

*Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture: Essays on Critical Theory and Music.* By Max Paddison. Kahn & Averill. 1996. pp. 149, £12.95,

This collection of essays is an important adjunct to Max Paddison's splendid 1993 study, *Adorno's Aesthetic of Music* (Cambridge U.P.). Indeed, it is also three testaments to both the substance and enduring relevance of Adorno's writings on music as well as to Paddison's enduring perspicuous engagement with them. The collection accomplishes a good deal: each of the four essays provides either an elaborated return to themes from the earlier book or an expansion of the groundwork upon which that study arose. Still, it is the collection as a whole, and wholly independent of the 1993 book, which is to be recommended as a most fruitful prolegomenon to Adorno's aesthetics of music. Paddison's achievement is to have articulated the continuities as well as discontinuities in that aesthetic by locating them within the larger confines and aspirations of Adorno's critical social theory. This means that Paddison successfully induces us to read Adorno's writings as formulations within an ongoing intellectual project: that of critical theory's special relevance for aesthetics.

Adorno is offered here as model and method, however imperfect in each regard, for a practice of critical reflection upon cultural artifacts, in this case musical works. Paddison's aim is to consider, by way of Adorno's reflections on modernism and mass culture, the idea of a critical theory of music. The lead essay, 'Critical Theory and Music', addresses just this possibility by first distinguishing what makes critical theory unique as a mode of theorizing (its self-reflection and implication with its object), and then asserts that critical theory's most promising aspect is precisely its kinship with the musical object. 'A critical theory of music thus becomes a parallel process to that of the musical work itself. Just as the work of art may be understood as the embodiment of the historical intertwining of subjectivity and objectivity, so would a critical theory of music—aim to illuminate and interpret that relationship' (p. 25). In short, this passage reveals that Paddison pays a good deal of attention to Adorno's formulations regarding the mimetic character of art.

The second essay, 'Adorno's Aesthetics of Modernism', focuses more narrowly on the specific dynamics within Adorno's Aesthetic Theory. Here Paddison provides a tremendously lucid premise of a notoriously difficult book. And in this regard it is as fine a place as any to learn of the major themes at stake in the aesthetic theory. In the middle of the essay, however, when Paddison steers his discussion back to the quest for a critical theory of music. I believe he offers an overly cautious and hence quiescent version of Adorno's aesthetics. He writes: 'Adorno maintains [that] art may itself be understood as a form of social theory—mute, however, until brought to speech via philosophical interpretation and aesthetic evaluation' (p. 62). I fear that 'philosophical interpretation and aesthetic evaluation' is far too weak a characterization of whatever force it is that Adorno intends to be capable of dislodging from the precincts of the artwork its mute and embedded social theory. I imagine instead that for Adorno what will be required to articulate the artwork will be some force at least as powerful as whatever it is that gives rise to and maintains its continuing mute condition. Further, one might even hazard that muteness is, for Adorno, a necessary condition for the advent of art. What needs

interpretation then, and what calls for an aesthetic theory, is not some message or content lurking just beneath the mute surface of this or that artwork, but the mute condition itself as precisely that which induces the artwork to appear to speak. (And isn't that a very odd thing for music, of all things, to express?) Yet in the conclusion to the essay Paddison insightfully acknowledges a parallel between the limits of interpretation and those of Adorno's own reflections, and suggests there is something to be learned in why neither suffices to resolve the enigmatic muteness of art: The failure of Adorno to break out of the hermeneutic circle and to bridge the gap between analysis and interpretation points instead to a fundamental problem of music analysis itself. Perhaps his most valuable contribution to music theory has been to focus on this dilemma: that is, the problem which faces technical analysis when it tries to move beyond the closed circle of the work and involve itself in anything more than what Adorno has called 'humanistic stocktaking' (p. 80).

The third essay, 'Adorno, Popular Music and Mass Culture', considers what Paddison and many others find to be the largest limitation within Adorno's aesthetics of music, if not in his work as a whole: his infamous, thorough dismissal of so-called popular music. Paddison explains that though it was extremely shortsighted of Adorno to fail to perceive in popular music the remotest chance of its ever being 'authentic'—which would have entailed that the music somehow display a modicum of critical self-reflection—still, the forecast for popular music is no more encouraging than that for serious music: 'If Adorno's diagnosis of the predicament of music in the twentieth century is correct ... then a critical, self-reflective music using the material of popular culture can no more escape the contradiction formulated by Adorno than can the serious avant-garde' (p. 105). That contradiction is more like an inevitability, since modern music, for Adorno, finds itself either in flight from, or in embrace of the commodity form.

The final essay, 'Critical Reflections on Adorno', responds to a number of judgments leveled against Adorno's work in order to argue against them that it nonetheless remains among the most vital sources for contemporary music theory. In sum, Paddison has assembled an accessible and timely collection of reflections on Adorno's aesthetics of music in service of showing just how it might compose a framework for the present critical interpretation of culture.

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