

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### 1. General Considerations

This thesis investigates Adorno's notion of expression in *Aesthetic Theory*. It describes some of the features of his critique of the Western aesthetical-philosophical-historical tradition important for the comprehension of his *Aesthetic Theory* primarily involving theories about the relation between the individual and nature. Adorno suggests that the understanding of this relation amongst the Western aesthetical-philosophical-historical tradition, mostly coming from the ideas of Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche, contributed for a comprehension of aesthetics which emphasises either the individual or nature. In either case, Adorno perceives an unbalanced relation between individual and nature which, according to him, it is the root of suffering. For that reason, suffering is in *Aesthetic Theory*, the expression of the relation - or the unbalanced relation - between the individual and nature.

Furthermore, he considers that all manners of conceiving expression, apart from expression as suffering, are contributing to the unbalanced relation between the individual and nature thus perpetuating suffering. His notion of expression as suffering has two different directions in his theory. On the one hand, it expresses the unbalanced relation between the individual and nature and on the other hand, it makes possible consciousness about this relationship motivating change minimising suffering.

Therefore, Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* reveals his understanding of suffering as both positive and negative experience in which expression is a form of knowledge acquisition qualitatively different from knowledge acquired through reason. The importance of expression is central for Adorno's understanding of aesthetics as an expression of the real world. For Adorno, it is music that better imparts the knowledge immanent in expression due its affinity and nonconceptual language. His understanding of musical technique in relation to expression is crucial for his understanding of music as an expression of reality.

There are several important elements of *Aesthetic Theory* to be considered for consistent thought about his notion of expression as suffering and its relation to music within Adorno's philosophical context. First of all, it demands an understanding of Adorno's dialectical philosophy and writing in the context of critique as a mode of thought in which there is no particular conclusion to be attained apart from the recognition of the dialectical quality of things and beings; that is to say, something is only something through its relation to the other in that, in the course of history, this relation happens only by differentiation and negation. The meaning which eventually comes out of this relation is never definite; it is subject to infinite change produced by critical thought.

"Dialectic is the unswerving effort to conjoin reason's critical consciousness of itself and the critical experience of objects. The scientific concept of verification makes its home in that realm of separate, rigid concepts, such as those of theory and experience" (Adorno, 1993 pp 9, 10)

Thus Adorno's discourse upon expression carefully avoids making 'expression as suffering' a static statement. Rather, his notion of expression reveals an inherent movement, positive and negative, in suffering due to its dialectical quality. Furthermore, Adorno's notion of expression as suffering is a reflective quality rather than a definition or a conclusion. It is an objective experience that adds to consciousness aspects of reality that reason is not able to reach. It is a reflection of a second order, produced by expressive features of the self, different from reflection produced by reasoning.

Expression in regard to reflection and consciousness, inherent in suffering, imparts irrational and nonconceptual features from within the subject as a result of the process of the domination of nature which is, in Adorno's theory, a source of suffering with roots in relations between subject and object. In relation to music, expression as having the relation of subject and object as content, imparts these irrational and nonconceptual features mediated by technique through his idea of *immanence of the musical material*. Irrationality and nonconceptuality are constituted in the idea of suffering as what is not identical to the subject - the process of domination of nature - to preserve identity. Suffering is thus at the same time good and bad. It is a negative

and a positive experience; that is to say, it is in suffering that the possibilities of freedom from domination reside at the same time that it expresses such domination. His notion of expression as positive and negative experience is very important for the understanding about why aesthetics has an important role for the individual and society for Adorno.

According to NicholSEN and J. Sampaio, experience in Adorno takes a “form of immediate negation, of nausea, shock, alienation, dissonance and despair”, preserving truth and identity.<sup>1</sup> The importance of expression for *Aesthetic Theory* resides in its quality of unity as a tension between opposites, mediation between subject and object. In expression, the subject can actually meet the contradictoriness of subject and object, which is the power relations between humans and nature, and therefore find the unity of thought, experience and sensibility.<sup>2</sup> However the experience is not pleasant; as Adorno sees the process in which expression happens as painful. In order to avoid contact with reality, the individual detach from the same aspects of reality that might be a source of suffering.<sup>3</sup> Alienation is the result of a regressive consciousness in which the subject substitute reality with illusion<sup>4</sup>. For Adorno, the situation is worse after the Enlightenment. For him, the idea of ‘better life’ increased the possibilities for alienation. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno identifies several elements that contribute to alienation, particularly the commodification of the culture industry, Romantic ideal of natural beauty, and idealist aesthetics.

Expression in *Aesthetic Theory* is the ‘quality’ that brings the subject back to reality, in which the integration of all aspects that are alienated becomes possible. In conceiving an individual who integrates all these aspects within him or herself, Adorno constructs a model of argumentation that interacts dialectically with other theories in order to affirm his own particular view of aesthetics as adding expression to consciousness; for that reason, expression is a form of knowledge. Mediation is thus the aspect of *Aesthetic Theory* that is “most radical and, to some, indigestible”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adorno, 1993 p xvii.

<sup>2</sup> Adorno, 1993 p xvi.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed reading in relation to *detachment* in *Aesthetic Theory* see Sherrat, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Sherrat, 2000 p 63.

<sup>5</sup> Adorno, 1993 p xvi.

In *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno also investigates the causes for domination. Although Adorno is related to the Frankfurt School in terms of his critique of modernity in regard to the Second World War, in *Aesthetic Theory*, he is also investigating the reasons for suffering, its historico-philosophical context, in a broader perspective, particularly the manner in which the individual relates to nature in favour of his or her own development. He also investigates which aspects of the individual might have been contributing to what he considers regressive in society, where the process of domination of nature is predominant. What creates suffering? For Adorno it is the power relation between humans, the process of domination of nature, and individual's avoidance of facing reality that in his theory comprises his critique of reason, his historical perspective, psychology, sociology and his aesthetics.

For Adorno, progress and regression are related to consciousness as it is intimately connected to history.<sup>6</sup> Adorno's notion of progression has less to do with the notion of development as having linear progress. His view of progress is closely related to his critique of modernity in which for him, the most advanced societies - with the most technological sources as well as modernist fantasies about bringing a better world - are the ones that produced 'total catastrophe'.<sup>7</sup> In this regard modernism produced narrow forms of consciousness preventing the possibility of critical thought. For Adorno, progress and regression are related to the process of domination of nature, a relation between the individual and nature. For Adorno, situations and facts are not isolated; they are dependant upon historical relations and because of that, the manner in which modernity deals with the past is extremely important for his theory. What are the features in history, in philosophy, in the way individuals relate to others, in consciousness that contribute to a regressive society? This issue leads to the second important element in *Aesthetic Theory* that helps to comprehend Adorno's notion of progress and regression.

For Adorno, history is a changing constellation of elements in which perception and concepts are dependant.<sup>8</sup> Perception and concepts are subject to history's law of

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<sup>6</sup> Adorno, 2005 p 89.

<sup>7</sup> Adorno, 1997 pp 33-4.

<sup>8</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 2.

movement not to a set of invariants, in which meaning acquires its content.<sup>9</sup> Thus, understanding of the world is always in transition and needs to be interpreted only by history's transitory character. From his view of history, concepts and definitions are also subject to critique as they are historical sediment. For that reason, Adorno, when dealing with traditional manners of dealing with concepts, is generally relating to their meaning in different historico-philosophical perspectives which leads to another aspect of his *Aesthetic Theory*: which is his constant critique of concepts.

## 2. Aesthetic Theory

In the course of *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno cites different 'types' of aesthetic, such as *aesthetic semblance*, *aesthetic truth*, *aesthetic historiography*, *aesthetic nominalism*, *aesthetic hedonism*, *aesthetic identity*, and *aesthetic rationalism* in which specific theories are related to his own particular view of aesthetics. Although he does not relate to aesthetics as being of a certain 'type', Adorno is making references to particular theories in which understanding is the main objective; that is to say, he is concerned not only about what reason cannot reach in terms of concepts but also what makes concepts historical sediment.

In regard to concepts and definitions for Adorno, the concept of subjectivity is central in two aspects. First, it is because subjectivity is the starting point for modern theories of aesthetics, such as Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, which largely influenced art from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards.<sup>10</sup> Second, because the study of subjectivity deals with the relation between object and subject in regard to knowledge acquisition, reflective consciousness, and beauty. Therefore, a study about subjectivity in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* is crucial for the understanding of Adorno's expression, which seems to differentiate his theory from traditional aesthetics in the Western modern philosophy. Moreover, Adorno gives in detail the aspects of traditional usage of the word *subjectivity* as historical sediment, in which, according to him, regressive consciousness is produced. As a consequence of his critique of subjectivity, a 'materialistic-dialectical aesthetics' is the unmasked differentiation by chronological evidence (instead of taste), and its relation to what is immanently opposed to them: a

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<sup>9</sup> Adorno, 1993 p 3.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce Haynes 2007 p 181.

reaction against historical movements which, in Adorno's understanding of the contemporary situation, developed into the failure of knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

In Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* expression, in contrast to subjectivity, is what the individual contains within him or her that is nonidentical to his or her nature. Expression unifies all aspects that for Adorno are integrated within the individual such as thought, experience and sensibility. It adds the object to aesthetic experience as a very important element for the constitution of the subject which according to Adorno, was rejected by the historico-aesthetical-philosophical tradition, blocking a part of the subject that, under his understanding of the dialectics between subject and object, is essential for an interaction of all aspects of an individual's existence.

Furthermore, expression is not only related to the subject but also to the object, for the latter can express the real content of what was released out from the subject's impulses. In regard to arts, expression as suffering is the intensionless in the artwork, produced by impulse, an activity of expression mediated by advanced technique. Art can also emanate from within, through the process of the domination of nature from which it emerges and to which they are critical. In regard to art and their relation to expression, the most radical of his *Aesthetic Theory* is perhaps that the elements of creativity are essentially not creative. They are objective and have less to do with imagination or subjective feelings than with aspects of a living subject, such as sexuality, desires, happiness, knowledge, power, compassion, love, hate, pain, survival, repression, illusion, or pleasure, briefly described as elements of thought, experience, and sensibility. Creativity for Adorno resides in objectivity, in the real world, and in the relation between individual and nature free from the processes of domination of nature. Furthermore, creativity originates a 'mature art' if it is generated by a progressive consciousness.

Consequently, the 'materialist concept of modern art' is for Adorno the expression of a crisis of experience, of the rise of crises of knowledge. It is the "conflict between the

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<sup>11</sup> Yvonne Sherrat 2000 pp 42-43.

inner aesthetically and socially conditioned.”<sup>12</sup> Its representative consciousness is equivalent to advanced technical procedures that surprisingly coincides with total catastrophe as well as the possibility of freedom and identity.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, it seeks the abolition of material interests in which the process of domination of nature resides. It is a critique of a spirit that can be exchanged at every commodity object.<sup>14</sup> For Adorno, spirit cannot be sold and the manifestation of spirit in modern art prevents it from every possibility of commodification.

Thus Adorno questions the philosophical basis of creativity that rejects, or did not conceive objective responses for the construction of the artwork. Adorno investigates what is actually making those responses happen, what are the qualities of these responses, to what they refer, what are their purposes, to what they are related as well as how they relate to the artwork. Therefore, *Aesthetic Theory* is a proposal for a new understanding or a critical reflection about the individual in his or her environment and how art is situated amongst this relation, why it is important for society as well as for the individual.

Although the elements that for Adorno participate in the creative process are closely related to the psychoanalytic idea of the artwork, as social structures interfering deeply in the individual’s psyche and a product of a subconscious, he has more to say about the quality and content of the artwork. For psychoanalysis, art is an object valid only for the release of psychological projections, which still has a residue of idealism.<sup>15</sup>

For Adorno, artwork is more than a projection. It is a result of a variety of elements, including impulse mediated by the law of form emanating content. However, form for Adorno is not related to pre-established forms but is a result of these mediated processes of creation as a solution for problems between technique and idea. That is to say, musical form is not an end to be achieved in which technique is subordinated. Instead, technique is a tool for the objective impulses that wish to realise something not yet foreseen. For that, the basic principle for technique in Adorno’s theory is

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<sup>12</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 34.

<sup>13</sup> Adorno, 1997 pp, 33-5.

<sup>14</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 29.

<sup>15</sup> Adorno 1997 p 8.

experimentation. In contemporary times, this is more evident due the failure of form and tradition. However, for Adorno, experimentation in Expressionism is still problematic, as he perceives that some of the technical procedures used at that time are historical sediments as same as concepts. Thus, for modern music, a critical approach to the musical material is the only possibility for experimentation, in the acknowledgement that:

“If the artist’s work is to reach beyond his own contingency, then he must in return pay the price that he, in contrast to the discursively thinking person, cannot transcend himself and the objectively established boundaries” (Adorno, 1997 p 42)

*Aesthetic Theory* is more than a theory of aesthetics; it is a treatise on expression and technique in which both interact philosophically as well as practically, considering elements of reality as part of the creative process. His view of expression gives rise to a particular notion of technique that in *Aesthetic Theory* does not relate solely to technique in Schoenberg. Although his notions of musical technique and critique are usually connected to his *Philosophy of Music*, in *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno proposes an understanding of compositional technique that is intimately related to his notion of expression and largely determines his notion of musical form.

Nevertheless, amongst modernist musical trends, it is in Schonberg that Adorno sees a close relation between musical technique, expression, and consciousness. *Philosophy of Modern Music* serves as an illustration of Adorno’s understanding of the importance of music in relation to *Aesthetic Theory* in which expression is fundamental.

It is important to notice that Adorno’s lack of explanation in relation to certain concepts used in *Philosophy of Modern Music* might have interfered in its reception creating misunderstanding in relation to Adorno’s musicological approach that have been regarded as “abstract and [lacking] real grounding in concrete musical examples.”<sup>16</sup> One of the reasons that I think originated what Paddison states to be misunderstandings in relation to *Philosophy of Modern Music* it is because Adorno does not explain the aesthetical-technical terms that he uses in analysing Schoenberg.

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<sup>16</sup> Paddison, 1993 p 270.



Nevertheless, it is one of Adorno's characteristics of writing, not to be completely direct in explaining the concepts he is referring to. This is more evident in *Philosophy of Modern Music* in which he uses concepts created by him that are possible to be understood, only through his own theories. Although *Aesthetic Theory* was published years later than *Philosophy of Modern Music*, it seems that Adorno already had his notion of aesthetics clear when he wrote *Philosophy of Modern Music*. One reason to argue in favour of this assumption is because in *Philosophy of Modern Music*, he uses terms developed later in his notion of aesthetics, such as 'hovering above', and 'movement at standstill' that were possible to be known only when *Aesthetic Theory* was published. These terms are better clarified in *Aesthetic Theory* which helps to contextualize his aesthetical-analyses of Schoenberg. They relate to Adorno's notion of the relation between nature and individual that are primal for his notion of aesthetics. Therefore, it is for that reason that in Chapter 3, I examine the terms Adorno develops in *Aesthetic Theory* in relation to *Philosophy of Modern Music* to investigate how Adorno relates theory and practice within his notion of expression as suffering.

However, there are important differences between the purpose of *Philosophy of Modern Music* and *Aesthetic Theory*. In the former, Adorno is adopting a philosophical-musicological approach to Schoenberg's technique that Schoenberg himself could not have had in mind when building his technique. For Adorno, the artist does not need necessarily to be aware of how the processes of expression and technique interact but he is necessarily impelled to respond to expressive impulses in which technique is subordinated. Thus, Adorno, in *Philosophy of Modern Music*, investigates how expression and technique are well integrated within Schoenberg's compositions. In regard to *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno seems to be freer in dealing with aspects of technique as result of his notion of expression. In *Aesthetic Theory*, his proposals in regard to technique do not necessarily match those of Schoenberg; Adorno builds his own particular view of technique which is not fixed and forms the basis for his understanding of form.

The artwork is to be seen only by its relation to expression, not to its relation to style, form, or historical periods. The manner in which it achieves the objectivisation of form in perfection with the laws of expression is the artist's struggle for technique,

mediation between historical sediment, the process of domination of nature, and the need of being free from them. In this regard, the artwork, through technique, is able to abstractly communicate social structures within the artist's struggle of making his or her expressiveness eloquent. And in that process, art receives its content, which is also expressive and able to communicate the artist's intentionless; a reflection of a second order coinciding with social structures, and which in the artwork appears as accidental. However, this communication is not discursive, nor an empty abstraction, nor even a communication of feelings. Instead, it is a communication of the silent agony of the impact of dialectical relations between object and subject. In the next chapter I examine, how agony, in expression as suffering, resembles nature's identity in Adorno's comprehension of both as mute which is one of his important perspectives about the aspects in which art shares with nature in *Aesthetic Theory*.

### 3. Methodology

Adorno's aesthetics is a theory that comprises diverse theories in modern philosophy as well as presenting vast examples of different artistic areas from different periods. Apart from the complexity of his theoretical background, there is also Adorno's own philosophical perspective about aesthetics, self, society, and arts. In addition, his unusual writing style makes his theory difficult to understand. Sometimes he is very direct and careful in explaining whose theory or work he is referring to as well as what he actually means regarding certain words and critical perspective. At other times, he is completely obscure in his phrase constructions, which seem to contradict something he had said only a few paragraphs before, making his *Aesthetic Theory* a very difficult puzzle. Furthermore, something he writes in one of his works might be better clarified in another work, which makes the puzzle even more difficult. Therefore, it is very difficult if not impossible to grasp everything about *Aesthetic Theory*, even more in a short thesis such as the present one. However, there is necessarily an understanding of some aspects related to different perspectives of Adorno's critique of the Western aesthetical-historical-philosophical tradition essential for the comprehension of his notion of expression in *Aesthetic Theory*.

The first aspect is related to the Western aesthetical-historical-philosophical context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, following a Kantian tradition, through the idea of absolute music

which in music was represented by symphony and opera.<sup>17</sup> Absolute music illustrates the divergences about musical understanding in relation to notions of autonomy of instrumental music and in relation to the symphony and ‘transcendental language’ in relation to opera. These divergences lasted up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, demonstrating differences amongst aesthetic theories, such as romantic (feeling) and formalist (structure).<sup>18</sup>

In Chapter 2, I describe Adorno’s notion of expression which implies his critique to 19<sup>th</sup> century aesthetics focusing on the Romantic idea of natural beauty in *Aesthetic Theory*. I investigate Adorno’s comprehension of the relation between individual and nature in *Aesthetic Theory* in relation to his critique of Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche and their notions of *subjectivity*, *spirit*, and *impulse* respectively. Further, I examine Adorno’s investigation of how these notions are related to his dialectics, demonstrating why Adorno considers perception as conditioned by the Western traditional aesthetic, referring to them as ‘dogmatic’. Moreover, throughout Adorno’s comprehension of the relation between individual and nature, it is possible to examine in detail his notion of expression in regard to art and music.

In Chapter 3, I describe Adorno’s comprehension of form in *Aesthetic Theory* contrasting his approach to form in Schoenberg in *Philosophy of Modern Music*. Adorno’s notion of form relates to his comprehension of the relation between individual and nature in which expression is fundamental. I also examine the musical elements that are important for his notion of form as well as for his musical criteria. Chapter 3 also demonstrates the differences between Adorno’s notion of expression in *Aesthetic Theory* and the Expressionist movement. The difference resides in Adorno’s critique of the aesthetic tradition in the context of Expressionism, which illustrates that his understanding of form in *Aesthetic Theory* is different from the Schoenberg School. However, it is in the Schoenberg School, that Adorno sees, amongst Expressionist musical movements, a close relation to his notion of expression.

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<sup>17</sup> Bruce Haynes 2007 p 181; Dalhaus 1989.

<sup>18</sup> Ludwig Finscher: *Germany, I: Art and Music* Grove Music online (Accessed on September, 15<sup>th</sup>, 2007) <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>. Dalhaus, 1989 p 69.

In regard to the second aspect, a careful reading of Adorno's notion of subjectivity and expression amongst philosophical studies about *Aesthetic Theory* makes possible a comprehension of Adorno's notion of the importance of expression for the individual and morality in *Aesthetic Theory*. Although these theories do not take into consideration the arts in relation to expression, they were useful for the comprehension of the functionality of expression within the individual in relation to Adorno's dialectics. In the conclusion, I describe Adorno's notion of the individual, which also involves his critique of the Western aesthetical-historical-philosophical tradition. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno states that expression seems to be more relevant for the individual preserving his or her identity.<sup>19</sup> His notion of expression in artistic experience suggests that music and art are a remedy for consciousness, demonstrating his positive view about the dialectics and suggesting solutions for domination.

Therefore, these first two aspects that relate primarily to Adorno's philosophical perspective contributed to the comprehension of Adorno's critique of the Western aesthetical-historical-philosophical tradition and its consequence for his notion of natural beauty, expression, individual, and arts, which seems to comprise Adorno's overall idea of aesthetics. However, in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* these elements cannot be interpreted separately from each other; they are interconnected and dependant upon relations between the individual and nature.

The third and fourth aspects relates to his musicological perspective. In regard to the third, it was necessary an informational literature about different trends in contemporary musicology in relation to Adorno as well as amongst musical practices in the context of Expressionism such as twelve-tone composition and historically informed performance. They were useful for the comprehension of the central discussions about twelve-tone composition and historically informed performance that influenced Adorno's philosophy, and questioned notions such as authenticity and originality, which were also part of Adorno's musicological perspective. Further, a reading of 18<sup>th</sup> century's musical treatise's *On the Playing the Flute* as well as Romantic idea of absolute music in relation to symphony were useful for

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<sup>19</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 84.

understanding the changes in the relation between expression, musical material and consciousness in *Aesthetic Theory*.

For Adorno's notion of expression as suffering, I examine his own writings in relation to important elements in his theory that constitute his notion of expression, which relates to a broader theoretical scope within his *Aesthetic Theory*; for example, subjectivity, addendum, impulse, spirit, mediation, non-identity, and mimesis. Other important Adorno's literatures useful for the comprehension of expression in *Aesthetic Theory* are *Critical Models*, *Negative Dialectics* and *Hegel: Three Studies*. They provide useful thought about Adorno's notion of suffering as expressive, receptive and active; positive and negative experience. They elucidate the polarity of expression in Adorno's comprehension of suffering, crucial for further reflection in relation to his theory of the self in which aesthetics is fundamental.

## Chapter 2

### Expression in Aesthetic Theory

Expression is a key-word to help reach an understanding of what Adorno means by aesthetics and its importance for the individual and arts. Adorno has a positive understanding of expression in regard to the individual and society, as mediation between thought, experience, and sensibility.<sup>20</sup> However, it is necessary to locate his view of expression under certain premises within his theory to reach an approximate idea of his interdisciplinary approach to aesthetics, in which expression is fundamental.

One of the most important premises for the understanding of Adorno's notion of expression in relation to art is natural beauty.<sup>21</sup> For Adorno, nature contains within its own chaotic structure elements of pleasure and pain which he calls 'mythical ambiguity'<sup>22</sup> and *shudder*. These elements are part of nature's objective appearance as living "objects" and they are nature's identity.

In *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno explains that nature's identity causes an impact within the subject, which experiences it in an immediate astonishment, a shock. Adorno says that the impact is the primordial origin of human action, generating both progression and regression. In relation to progression or enlightenment' it makes possible the real experience of the object, the feeling of fear and pleasure, where both subject and object communicate their own distinct identities. In regard to regression or myth, it produces the crude exploitation of nature (process of domination of nature), increasing the Enlightenment idea of a free and dignified humanity working for development.<sup>23</sup>

Further, the process of domination of nature suppresses *shudder* in the experience between subject and object because of nature's threatening quality above subject

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<sup>20</sup> Adorno, 1993 p xvi.

<sup>21</sup> "Therefore reflection on natural beauty is irrevocably requisite to the theory of art." (Adorno, 1997 p 62).

<sup>22</sup> Adorno 1997 p 66.

<sup>23</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 62.

control and resultant fear of death. However, domination does not only suppress nature's threatening element but also the pleasant elements which, throughout 'ascetic authoritarianism,' repress the sensuous phenomena implicit in the relation between subject and object<sup>24</sup> For art, the suppression of sensuous phenomena in idealistic aesthetics is one aspect of Adorno's critique on Kant's idea of disinterested satisfaction related to a pleasure in contemplation distinct from pleasure in sensual satisfaction. This pleasure in Kant would be a merely subjective one of a higher order, in which beauty is given by a reflective capacity instead of sensuous experience.

Moreover, this disinterested satisfaction is preceded by a free play between the faculties of imagination and understanding which act harmoniously in aesthetic experience. In Kant's theory, the communication of the faculties of imagination and understanding is not empirical or psychological, but necessary.<sup>25</sup> Although Kant has recognised the 'trembling' caused by nature in the theory of sublime, he separates the experience of sublime from sensuous phenomena<sup>26</sup> and, according to Adorno, this is why Kant placed that experience into reason instead of into the empirical.<sup>27</sup> That is to say, in Kant, the experience of *shudder*, which in his theory he calls the sublime, is produced by reflective properties of the mind which are *a priori* experience whilst in Adorno, the experience of *shudder* is produced by an impact within the individual.

In Adorno's theory, thought and experience are united by his notion of expression achieving the unity of theory and practice. Therefore, for Adorno the freedom experienced in the subject's isolation as a result of the sublime is illusory as it is otherwise precisely the oppressed.<sup>28</sup> Adorno reflects upon desire in Kant, who separates it from art, and in Freud for whom art transforms unsatisfied libido into socially productive achievement.<sup>29</sup> This separation is what in Kant constitutes art 'unconcerned that subjective, instinctual components of art return metamorphosed in art's mature form which negates them.'<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 276.

<sup>25</sup> Douglas Junior, 2005 p301.

<sup>26</sup> Douglas Junior p 90.

<sup>27</sup> Douglas Junior p 62.

<sup>28</sup> Adorno, 2005 p 252.

<sup>29</sup> Adorno, 1997 pp 10-11.

<sup>30</sup> Adorno, 1997 pp 10-11.

For Adorno, beauty resides in nature's identity. Therefore, natural beauty has its origin in nature's 'mythical ambiguity' of pleasure and pain non-identical to the subject, but nevertheless, mediated within the subject through the impact. Therefore, the manner of knowing the object is given through different qualities of the subject which in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* are primarily expression. Expression in this regard is the quality of the object in Adorno's notion of *shudder* and of the subject in Adorno's notion of suffering that permits both to communicate in a fashion in which subject is mediated by object as well as object by subject. In art, expression is the quality of the musical material. Moreover, in Adorno's dialectics where object and subject have distinct identities, expression is a form of knowledge that does not recognise the polarity between subject and object as definitive.<sup>31</sup>

According to Adorno, Hegel has developed Kant's notions of universality and necessity in his idea of spirit:

"Hegel conceives spirit as what exists in and for itself; it is recognised in arts as its substance not as a thin, abstract layer hovering above it. This was implicit in the definition of beauty as a sensual semblance of the idea." (Adorno 1997, p 90)

For Adorno, sensuous phenomenon resides in his notion of *impulse*, which is an activity of expression related either to the impact of *shudder* or to the impact of the process of domination of nature. In this regard, *impulse* is an action that permits the subject following different paths in front of the fear of death either of abandonment or of domination.<sup>32</sup> In regard to abandonment, expression achieves the unity between thought and experience in peace between the polarities of subject and object. This aspect in *Aesthetic Theory* is what Yvonne Sherrat calls utopia.<sup>33</sup> In relation to domination, *impulse* is critical to the unbalanced relation between subject and object generating suffering. In relation to art Adorno calls this action *mimetic impulse* because of its ability to give expression a form. Moreover, *spirit* in art is *mimetic impulse* nonidentical to the subject, an action of expression which contains sensual

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<sup>31</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 111.

<sup>32</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 111.

<sup>33</sup> See Sherrat 2000.



satisfaction and critique of the domination of nature; which in the artwork it is the appearance of the inward.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, expression, by mediating subject and object, is what makes this process happen. Adorno's critique of Hegel in music is in regard to form as being the content of the artwork, which for Adorno is a form of regression, as well as in regard to the absolute concept of art which in 19<sup>th</sup> century influenced the manner of experiencing music as more liberating and detached from language. The absolute, which for Hegel is the substance of arts, is for Adorno the historical transitoriness from which, together with his critique of subjectivity and absolute spirit, he adopts his materialist view of aesthetics.<sup>35</sup>

According to Adorno, idealist aesthetic theories located the experience of pleasure and pain in relation to the subject's reason and identity making the 'object like the subject', suppressing the object's identity and sensuous phenomena. From this perspective, what was created was an unbalanced relation between subject and object; modern philosophies emphasised either the object or the subject. It is in natural beauty that Adorno sees how this separation (as an unbalanced relation between subject and object), happens amongst modern aesthetic theories and their influence in society. In regard to Kant, by experiencing nature, the self is conscious, through subjective reason, of his or her freedom and nature's superiority. In regard to Hegel, by experiencing nature, the self is conscious, through absolute spirit, about his or her superiority to nature. According to Adorno, these theories placed the immediate astonishment in subjective consciousness, inverting the *a priori* in aesthetic experience. For Adorno, it has pathological effects for the individual and society, such as false happiness or illusion, the increase of pain, the perpetuation of violence, and alienation. For that reason, aesthetics, as a discipline, influenced the very concept of modern self, which according to Adorno reinforced the separation between self and nature even though this distance was paradoxically in close relation with nature and pleasure.

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<sup>34</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 92.

<sup>35</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 7.

In relation to natural beauty, the notion of *a priori* replaced what for Adorno is the premise for aesthetic experience, with a notion of natural beauty as being *a posteriori* or beyond subject's reason and identity. Furthermore, repression was veiled by ideals of autonomy and freedom resultant from the same theories that have increased the process of domination of nature.<sup>36</sup> However, for Adorno the real experience between object and subject is the one in which both subject and object are equally mediated,<sup>37</sup> preserving their differentiated identities, which maintains the 'mythical ambiguity' permanently reproduced in the historical antagonism between subject and object.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, in *Aesthetic Theory*, expression responds to the predominantly regressive states of mind and society but taking a position against them as well as preserving identity. In regard to Adorno, expression is an irrational response to domination and repression. For Adorno, what is experienced as beauty, as it is conceived by the idealist notion of natural beauty, is the anxiety for death and its immediate negation in consciousness. Therefore, expression as a critique of culture(s) gives to the artwork an anticultural manifestation, in which the artwork is free from the context that has produced it while at the same time reaffirming it.<sup>39</sup>

For Adorno, the unbalanced relation between subject and object is expressed by an irrationality of the administered world in which regressive states of mind and society are predominant. In this regard art participates as response of what would be rational in them, impulse, which in art creates the relation of its particulars to the irrationality of the administered world.<sup>40</sup>

Apart from the inversion of the *a priori* or in Adorno words, the *preartistic*, idealist aesthetics also replaced the experience of natural beauty with the experience of an administered world in the idea of 'second nature' is the representation of human

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<sup>36</sup> Adorno 2005 p 246.

<sup>37</sup> Adorno 2005 p 247.

<sup>38</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 84.

<sup>39</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 81.

<sup>40</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 53.

damage on the earth surface, exploitation as nature; it is what reality represents as suffering of the past.<sup>41</sup>

The experience of second nature is thus the expression of domination that distances from the fear of death, for what cannot be possibly dominated, in the terrific appearance of first nature. From this idea of natural beauty, the process of domination of nature is subjective.<sup>42</sup> In this notion of subjectivity, dignity and freedom are something yet to be achieved and points to the primacy of the object in the subject. Nevertheless, he considers the possibilities of dignity in contemporary society only in his very specific understanding of aesthetics that relates to his critique of concepts, law, and freedom. Additionally, dignity can be achieved in both individual and art where the reconciliation between subject and object are present in both object and subject. Therefore, expression, in the overall idea of Adorno's comprehension of aesthetics, in which suffering has a central participation, contributes importantly to his notion of self and arts.

In 'second nature', aesthetic experience substituted the original shock, caused by nature's identity with the appreciation of nature's devastation in which the mythical pain was suppressed experiencing second nature as beautiful. However, for Adorno, beauty resides in that 'mythical ambiguity' which is the quality that the concept of development wrested from the subject: the immediate astonishment, a quality of nature paradoxically essential to art.

Therefore, the paradox resides in the manner that modern aesthetic theories transform art beauty in ideology in which the aesthetic experience of art is closely related to the aesthetic experience of nature without, however, recognising the elements of nature, the mythical ambiguity of pleasure and pain, as constituting experience.

In relation to natural beauty, the suppression of nature's identity from experience in modern aesthetic theories brought about several consequences. On one side, the element of pain turned into domination and violence and on the other side, the element of pleasure turned into sexual repression and futility. In relation to arts, in

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<sup>41</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 64.

<sup>42</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 65.

modern society, and according to Adorno, since the Renaissance, art functions either as an object of possession or as a source of pleasure, which is distant from mythical ambiguity. However, the attempt to bring back this pleasure in arts has a certain infantile quality, as it is immediately related to form instead to the sensuous satisfaction of its means, indeed, independently from form. The means is nevertheless originated through the impact caused by the relation between subject and object.

According to Adorno, during times in which musical compositions were attached to form, as an end, the impulse, the expressive material was still subjugated to the formal elements within the overall structure of the composition. Nevertheless, it is still possible to recognise impulsive elements in the material in the great artworks of the past where advanced technique combined with impulse could pass over the limitations of form, as Adorno exemplifies being the case of, amongst others, Gesualdo, Beethoven, Bach, and Schoenberg.

In modern artworks where form is not an end, the relation between technique and expression has set free ways of dealing with the particulars within the musical composition. The impulse is thus able to realise its own form without the necessity of following any prestablished conception of form. Instead, by combining the expressive necessities with the particulars, the form is something that is not foreseen or premeditated. It is the result of a perfect combination between technique and expression in which form is secondary.

From this perspective, the artwork acquires its own identity, different from nature but in a true relation to it. Further, the impulse as being expressive in relation to the individual and mimetic in arts, is able to impart from appearance its own expressive qualities that are different from the subject. The subject for Adorno is only a part of this process, which together with the object can create a structure able to say more than it appears in its form. Therefore, the elements that constitute the object, the artwork, which are both before technique and essential to technique are: sensual phenomena, historical sediment, process of domination of nature, 'shudder', and 'the more' in which artwork becomes - throughout its process of transforming these elements eloquent into an image - self identical, self same, more than a thing,

although only by becoming a thing and therefore spirit. The subordination of form to these elements evinces consciousness and gives to the art an affinity with dream.<sup>43</sup>

Since impulse is a reminder of the distance between subject and object, it expresses pain, which is not accessible to discursive knowledge. Adorno's notion of suffering is therefore the only expressive quality able to impart this separation and a memory of a 'mythical ambiguity,' regardless of historical time.

"The expressive character of art doesn't change because of its historical process of domination which in all periods remains the same." (Adorno, 1997 p 2)

Thus the law of form, which Adorno calls *appearance* in his theory, is the antagonisms of reality (expression) and unreality (form) which gives to art its quality of a 'movement at standstill'. Further, the quality of art and nature of appearing more than they are, for Adorno, is a result of the objective elements of art and nature that idealism placed in subjectivity. According to Adorno, art and nature are related to each other in aesthetic experience, since for the former, it refers to nature 'as the mediated plenipotentiary of immediacy' and for the latter, as the 'mediated and objectified world.'<sup>44</sup>

Therefore for Adorno, real pleasure (the mythical pleasure) is found emancipated from form and therefore from beauty. For him, to experience art as beauty and pleasant in form is a regressive experience, although he doesn't mean that all beauty in art is regressive. It depends upon differentiation amongst its elements and coherence in the *nexus* of the artwork, independent from form. For that, a constant avoidance of technical effects is essential. In the next chapter, I examine in more detail some of the features involving Adorno's notion of technique in relation to expression in musical composition throughout a comparison between some of his thoughts about technique in *Aesthetic Theory* and his understanding of it in relation to Schoenberg in *Philosophy of Modern Music*.

The sensuously pleasant for Adorno does not relate to form but to the process of giving form through expressive impulses.<sup>45</sup> From this perspective, sensuous phenomena are found only through expressive impulses which, in combination with

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<sup>43</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 86.

<sup>44</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 62.

<sup>45</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 14.

critique in relation to the musical elements, produce an indirect pleasure in giving form. It is in this process that the beautiful and the ugly must reside, not in the results or ends. In this case, there is no beauty or ugly *per se* but only *the way* in which one is dependent upon the other, as for Adorno, beauty originates in the ugly in relation to the premise of ‘mythical ambiguity.’

According to him, beauty and ugliness are, within modern aesthetic theories, regressive aspects of the relation between subject and object.<sup>46</sup> However, it is only the knowledge of this process that makes possible to distinguish whether or not this pleasure is grounded in the law of form entirely in accordance to the nexus of expressive impulses or if it is “simply a failure of craft.”<sup>47</sup> In art however, this distinction is not separated from the questions of good or bad.<sup>48</sup> It is precisely amongst these distinctions that in art these judgements are grounded in the relation between expression and musical technique, not taste.

Nevertheless, impulse is the expression of the dialectics between subject and object through which sensuous phenomena gives form to art, which does not need to be necessarily beautiful. Thus, true happiness is the acceptance of sensuous phenomena, which in the artwork is indirect, independent of form, but in which the eloquence, the language of the artwork can speak out from its own ‘being in itself’ as nonidentical. Sensuous in the artwork is thus what is not intentionally made. Contrary to it are false pleasure, infantilism, and kitsch, trademarks for the culture industry which claims to have had finally put an end to the taboo.<sup>49</sup> In this regard, for Adorno, the taboo is perpetuated by aesthetic theories that set up experience as a dogma impeding critical thought essential to enlightenment.

For that reason, to experience the unpleasant as ugly in form is for him to misinterpret both ugliness and pain, in which pain can actually signalise the features nonidentical to the subject, making possible a release of pain; for Adorno, the ugly can make the beautiful shine.<sup>50</sup> For him, beauty and pleasure originate in pain and in the ugly. In music, the most representative of this relation is dissonance, ‘the aesthetic archetype

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<sup>46</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 47.

<sup>47</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 15.

<sup>48</sup> Adorno 1997 p 164.

<sup>49</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 276.

<sup>50</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 84.

of ambivalence.’<sup>51</sup> The manner, in which beauty and ugly were dealt in modern society and arts, perpetuated the separation between object and subject, increasing repression, domination, and violence. Nevertheless, Kant also found in the sensuously pleasant, which is based on form, a regression. And that is why he didn’t regard music as a serious art, because of its lack of content and sensuously pleasant quality. In this aspect, Adorno is critical of Kant who ‘emphatically rejected the knowledge from within.’<sup>52</sup>

“Once conscious of this nexus it is impossible to insist on a critique of culture industry that draws the line at art” (Adorno, 1997 p 18)

According to Adorno’s understanding of the relation between subject and object in a context of war, he questions the emancipated individual, the self liberated from his instincts, the spiritualized and intellectualized individual. He questions how a modernized individual living in a happy life can maintain and sustain horrific attitudes. It is in Nietzsche’s theory of *Will to Power* that Adorno also recognises an unbalanced relation between subject and object perpetuating violence in power relations amongst individuals and nature. In Nietzsche’s theory the search for happiness is attached to humanity’s natural search for power.

*Will to Power* is a principle for individual evolution based in an active, creative force inherent in nature itself that raises human struggle for survival beyond the basic levels of subsistence, into the idea of struggle for power, to a metaphysical realm. Nietzsche’s previous theories of *Will to Power* involve his critique of Darwinist evolutionism regarding the suppression of metaphysical features within the individual. Nietzsche’s idea of happiness as the end of human purposes is the individual *moto* of development which is the “primordially of egoism,” “an evolution towards the individual.”<sup>53</sup> The individual is his or her own end without being subjected by a general good. Further, *Will to Power* is a perfection principle that differentiates individuals amongst themselves as ‘weak’ or ‘strong’ in accordance to their inner principle, which acts as an index of perfection.

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<sup>51</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 15.

<sup>52</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 165.

<sup>53</sup> Moore, 2006 p 523.

The idea of a perfect individual represented by the concepts of genius and strength is therefore the salvation of a community destabilised by the pathological and weak individual. In this regard, the strong dominate the weak whose functional activity is determined by the dominant part.

In Nietzsche's theory, the individual has an impulse to power for the achievement of happiness. The impulse for Nietzsche is beneath consciousness, a "discharge of strength as the uniquely organic activity of the will to power."<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, this principle is an activity that belongs to nature and occurs even without a presence of a subject. The struggle for power is the higher condition in which the individual can overcome its primitive instinctual forces by driving towards the limits of its own existence.

Adorno's critique of Nietzsche is directed to his idea of impulse as a discharge of strength, and power as a principle inherent in humans and nature. For Adorno, impulse is an expression of dialectics between subject and object, and critique of power relations different from nature's identity, the objective mythical ambiguity of pleasure and pain. Adorno questions the inseparability of aesthetic experience from illusion in Nietzsche's aesthetic theory.

For Nietzsche, illusion is the only way of understanding the world as well as the aesthetic justification because it turns suffering into notions within which one can live.<sup>55</sup> For him, art has no value in itself apart from minimising suffering through illusion. For Nietzsche everything has its value in the satisfaction of the will to power regardless of its purpose. For him, beauty is defined "with the act of projecting pleasing Apollonian 'semblance' or 'illusion' onto the object of aesthetic representation."<sup>56</sup> Further, in Nietzsche's theory, real life leaves no room for the possibility of lasting satisfaction or happiness.<sup>57</sup> For that reason Nietzsche has a positive view of art as illusion and semblance whose values are only extrinsic to art. Additionally, for Nietzsche, a certain pleasure and tolerance in suffering are indices of strength, which relates his aesthetic theory with his *Will to Power*.

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<sup>54</sup> Pearson, 2006 p 533.

<sup>55</sup> Pearson, 2006 p 45.

<sup>56</sup> Pearson 2006 p 42.

<sup>57</sup> Pearson, 2006 p 42.



Although Adorno sees (as Nietzsche does) suffering as having roots in cruelty, Adorno's critique of Nietzsche's conception of suffering is because Nietzsche does not question it, accepting reality as it is. The arts are only escapism from cruelty instead of a critique of it. For Adorno, suffering has its roots in domination which seems to be a 'natural' feature within Nietzsche's theory of *Will to Power*. In Adorno's notion of semblance as illusion is otherwise false happiness, and the ugly related to this notion of semblance is regressive.

For Adorno, expression as suffering has a positive healing quality which makes possible the diminishing of suffering as well as the possibility of an action critical of cruelty. Contrary to Nietzsche, it is not an illusion, but the expression of reality. For him *appearance* in opposition to form and semblance imparts the critique of society through expression, which for Adorno is the *immanence of the musical material*. For Adorno *immanence* is the metaphysical realm of art that Nietzsche regarded as being the *will to power*. Immanence is thus the content of the artwork that forms that 'thin, abstract layer hovering above it'<sup>58</sup> which in Adorno's aesthetic experience is *aura*. *Immanence*, *aura*, and *appearance* are therefore expressive elements of the artwork in perfect relation with impulse produced by expression of the dialectics between subject and object.

In this polarity, immanence is what is not identical to the subject, and in non-identity the subject is critical to the object. By negation the subject expresses what is not identical. The object in this case is oppression and domination, different from the *shudder*, which is free. In relation to the artwork, subjectivity is therefore the expression of 'second nature', the process of the domination of nature. Therefore it is only by apprehending the process of giving form that is possible to know an artwork.<sup>59</sup>

In this process, there is always an element of tension in which the balance between subject and object is to be achieved. In this regard, tension is the relation of 'form and

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<sup>58</sup> Adorno, 1997 pp 89-91.

<sup>59</sup> Adorno 1997 p 88.

its other represented in the work by particulars'.<sup>60</sup> Within this constellation of elements, the relation between arts and society, expression is the catastrophic state of being - which for Adorno is the irrationality of the administered world, suffering - of the emancipated individual in which art participates as a response and as an expression of a tension between form and horror, pleasure and pain.<sup>61</sup>

In relation to modern art, in *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno investigates internal aspects of the subject and confronts them to the internal aspects of society as an advanced relation between self and nature. Under this perspective, expression as the object, the critique, the immediate negation, the non identity, gives to aesthetics a mode of indeterminately knowing the world, the elements of nature, as first nature. For that reason, aesthetics is for Adorno a form of knowledge acquisition distinct from reasoning and illusion, *moto* for human change, progress, and peace in which his notion of expression as suffering acquires its positive perspective. Moreover, *Aesthetic Theory* is not only concerned with the experience of arts but primarily how the experience of the world in general relates to arts.

However, in the administered world, the experience of first nature might not be possible and it gives place to second nature, recognising the first nature as a memory of freedom in suffering. The experience of *shudder* is thus different from the experience of second nature, since the former represents what Adorno considers as freedom (one that perhaps never existed) and the latter, domination. In this regard, expression as suffering for Adorno contains this ambiguity of the relation between self and nature as the possibility of freedom as well as the consciousness of domination. Through expression, mythical ambiguity is never forgotten, preventing the regression of consciousness. Its primordial origin is the relation of self and nature free of domination. In this regard, Adorno states:

“Peace is the state of differentiation without domination, with the differentiated participating in each other.” (Adorno, *Critical Models*, p 2)

Therefore, for peace, amongst Adorno’s understanding of the world in general, there is the need of critical thought in relation to historical tendency as well as in relation to

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<sup>60</sup> Adorno 1997 p 53.

<sup>61</sup> Adorno 1997 p 53.

concepts, common to Western aesthetical-historical-philosophical tradition, which in accordance to his understanding of the dialectics between subject and object perpetuates domination. In Adorno's notion of expression, it is suffering that makes possible a critical action in relation to domination.

In regard to concepts and their historical sediment contributing for the blocking of critical thinking, the notions of subjectivity and objectivity are, in Adorno, exemplars; according to him, they need to have priority over all definitions.<sup>62</sup> Internality and externality are thus distinguished, and perhaps defined, only by what they are referring to in the transitory character of history, giving to concepts of subjectivity and objectivity a mutable or ambiguous quality. That is why for Adorno the distinction is important to identify their content, quality, and function. In regard to arts Adorno says:

“The observing subjectivity is to be strictly distinguished from the subjective element in the object, that is, from the object's expression as well as from its subjectively mediated form”. (Adorno. 1997 p 164)

For Adorno, nature's identity is distinct from the identity of the subject and it is possible to reach, although not through reason, nature's identity. This idea of a possible understanding of the object without making it like the subject as well as without the need of dominating fear is Adorno's main foundation for his utopia, in which expression act as a mediator between subject and object. Expression brings the distinct identities of the subject and the object. In *Aesthetic Theory*, art and nature are completely different, although well integrated within each other. His dialectic is the recognition that subjectivity and objectivity are present both in the subject and in the object. For Adorno art beauty is neither above nor below natural beauty:

“The tendency to perceive art either extra-aesthetic or pre-aesthetic fashion, which to this day is undiminished by an obviously failed education, is not only a barbaric residue or a danger of regressive consciousness. Art perceived strictly aesthetically is art aesthetically misperceived. Only when art's other is sensed as a primary layer in the experience of art does it become possible to sublimate this layer, to dissolve this thematic bonds, without the autonomy of the artwork becoming a matter of indifference. Art is autonomous and it is not; without what is heterogeneous to it, its autonomy eludes it” (Adorno, 1993, p 6)

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<sup>62</sup> Adorno 2005, p 246.

Therefore, Adorno's notion of the aesthetics is based basically upon three elements: natural beauty, expression, and appearance. However, this conjunction of object and subject has in his theory important consequences for the subject as the objectivity of the subject (which is subjectivity in the object) is the subject's immediate negation, a protest against domination. In this regard, Adorno's notion of music embodies this process amongst his constellation of elements that implies the elements of the object: sensual phenomena, historical sediment, process of domination of nature, 'shudder', and 'the more'; the elements of the subject: expression, impulse, critical thinking, and knowledge from within; and the elements of art: immanence, aura, appearance, and technique. However all these elements are integrated within each other through his notion of mediation, in which suffering seems to be central.

There are at least two aspects in *Aesthetic Theory* in which arts and nature share. The first is that both have a quality of a 'movement at standstill' which relates to form and to his historical perspective. From this aspect neither arts nor nature are fixed. The second is that both have a quality of 'indeterminateness' in suffering and *shudder*, which relates to knowledge. Adorno calls indeterminateness, that is, something beyond subject's identification. Objectively, art and nature have both their historical qualities of being both a 'movement at standstill'; nature, as arts, falls mute when it appears to say more than it is; art and nature point to the primacy of the object in subjective experience. From this notion of primacy of the object, Adorno builds his notion of expression as suffering which together with other important notions such as natural beauty and appearance form a constellation of elements crucial for understanding of his comprehension aesthetics.<sup>63</sup>

In *Aesthetic Theory*, the idea of expression as suffering starts from the relation between self and nature, which is never completely forgotten in the relation between subject and object, where the possession of 'shudder' was always converted into totality exchange, precisely reminding what cannot be exchanged, spirit, and that "which appears more truly in the individual than in the synthesis of singularities."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Junior, Douglas 2005 p 305

<sup>64</sup> Adorno, 1997p 84.

## Chapter 3

### Expression in Philosophy of Modern Music

In this chapter I describe expression as suffering as given in *Aesthetic Theory* in relation to Adorno's view of Schoenberg's School in *Philosophy of Modern Music*. It also situates Adorno's notion of expression amongst the Expressionism movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. I examine the relation of expression and technique in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* in contrast to his musicological approach to Schoenberg in *Philosophy of Music* in order to distinguish Adorno's comprehension of form in relation to his notion of expression as suffering. Therefore, it is very important to understand how form happens in Adorno's conception of art, which demands an understanding of expression within his theory. For that reason, in this chapter I examine Adorno's notion of expression as suffering and its relation to the process of giving to an artwork its form, which seem central in Adorno's understanding of modern art.

In *Aesthetic Theory*, expression in relation to art and music is the objectification of the relation between subject and object in *appearance*. Adorno explains that this relation is the basis for creativity and therefore the *moto* for musical technique. For Adorno, expression is related to the artist and his or her critical thought about technique that enables a coherent disposition of particulars within the distance between what is internal and what it is not yet existent.

It is this process, that Adorno considers one of the most important features of art in relation to expression because it makes possible the building of an expressive object that imparts a type of content essential to individual's understanding about him or herself as well as about what is not identical to them. It can help consciousness to be aware of what are the elements internal and external to the individual that might either contribute to or be the basis of suffering. It is form that can emanate what this process

is able to communicate; however, it is never an end in itself. The end for Adorno is otherwise the means; that is to say, the process of eloquence in giving to the artwork its form.

In Adorno's notion of arts, the means coincide with the ends. For that reason, the notion of beauty and ugliness which relates to form as something predetermined is in *Aesthetic Theory* a manner of suppressing this process blocking truth about the artwork and reducing it to a narrow form of understanding. Further, it impedes reaching what this process can speak about within its own eloquence immanently related to the relation between subject and object. Consequently, Adorno is critical of aesthetic theories that relate beauty and ugliness to form; he considers these theories a form of regression and maintenance of suffering. Adorno states that the experience of beauty is intimately related to concepts, ideals and theories that set up rules about what is beautiful and about what is needed to achieve beauty. For that reason, Adorno sees these theories as historical sediment and consequently as dogmatic. Within music, the same happens in regard to the ugly when it is related to technical procedures that use musical effects to produce a certain disharmony. Within the particulars, it creates a false 'shock,' which is not correspondent to expression but to the achievement of a specific form. In this regard, beauty and the ugly can both be a form of regression; it all depends upon how the particulars are related to expression. For Adorno, beauty and ugly are in relation to the process, to sensuous phenomena and to the *nexus* of the artwork, independent of form.

Adorno's comprehension of the process is revealed in his *Aesthetic Theory* throughout his view of the interconnection of aesthetic with expression which has its fundamental element in Adorno's critique of the externality of aesthetic to art.<sup>65</sup> Consequently, this assumption implies a distinction between poles of internality and externality inherent in Adorno's comprehension of the dialectics between subject and object. This tends to the recognition of the intertwinement of these opposites as the possibility if not, the realisation of peace, which is what he calls the reconciliation between self and nature. Nevertheless, in music, for this relation between expression, meaning, *nexus*, and form:

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<sup>65</sup> Adorno, 1997 p xii.

“It is very difficult to distinguish the aim from the affirmative semblance of actuality of meaning in a fashion that would be definitive enough to satisfy the philosophical construction of concepts.” (Adorno, 1997 p105)

In the previous chapter, through an investigation of Adorno’s comprehension of the relation between subject and object it was possible to understand why the ‘process of doing’ is important for expression in relation to arts, giving to the musical material, through technique, its content. However, he considers that during the ‘process of doing’ there are some features of expression itself which are necessarily confronted with the question of how to give to an artwork its form. These features are the qualities of expression, external and internal to the subject, which are essentially nonartistic and necessary to arts.

For Adorno, expression is objective, real, a form of knowledge, amorphous, resultant of the relations between subject and object, as explained in the previous chapter. Moreover, his notion of expression is related only with expression as being suffering which, in the overall idea of expression in *Aesthetic Theory*, impedes an interpretation of suffering as a concept. Although suffering can be conceptualised, for Adorno, suffering does not relate to any concept. It relates to the dialectical relation between subject and object. Therefore, suffering is a constellation of elements, a condensation of diversified aspects, which in expression appears as a suffering. For this reason, expression for Adorno is only the expression of suffering. For Adorno, music serves as a model since its elements are closest to the amorphousness of suffering, giving to it place to “scream”; that is to say, to be critical of the domination of nature.

In regard to music, Adorno considers that content is more important than form. However, the process of giving content to an artwork implies that in the ‘process of doing,’ form is subordinated to the necessities of expression. For him, expression is found in the ‘process of doing’, not in musical form. In *Aesthetic Theory*, expression and musical form are antithetical. His critique on form follows his philosophical approach to concepts, historical sediment, and reason, which forms his comprehension of aesthetic experience. For Adorno, form can represent a regressive consciousness if it is based upon musical elements that are ready-made, that follow

preestablished rules, or that aims to reach a predetermined structure. However, he recognises the essentiality of form in art and because of the elements that involve form in the historical time he considers form as a philosophical problem in relation to music. In the 'process of doing', musical technique must set up expression free from any predetermined result. For him, the antithesis between expression (real) and form (unreal) is the most important problem, which he considers insoluble, inherent in the 'process of doing.'

However, although he considers the antithesis a problem, he recognises it as necessary because, through form, art is able to communicate the real through the unreal. That is to say, expression, to be eloquent, needs a body that enables it to appear. However, it is not in every form that Adorno finds coherence with expression. There are some musical forms - such as Hindemith and Stravinsky - that he considers to be in accordance to pre-established concepts about musical elements. In relation to the antithesis between expression and form, the question that needs to be answered is for Adorno the 'how of expression'<sup>66</sup>. How can one make the amorphous (expression, real) be form (unreal)?

For him, there are two aspects to be considered. The first is to recognise the unreality of form as well as the unreality of all elements which he considers as vague, such as musical idea, motif, and theme. The second is to accept expression as real, something objective, although impossible to be conceptualised. Because expression is amorphous, for Adorno<sup>67</sup>, it is art that, due its own unreality, is able to make eloquent the knowledge founded in expression: knowledge of second order, able to communicate the mute - a relation between object and subject as described in the previous chapter.

For Adorno, the elements of music have a quality of nothingness essential to expression. He recognises that the elements of music have no content in themselves. However, what gives content to the artwork is expression and the manner in which the musical elements are organised in relation to it. In this regard, technique is what

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<sup>66</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 114.

<sup>67</sup> Adorno, 1987 p 41.



makes possible the reality of expression - which he considers a reality of a second order- to be unveiled.

In this regard, for Adorno the 'process of doing' is what mediates expression and the form in which technique is fundamental. Therefore, the 'process of doing' for Adorno is a paradoxical cycle in which the real is made through the unreal in order to appear. For that reason, he calls an object of art as *appearance* and not as form or semblance. Artwork is the appearance of a reality of a second order. Because of the unsolved antithesis between expression and form, Adorno considers that it is critical reflection about technique that makes possible expression to be eloquent through form. The content found in expression is transformed throughout this process of eloquence. As expression is nonconceptual, but nevertheless has meaning, the elements it demands in relation to technique are different from those in which conceptual knowledge uses; historical sediment in relation to music contributes to a blocking of expression in the same way that they work for regressive consciousness in relation to aesthetics.

In regard to the nonconceptual nature of expression in relation to musical technique, Adorno states that the elements that contribute to the critique of historical sediment in music are discontinuity, non-interpretation, and reflection of a second order.<sup>68</sup> The antithesis between expression and form is expressed in art as the antagonism of suffering and art as play, the acknowledgement of the darkness of radical art, as well as the recognition of form as the *organum* of suffering and its neutralisation.<sup>69</sup>

For that reason, form in artwork is central, as he says that to find content in form is a regression; content must be encountered only through expression. His philosophical approach to music relates his critique of the externality of aesthetic, that is to say, to beauty in relation to form instead of regarding beauty to the 'process of doing' - which he considers to be the internal aspects of the artwork, that are at the same time nonartistic.<sup>70</sup> Adorno is also concerned about internality and externality of musical form, which follows the same philosophical approach found in his *Aesthetic Theory*, and which he bases his musicological approach to the Schoenberg School in

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<sup>68</sup> Adorno 1997 p 27.

<sup>69</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 39.

<sup>70</sup> Adorno 1997 p 57.

*Philosophy of Modern Music*. For him, form *per se* is the ritual of the domination of nature in play. In relation to the subject and form Adorno states that the subject annihilates himself when he or she tries to rationalise the material externally at the expenses of the inner qualities that masters the work. Therefore, through his understanding of form in relation to expression in musical composition Adorno distinguishes between construction and composition. This distinction between construction and composition is in relation to the antithesis between expression and form, which follows his critique to the externality of aesthetics and his view of 'knowledge from within' developed in *Aesthetic Theory*. This might explain why for Adorno technique is essential and how it is able to impart content, not because of the musical elements *per se* but because of the manner in which form is in accordance with expression.

For Adorno, construction is the procedure in which musical elements are external to the work.<sup>71</sup> It is a structure that, by montage, seeks a unity that has its basis/affinity in cognitive processes. The cognitive process that the material imposes is indifferent to self-expression. The subjective subject is in this regard no more than illusion; in which the subject anticipates its own expression or when the subject is not aware that he is annihilating his own expression in favour of a cognitive process that is more concerned to the elements that are ready-made from outside, thus he is working in favour of his own regression as of the musical material. In this regard, the subject cannot predict in terms of result due his own cognitive process' limitation.

However, for Adorno, there is a real qualitative musical element from which the subject cannot escape; a subjective element in the material called 'accident' which is the non-intentional artistically genuine and expressive. In the 'accident,' where the subject loses control, the subject disappears and only through this disappearance does artwork breaks through reason. However, the accident is found through mimetic impulses, which acts as a mediator between expression and *appearance*. Nevertheless, it is technique that organises these elements, which for him are the elements that need to be considered in the realisation or evaluation of an artwork.

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<sup>71</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 57.

In this regard, how does modern art need to be organised in face of the collapse of traditional procedures? Adorno's answer is free control over the material and technology.<sup>72</sup> However, for him, lack of form and the break of form can represent either inconsistency or coherence. How to distinguish between them? In *Philosophy of Modern Music*, Adorno offers a case study about his notion of inconsistency and coherence in relation to expression and form. For him, radical music perceives man's suffering<sup>73</sup> and for that reason modern music is closer to his notion of expression and freedom than those from earlier periods. For Adorno, the problems related to form in modern music are related to what he calls *cultural watchwords*,<sup>74</sup> which predetermines musical form, anticipates and impedes expression. Therefore, the expression of the dialectics between subject and object is not realised, causing an impoverishment of the musical material due its lack of content, since for Adorno, content is found only in his notion of expression as suffering.

In *Aesthetic Theory* the distinction between inconsistency and coherence demands a need of distinguishing between nexus and effects, implying a tension which is the relation of 'form and its other represented in the work by particulars.'<sup>75</sup> In this regard, art itself is dialectical. Art's ambivalence is to take the unreal (form) as real act (expression) in instant *appearance*.<sup>76</sup> In music it is dissonance that expresses this ambivalence. However, art as mere *appearance* is not useful. *Appearance* is not only expressive elements; it is a thing whose power is to appear, and the process is externalised as their own act, not only as human act nor to humans only.<sup>77</sup>

Adorno 'judges' in terms of art's expressivity with its relation to technique, which does not mean its relation to perfection nor to a higher art posited by the idea of *art pour l'art*. Instead, it relates to the preartistic level of art (expression), which is at the same time the memento of art's anticultural character, the antithesis to the empirical world as explained in the previous chapter. The non-artistic characteristic of expression is for him the requisite for aesthetic experience.

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<sup>72</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 59.

<sup>73</sup> Adorno, 1987 p 41.

<sup>74</sup> Adorno 1987 p 4.

<sup>75</sup> Adorno 1997 p 53.

<sup>76</sup> Adorno 1997 p 79.

<sup>77</sup> Adorno 1997 p 80.

Nevertheless, in *Philosophy of Music* Adorno approaches his idea of technique in relation to Schoenberg which is the contemporary composer who is closer to his idea of the 'process of doing' in relation to the antithesis between expression and form. In *Philosophy of Modern Music*, Adorno states that modern music in relation to the late Schoenberg and his school approaches the dialectics between subject and object, as explained in the previous chapter, by polarizing expression.<sup>78</sup> This polarization resembles the relation between self and nature in its mythical aspect upon Adorno's notion of 'movement at standstill'. In the previous chapter, we saw that it is in this quality of 'movement at standstill' that nature conjoined with arts. In Schoenberg's *Erwartung*, Adorno perceives how Schoenberg expresses this relation between expression and form in his musical material and how it serves as a basis for further development of Schoenberg's technique. The polarization of expression consists on one hand, absorbing shock, which generates movement, and on the other hand a human being paralysed by his or her own anxiety and fear of death.

"It is this polarisation upon which the total world of form of the mature Schoenberg - and Webern as well - depends. The intensification of musical "communication" - not even suspected by this school in the beginning - the difference between theme and development, the constancy of harmonic flow, and the unbroken melodic line are destroyed by this polarisation. There is not one of Schoenberg's technical innovations which cannot be traced back to that polarisation of expression, and which does not reveal traces of this polarisation even beyond the sphere of expression. This might well offer insight into the interdependency of form and content in all music. For one thing, it is foolish to proscribe exaggerated technical articulation as formalistic. All forms of music, not just those of Expressionism are realisations of content." (Adorno, 1987 p 42)

However, in *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno is far deeper in giving examples about expression as suffering regardless of historical period. Further, he explains in more detail what technique is and how it happens in relation to expression. However, in this short thesis, it is impossible to grasp all aspects of Adorno's technique and expression in relation to the individual, society, and music. However, in order to exemplify his notion of expression as suffering within a musical context, I examine Adorno's understanding of Schoenberg in *Philosophy of Modern Music* underlying that his notion of technique, as he develops in *Aesthetic Theory*, is indeed independent from Schoenberg.

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<sup>78</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 42.

In the introduction of *Philosophy of New Music*, Adorno connects the situation of Modern music with what he thinks to be the crisis of culture, in which the concept of order in music correlates to the concept of order of society that raised, through the end of ‘which could be foreseen,’ a type of musical organization, more properly understood as a second organisation, in relation to his critique of form.

Adorno’s critique of reason and natural beauty underlines notions of second reflection, second communication, and second nature related to his dialectics. In music, specifically in what concerns his understanding of modern music, as presented in *Philosophy of Modern Music*, he builds a notion of second organisation which comprises his notion about the chaotic state of society and his notion of musical form. From his critique of form, he constructs a notion of the musical material as an expression of social relations, which he develops later in *Aesthetic Theory* in his understanding of expression as suffering.

In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno describes more deeply his notion of technique and its relation to expression, aesthetics, arts and society than in *Philosophy of Modern Music*. He considers specific aspects of the musical context of his time in order to investigate *how* the musical material is in fact related to social relations as well as to expression, according to his understanding of it developed in *Aesthetic Theory*.

In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno is clear when he says that expression is not only the expression of living subjects but also the expression upon relations between subject and object of which the subject has no control. This expression in modern music is the basis of the break of form that follows an organization of particulars, which in *Philosophy of Modern Music*, is better achieved in Alban Berg’s *Wozzeck* than in Schoenberg’s *Erwartung*.<sup>79</sup> Twelve-tone technique is for him, one example of how the Second Viennese School had achieved the truth of modern context through its radical reflection upon the antithesis between form and expression in relation to the context, concepts, historical sediment, and reason. The musical material in modern music is predetermined by historical tendency, and by technical procedures that had already been conceived. For Adorno, it is from consciousness of the historical

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<sup>79</sup> Adorno 1987 p 30.

tendency as a fact permeating creative impulses<sup>80</sup> that the historical tendency can be overcome, even when its results does not precisely follow the elements in which its final structure has developed from. This is the case for twelve tone technique. However he states that

“Twelve-tone technique must not to be misunderstood as a “technique of composition”, as was, for example, the technique of Impressionism. All efforts to employ it as such results in absurdity” (Adorno, 1987 p 61)

The matter for Adorno is how to turn these historical implications less legible.<sup>81</sup> The argument is not to turn the historical procedures less legible only *per se*; that is to say, not only by what this lack of legibility can produce externally in terms of effects; but how these processes challenge these historical implications, which Adorno calls *energy* and which, according to *Aesthetic Theory*, are immanently related to consciousness, historical sediment, and concepts.

Adorno states that society has become unaware of *energy*, which he understands to be a central problem for composition.<sup>82</sup> Within Adorno’s understanding, in the ‘process of doing’, the subject faces aspects that relate to the dialectic, which to a certain extent constitutes these historical implications. The implications can be, in one aspect, concepts and dogmatic understanding of aesthetic, which in the previous chapter we sought to be in relation to historical-philosophical-aesthetical western tradition’, and in another aspect, the reconciliation between self and nature in the notion of expression of suffering.

*Energy* in *Philosophy of Modern Music* is an historical tendency; it is subjective rather than expression. It is what in *Aesthetic Theory* the process of domination of nature has become in the advanced relation between object and subject. In relation to modern music these two aspects (subjectivity as *energy* and objectivity as expression) are significant. In regard to the first, the usage of musical elements such as triads and resolutions in a fashion that deals with them in a previously established structure as well as regarding them as having content *per se* is a form of regressive attitude

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<sup>80</sup> Adorno 1987 p 33.

<sup>81</sup> Adorno 1987 p 32.

<sup>82</sup> Adorno 1987 p 33.

towards musical material. In regard to the second, the reflection about these procedures in relation to ‘the process of doing’ originates coherence between expression and form without form be something prestablished. In regard to the latter, the musical material works in favour of an enlightened consciousness. Adorno states that it is only by ‘disobedience, independence, and spontaneity’ that the most organised structure can achieve its critique of the material.<sup>83</sup>

The relation between the ‘processes of doing’ and consciousness for Adorno is primal for his positive notion of expression as suffering in art and its positive analysis of Schoenberg’s School. For Adorno, ontology resides “in the perception of the kinetic laws of matter” in which “not all things are possible at all times.”<sup>84</sup> This argument is an important factor to comprehend Adorno’s understanding of historical determinacy in the musical material as well as for his analysis of Schoenberg in *Philosophy of Modern Music*. It also serves to help comprehend Adorno’s musicological aptitude towards the musical material, which consists in placing the musical elements in their historical context. That is to say, musical elements that might have served for a specific time, type of composition, or specific composer does not have the same validity out from the context that had created it. As this contextualised musicological approach has perhaps been discussed more extensively amongst performance in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it seems that, in composition, at least under Adorno’s writings, the composer is still eluded by the ideal of imagination and/or creation that impedes his or her reflection about what is in fact technical innovation.<sup>85</sup>

It is in Schoenberg that Adorno perceives a consciousness of false freedom between *energy* and expression in which the composer is impelled to respond in reaction of the perpetuation of *energy* as a form of thought, form of perception and a form of determining what is right and wrong ‘unequivocally dependant upon this single chord’<sup>86</sup> For Adorno, this single chord is - whatever the chord is - the unquestionable perpetuation of *energy* throughout time.

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<sup>83</sup> Adorno, 1987 p 37.

<sup>84</sup> Adorno 1987 p 33.

<sup>85</sup> Adorno 1987 p 36.

<sup>86</sup> Adorno 1987 p 36.

Adorno states that there are residues of this perpetuation in the works of Stravinsky and Hindemith, which he evaluates as being a matter of technical procedures in relation to musical elements within the artwork in the context of social decay. Furthermore, Adorno's understanding of these composers' compositional methods relates to the impossibility of real expression; where the subject is free of *energy* only by accepting, by being conscious of its dependence of it in a fashion that *energy* is transformed into its opposite instead of shadowing historical tendency through a certain disposition of musical elements. Although having satisfactory results for the modern ear, they still perpetuate concepts that work against consciousness.

In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno considers that musical elements are amorphous.<sup>87</sup> For him, it is mimetic impulses that gives form and meaning to them and, because of social processes, concepts, and believes, these elements carried out throughout history a meaning which does not corresponds to what Adorno considers to be real meaning - a meaning that embedded relations of subject and object, which seems to be for Adorno more valid for the individual than for the singularities of such elements. In this regard, for Adorno, the Schoenberg School turned these elements back to their amorphous state by incorporating them into a reoriented musical technique. According to Adorno, such innovation was only possible through consciousness of the relation and disparities between *energy* and society.

The overall notion of expression in relation to Schoenberg in *Philosophy of Modern Music* is to be considered in different perspective from the Expressionist movement in which Schoenberg is situated. It is also to be considered as a reflection amongst theories of aesthetics that had contributed to notions of expression that regard it as imitation whether of the outer or inner nature, representation and expression of emotions, expression of the will, expression of feelings, or expression of the unconscious. These views of expression relate to different epochs in history and since 18<sup>th</sup> century have been influencing understanding about Western music.<sup>88</sup> For Adorno expression is only the expression of suffering, a relation between object and subject which is:

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<sup>87</sup> Adorno 1997 p xx.

<sup>88</sup> Max Paddison, *History of the Concept of Expression, 2. After 1800*. Oxford Music Online.



“integrated into the work’s ‘law of form’ through the powerful historical tendency towards rationalization. These opposing aspects interact, and ‘expression’ is seen as the result of tension between them”. (Max Paddison, *History of the Concept of Expression, 2.After 1800*. Oxford Music Online)

Moreover, Adorno’s view of expression is integral to aesthetic only through his notion of expression as suffering, which is the expression of the dialectics between subject and object as explained in the previous chapter. In his view of expression, Adorno adopts mimesis and formalism<sup>89</sup> in a very different perspective where mimesis does not imitate and form does not follow any rule. For Adorno, expression is what rules form and *a priori* mimesis. In his view of expression as *a priori*, his notion of aesthetics becomes qualitatively different from the theories of aesthetic in which subjectivity is *a priori*. From this perspective, his notion of expression integral to aesthetic suggests “an aesthetical rationality as fundamental to the human moral” in which his notion of expression “is a reflection about the limits of reason in front of opaque objectivity of suffering which is only partially exposed by the senses.”<sup>90</sup>

In relation to *Philosophy of Modern Music*, Adorno considers Schoenberg’s *espressivo* different from Romantic expression approaching “genuine emotions of the unconscious”<sup>91</sup> However, in relation to *Aesthetic Theory* he is critical towards psychoanalytical theories which:

“falls short of the phenomenon of art. Psychoanalysis treats artworks as nothing but facts, yet it neglects their own objectivity, their inner consistency, their level of form, their critical impulse, their relation to non physical reality, and, finally, their idea of truth.” (Adorno, 1997 p 9)

From this point of view Adorno differs from Expressionism’s theories of expression which is “regarded as the direct expression of the overwhelming power of the unconscious.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Max Paddison, *History of the Concept of Expression, 2.After 1800*. Oxford Music Online.

<sup>90</sup> Douglas Junior, 2005 p16.

<sup>91</sup> Adorno, pp 38-9.

<sup>92</sup> Max Paddison, *History of the Concept of Expression, 2.After 1800*. Oxford Music Online.

In relation to Expressionism, Adorno states that the manner in which the musical elements were set free from traditional procedures with the belief that these elements inherently expressed something is illusory. For Adorno, the relation between expression and the musical material corresponds to ‘capriciousness and accidentalness.’<sup>93</sup> Another aspect of Adorno’s critique of the Expressionist movement is in relation to the concept of the new in the aspect that within the context of Expressionism, the new was attached to the idea of experimentation - element that Adorno considers essential to technique. For Adorno, the intention of achieving the new in modernism through experimentation implied ‘subjective convictions and psychological character of the artist.’<sup>94</sup> In relation to this idea of experimentation, the fundamental and problematic was:

“the latently traditionalistic belief that [experimentation] would automatically become clear whether the results were a match for what had already been established and could thus legitimates themselves. This concept of experimentation became accepted at the same time it became problematic in its trust in continuity” (Adorno, 1997 p 24)

For Adorno, when the ‘process of doing’ is subordinated to coherence of the musical elements, it will employ methods without having in mind any result.<sup>95</sup> Adorno states that this process implies consciousness about the artist loss of power and the fact that imagination does not have a fixed focus.<sup>96</sup> For Adorno “the truth of the new is situated in the intensionless.”<sup>97</sup> In this regard for Adorno, experimentation has been appropriated by what he calls *isms* (cubism, expressionism, impressionism) which are “schools that replace traditional and institutional authority with an objective authority”, and which does not necessarily culminate in great works.<sup>98</sup> That is why for him the distinction between inconsistency and coherence is important for the production or evaluation of the artwork in which his understanding of ‘knowledge from within’ seems to be essential. However, in *Philosophy of Modern Music*, this coherent approach to the musical material, in which the Schoenberg School is exemplar, demonstrates objectivity as a ‘counter-movement of Expressionism.’<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 90.

<sup>94</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 23.

<sup>95</sup> Adorno 1997 p 24.

<sup>96</sup> Adorno 1997 24.

<sup>97</sup> Adorno 1997 p 26.

<sup>98</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 25.

<sup>99</sup> Adorno, 1987 p 49.

From this perspective Adorno's notion of expression as suffering that he presents in *Aesthetic Theory* does not correspond entirely with his view of Expressionism, which suggests that his notion of expression in *Aesthetic Theory* is developed, perhaps not completely, independent from his musicological approach to Schoenberg in *Philosophy of Modern Music*. One of the reasons that led Adorno to a more differentiated notion of expression from Expressionism is related to his idea of experimentation in relation to coherence, which seems to be in *Aesthetic Theory* fundamental for what he calls the 'transcendental' in the artwork.<sup>100</sup> His critique of Expressionism is based on his criteria for modern art which is the avoidance of effects.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, Adorno's independent view of expression in relation to Expressionism enables him to develop an idea of technique in *Aesthetic Theory* in which the 'artwork draws credit from a praxis that has yet to begin.'<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 78.

<sup>101</sup> Adorno, 1997 p 78.

<sup>102</sup> Adorno 1997 p 83.

## Chapter 4

### Conclusion

Adorno's criticism is a re-reading of a subject, a re-evaluation of history and human relations in late capitalism "animated by the drive for self-preservation."<sup>103</sup> For Adorno, life is distorted in the unbalanced relation between subject and object, since for him there is no possibility of an existence independent of the transsubjective world. In relation to aesthetics, the possibility of a notion of existence without the object has created distortion of perception in which beauty is misperceived. For him, aesthetics contains the object and for that reason it is expressive. In conjoining aesthetics with expression, Adorno's notion of knowledge acquisition is related to both consciousnesses as a form of thought and as a form of bodily action.

Aesthetics in this regard is not only reflective in relation to the mind, but also active in relation to the body. Adorno conceives bodily responses as form of knowledge acquisition qualitatively different from knowledge acquired through reason. In his conception of the object within the subject Adorno conceives an irrational self. Suffering in *Aesthetic Theory* expresses irrationality; it is what cannot be reduced to a concept.<sup>104</sup> It is resultant of the process of domination of nature that, through history, interferes in the individual formation as a deformation of the individual's nature. Such formation/deformation enters in the subject through an impact, an immediate astonishment in which Adorno sees the primordial origin of human action. It is in this way that, Adorno conceives expression as regulative for morality—and by extension for education—produced by aesthetic experience. However, his morality implies a conception of metaphysical experience as an experience of the non-identical, throughout which the individual is capable of perceiving his or her distance (cognitive, aesthetical, and moral) from nature and from others in relation to him or herself. The metaphysical experience acts irrationally and spontaneously in the individual, whose expression is given under an impulse. The impulse is regenerator,

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<sup>103</sup> Cook, 2004 pp 73-4.

<sup>104</sup> Douglas Junior p 2005 p 20.

expressive and it will be the objective and corporeal suffering, through which the individual is capable to diminish its own pain as well as the pain of the other.<sup>105</sup>

Consequently, Adorno's investigation of the suppression of bodily responses in aesthetic experience has consequences for the individual who annihilates morality and the possibility of real experience. In the suppression of morality the process of domination of nature is predominant. The suppression of the object in experience is a cause of dehumanisation, an advance towards a pathological narcissism where suffering, violence, and unfreedom reside; the subject is an "open insanity."<sup>106</sup> He considers the inseparability of subject from object the only condition for existence and morality. This is the primacy of the object in experience.<sup>107</sup>

In *Aesthetic Theory*, the relation of music with social development, history, and consciousness has its roots in Adorno's investigation about the relation between subject and object. For Adorno, history, as nature, is discontinuous and chaotic, which the process of domination of nature tends to rule. If the break with reason is possible only through expression, thus the reconciliation with the chaotic state of history and nature is achieved, preventing the failure of reason into modes of thought that works against the "original" state of discontinuity and chaos. It is throughout Adorno's investigation of the relation between art, expression, and the process of doing that he builds his notion of music as able to impart morality throughout the musical material. For modern music, his notion of musical technique is in close relation with the original state of discontinuity of nature and history. The relation of morality and musical material is in relation to coherence with expression, which is not related to 'right' or 'wrong' as being externally interfering some specific actions, but to critique domination, which tends to rule precisely what has been regarded as 'right' and 'wrong' by the Western aesthetical-historical-philosophical tradition, which in his *Philosophy of Music* appears as *energy* impeding expression.

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<sup>105</sup> Douglas Junior, 2005 p 315.

<sup>106</sup> Cook, 2004 p 84.

<sup>107</sup> Cook, 2004 p 81.

In regard to expression as suffering in *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno's critique to subjectivity amongst Western aesthetical-historical-philosophical tradition is central since, according to Douglas Junior (2005):

- (1) it suppressed the experience as consciousness constitutive of the individual;
- (2) it suppressed knowledge as reflective agent capable to confer awareness of domination;
- (3) it is regarded as being good;

Although Adorno was introduced amongst British and American musicology only during the 1990s, his works are relevant for postmodern musicology because of the increasingly awareness of the importance of music context as dependant upon interdisciplinary narratives, focusing on criticism while decentring technical analysis to confront the artwork in "aesthetical terms".<sup>108</sup>

However, Adorno's approach to music is not only in regard to sociology, the culture industry, or alienation nor a completely detachment from formalism. His comprehension of musical material, as presented in *Philosophy of Modern Music*, is an aesthetic-technical analysis comprising both formalist and historico-critical musicological tendencies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>109</sup> In this regard, through an investigation of his notion of expression as suffering, it is possible to achieve a comprehension of how coherent Adorno is in relating, theory with practice, formalism with historico-criticism in which *Aesthetic Theory* is exemplar.

Adorno's comprehension of the dialectic between subject and object is interdisciplinary and can be incorporated by different areas such as politics, sociology, cultural studies, art, music, environmental sciences, development, and philosophy. However, one of the most important notions of Adorno's theory is, in my opinion, his understanding about the self, his or her functionality, feelings, thinking, and relations. His theory, almost always regarded as pessimistic, reveals a great compassion for human beings and sadness about cruelty. His theory emanates an *aura* that innocently hovers above the reader with love and desire for peace. His attempt to

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<sup>108</sup> Sutbonik 2002 p 237.

<sup>109</sup> Sutbonik, 2002 p 237.

bring a 'better world' might have some residues of romanticism and perhaps this is one reason that makes his *positive dialectics* a utopia. It seems that to reach the most positive aspects of his theory, it is necessary to enter into the deepest and darkest well where death resides, ready to remind that there is always something beyond reasoning present at each instant of life. Moreover, it is an invitation to face the fear of the journey into the well, which seems to comprise the inwards of consciousness and the outwards of the world. His theory is a journey that comprises life and death, suffering and love; whatever side of the journey, it will be a journey through extremes, opposites interacting with each other in tension, the two sides of the coin.

Adorno's comprehension about music in context is an example about how music achieves the expression of these extremes; and modern music, in particular, the consciousness of death. Perhaps, it is his view of consciousness in relation to music that makes Adorno regard it a serious art. Furthermore, his notion of expression as suffering, suggests a physiology of the process of doing, which I believe gives insight into improvisation in contemporary classical composition, a trend that at the time of *Aesthetic Theory*, was not as common as it is now a day. Further, it suggests a healing quality of music, not in the same perspective as music-therapy, but in relation to the artwork alive in cultural activities, processes of musical production and the importance of the artist for society, which might well serve as a justification for his *Aesthetic Theory*.

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