlicka. The relationship of Adorno with liberalism can also be seen from the perspective of liberal perfectionism, as Adorno seems to have an idea of what the maximum good should be in a society, that is freedom of the individual. However, a classic issue that comes up when discussing perfectionism regards if and how it can be reconciled with pluralism, which is also a fundamental element that cannot be absent in an Adornian framework. I will then assess his relationship with Marxism. It is indeed clear that Adorno's philosophy stems from the Western Marxist tradition of that time, which tried to revisit Marxist theory since the proletarian revolution predicted didn't happen after the first world war. I will discuss what are the similarities and the differences from the original Marxist theory, as well as discussing what are the main influences in Adorno's Marxism, focusing on the influence of Georg Lukacs. Then, it will be important to understand what the point of contacts between Adornian theory and the more modern analytical Marxist political philosophy can be, especially focusing on the discussion of the issue of justice in a Marxist society. Finally, I will discuss what I believe is the main thing that distinguishes classical, and arguably modern as well, Marxist theory from Adornian theory, that is regarding the issue of conformity and equality in society, something that the Frankfurt's philosopher highly despised.

Chapter 3: Adorno and Multicultural liberalism

Although Adorno never subscribed to any specific political theory, Adorno's thought, especially early on in his career, has a mainly liberal character heavily influenced by a Kantian perspective, like the one of his mentor Cornelius⁹⁵. However, the collapse of the liberal order and the rise of totalitarianism in Europe could not allow for a classic liberal thought to be acceptable. Moreover, Adorno had a perception that even the US, supposedly the last remaining bastion of liberal society, was no more than a disguised totalitarianism, guided by corporations and not the state. However, the solution for Adorno was not a return to old-school liberalism, as that evidently was a failure, nor it was a communist revolution, as he was fundamentally against any type of collective ideology⁹⁶, although he was close to socialist and Marxist thinking. It was clear that society needed a deep

⁹⁵ Petrucciani, 2015, I. La formazione e il primo tempo della filosofia di Adorno section

⁹⁶ Müller-Doohm, 2015, First meeting with Max Horkheimer in the seminar on gestalt psychology section

change, but in the eyes of Adorno the modalities of achieving it were missing. As such, he focused on theoretical research to reveal the opportunities of bringing such change⁹⁷.

Regarding liberalism, Adorno always displayed an ambivalent attitude. As mentioned before, the focus he places on subjects' freedom and the radical opposition to anything vaguely resembling of totalitarianism and conformity may portray the picture of typical liberal thinker. However, he had a clear Marxist approach, thinking that wage labor and class division were key in understanding the problems of modernity⁹⁸. He argued that classic liberal values, which were put forward as universal, were used to protect the interests of the ruling classes⁹⁹. But, unlike typical Marxists, he would not oppose theories of classical formal democracy, as a society organized with these principles in mind would allow for the development of the individual and would be composed of free-thinking individuals that can decide the best for themselves and others through negotiation and discussion¹⁰⁰, which is something that Marxist thinkers usually tend to sacrifice for a tendency towards harmony and organized societies. This idea will be further explored in the section about Marxism. It seems then that Adorno would adhere to a fundamentally liberal society, where individuals are free to create their own identity. In this section, Adorno's thought relationship with multicultural liberal theory will be discussed. First, I will explore what are the main positions of multicultural theorists towards the rights of minorities are. The claims these theorists make are usually very strong and are such they raise some problems. Adornian theory can be helpful in better understanding and solving some of these issues. Lastly, I will address two main problems that can come up when discussing multicultural theory. The first one can be found in the case of cultural differences created by the effects of domination. I will briefly discuss how Edward Said's Orientalism can be helpful when discussing such problems and the relevance it can have within an Adornian perspective. The second one regards Adorno's skepticism about formal justice, which however is and should be an important element for reaching equality in a multicultural framework.

[Multicultural debate: rights and minorities](#)

While the adherence to these basic principles of democracy would not seem into doubt, Adorno explicitly criticizes the notion of formal egalitarianism. According to the author, it seems that abstractly invoking equality for everyone would equal a descent into totalitarianism, as it would

⁹⁷ Hammer, 2013, From liberalism to Marxism section

⁹⁸ Hammer, 2013, Adorno and liberal political theory section

⁹⁹ Hammer, 2013, From liberalism to Marxism section

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

mean to erase individual differences¹⁰¹. He writes that: “*Politics that are still seriously concerned with such a society ought not, therefore, propound the abstract equality of men even as an idea. Instead, they should point to the bad equality today, the identity of those with interests in film and in weapons, and conceive the better state as one in which people could be different without fear*”¹⁰². In this passage Adorno clearly values the valorization of individual and cultural differences more than a state advocating for total equality¹⁰³, which arguably could be better functioning, but in Adorno’s eyes would be of totalitarian nature. This is a position that resembles those of multiculturalist theorists from the 1990s¹⁰⁴. Multiculturalist debate before 1989 constituted fundamentally of a debate between communitarian and liberal thinking¹⁰⁵: defenders of multiculturalism usually subscribed to the idea that communities, especially those that managed to avoid the focus on the individual imposed by liberal thinking, ought to be protected through appropriate group and community rights. Moreover, they argued that the conception of an autonomous individual is fundamentally wrong, as individuals are formed and embedded in societies and ways of life that define a priori what is good for them¹⁰⁶. Being a multiculturalist meant criticizing liberal thinking, as the individual was seen as a part of a whole social group, with little to no individual autonomy. While the idea of individuals as a product of their interactions is one of the key points in understanding Adorno’s philosophy, the same thing cannot be said for the idea that society decides what is good for individuals. Adorno is radically opposed to any type of society that does not allow the subject to freely thrive and seems to be closer to the position of authors like Joseph Raz and other “liberal culturalists”. Raz’s claim is that the individual can only develop if the culture and/or minority group to which they belong is properly safeguarded and can flourish without problems¹⁰⁷. As such, a society concerned with individual autonomy should guarantee some rights to minority groups in a way that individuals that are part of such groups can be free.

Problems and solutions

This claim may seem attractive, but it raises three main issues:

- A) What should the approach be to minority groups that have fundamentally illiberal practices or that damage some of their members?¹⁰⁸ An example could be traditional rules regarding

¹⁰¹ Hammer, 2013, Adorno and liberal political theory section

¹⁰² Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, as quoted in Hammer, 2013, Adorno and liberal political theory section

¹⁰³ Hammer, 2013, Adorno and liberal political theory section

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Kymlicka, W. 1990. *Contemporary political philosophy : an introduction*, Multiculturalism section

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Kymlicka, W. 2006, *Liberal Theories of Multiculturalism, The Second Stage: Multiculturalism Within a Liberal Framework* section

the freedom of women, typical of Muslim societies. Giving rights to such groups could harm its members, allowing the groups to continue pursuing such practices because they are in accordance with their culture.

- B) What rights should be accorded to minority groups in order that they serve the purpose of strengthening individual freedom rather than undermining it? Group rights can inherently be opposed to individual rights¹⁰⁹. An example could be church attendance. Catholic church may demand attendance to certain rites or celebrations to keep the individual as part of the group.
- C) Differences between groups are not always dictated by culture but sometimes they are a result of relationships of power or domination¹¹⁰, for example the social condition of Roma people in some parts of Europe or the condition of Black people in the US. This is an issue I'd argue both Raz and Adorno partly ignore – notwithstanding its coherence with the latter's theoretical framework – but it is well captured by authors like Edward Said. I will discuss this last issue in more detail in the next section.

To solve the first issue, Raz argues that society should not support groups that do not guarantee the individual autonomy for each of its members¹¹¹, which is a rather strong claim. Following the example of Muslim minorities, in the case of a group that does not allow enough freedoms for its women, like the possibility of education, Raz would probably argue that if such group demanded recognition, it would need to abandon its illiberal practices. I would argue that this would also be coherent within Adorno's own philosophy. As already discussed, Adorno's philosophy puts the development of the individual at the forefront and before the benefit of the group. If a limitation of group rights meant more individual freedom, it would be a good thing to limit those rights. This claim raises some problems. First, some groups, like Amish people, would appeal on religious tolerance grounds, arguing that it is a liberal value that could take precedence over individual autonomy¹¹². Other objections could include the ones from indigenous groups, which may claim their right to self-government, as they predate the arrival of colonizers' states¹¹³. Raz argues that states have the right to impose themselves in this case, but it is not clear how he legitimizes his position¹¹⁴. Adorno's position on these issues is not easily inferable from his writings, but it is

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Hammer, 2013, Adorno and liberal political theory section

¹¹¹ Kymlicka, W. 2006, Liberal Theories of Multiculturalism, The Second Stage: Multiculturalism Within a Liberal Framework section

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

reasonable to assume that he would stand alongside the protection of individual freedom no matter what, to avoid what he would call “homogenization”.

Regarding the second issue, most liberal culturalists would agree to a so-called “right of exit”, meaning that the individual should have the right to not stop participating in the activities of a certain group and to be informed of the conditions and opportunities available in the larger society¹¹⁵. The discussion mainly revolves around the formal details of such a right, with some authors arguing that a formal legal right is enough¹¹⁶, while others argue for a stronger version, as intra-group oppression may influence the capability of the individual to leave such group, because of phenomena like sexist discrimination¹¹⁷, or stigmatization. The problem arises when groups argue that their members should not have a legal right to not follow the practices the group prescribe. These issues are labelled by Kymlicka as minority claiming “internal restrictions”¹¹⁸. Minorities may want the right to restrict the behaviors of their members, such as not giving them some legal rights. According to Kymlicka, liberal societies should not award such rights to minority groups, as the commitment to individual autonomy comes before anything else, which is also a position coherent with Adorno’s framework. The other type of rights that minorities may want to claim are labelled “external protections”¹¹⁹. They regard protection from other groups and from larger society, staying coherent with liberal thought, as they would not limit in any substantial way individual freedom. If anything, external protections could improve the quality of life of the members of a group if we stand by the initial claim that the individual thrives if the conditions of their community are adequate. Finally, it is possible to say that minority community rights are coherent with liberal thought if they do not restrict the freedom of the members of the minority and if they promote a healthy environment in which there is mutual respect between different minorities.

Cultural differences and relationships of power

The third issue is the one I argue is the most complex to deal with, and it comes up every time there is a discussion about protecting cultural differences. It is imperative to distinguish between cultural

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ C. Kukathas, Cultural Toleration, in I. Shapiro-W. Kymlicka (eds.) «Ethnicity and Group Rights: NOMOS», 39, NYU Press, New York 1997, pp. 69-104, as quoted in Kymlicka, 2006

¹¹⁷S. Okin, Mistresses of their own Destiny? Group Rights, Gender, and Realistic Rights of Exit, presented at the annual meeting of the “American Political Science Association”, Sept. 1998. as quoted in Kymlicka 2006

¹¹⁸ Kymlicka, W. 1990. Contemporary political philosophy : an introduction, Multiculturalism section

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

differences that are produced by culture and those that are produced because of relationships of domination. For example, Adorno talks about protecting differences between the black community and the white one¹²⁰ in the USA, ignoring the fact that most of those differences are socially created by unequal relationships of money and power¹²¹. This fact is well-captured by Edward Said's landmark 1978 work *Orientalism*. The focus of Said's study is analyzing the relationship between what he calls the "Occident" and the "Orient", two distinct ideas that he argues are socially and historically generated and are not present as "inert facts of nature"¹²². He demonstrates this by giving various examples of how historically in every field of study the Orient has been portrayed as an amorphous block of cultural ideas, that go beyond the existence of actual oriental cultures¹²³. However, the strongest claim in Said's work is that this set of Oriental ideas were born and were created by an unequal balance of power between the Occidental powers and the Orient during the 19th century and can be used to better understand unequal dynamics of power between European-Atlantic culture and the Oriental one. He indeed argues that Occidental cultural hegemony has served to define and distinguish European culture as superior compared to other non-European cultures¹²⁴. There could be various objections that can be raised at Said's work. For example, he is not very clear as what are precisely these ideas about the "Orient", as he mentions only a few concepts ("*Oriental despotism, Oriental splendor, cruelty, sensuality*")¹²⁵. However, it seems that the issues about how to deal with cultural differences and stereotypes created by unbalanced power relations, both in or out of an Adornian framework of analysis, are not adequately explored and could be a topic for further research. Even if the liberal culturalist approach to Adorno fails to deal with this last issue, an interesting parallel can be traced between Said's and Adorno's work, regarding the use of culture and media as an instrument of domination. Said argues that especially in the post-modern world, mass media and television have been used to continue reinforcing the stereotypes and the negative images that were historically created about the Orient¹²⁶. This is coherent with Adorno's account of how standardized cultural products are used as an instrument of domination: by proposing a homogenous perspective about the Orient across media, people's beliefs are reinforced, and domination can be consolidated. It can be argued that such a process is not intentional and there is no grand scheme of domination and control, but it is exactly this non-intentionality that strengthens Said's and Adorno's points. Oriental stereotypes are so deeply

¹²⁰ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, as quoted in Hammer, 2013, Adorno and liberal political theory section

¹²¹ Hammer, 2013, Adorno and liberal political theory section

¹²² Said, E.W. 1978. *Orientalism*, p.12

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.13

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* p.34

engrained in us, also due to the mechanical reproduction of cultural media typical of late capitalism, that even the authors of such media are not capable of recognizing them. The last shortcoming of this approach is how Adorno seems to deal with formal egalitarian justice. Adorno claims that formal equality before the law for minorities would equal an eradication of differences, typical of totalitarianism¹²⁷. It can be argued that Adorno mistakenly identifies the demand for equal rights typical of liberalism with the totalitarian eradication of differences¹²⁸. While it is true that formal equality before the law is not enough for recognition, it is also true that entirely dismissing the principle of equality of rights is necessary to guarantee Adorno's final aim¹²⁹, which is the freedom of individuals, and it is not clear how formal equality can destroy individual identities¹³⁰. The relationship between Adorno and justice is something that will be further explored in the context of the discussion of Marxism; for now, suffice it to say that his approach seems to be quite ambiguous.

Chapter 4: A liberal perfectionist approach

Another possible approach consists of framing Adorno's theory within perfectionist liberal theory. As discussed in the previous chapter, Adorno places a great deal of responsibility on the individual, and strongly considers conformity as an existential threat to democracy. It seems that he would despise the conformity of a citizen who would not take responsibility for the actions of the society in which they live, instead of letting others decide for them. Perfectionist theorists envision a state and a society whose main objective would be the pursuit of maximum good. Obviously, these scholars differ very much in the way in which they define "goodness". For this reason, the different types of perfectionism and its main general ideas will be briefly explored. After that, I will discuss what contributions can Adorno's theory give to the perfectionist vs anti-perfectionist debate: I would argue that Adorno may be considered under the perspective of pluralist perfectionism, as he's someone that aspires for a society in which the maximum good is the freedom of each individual, who however should be responsible for their actions in regard to the community as a whole and does not let the community decide for them^{131 132}.

¹²⁷ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, as quoted in Hammer, 2013, Adorno and liberal political theory section

¹²⁸ Hammer, 2013, Adorno and liberal political theory section

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Hammer, 2013, Adorno and liberal political theory section

¹³² *Ibid.*

Types of perfectionism and definitions

In the words of John Rawls, perfectionism is “*a teleological theory directing society to arrange institutions and to define the duties and obligations of individuals so as to maximize the achievement of human excellence in art, science and culture.*”¹³³ However, this definition may be way too specific: it defines a perfectionist state as one that pursues excellence in a specific set of goods, but it need not be that way¹³⁴. Perfectionism can be defined as a doctrine that associates human good with objectivity, with perfectionist writers arguing that human life should be devoted to the pursuit of such good, whatever it may be¹³⁵. Some perfectionists argue that the good to be pursued can be also unrelated to human lives, but usually such pursuit is related to conducting an overall valuable life¹³⁶. It is possible then to classify perfectionism in two macro-categories that are relevant to this work. The first one can be defined as “human nature perfectionism”, that is a tradition that places great importance in the development of human nature. Theorists of this school will mostly argue that the ultimate good is found within human nature, and the state should promote and should be guided by values such as rationality¹³⁷. Such theories are clearly influenced by the work of ancient scholars like Aristotle, who famously argued that the state should promote the highest kind of good. The second category of perfectionist thought can be called “objective good perfectionism”, and it is found in theories that believe that the state and society should aim at the realization of objective goods; however, they identify such goods outside of human nature. An example could be definition by Rawls given previously, where the aim of the state is conducted specifically at something that is outside human nature¹³⁸.

Pluralism in perfectionist theory

The main issue with perfectionist liberal theory is found in its relationship with pluralism. Is the ultimate good the same for all human beings or does each individual have their own good to pursue? This key question is very complex to answer, but it can be approached by correctly defining what we mean by pluralism, and it is fundamental aspect of liberal perfectionist theory if we want to read Adorno under this light. By pluralism, in the context of perfectionism, it is usually meant

¹³³ Rawls J., *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 325, as cited in Wall S. 2009

¹³⁴ Wall S., *Perfectionism in Politics: A Defense*, in *Contemporary debates in political philosophy*, edited by John Christman and Thomas Christiano 2009 p.100

¹³⁵ Wall, S. 2019. *Perfectionism in Moral and Political Philosophy*. Summer 2019 ed. [online] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

¹³⁶ Wall S., *Perfectionism in Politics: A Defense*, in *Contemporary debates in political philosophy*, edited by John Christman and Thomas Christiano 2009 p.101

¹³⁷ Wall, S. 2019. *Perfectionism in Moral and Political Philosophy*. Summer 2019 ed. [online] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Two Versions of Perfectionism section

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

“value pluralism”, that is the different attributions of what is objectively good for each individual¹³⁹. It is then possible to unite perfectionism with this idea of value pluralism. For example, taking objective goods perfectionism, some goods may have an equal objective value for two different individuals, or may be impossible to compare their value to decide whose individual life is better¹⁴⁰. Instead, taking human nature perfectionism it would be possible to see how by placing the development of human nature as the ultimate good, each individual would have a different tendency and a different nature to develop. For example, some might be better in scientific endeavors, while others might want to pursue artistic or athletic careers, but the main goal of developing each individual’s nature would be the same for everyone, and perfectionists argue that this should be the goal of the state.

Perfectionism or anti-perfectionism?

Now that the main ideas regarding perfectionism have been explored, it is time to discuss what help we can gather from Adorno’s work on these issues. From the analysis of the theoretical framework in the first part of this work, it seems that Adorno has a somewhat clear idea as to what society should aspire to, that is maximum freedom for the individual. However, as his work is not strictly political in nature, it is difficult to properly point out what should be done in actuality. It could very well be argued that his view is actually that of an anti-perfectionist. Anti-perfectionism as a doctrine can be divided in two main views: the first one maintains that governmental action should not be directed as to what can be considered bad or good, and so should be blind to the conceptions of good of the individuals¹⁴¹. The other view, which is similar to the first one, states that governments should not take actions that “*neither [will] improve nor hinder the chances individuals have of living in accord with their conception of the good*”¹⁴². Both these conceptions are based on the idea that people are capable of deciding for themselves what is good and what is bad, and governments need not, and should not, intervene in individuals’ autonomous decisions. An example that can be done regards the difference between totalitarian states and liberal states. It can be argued that liberal states do not promote different ideals than totalitarian ones, but that simply they promote no ideal of what a good life should be, and let individuals choose for themselves¹⁴³. This can also apply to the political life of individuals, who can decide through their participation in the democratic process

¹³⁹ Wall S., Perfectionism in Politics: A Defense, in Contemporary debates in political philosophy, edited by John Christman and Thomas Christiano 2009 p.105

¹⁴⁰ Wall, S. 2019. Perfectionism in Moral and Political Philosophy. Summer 2019 ed. [online] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Perfectionism and pluralism section

¹⁴¹ Raz, J. 1986. The Morality of Freedom., p.108

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

towards which direction the state should go. Assessing in detail the arguments for and against perfectionism would be too big of a task and it is beyond the scope of this work¹⁴⁴. It will be sufficient to say, however, that the anti-perfectionist claim that state-neutrality and individual autonomy are directly correlated is not completely accurate, “[f]or it is the goal of all political action to enable individuals to pursue valid conceptions of the good and to discourage evil or empty ones”¹⁴⁵, and as discussed before, pluralism and perfectionism can be compatible without having the state acting as an oppressor.

The key caveats in an Adornian perfectionist theory would be the way in which the individual can actually be autonomous and the responsibility that the individual has towards society as a whole. Indeed, according to Adorno, in the bourgeois society dominated by capital and by the Culture Industry, true autonomy is acquired either through the pursuit of advanced art or through an attentive dialectical reflection¹⁴⁶. Once this autonomy is acquired, individuals must not conform and to always think critically, while keeping in mind that only they, and not the community, are the ones responsible for their choices¹⁴⁷. Society should therefore aim to give individuals the tools to be perfectly autonomous and to develop freely.

Chapter 4: Adorno and Marxism

Even after a somewhat superficial reading, everybody can say with certainty that Theodor Adorno’s work is influenced by Marxism thought. The frequent mentions of relations of domination, capitalistic exploitation, alienation, reification and even the dialectical method he uses are all of clear Marxist derivation. However, his relationship with arguably the most influential philosopher of the last 200 years is not as clear cut as one might expect. There have been countless explorations of what are the points of contact between his theory and the Marxist one. In this section, I will first explore some of these similarities, the differences, and the influences other authors, such as Lukacs, had on Adorno’s theory. These differences are obviously to be reconducted to the very different historical time frames, as Marxist theory needed heavy revision after the events of the early 20th century. An interesting concept that will be discussed is the idea of conformity and how Adorno’s theory differs from the original Marxist position: the critique of capitalist societies is mostly redirected from aspects of class conflict to the concept of the annulment of social relationships. Then, I will talk about how Adornian theory can be applied to Marxist political theory, regarding

¹⁴⁴ For a much more detailed discussion of the topic, see Raz, J. (1986). *The Morality of Freedom*, pp. 110-133

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 133

¹⁴⁶ Hammer, 2013, Adorno and liberal political theory section

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

the concepts of justice and rights in a society. Here again, Frankfurt's theorist ideas seem to be aligned with that of Marxist thought, but only to the extent that formal justice is not used to destroy individual differences in a society.

Similarities, differences and Lukacs' influence.

The relationship between Adornian theory and Marxist philosophy is not straightforward. Indeed, Marxist thought during the 20th century, and especially at the beginning of it, was in somewhat of a crisis. While Anglo-American philosophers mostly ignored Marxist philosophy for most of the century¹⁴⁸, European philosophers such as Gramsci and Lukacs tried to reinterpret Marx's legacy in order to better understand the socio-political conditions of their time, forming a current that could be grouped under the name of Western Marxism¹⁴⁹ Moreover, in light of the evident failure of most proletarian revolutions in the east, the descent into totalitarianism of the Soviet Union and the rise of Fascism, Marxist thought was in clear need of revision¹⁵⁰, as its predictions were starting to crumble one by one. The proletarian revolution that was deemed inevitable was not successful in Europe and capitalist society was even stronger than before in the United States.

Adorno's Marxism, and in general most of Western Marxism and Frankfurt's school, as well as the more recent American resurgence of the late 20th century, shifted away from what can be called "scientific Marxism", that is the original theory proposed by Karl Marx. It predicted the proletarian revolution and the overthrow of capitalist society as something inevitable that was bound to happen, and as such it did not need to justify the motivations for why it should happen, something that late 20th century Marxists were instead concerned in demonstrating¹⁵¹. However, Western Marxist of the early to mid-20th century were more concerned in using Marxist theory to better understand European society during those turbulent times. One of the most prominent figures of this current, and one that heavily influenced Theodor Adorno's positions on Marxism is Georg Lukacs. Given his relevance on the topic, I deem necessary to briefly discuss what his core beliefs and contributions to Western Marxism were, as Adorno's theory heavily builds on Lukacs thought¹⁵².

Lukacs' theory is developed in his book "History and Class consciousness" (1923), as well as in some precedent essays¹⁵³. His so-called reification theory builds on the original Marxist argument of commodity fetishism, that is the idea that relationships in capitalist societies are distorted and

¹⁴⁸ Kymlicka W. 1990, p.167

¹⁴⁹ Hammer, 2013, 2 Adorno's Marxism section

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Kymlicka W. 1990, p. 167

¹⁵² Hammer, 2013, The imprint of Lukács section

¹⁵³ Stahl, T. 2023. Georg [György] Lukács. Summer 2023 ed. [online] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, History and class consciousness section

hidden by the fact that they can, and ultimately are, thought as something that has an instrumental value which can be objective and can be calculated. In Marx, this idea is mostly referred to the relationships between the subject and the economy, in other words, to class relationships. Lukacs, instead, goes a step further, arguing that the commodity form way of thinking has extended to every aspect of capitalist societies, and has become “*the dominant form of objectivity itself*”¹⁵⁴. Adorno’s theory further builds on this principle, assessing that this is the main reason as to why human suffering still exists, notwithstanding the immense technological and scientific progress¹⁵⁵. Lukacs’ reification theory extends to human qualities and characteristics as well, as they are no longer an integral part of oneself, but they become just another thing – reification literally means “becoming a thing” – that the subject can use, no more different than any other object¹⁵⁶. Adorno further extends the concept of reification to cultural production in his discussion of the Culture Industry, also analyzing what disastrous effects it can have on the subjects, arguing that the commodification of art products leads to the destruction of subjectivity, a concept which I have discussed extensively in the first part of this work.

It is evident then how the main difference between the original Marx’s theory and the school of Western Marxism is the shift in focus from economic relationships and class to the effects that capitalism has on overall society and the subject outside of class logic. Adorno and other theorists argue that Marx’s critique was limited and was not fit to describe what Adorno calls “late capitalism”¹⁵⁷, which has an even stronger grasp on the life of the subjects than what capitalism had in Marx’s times. Another key difference, however, can be found in the conception of the relationship between mankind’s labor and nature. According to Marx, nature is no more than a tool that is a disposal to mankind, which uses and transforms it as part of its labor¹⁵⁸. The value of nature in Marxist theory is only given by the usefulness that it has relative to humanity. This is not the case in Frankfurt’s theorist philosophy. As a matter of fact, Adorno despises the instrumental value and the objectification to which nature is subject, as it is part of the so-called “disenchantment”. I will discuss in more detail the issue of disenchantment in the section about Adorno and Environmental ethics.

Now that we have discussed the basis of Adorno’s Marxism, it is time to see what role it can play in a classical, and modern, Marxist conception of society. While theorists in the early 20th century

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., Reification Theory section

¹⁵⁵ Zuidervaart, L. 2015. Theodor W. Adorno (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy), Critical Social Theory section

¹⁵⁶ Stahl, T. 2023, Reification Theory section

¹⁵⁷ Zuidervaart, L. 2015, Critical Social Theory section

¹⁵⁸ Hammer 2013, The ecological challenge section

focused more on theoretical interpretations of society, so-called “analytical Marxists” of the late 20th century tried to explore the conditions and the desirability of a Marxist society. Adorno’s theory can be helpful in better understanding issues of justice, a highly discussed topic by Marxist theorists.

Marxism and Justice

The main point that analytical Marxists contest to classical liberal political theory is the very essence of the concept of justice. According to Marx himself, justice was an inherently wrong concept, as he rejected the fundamental idea underlying it, that is applying an equal standard to different individuals. This is because this is only possible if we take only one aspect of those individuals to count¹⁵⁹. He gives the example of workers: completely different individuals would be seen only under their characteristic of being a worker, completely ignoring all of their other important aspects. For example, it could be the case that “*one worker is married, another is not; one has more children than another, and so on*”¹⁶⁰. As such, giving equal rights does not do justice to everyone, as some people will naturally have more or less needs than others. However, it is evident that this idea is flawed, as there would be virtually infinite things to consider if we were to have a conception of justice like the one suggested by Marx¹⁶¹. Moreover, according to most Marxists, a truly just society would not have the need for formal justice, as there would not be the need for justice in the first place¹⁶². There are two main reasons as to which Marxists say so. The first one would be the elimination of conflicting interests. People would solve their conflicts spontaneously if they had some kind of identity of interests and/or affective ties, such as the ones that can be found in some families¹⁶³. I will explore this idea further in the next section. For now, suffice it to say that it is improbable that such a solution could work, and Adornian theory strongly opposes the idea of identity. The second reason regards the elimination of material scarcity. According to Marx, if there were enough resources for everyone, conflicts about resources would be resolved¹⁶⁴. This claim, however, does not stand either from a logical standpoint or from an empirical one. Firstly, there are some resources which are inherently limited, such as oil reserves or drinking water¹⁶⁵. Secondly, in light of the extreme economic expansion of the last three decades or so, we can safely assume that material scarcity is practically solved, but the issue remains about distribution and managing resources. For example, it is agreed that mankind produces enough food for everyone, but the

¹⁵⁹ Marx and Engels 1968: 320, as quoted in Kymlicka 1990 p. 169

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Kymlicka 1990, p. 170

¹⁶² *Ibid.* p.171

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* p.172

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

problem of world hunger still persists, due to poor food management¹⁶⁶. However, Marxists go a step further. The last point that they tend to attack in discussion on justice is the focus that there is on equal distribution, when they argue it should be on production.¹⁶⁷ This is the classic Marxist argument regarding means of production, as it may very well be that a capitalist and a worker have the same income, but the relationship of power that the first one has in relation to the other will still leave the worker in a disadvantageous position¹⁶⁸. For this reason, redistributing would not be enough, but production would need to shift as well. However, it's not clear how this issue would attack the concept of justice as a whole. Indeed, most theory of justice, like the Rawlsian one, focus on issues on distribution, as they usually argue for a more "egalitarian pattern of property-ownership"¹⁶⁹.

Adorno's position on issues of justice seems to be ambivalent. He's not completely skeptic regarding the concept of formal justice like most classical and modern Marxists are. This is because he argues that arbitrarily refusing the principle of treating people as equal would mean regressing into what he calls "ancient justice"¹⁷⁰, by giving unrestricted power to rulers and creating even more injustices. It is important to recall in this context a concept that we discussed in the first part of this world, that is the Adornian critique of modern society also extends to pre-Enlightened one, as Adorno is not advocating against progress, but he's criticizing the effects of the hyper-rational mentality that pervades capitalist societies.¹⁷¹

At the same time however, Frankfurt's theorist seems to not be in favor of a justice that completely flattens the cultural and individual differences in the individuals, a topic which we also already discussed in the section about liberalism. His complaints in this regard are reasonable to a certain extent, as it is true equal rights do not necessarily mean equal consideration in society and do not capture the full extent of the needs of the individual, an argument that is close to that of Marxist theorists discussed in this section. But Adorno makes a great error when comparing the demand for equal rights to the totalitarian extermination of differences, as when there's a totalitarian regime, oppressed citizens are not of the same judicial nor moral standing before the law of other citizens¹⁷².

¹⁶⁶ Munoz and Anthem, 2021

¹⁶⁷ Kymlicka 1990, p.170

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Adorno 1973: 140, as quoted in Hammer, 2013, Adorno and liberal political theory section

¹⁷¹ See the section of this work on Dialectic of Enlightenment, pp. 3-5

¹⁷² Hammer, 2013, Adorno and liberal political theory section

Conformity and Equality

The idea that capitalism provided more freedom to the individual was very popular during the mid-20th century. Among others contributing factors, there was the fact that many people owned cars or that they had access to art and entertainment, something that before was only accessible to a privileged elite¹⁷³. But, for Adorno and Horkheimer, these were the complete opposite of freedom-creating opportunities. Instead, the structure of the new cities, which required the ownership of cars especially in the USA, created individuals that at the same time were isolated but massified¹⁷⁴. Moreover, we already have discussed the process of how the mass-produced art products of the Culture Industry destroyed individual subjectivity. Every element of the new society leads the Frankfurt theorists to criticize it and its elements that hindered the development of subjects.

However, Adorno also strongly opposes the Marxist claim that there should be some degree of identity between the interests of the individual and the interests of the overall society. Marxists argue for such identity as they believe that in this way there would be no more need for formal justice. However, this raises a number of problems. Firstly, it seems that even if there was identity of interests between the general society and individuals, conflicts still may arise about the ways in which to achieve those interests¹⁷⁵. The example that Will Kymlicka provides in his chapter about Marxist political theory is straightforward enough:

*“You and I may both believe that experiencing music is a valuable part of a good life, and that music should be supported with one's time and money. But you may wish to support music in such a way as to allow the greatest number of people to experience it, even if that means that they experience lower-quality music, whereas I want to support the highest-quality music, even if that means some people never experience it.”*¹⁷⁶

This type of conflict, while it might be argued that creates discordances in society, is however fundamental for the democratic process, and in an Adornian framework for the development of subjectivity as well.

Secondly, on a more fundamental level, such conflicts are unrealistic to solve practically, as the identity of interests functions only if there is an identity of priorities on things to achieve and on the means of achieving those things. But it seems logical to think that if two individuals have the same desires, the same ideas on how to achieve those desires and the same reasons to do so, they are

¹⁷³ Witkin, R.W. 2003 p.41

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Kymlicka 1990, p.172

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

fundamentally identical subjects¹⁷⁷. According to Adorno, this idea of shared interests is incompatible with democracy and with the ideal society, as it would create what he would call “non-identity”.¹⁷⁸

It is easy to see then how Adornian theory is heavily influenced by Marxist thought, but there are some striking differences that are mostly imputable to the completely different times in which the two philosophers lived. The most interesting element is probably the shift in focus from the effects of capitalism on economic relationships to social ones, something that original Marxist theory did not explore as deeply as Western Marxist theorists such as Lukacs and later Adorno did. The focus on society will be discussed in the next part even more deeply, when discussing issues of feminism and climate justice and ethics under an Adornian perspective.

Part 3: Literature review of modern approaches

Chapter 6: Feminist Approach

On a surface level reading, Adorno’s work might seem somewhat outdated, and analyzing it sometimes might feel like just exercises in style. However, his overall corpus hides a surprising sensibility and relevance for contemporary matters, that has been and still is being explored by scholars. It has already been discussed previously in this work how the culture industry’s mechanisms of domination influence society through culture and mass media, and how Adorno’s analysis is accurate in describing today’s art world and its relationship with society and work. Another interesting field in which Adorno’s work can be applied is that of feminism and gender studies. The connection is somewhat intuitive: the submission of women to men is a product of domination and culture, and as such it is explored by the Frankfurt theorist. In this section, I will discuss what are the point of contacts between feminist theory and Adornian theory. I will first explore what is the fundamental idea behind feminist interpretations of Adorno, that is the identification of women with nature: an intriguing concept that will be discussed is that of the connection with ecofeminism. Adorno frequently argues that the idea of woman and femininity is closely associated with that of nature, and as such is subject to domination by men¹⁷⁹, a claim

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Hammer, 2013, Adorno and liberal political theory section

¹⁷⁹ Hammer E., 2013, Feminist interventions section

fundamental to ecofeminist discourse. I will then discuss the concept of the division of the public and the private sphere, a key theme in feminist political theory. Once again, Adorno's work provides an insightful view on the dynamics of powers of the overall society and how they intersect with the private life of individuals and couples. The last concept that will be discussed will be Adorno's relationship with gender-related issues and queer theory, an idea that has not been thoroughly explored in literature but that I believe is very relevant and surprisingly modern. For these reasons, I believe that Adornian theory can be of great importance and help when discussing contemporary problems such as feminism and gender identity.

Women and Nature: Adorno and Ecofeminism

The main point that Adorno makes in regard to feminist issues is how the concepts of "femininity" and "women" are no more than concepts constructed through history¹⁸⁰. These concepts are just a product of domination that restrain the free development of the subject, as they force them into either complying with them or oppose them. The problem, however, is that even when opposing them, the subject is still complying with the overarching logic of male-dominated bourgeois society. This concept will be further clarified when discussing feminist political philosophy. But how were these concepts constructed through history, and why is there a male domination over women? Adorno answers these questions by pointing out how women are seen in bourgeois society, that is as a "natural fact", as the "embodiment of nature"¹⁸¹. Since women are seen as merely nature, and not as subjects, it is only logical that mankind's longing to completely dominate nature will also extend to women. This is one of the concepts at the basis of ecofeminist discourse, which can be considered a branch of feminist theory that developed around the end of the 1980s that strives to connect environmental issues with gender-related issues and feminism¹⁸². Although the term encompasses a variety of theories that sometimes are not even compatible¹⁸³, it is possible to identify different macro-categories of research¹⁸⁴, each dealing with different aspects of the relation between women's oppression and nature's domination. The relevant category to the present work is the one that develops on the claim that: "*The building of Western industrial civilization in opposition to nature interacts dialectically with and reinforces the subjugation of women, because women are believed to be closer to nature. Therefore, ecofeminists take on the life-struggles of all of nature as our own*"¹⁸⁵. This claim, clearly influenced by Adornian theory, attempts to link the

¹⁸⁰ Adorno, *Minima moralia*, as quoted in Hammer E., 2013, *Feminist interventions* section

¹⁸¹ Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, *Man and Beast* section

¹⁸² Warren, K. J. (2014). *Feminist Environmental Philosophy* (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy), Introduction

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ King, Y. (1989). *The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology*, p.21

struggle for women's liberation to the struggle for ecological justice and respect towards nature. According to these theories, women and nature are identified as "others", as objects to be exploited and dominated¹⁸⁶, and precisely this connection is the root of women's oppressed condition in society. According to King (1989), once the women-nature connection is established as true and as the main reason for women's oppression, there are three ways in which feminist theory can approach the issue. The first one involves destroying such connection, in order to integrate women in a fully rationalized society, where they can work and be treated as rational subjects¹⁸⁷. This is the main position of many feminist theorists and seems to be the direction in which society has been heading in the last 40 years or so. The second position instead tries to reinforce the connection between women and nature, opposing it to the connection between male culture and rationality. Both these positions are criticized by King. She argues that instead the main goal should be to rethink the division between nature and culture, starting precisely from the women-nature connection and embracing both "science and magic"¹⁸⁸. This is a very fascinating position if we analyze it from an Adornian perspective. The divide between nature and culture, and the resulting domination of nature by men, is arguably at the heart of enlightened thinking, which is what Adorno's philosophical project aims to reconfigure, and the ecofeminist position seems to align very much with it. This is because, contrary to the other previously mentioned ways, the ecofeminist position proposed by King aims to surpass existent structures, instead of joining, as it acknowledges them as products of domination. The concept of joining existent structures of domination in the attempt of liberation is a recurrent theme in Adorno's relationship with feminist thought, and one that will be discussed later in this section.

Private and Public sphere

Another relevant category of feminism thought deals with political aspects of the world that, according to theorists, are not fully equipped to deal with feminist concerns or are pervaded by male bias, therefore resulting in gender inequality in society. There are many strands of feminist political philosophy, ranging from liberal influenced theorists to Marxist ones¹⁸⁹; however, one theme that usually unites these theorists is their focus on the divide between the public and the private sphere in society, and how understanding the gender dynamics in the interaction between the two spheres is a fundamental step towards achieving gender equality. Often political theorists have neglected the importance of the private sphere and private relationships such as the one of marriage, as such

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p.22

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p.23

¹⁸⁹ Kymlicka, W. 1990. Feminism section

relationships were bound to be governed by natural laws rather than man-made ones¹⁹⁰. However, relationships in the private sphere were, and arguably still are not equal in how they unfold and develop, with the male figure usually leading economically, while the female figure bounded to domestic and family work. Nonetheless, many liberal feminists were content with the notion of traditional marriages, thinking that achieving equality in the public sphere was sufficient¹⁹¹, perhaps believing that it would help women have a more equal relationship in their marriages. However, this is not the case, there's a tendency for women to be confined to lesser-paid jobs, making them economically dependent, and putting them at the lower end of a relationship of command¹⁹². For this reason, Adorno was very critical of traditional bourgeois marriage. According to the Frankfurt theorist, the real reason for which this inequality is present in the structure of marriage is not to be attributed entirely to the identification of women with nature discussed earlier, but mostly to the dynamics that govern the capitalist market system. In *Minima Moralia*, aphorism 11, Adorno seems to argue that marriage in a bourgeois society is a fundamentally patriarchal institution, where the man has a "barbarous power over the property and the work of his wife"¹⁹³, and that the economic aspect of the marriage "sexually, socially and professionally compels women into subjection"¹⁹⁴. This does not necessarily mean that marriage is only an economic institution for Adorno, but it seems that he believes that the economic aspect is an inevitable one that profoundly influences how the dynamics of power unfold. Adorno was therefore very critical of liberal feminist activists, even going as far as defining them as "ferociously efficient imbecile[s]"¹⁹⁵, precisely because, according to him, they were pursuing the wrong goals. By aiming for equality in the public sphere of the bourgeois society, women will only find themselves in an arguably even worse situation than before, one in which they are subjected to the logic of capital and objectified as workers¹⁹⁶. Not only this, but the patriarchal domination would still be in place, especially in the private sphere, where women would be confronted with the choice of having a career or having a family¹⁹⁷¹⁹⁸, with the prospect of managing both at the same time being extremely difficult. Women would also lose what can be called "epistemic privilege", that is a "*a special advantage with respect to possessing*

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., Public and Private section

¹⁹¹ Evans 1979, as quoted in Kymlicka 1990

¹⁹² Kymlicka, W. 1990. Contemporary political philosophy: an introduction, Feminism chapter, Public and private section

¹⁹³ Adorno T.W., *Minima Moralia*, 11 section

¹⁹⁴ Hammer E., 2013, Feminist interventions section

¹⁹⁵ Adorno 2005, 93, as cited in Duford, 2017, p. 795

¹⁹⁶ Duford, R. (2017). Daughters of the Enlightenment: Reconstructing Adorno on Gender and Feminist Praxis. *Hypatia*, 32(4), p. 795

¹⁹⁷ Kymlicka, W. 1990. Contemporary political philosophy: an introduction, Feminism chapter, Public and private section

¹⁹⁸ Arguably, this can be detrimental to men as well. For a detailed discussion of the topic, see Reeves, R.V. (2022). *Of Boys and Men*. Brookings Institution Press

or acquiring knowledge about how fundamental aspects of our society (such as race, class, gender, and sexuality) operate to sustain matrices of power”¹⁹⁹. Fundamentally speaking, according to this concept, women are in a position in which they can recognize their own status as oppressed, and therefore act consciously. As Hewitt (1992) argues, women, by means of their exclusion from the system theorized by Adorno, can represent an “*escape from the all-inclusive system of power*”²⁰⁰, and therefore have an extremely important role.

We therefore have seen how Adorno is extremely influential to feminist thought, and how he criticizes instances of feminism that are not very effective. However, from the account of femininity as an historically created category and as a product of domination, it could be assumed that Adorno does not provide any real practical contribution to the theme, as no political practical measures could be taken to alleviate the burden of patriarchy from women. Nonetheless, I believe that his critique is useful to explore what would be the overall aim of society, that is a world in which “*people could be different without fear*”²⁰¹.

Adorno and queer theory

A quite interesting reading of Adorno’s work can be done through the lenses of queer theory. It can be argued that Adorno’s aim in regard to gender issue, but also to liberalism in general, is not that of plain inclusivity and equality for everyone, but rather the free development of the subject without constraints imposed by overarching structures of domination. Arguably this can be understood as the need of the “*uncoupling of bodily differentiation from enforced norms of sexed, gendered, and heterosexual behavior*”.²⁰²As we already discussed, the liberation of women in the capital world might be even worse for women, as the condition of women, but people in general, as “work objects” under the capitalist system is not really put into discussion, and as such the question of women’s oppression may also disappear²⁰³. As such, under an Adornian framework it seems that the way out of patriarchal domination does not lie in the liberation of women from the former into the system of capitalistic domination to which mankind as a whole is submitted, but in the realization that the sex/gender assignment is an historically created instrument of domination, that forces subjects into pre-existent, non-natural societal roles and hinders the free development of their personality²⁰⁴. However, in the most typical fashion of Adornian theory, such a goal is not a

¹⁹⁹Moya 1997, 13, as quoted in Duford (2017), p. (786)

²⁰⁰ Hewitt, A. (1992). A Feminine Dialectic of Enlightenment? Horkheimer and Adorno Revisited. *New German Critique*, (56), p.143.

²⁰¹Adorno 2005, 104, as quoted in Duford (2017), p. 794

²⁰² Duford (2017) p. 794

²⁰³ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

programmatic one, meaning that it must be viewed as the ideal direction towards which society should be going as a whole, and there is no set of political instructions given to reach it.

In this section we have reviewed the connections that can be traced between Adorno's work and various branches of feminist political theory. First, the relationship with ecofeminism was explored, as Adorno's position that women are more closely identified with nature than men is extremely original for his time and influenced a lot of theorists in later decades. I then discussed the points of contacts with the more classical feminist political philosophy, which extensively deals with the relationship between the public and the private sphere, a topic that the Frankfurt theorist also explored, arguing how the capitalistic economic relationships interfere and greatly poison the traditional structure of bourgeois marriage. Finally, the more modern interpretation of Adorno linked with queer theory was briefly explored. This is an extremely interesting point of view that I believe could be researched more, as it is a modern and very relevant aspect of Adorno's theory for current times. In the next section, another relevant aspect of Adorno's theory in contemporary world will be explored further, which is the relationship between Adorno and nature that was touched upon in the discussion of ecofeminism.

Chapter 7: Adorno and the environment

The relationship between Adorno's philosophy and more recent environmental philosophy is extremely interesting and worth exploring, as some ideas have been starting to be used by some scholars of branches of environmental theory. However, Adorno never speaks out about ecological concerns, but his philosophy clearly contains a certain interest for the interactions between humanity and nature. The main point of contact between Frankfurt's theorist and green philosophy regards the critique of the concept of instrumental reason and the objectification of nature, which leads to the so-called "disenchantment" process. The concept of disenchantment and its effects on nature and society will be discussed in the first section of this chapter. Disenchantment fundamentally consists in stripping away every mysterious element from nature. While this might seem a good thing, we will discuss the negative side effects that it brings with it. The concept of disenchantment and of instrumental value of nature are themes that are usually discussed by deep ecological theorists. Deep ecology is a more radical branch of environmental philosophy that aims at building a society where nature and the environment are brought to the forefront of society and politics. However, I will also address some inconsistencies in these theories that are not compatible with Adorno's views on subjectivity and the freedom of individuals. The last theme I will discuss

regards the relationship between humanity and nature, and how it is possible to use an Adornian perspective to rethink it. There have been a number of attempts at applying critical theory to environmental philosophy, and I will address some of the ideas that have been brought up for rethinking such relationship.

Disenchantment and Nature

As extensively discussed in the first part of this work, one key theme of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is the critique of the instrumental positivistic way of reasoning, typical of modern societies. This permeates every aspect of society, including nature. The natural environment is seen in modern societies just as another object at humanity's disposal, predictable and scientifically analyzable. This, according to Adorno, leads to the "disenchantment" of nature, that is stripping away every element of mystery, as well as taking away the meaning and value that natural elements can have beyond their instrumental value²⁰⁵. Before getting into why this is an undesirable thing to happen, let's briefly look at the historical process through which Adorno believes that such disenchantment has happened. In the *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, the authors heavily focus on myths, as they believe that modern society has witnessed a regress into mythology. Myths were used to somewhat understand nature and to give people a certain set of beliefs that is difficult to criticize, as it is shared by everyone in society²⁰⁶. Now, since myths are used to understand nature, they are considered to be by the authors as the first form of enlightenment, but the main difference from modern enlightenment, is that natural elements are understood to be mysterious²⁰⁷. For example, in Greek myths, natural elements were considered to be the embodiment of divinities, like Apollo for the sun, or Zeus for the lightning²⁰⁸. As such, natural elements could not be predicted and were mysterious, because they had human characteristics. The project of Enlightenment aims to spoil the world of every enchantment possible, but in doing so, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, creates another form of mythology, this time regarding social relationships²⁰⁹. Subjects cannot question social facts, as they are presented to them as something natural, as well as mistakenly believing that certain social facts are instead natural facts²¹⁰, such as the identification of women with nature, which we already discussed in the chapter about feminism.

Some might posit the question of why disenchantment is a bad thing. After all, it means more control over nature, less mystery, and more progress for the human race. Adorno and Horkheimer

²⁰⁵ Stone, 2006, p.232

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p.235

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p.238

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

do not think that this aspect of disenchantment is inherently bad, quite the opposite. They oppose any type of regression; they instead focus on the effect that disenchantment has on the development of subjectivity. Indeed, as we extensively discussed in the first chapter of this work, domination of outer nature also implies oppression of inner human nature. However, the authors do not explicitly tell us why dominating nature is bad in itself, but implicitly it seems that they believe that dominating natural beings prevents or interferes their natural and spontaneous development, causing suffering worthy of criticism.²¹¹ This part of Adorno's theory is probably the clearest departure from Marxist theory, which believed that nature was just a tool which value derived from the labor that humans put in controlling and dominating it²¹², while it is clear that for the Frankfurt theorist nature should have some kind of value other than the instrumental one. The correct approach to solving this problem is a sort of "re-enchantment" of nature, that Adorno and Horkheimer pursue by trying to dialectically reunite romanticism and enlightenment, which ultimate goal would be to return to Romantic values such as imagination and spontaneity, but without going back from the standpoint of progress and technology²¹³. According to Adorno, re-enchantment must happen through the aesthetic experience of nature and by avoiding thinking about nature rationally when we experience the beauty of the natural environment. The concepts regarding nature, its domination and the relationship with mankind brought about by Adorno's philosophy have been of some interest to scholars of environmental ethical and political philosophy, although he himself never confronted directly with environmental philosophy. We will explore some of these positions in the next section.

Deep Ecology and environmental ethics

Deep ecology can be considered a branch of environmental philosophy, which aims to take a more radical approach to issues of environmental ethics and climate change. While reformist positions in environmental politics and philosophy aim to solve issues of pollution and related topics with a more traditional approach, by forming a dialogue between governments, businesses and society, the more radical deep ecologists argue that such a change would not be enough, as the main problem was not to be found in policies but in the overarching system. They advocate for more stringent measures as well as for a framework shift, which usually includes the overthrow of capitalist society²¹⁴, as it is considered an unsustainable model to deal with climate issues. It is no surprise that some scholars took inspiration from Adorno's philosophy, which shares some of these concerns and gives some insights on the relationship between humanity and nature. They also argue that the

²¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 236

²¹² Hammer, 2013, The ecological challenge section

²¹³ Brennan and Lo 2021, Disenchantment and the new animism section

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2. The Development of Environmental Ethics section

fight against climate change and pollution advocated by classical ecological movements has as ultimate goal the “health and affluence of people in developed countries”²¹⁵. The approach which deep ecological theory advocates for is instead one in which every living being has equal moral standing and value, while usually this is a privilege that is only reserved to human beings.²¹⁶ This is the so-called principle of “bio-spheric egalitarianism”.²¹⁷ Moreover, they believe that the human ego should expand to include the external environment in it²¹⁸. This is because they see nature as a web, where the various elements - be them plants, animals, or humans – are inevitably interconnected and co-dependent on each other²¹⁹. If these principles were to be applied, for deep ecologists there would be no need for policies on climate issues, as people would take care of their surrounding environment as it was part of themselves. However, there are two main criticisms that can be directed to deep ecological theory, as well as another that comes from an Adornian perspective. The first one regards the tendency to be rather unclear about what it means for every living being to have equal moral standing and value. How can plants, and even mountains and rivers have interests or any kind of moral standing? Should there be laws protecting such “rights”, and how should be these laws designed? Deep ecologists have been unclear on these topics²²⁰, rendering the principle of bio-spheric egalitarianism somewhat undefined and practically weak. Another issue regards the accusations of elitism, to which we have become accustomed to throughout this study, as Adorno’s philosophy and related topics are always in some way perceived as elitists. The accusations come from the fact that deep ecologists place too much emphasis on the idea of a radical approach to ecological, with some authors arguing that such an approach tends to leave behind developing countries²²¹, as they would need to inevitably use some resources to develop adequately, needing a personalized approach to issues of environmental concern. The third criticism comes from a classic Adornian concern regarding issues of subjectivity, conformity, and non-identity. Radical ecological positions tend to dismiss progress, humanistic thought, and individualism as something dangerous for the whole natural environment²²². While Adorno is critical of enlightenment and its effects, as we’ve discussed multiple times during this study, he’s very concerned about the identity of the subject, and would be dismissive of an ideology that privileges the wellbeing of the overall system at the expense of the subject. Moreover, the deep ecological tendency of rejecting progress would be incompatible too with Adorno’s philosophy.

²¹⁵ Næss (1973), as cited in Brennan and Lo, 2021, Deep Ecology section

²¹⁶ Brennan and Lo, 2021, Deep Ecology section

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² Hammer, 2013, The ecological challenge section

Progress, as said before, is not inherently bad, but it becomes so when it interferes with the social relationships and the natural development of the subjects. These views would justify action against the subject in favor of “the natural” or “the necessary”²²³, which is highly incompatible with an Adornian view not only on environmental philosophy, but on society in general, as such an approach would be something akin to totalitarian thinking. In the next section I will discuss other approaches useful to rethink the relationship between humanity and nature under the perspective of Frankfurt’s school of critical theory.

Human-nature relationship

While deep ecology seems a promising approach to radically change the relationship between humans and nature, we have addressed some key issues that make it less appealing. According to Bernstein (2001), the solution to disenchantment can be found in Adorno’s work and point to some sort of animism²²⁴. Adorno, in Bernstein’s interpretation, argued that disenchantment destroyed the capacities of humans for “*affective response, imaginative identification, attentiveness to individual items*”²²⁵. This is because as humans start thinking in terms of instrumental relationships, the ability to process such capacities falls in disuse. It seems logical then that the solution would be some kind of “auratic animism”, trying to dissolve the distinction between living and non-living²²⁶, but not completely, just enough that nature has still some kind of primordial aura of mystery that gives it meaning beyond the instrumental. This approach is interesting because it follows a deep ecological path, but without the priority to the whole and the universal that deep ecology’s theorists assign. However, the same criticism of impracticality that applied to deep ecological claims of equal moral standing applies also here. However, it could be argued that as an indefinite general principle, the “auratic animism” reading proposed by Bernstein is stronger than the deep ecological bio-spheric egalitarian principle. As a matter of fact, it does not presuppose any strict moral obligation to be applied to the environment, but if auratic animism was the approach, humanity would still preserve and respect the environment, not only for personal gain and self-preservation purposes, but also for the deeper intrinsic meaning that it would be assigned to the environment.

Another approach which deserves to be explored is one in which the distinction between natural and non-natural would be cancelled altogether. Following the deep ecological idea of interconnectedness and interdependence of living beings and ecosystems, Morton (2007) argues that thinking the environment as something which surrounds us and is fundamentally different from us

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Bernstein 2001, p.194.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid. p.195

does not help the overall discourse, even if we want to protect it²²⁷. He follows the same reasoning that feminist theorists use when criticizing the idea of women through history: “*putting something called Nature on a pedestal and admiring it from afar does for the environment what patriarchy does for the figure of Woman. It is a paradoxical act of sadistic admiration*”²²⁸. He further argues that in a society that recognized the fact that it is an integral part of the environment, there would be no need to even have the discussion about respecting it, as respecting the environment would be simply respecting society itself²²⁹. Finally, the most radical position is that of philosophers who argue that in reality it does not make sense anymore to talk about nature, as every place on the planet is extremely influenced by the actions of human beings²³⁰, and environmental philosophy and politics should be concerned with the overall environment and not with the natural one. This idea, I would argue, fits in with the concept of disenchantment that we have discussed in this section. Indeed, if everything is contaminated and cannot be considered natural anymore, it loses its meaning beyond itself, and the only way to actually care about it is to make it gain its meaning back through the aesthetic experience proposed by Adorno.

Conclusions

Throughout this study, we have explored the different types of applications that Adorno’s philosophy can offer to us in the modern world. We started by explaining the key concepts of his philosophy: although it is a very complex and cryptic work, the Dialectic of Enlightenment offers us a very original framework to think about present society, as many elements which Adorno and Horkheimer discussed are still present in today’s world, even though we may not realize it. At the same time, the Philosophy of Modern Music, as well as the chapter of the Culture Industry, provide a deep reflection on the state of the artistic and creative world, which is profoundly struggling to find its meaning outside of the instrumental goals that society expects to be reached. Although the 20th century was by no means devoid of artistic expression like Adorno feared in the 1940s and 50s, it is undeniable that the approach of consumerism has pervaded the world of arts, which inevitably also influences the capacity of the subject of thinking critically and of making sound political decisions. The intertwining of politics and arts in Adorno’s philosophy is a concept that I believe

²²⁷ Morton 2007, Imagining Ecology without Nature section

²²⁸ Morton 2007, p.5, as cited in Brennan and Lo 2021, Disenchantment and the new animism section

²²⁹ Morton 2007, Imagining Ecology without Nature section

²³⁰ Vogel 2015, p.5

to be extremely relevant and a key component in understanding some of today's problems, and a topic that certainly deserves further exploration in the future.

We then turned onto the more classical approaches to Adorno in political theory. Adorno's philosophy puts a lot of emphasis on the individual and their freedom, and we have seen how this focus creates an interesting link with liberal political theories. The criticism that Adorno makes to formal justice has some shortcomings, as it is necessary to have some kind of protection of rights. but the overall point he makes about "being different without fear" is a classical multicultural liberal claim. Moreover, his tendency to consider human freedom as the ultimate good for society as well as his utopian visions of society can be useful in a liberal perfectionist framework. We have also discussed the clear, but at the same time complex relationship that Adorno has with Marxist theory. While the structure of the Frankfurt philosopher's thought is definitely of Marxist derivation, when discussing how society should be organized and how humans should interact with nature classical Marxist theory and Adorno start to diverge. Marxist theorists usually assign only an instrumental value to nature, thinking that the only thing that can give value to nature is human labor. We have explored, however, how Adorno's position on natural issues seems to be much closer to recent deep ecological positions, as well as how many theorists in the field of environmental political and ethical philosophy have picked up the Dialectic of Enlightenment as a framework for developing their own theories, using the concept of disenchantment of nature as a basis. The application of Adorno's theory in contemporary issues also extends to feminist and gender studies, where it is possible to use Adorno's intuitions on mechanisms of domination and claims about women to better interpret what should be the relationship between the private and the public in the context of gender issue. At the same time, some scholars have started speculating on the possibility of using an Adornian framework to understand the concept of gender as a free expression of the individual rather than as an immobile unchangeable category, which is a topic that definitely needs to be explored further, especially in the field of political theory and philosophy.

This study goes to show how Adorno's philosophy has an extremely wide range of applications in various fields of political theory. Adorno was an extremely visionary and influential philosopher: many ideas that he brought out in his time were simply not adequate to the 1940s and are being picked up and researched by scholars only in more recent years. The Dialectic of Enlightenment, as well as the other works, provide us with a different point of view on society, make us reflect on our condition and on the relationship we have with various aspects of the world. These relationships, such as the one with art, nature, or media, may not seem relevant in how society is run, but on closer inspection, they hide threats to the well-functioning and the existence of our democracies. Adorno was extremely concerned about the society of the future, but his pessimism regarding

conformity seems to not have realized in the 20th century. However it is evident that, as Jameson puts it: *“there is some chance that he may turn out to have been the analyst of our own period, which he did not live to see, and in which late capitalism has all but succeeded in eliminating the final loopholes of nature and the Unconscious, of subversion and the aesthetic, of individual and collective praxis alike[...]*”²³¹

²³¹ Jameson 1996, Adorno in the stream of time section

Bibliography

Whenever the edition, year of publication or editor is not specified, it means that I referred to the eBook present on the online library provided by LUISS University, Perlego, which was the first thing I resorted to when I needed to look for resources. The same applies to the notes and reference at the end of each page of this work: whenever the page number was not available, I instead referred to the whole section of the eBook or article.

Adorno, T.W. (1949). *Philosophy of modern music*.

Adorno, T.W. and Horkheimer, M. (1944). *Dialectic of enlightenment*.

Bernstein, J.M. (2001). *Adorno : disenchantment and ethics*. Cambridge England ; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Brennan, A. and Lo, Y.-S. (2021). *Environmental Ethics (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)*. [online] Stanford.edu. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-environmental/>.

Cook, D. (1996). *The culture industry revisited : Theodor W. Adorno on mass culture*. Lanham, Md. ; London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Cook, D. (2014). *Theodor Adorno*. Routledge.

Duford, R. (2017). Daughters of the Enlightenment: Reconstructing Adorno on Gender and Feminist Praxis. *Hypatia*, 32(4), pp.784–800. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12360>.

Habermas, J. and Levin, T.Y. (1982). The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-Reading Dialectic of Enlightenment. *New German Critique*, 26(26), p.13. doi:<https://doi.org/10.2307/488023>.

Hammer, E. (2006). *Adorno and the political*. London: Routledge.

Hewitt, A. (1992). A Feminine Dialectic of Enlightenment? Horkheimer and Adorno Revisited. *New German Critique*, (56), p.143. doi:<https://doi.org/10.2307/488332>.

Jameson, F. (1996). *Late Marxism; Adorno or the Persistence of the Dialectic*. Verso Books.

King, Y. (1989). *The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology*, in *Environmentalism: Critical Concepts, Volume 2*, edited by Pepper D., Webster F., Reville G., Routledge

Kymlicka, W. (1990). *Contemporary political philosophy : an introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Second edition.

Kymlicka, W. (2006). *Liberal Theories of Multiculturalism*. [online] Available at: <https://ojs.uniba.it/index.php/postfil/article/viewFile/909/734>.

Morton, T. (2009a). *Ecology without Nature*. Harvard University Press.

Morton, T. (2009b). *Ecology without nature : rethinking environmental aesthetics*. Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London: Harvard University Press.

Müller-Doohm, S. (2015). *Adorno*. John Wiley & Sons.

- Munoz, C. and Anthem, P. (2021). *11 facts about food loss and waste – and how it links to sustainable food systems* / World Food Programme. [online] www.wfp.org. Available at: <https://www.wfp.org/stories/11-facts-about-food-loss-and-waste-and-how-it-links-sustainable-food-systems#:~:text=Food%20loss%20and%20waste%20can%20damage%20the%20sustainability.>
- Paddison, M. (1982). The critique criticised: Adorno and popular music. *Popular Music*, 2, pp.201–218. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1017/s026114300000129x>.
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A Theory of Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Raz, J. (1986). *The Morality of Freedom*. Oxford University Press: Oxford University Press.
- Rose, G. (2014). *The melancholy science : an introduction to the thought of Theodor W. Adorno*. London: Verso.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*.
- Stahl, T. (2023). *Georg [György] Lukács*. Summer 2023 ed. [online] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lukacs/>.
- Stefano Petrucciani (2015). *Introduzione a Adorno*. Gius.Laterza & Figli Spa.
- Stone, A. (2006). Adorno and the disenchantment of nature. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 32(2), pp.231–253. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453706061094>.
- Vogel, S. (2016). *Thinking like a mall : environmental philosophy after the end of nature*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Mit Press.
- Wall, S. (2019). *Perfectionism in Moral and Political Philosophy*. Summer 2019 ed. [online] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/perfectionism-moral/#TwoVerPer>.
- Warren, K.J. (2014). *Feminist Environmental Philosophy (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)*. [online] Stanford.edu. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-environmental/>.
- Witkin, R.W. (2000). Why Did Adorno ‘Hate’ Jazz?. *Sociological Theory*, [online] 18(1). Available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/0735-2751.00092?casa_token=iZkSIXdtOPYAAAAA:g6kmWd6bTEXDEY6OU1811BA5LPYs1e4feG8vky-t7eqfshHA6kpi0xcLJVUXBJVT7bTzRsGfp_Ct8g.
- Witkin, R.W. (2003). *Adorno on Popular Culture*. Routledge.
- Zuidervaart, L. (2015). *Theodor W. Adorno (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)*. [online] Stanford.edu. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/adorno/>.