

14. Reading Adorno

CREATING A FREE PUBLIC

GEOFFREY HINCHLIFFE
University of East Anglia, UK

ABSTRACT: In this paper I explore the theme of domination. But rather than taking the theme of domination associated with republican liberty I investigate the idea of domination elaborated by Adorno. In particular, I am interested in how domination can be resisted through the creation of a 'free public'. This is a public space not so much colonised by instrumental reason but a space which permits and enables free activity. I use Kant's concept of freedom as set out in the Critique of Pure Reason to show how freedom is potentially a creative, enabling force. And I explore an example of an unseen public which nevertheless exhibits many of the characteristics of a free public. Such publics may be fleeting and transient but they nevertheless constitute the possibility of hope in the face of Adornian pessimism.

Two Types of Domination

In this paper I want to explore the conditions for what I term ‘cultures of liberty’. Recently, I have been trying to understand and write about a particular interpretation of liberty, commonly called republican liberty, or classical liberty (see Quentin Skinner (1998), J.G.A. Pocock (1975) and most recently, Philip Pettit (1997, 2012). The chief tenet of republican liberty is that one can only be called free providing one is not under the domination of another, or subject to the arbitrary will of another. Liberty does not just consist of negative freedom, the absence of impediments to action; specifically it includes the absence of non-domination by another. If I find myself in a situation where I have to comport myself in a certain way so as not to incur the displeasure of another who has it in his or her power to make things worse for me if she chooses then I am unfree, even though the one to whom I am subject has no need to resort to active interference. Thus, perhaps without my realising it, I live out and enact a culture of servitude. According to the doctrine of republican liberty, then, I am only obliged to follow the dictates of another if I have given him due authority and where that authority is appropriately defined in terms of its scope.

However, the idea of republican liberty could be said to be deficient in so far as not all forms of domination arise from discrete agent-centred relations. In particular, any theory of liber-

ty for the twenty first century cannot ignore Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis of domination in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1979). The domination they identify goes beyond that which arises in which one person might be said to be dependent on another in which there is a relation of power. Rather this domination affects everyone in so far as they live in a culture characterised by a certain version of rationality. Essentially, this takes the form of dominance through instrumental rationality, in which means to ends are invested with supreme value whilst ends are not subject to series scrutiny:

For the Enlightenment, whatever does not conform to the standard of calculability and utility is suspect. So long as it can develop undisturbed by any outward repression, there is no holding it back. In the process it treats its own ideas of human rights exactly as it does older universals. Every spiritual resistance it encounters serves merely to increase its own strength. Which means that enlightenment still recognizes itself even in myths. Whatever myths the resistance may appeal to, by virtue of the very fact that they become arguments in the process of opposition, they acknowledge the principle of dissolvent rationality for which they reproach the Enlightenment. Enlightenment is totalitarian (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979, p. 6).

For Adorno, domination is not just the straightforward triumph of instrumental reason over nature since humankind also end up dominating themselves, through their own rationality. This happens not because rationality is placed at the service of an

initial desire to dominate but because the instrumental nature of that very rationality breeds domination akin to a second nature or second skin. Humans cannot *help* to do otherwise than subject nature to technology and to subject each other through the administering of life from cradle to grave. Thus the promise of enlightenment turns into a dis-utopia in which the promise of liberation is converted into servitude that has a number of dimensions.

I do not wish to give here a substantive argument to try and convince doubters of the salience and currency of Adorno's analysis³⁵. I am going to assume that whatever is dubious about some Adorno's ideas in general (e.g. many of us might take issue with him over his dim view of jazz music and the portrayal of the rationality and cunning of Odysseus in the account of the *Iliad* is possibly overdrawn³⁶) there is enough in those ideas that resonate today.

³⁵ Made, of course, with his colleague Max Horkheimer in Los Angeles in the early 1940's.

³⁶ Odysseus is portrayed as an earlier exponent of instrumental rationality in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* but not all parts of the narrative fit well with this view. For example, Odysseus is powerfully assisted by his guardian, the goddess Athena. When some of the suitors (towards the end of the tale) try to combine to prevent their deaths at the hands of their avenger, Odysseus, they hurl spears at him all at once; but Athena helpfully deflects the path of the projectiles so they harmlessly strike a pillar nearby, thus enabling the hero to despatch them with his bow. He does indeed use his reason to outwit his foes; but not without help. Athena also gives Odysseus a helpful enhancement when he needs to give a good impression when addressing others: "She gave

Two short examples will suffice. First, in an illuminating article on Adorno's notion of disenchantment, Alison Stone (2006) points out that the relation between man and nature is more complex for Adorno than might seem at first sight. It is not simply the case that nature is disenchanted through the operation of instrumental reason and technologies so that all mystery and otherness is driven out. What also takes place is a re-enchantment in which nature is duly re-invested with mystery and wonder. But this re-enchantment takes place on human terms so that any mystery in nature is something that we have decided is sufficiently interesting or special to avow. And if nature is placed at a distance then it is we who can decide on how remote or close it is to be. Wildernesses are the creation of humankind so that the idea of 'letting nature be' is one that is difficult for a species (namely us) that cannot help but dominate nature, one way or another³⁷.

him ampler stature and presence, and over his head she made his hair curl and cluster like a hyacinth" (Odyssey, Ch VI). The point is that Odysseus has some god-like qualities in terms of his dispositions that fully merit this enhancement of his stature (it is one of the earliest examples of a make-over). On the one hand he is envied and on the other hand loved by some of the gods; his cunning and wit is never quite of this world. He certainly thinks both tactically and strategically – but this is at the service of the values of honour, trust and his own lordly status. It is less clear that for Odysseus instrumental thinking becomes an end in itself and it is this mind-set that leads to self-domination of which Adorno writes in his essays collected together in *Culture Industry* (1991).

³⁷ Near to where the author lives lies Redgrave Fen, a nature reserve on the Norfolk/Suffolk borders in the east of England. It is managed by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust. In the late 1980's when I first visited it I was

The other example lies in the way that man's dominating tendencies are turned onto himself so that, in Adorno's view, little or no aspect of life escapes *administration*: "Amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work. It is sought after as an escape from the mechanised work process, and to recruit strength in order to be able to cope with it again... so that leisure experiences are inevitably after-images of the work process itself" (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 137). And although work is now mechanised differently from when those words were written in the early 1940's, the processes of work and leisure are now more fused through the ubiquity of communications technologies, with the same applications often serving a dual role concurrently. Moreover, if one acknowledges that Adorno's analysis of the fetishism of commodities in respect of both aesthetic and cultural experience does indeed have plausibility (Adorno, 1991: 29-60), then we also are obliged to acknowledge that the promise of Enlightenment has

struck by the quiet beauty of a small river (the River Waveney) flanked on either side by willows which could be viewed from a wooden bridge. But a few years later the Trust decided that the Fen should be restored to its original character as a peat fen in order to attract wildlife appropriate for fenland. This involved removing a lot of scrub from the bogland and also necessitated the removal of all the willows from the riverside (although a nearby wood was spared). The problem was that the Fen was attracting the wrong kind of wildlife and so the logic of developers was applied fairly ruthlessly in order to rectify this error that nature had unwittingly perpetrated on itself. At the same time a large visitor's centre was constructed along with full parking facilities. It is still a pleasant place to visit: but one is in no doubt at all that Redgrave Fen is now 'managed'.

turned into a dystopia that has invaded and commandeered the domain of the aesthetic and of popular culture³⁸.

Jurgen Habermas criticises Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis on the grounds that it fails to appreciate the differentiation of rationality into different spheres (aesthetic, normative, judicial) which carry their own logos (Habermas, 1987). But of course, it is just this differentiation that Adorno's analysis challenges: the point about the logic of domination is that separate spheres of influence are difficult to develop and sustain. The trajectory of the history of post-war art, for example, does nothing to repudiate Adorno's thesis. Why, then, does DE still resonate for us in the 21st century? The answer, I think, is our readiness to respond to and recognise the suggestion that our lives still remain in some way administered and that however much there are those who remain impervious to the kinds of cramping entanglements described by Adorno, there is some truth in what is being claimed. In addition, Habermas, I feel,

³⁸ This has nothing to do with a lack of interest in the arts. The kind of domination that Adorno is talking about doesn't turn everyone into philistines nor does it detract from the interest shown by the millions of visitors to art galleries each year (over half a million visitors alone attended an exhibition of Matisse at the Tate Modern in 2014). Rather it speaks of the marginalisation of aesthetic ideas in public life, the way in which these are framed and codified so that those taking political or commercial decisions (or, indeed, educational decisions in the teaching of art) need never feel too troubled by what artists have to say. Pop Art captures this phenomenon without ever really going beyond it; it reflects back to us what we already know, even if it sometimes does this in interesting ways.

too easily relies on the accusation of ‘performative contradiction’ - namely that his protagonists have to rely on what they claim has become degenerate, namely critical reason. What their analysis demonstrates is not so much a contradiction but the powerlessness of philosophy in the face of the truth it discerns.

Resisting domination: The idea of a ‘free public’

It might be argued that even if we accept the validity of the arguments in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, we are not thereby dominated. People have become adept at seeking private domains of family, children and companionship on the one hand and, on the other, often derive considerable satisfaction from cultivating areas of expertise that may render at least tolerable the imperatives of the workplace. But even if both types of claims are valid, this merely re-enforces the arguments of the *Dialectic*. The fact that we retreat into and find solace in the domain of the private or the expert where the world may be kept at bay attests to our resilience but scarcely to our emancipation. What is missing, it seems, is a domain of public space that offers the possibility of free activity that can develop into non-predictable directions and which may start to fulfil the promise of enlightenment. Habermas himself, of course, undertook such a study early on his career in his PhD thesis which eventually became published in English as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1992). I do not wish to rehearse the arguments of this book except to say that

in it Habermas locates the high point of the public sphere back in the 18th and early 19th centuries; since that time he acknowledges that the public domain has become progressively administered in different directions by both the state and by corporate institutions. By the time of the late twentieth century (to say nothing of the 21st), the public sphere had become a shadow of its former self.

However, I want to suggest that maybe we should revive our thinking of the public sphere, that is, with a view to erecting and constructing a public (not private) domain in which life is not administered. The idea of a public sphere is one which provides a counter-weight to domination, a space from which no-one is excluded and in which liberty can be developed and exercised. That is, a public space which recovers a domain for freedom in addition to the private domain. To use the terms of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the logic of domination has not, I think succeeded in entirely colonising private space but it has colonised the public domain. There is therefore a need to recreate and re-fashion the public sphere both for the testing of validity claims and for the expression of freedom. Communicative action, without such a sphere is destined to remain strategic and instrumental. Aesthetic forms of discourse are fated to be overcome by a discourse of fetishism unless there is space in which the value of aesthetic expression as a commodity simply doesn't count.

I call this idea of the public sphere a 'free public'. The reason is that, as Habermas has shown, the idea of a 'public' is one

that is irreducibly normative. Thus I do not think any argument that advances the proposition that we no longer have a public sphere can be convincing. What has happened is not so much the disappearance of the public sphere but its transformation into what amounts to a laboratory in which humans are subject to a bewildering array of controls, guidelines, protocols, codes of practice, instructions and surveillance. This is not confined to institutions but affects street life itself; the *flaneur* is confronted by a range of signage (even more so in countries like Wales) and street camera inspection which, whilst not eliminating the joys of urban aimlessness entirely do severely restrict it. (The advent of the high-visibility jacket, in all its ubiquity, is another detail that reinforces the sense that even if oneself is not being directed then someone else is.) From government health directives on diet to the regimentation of teaching and learning in publicly-funded schools the public sphere has been transformed into a public laboratory populated by subjects³⁹.

³⁹ It is tempting to make a direct parallel with the human subject characterised as 'bare life' by Giorgio Agamben (1998) particularly as lives in the public laboratory are denuded of all responsibility and independence. It is not that individuals are not respected: but the respect accorded to them is by virtue of their being bearers of human life rather than based on respect for persons who independently can make their own decisions. However, there is still a private sphere in which individuals are less subject to control. This protection was not afforded to Jews in Europe under Nazi tutelage since, as Agamben himself explains, their very privacy was denied to them.

A free public is a sphere not free from laws and the authority that accompanies them but it is free from surveillance and prescription. It is a space (or indeed, an imagined space) in which persons are drawn for the sole purpose of making transactions with others with no other purpose in mind than that of self-enactment and enabling the self-enactment of others. It needs no other justification. In particular, members of a free public are not united by any kind of common goal other than that of preserving the space which permits them to act in this way. A free public, then is not a community. For the individuals of a public may have very little in common in terms of background and shared prejudice; indeed it is precisely because of this lack of collectivity that a public space is so important. Its flourishing is not premised on the idea that each has a common identity. A free public space enables all those whom precisely do not share a common identity to engage in unspecified transactions with unspecified outcomes⁴⁰.

In the next section I will elaborate Kant's concept of freedom and show how this connects up with the idea of a free public. In doing so I take issue with Adorno's analysis of Kant's concept of freedom. In the next section I will explore the idea of creating such a public. In what follows the term 'public' refers to a free public in the sense described, unless otherwise specified.

⁴⁰ This paragraph draws on the ideas of Michael Oakeshott in his *On Human Conduct*. Free agency is the "practice of agency without further specification" (Oakeshott (1975): p. 60).

Kant's concept of freedom

Kant's idea of freedom derives from his distinction between the empirical and the intelligible. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* he says:

...a subject belonging to the sensible world (would) have, first, an empirical world, whereby its actions, as appearances, stand in thoroughgoing connection with other appearances in accordance with unvarying laws of nature.....Secondly, we should also have to allow the subject an intelligible character, by which it is indeed the cause of those same actions as appearances, but which does not itself stand under any conditions of sensibility, and is not itself appearance (Kant, 1933, A539/B567 p. 468).

Kant goes on to explain that in the capacity of intelligibility, humankind possesses the faculties of reason and understanding and the former (namely reason) enables us to formulate ideas and has its own causality. Thus whereas the understanding is deployed as the essential mechanism for converting appearances into objects, the role of reason is a realm of genuine spontaneity. It is unconditioned and is directed towards the formulation of human ends and the creation of ideas. He explains that freedom is not simply to be viewed 'negatively' as merely independent of empirical conditions but it must also be viewed "as the power of originating a series of events" and as such can initiate "a beginning in a series of appearances" (A554/B582 p. 476).

Kant's concept of the intelligible is not, of course, without its problems. Even Kant's early critics professed themselves at a loss to comprehend the bifurcation of the person into what appears to be two selves (see Allison, 1990, p. 29). Moreover, Kant himself avers that the realm of the intelligible is timeless and therefore has no history. On the other hand he also says that there is a relation between the intelligible and the empirical: "reason is the abiding condition of all those actions of the will under which man appears.....every action is the immediate effect of the intelligible character of pure reason" (A553/B581 p. 476). Thus the intelligible is not invoked fitfully and then left aside: it accompanies those actions of ours, especially those directed towards value formation and understanding, orientated to action.

The best way of understanding the idea of the intelligible (at least from the standpoint of freedom) is to realise that freedom cannot be equated to an object of knowledge. From an epistemological perspective our knowledge of appearances is mediated through the forms of sensibility and through the operation of the understanding by means of the deployment of the categories. But the doctrine of freedom that Kant is proposing is dependent on a switch of perspectives, from the epistemic to the agentic. Thus we can experience the power of our freedom and witness its effects but we cannot *know* our freedom in the sense of its being an object for us. From the agentic perspective, there is nothing corresponding to appearances that help to establish the possibility of objective knowledge from the epistemic perspective. Nevertheless it is this agentic capability that

ensures we are not subject to empirical causality⁴¹ and that enable us to set off a train of events. Even if, from the empirical perspective (to switch perspectives back to the epistemic) these events can be explained in terms of a causal chain this does not detract from the agentic perspective. What this means, I think, is that although we may well be able to explain events post-hoc, the power of freedom (especially its power to initiate new beginnings) entails that we cannot predict human actions with any reliability⁴².

It is this notion of freedom that Kant refers to as the causality of freedom (and also sometimes as the causality of reason). The workings of an unfettered reason constitute precisely the power of freedom. But in addition to elaborating this doctrine of what might be termed a radical freedom, Kant also aligns freedom with the idea of a public as well. It is reason as a causality that is invoked in Kant's essay *What is Enlightenment*, where he condemns that immaturity of being dependent on the views of others and where he advocates: "the freedom to make public use of one's freedom in all matters [...] the public use

⁴¹ i.e. the causality outlined in the Second Analogy of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

⁴² The issue of 'timeless' character of the intelligible presents complex issues that cannot be fully treated here. My own 'solution', roughly, is that free actions are timeless in the sense that they are not subject empirical succession and causality (otherwise there could never be an initiation of something new) but that there is a time order in which agency is subject to succession but not causality.

of man's freedom must always be free and it alone can bring enlightenment among men" (Kant, 1970, p. 55)⁴³.

Of course, for Kant the public sphere was regarded as an open space in which one could (or could not) realise one's freedom depending on whether one had the courage to challenge and to imagine differently. The public sphere offered at least the opportunity to "have the courage to use your own understanding" (p. 54). It did not occur to Kant that we might have to use our reason to create a public – I shall explore this idea shortly.

Adorno considers these claims of Kant in his *Negative Dialectics*, only to dismiss them. He comments from a historical materialist perspective first of all: he notes that "philosophy had an unexpressed mandate from the bourgeoisie to find transparent grounds for freedom" but in doing so merely ceding freedom to the very rationality that restricts that freedom (Adorno, 1973, p. 214). Later in the chapter on Kant he goes on to claim that thought is never free and that there is always coercion of both what is thought and of the thinker so that "philosophy and society are interrelated in philosophy's inmost core" (p. 233). He then goes on to make fairly standard observations about the bifurcation of the two selves, echoing criticisms made during Kant's lifetime and subsequently.

⁴³ It is always a pleasure to read this particular essay of Kant, in which the austere Prussian intellectual of Königsberg shows a radicalism that would have been quite foreign to the mature Hegel.

The point I want to make is this. If Adorno is right about the logic of domination and if he is also right about dismissing the causality of reason then we are deprived of one possible escape route from domination. For I interpret Kant as holding out this possibility: that through its own causality and through its deployment in the public realm (the two go together) reason can assist us in resisting the baleful effects of instrumental rationality. It holds the possibility of both a critique and a transformation of the self that is both the perpetrator and victim of a constraining rationality. To use a term often favoured by writers on Adorno, reason provides us with a way of freeing ourselves from the entanglements of a dominating rationality.

But I do not pretend that these remarks constitute anything like a last word on the topic. Although I think Adorno is mistaken in his dismissal of the realm of the intelligible and that he deprives us of any weapons that we need to counter the plight of modernity as expressed in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, these hopes are a far cry from establishing a concept of reason that is substantive, cogent and which goes some way to meet the reservations of sceptics. However, there is one route of justification which I think would be a dead end: namely, one which deflects the putatively inflated claims of reason by bringing it down to earth, by secularising it (so to speak) so that its role is one of reflecting on norms, behaviour, best practice and the like. The effect of this route may well be to satisfy the sceptics but it would also deprive reason of all critical power of the kind adumbrated in *What is Enlightenment?*

Creating a public

Are there examples of the creation of a public sphere that we can recognise in times of modernity? In his book, *Music and Politics*, John Street introduces some reflections on the American Anthology of Folk Music. This was a collection of country music in a three album boxed set of LPs that was put together by Harry Smith, an American artist and collector. All the recordings were made between 1928 and 1933 and when Smith released his anthology in 1952, many of the performers has already fallen into obscurity. Some (Blind Lemon Jefferson, the Carter Family) are reasonably well known today, many others are only known to folk music archivists. The music varies from blues, Cajun, hillbilly and traditional folk and whilst the recordings and vocals are unsophisticated the musicianship of the guitar, banjo and fiddle payers is evident. The music is 'simple' but not especially easy to play and perform. There is no jazz and the music for the most part is rural rather than urban (Street, p. 100). It is not the kind of music for listening to in the living room at home, but rather the kind that needs to be played and listened to live, in a public space.

The claims made for this music were made most forcibly by Greil Marcus, an American music critic and writer. Marcus detected "the sound of another country, glimpsed from afar, a yearning for peace and home, a democratic oasis unsullied by commerce or greed," (Marcus, 1997, p. 21). For Smith had succeeded in presenting an image of inclusivity and rough equality. None of the performers were prioritised over others,

the performers included different styles of music, white and black. In the main, the lyrics are of a narrative and descriptive quality rather than expressive. There is no purposeful attempt to invoke sentiment that we associate with much of modern pop and rock music. Although there is a distancing between ourselves, now, and those performers as they were then, the performers themselves seem distanced from each other. In other words, the music does not express a *community* of feeling and what is “glimpsed from afar” is not, I think, a lost *collectivity*, that we no longer have but that we yearn for still. Hence it is the idea of an ‘invisible *republic*’ (rather than an invisible community) that does seem apt. Marcus goes on to say that what this music presents us with is “a kind of public secret.....a clearly recognisable America within the America of institutional majoritarian power.....it is a democracy of manners – a democracy of how people carry themselves, of how they appear in public” (p. 117). It should be noted, in this respect, that the performers do not appear to be interested in winning the approval of an audience. It is a world where you take people as you find them, where everyone believes that fate and chance plays a part. A couple of examples of lyrics will suffice. This is a song by Bascam Lunar Lunsford entitled *I wish I were a Mole in the Ground*:

I wish I was a mole in the ground

Yes, I wish I was a mole in the ground

If I's a mole in the ground I'd root that mountain down

And I wish I was a mole in the ground

Oh, Tippy wants a nine dollar shawl

Yes, Tippy wants a nine dollar shawl

When I come o'er the hill with a forty dollar bill

Baby, where you been so long?

Here is another example, by Clarence Ashley, *The Coo Coo*

Bird:

Gonna build me a log cabin

on a mountain so high

So I can see Willie

as he goes on by

Um hmm hmm...

Oh the coo-coo is a pretty bird

She wobbles when she flies

She never hollers coo-coo

'Til the fourth day of July⁴⁴

Thus the music evokes unfamiliar meanings and cadences, at one remove from the familiar, comfortable world of ubiquitous popular music. Although the music may not be equivalent in complexity Beethoven or Schoenberg (to evoke two of Adorno's favoured composers) its voice is not dependent on the familiar styles and meanings of administered culture. Marcus wants to make a further claim, which I shan't discuss here, namely that both the spirit and even some of the lyrics feed into Bob Dylan's *Basement Tapes* and I think that it is indeed the case that elements of the 'invisible republic' do find themselves in his music. This was apparent more recently in the music he played on his *Theme Time Radio* series of a few years ago – an eclectic and relatively obscure mixture of Americana, interspersed with seemingly wise and homely comments and advice which for the most part remained aloof from more sophisticated contemporary trends in art and culture.

Of course, critics hold that Marcus' claims for the American Anthology are overblown, that Harry Smith's project was never anything other than a commercial enterprise and the claims made for the artists are unsustainable (see Street, p. 105). But

⁴⁴ It is worth noting that in this song no domination of nature is hinted at, but rather an accommodation

these criticisms miss the point: the invisible republic that we see as being invoked and exemplified by the performers in *American Anthology* is something that we ourselves are *imagining*. And we know now, from the work of Benedict Anderson, that imagined communities are not ephemeral but can take real substance in the form of nationhood. For Anderson, all communities are imagined to the extent that whilst non-one knows most of the members in it, each lives their lives in the image of the community (Anderson, 1991 p. 6). In its capacity as imagined, a community of nationhood develops a “deep, horizontal comradeship” that crosses boundaries of inequality and status. These imaginings have motivational power: persons both kill and die for their sake, as the highest honour that can have a greater personal resonance than even the pull of family and children.

However, a republic in the form of a public domain is not the same as a nation. For whilst this too has to be imagined and invented, a republic does not have the weight of collectivity that accrues to the concept of nation. To be part of a public is not the same as having a communal experience and substantive beliefs, no matter how venerable. In a republic these are open to scrutiny, doubt and criticism. A republic is a risky place to live and fellow-feeling arises from acknowledgement that someone has stood their ground and comported themselves in a way that does not set out to curry favour and to seek approval. In a republic, no-one is feted for merely expressing conventional truths. It is not easy to see how persons could kill and

die for the glory of a 'space', even if it is one in which liberty may be exercised.

Conclusion

It will be clear that the invisible republic referred to is a version of the 'free public' discussed earlier. Certainly the republic of these American musicians - invisible or otherwise - seems a long way from Kant. But in Kantian terminology, it is the causality of reason that can initiate new beginnings and that can also, I suggest, create a public. It is possible to do this through the transactions of free agency in which what is being explored and created is not a common aim, purpose or agenda but rather where the purpose is merely 'agency without further specification' as Oakeshott termed it. The 'public' is created through those transactions and exchanges, through the recognition of each other's products of agency (in the example mentioned, the products are musical). In this way, an often fleeting, transient, space can arise in which no-one is excluded, where anybody can join the conversation.

Conversations that establish a free public can be profoundly educative. It is not only that a vocabulary that has to be learned if one wishes to engage; it is also that the transformation from private to public is accompanied by a transformation of outlook as one becomes exposed to ideas, vocabularies and perspectives previously un-encountered. The unpredictability and lack of any prescribed outcomes becomes a strength as far as

learning is concerned because participants see each other as co-creators of a conversation so that although everyone is learning, no-one is a 'learner'.

Such a public is also free of both types of domination. Although some will no doubt have more influence than others, there is no structure wherein one group of persons are obliged to become beholden to another group or individual. And since this a domain of free agency without further specification then instrumental rationality does not dominate. To be sure, individuals will employ means-end reasoning in order to achieve sought for goals but such rationality does not acquire the characteristic of a shared goal in which the process of achievement becomes a driving force against which nothing else counts.

If Adorno's analysis of domination resonates for us, nevertheless I maintain that Kant's analysis of freedom gives us a possible platform to build hope.

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Geoffrey Hinchliffe is an Honorary lecturer at the School of Education, University of East Anglia. He has taught in adult education and currently teaches undergraduates and undertakes