

# **Love (for pop music) won't tear us apart again:**

Nietzsche and Adorno on pop music

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# Introduction

Since 2015, Spotify, one of the biggest music streaming platforms, has incorporated an annual feature, which allows the users of this platform to see personalised insights into their listening habits, such as their favourite genres or artists, or the amount of time spent listening. Apart from a pretty-looking report, users can reflect on their consumption of music and activity on the app. Along the lines of this reflection thanks to Spotify Wrapped, there arises a tension between the unquantifiable, symbolic value and cultural significance that music has against the desire of turning it into numerical data. This tension is further exemplified by the findings of a study on Western popular music and its patterns and metrics observed throughout fifty years.<sup>1</sup> The authors of this study applied a highly mathematical methodology in order to unveil these regularities of this particular genre, and their results indicate a strong tendency towards conventionalism, homogenisation, and recognition of trends.

Taking into account that pop music is quite possibly the most affected by this notion of standardisation, a dilemma presents itself: has pop music become overly standardised and homogenised losing its symbolic and cultural value? Reflecting further, I intend to use this paper to ground this dilemma in philosophical terms. The critique of music in terms of numbers and patterns can be associated with Theodor Adorno's concept of the 'culture industry' from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.<sup>2</sup> This concept encapsulates the process of commodification of culture and how that affects its aesthetic value in a framework of industrial production, distribution and consumption that are primarily meant to generate profit. Nonetheless, this perspective does not allow for individual taste and cultural meaning of pop music. It also does not account for the diversity of genres within pop music that the study of Serrà et al. could not investigate.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the culture industry is an embodiment of the institutionalisation of art and culture, which is notable, yet does not encompass the entirety of artistic expression and aesthetic experience that music enables human beings.

Having briefly delineated the need for a more nuanced approach towards pop music, I would like to incorporate the concept of the Dionysian from *The Birth of Tragedy* by Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche introduces concepts of the Apollonian and the Dionysian,

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Serrà et al., "Measuring the Evolution of Contemporary Western Popular Music," *Scientific Reports* 2, no. 1 (July 26, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1038/srep00521>.

<sup>2</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Allen Lane, 1973). 120-167.

<sup>3</sup> Serrà et al., "Measuring the Evolution of Contemporary Western Popular Music." 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche: The First Complete and Authorised English Translation*, ed. Oscar Levy, trans. WM. A. Hausmann, 3rd ed., vol. One: *The Birth of Tragedy* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., New York: Macmillan Company, 1923).

which mean to demonstrate the twofold nature of human experience and artistic expression. The Dionysian, as opposed to the Apollonian, is the element that represents the primal, brute even, side of human beings that de-individuates human beings and creates a sense of unity. This element can be considered to represent the ecstatic states, strong emotions, that are hidden in the everyday reality by the collected Apollonian. The reason why I mention the Dionysian is to propose an alternative approach towards pop music that counterbalances the rationalised approach of the culture industry, the Dionysian element celebrates the emotional, chaotic, and bodily aspects of the musical experience. The Dionysian as an alternative understanding of pop music allows for analysing pop music beyond its mode of production, and account for its emotional impacts that it has on the audiences. Therefore, this thesis is an attempt to answer the following research question:

*To what extent can the Dionysian, as conceptualised by Friedrich Nietzsche, serve as an alternative understanding of contemporary pop music to the culture industry by Theodor Adorno?*

The goal of this thesis is to apply the Dionysian as an element that demonstrates that pop music can be evaluated beyond its mode of production. In this pursuit, I intend to bring forth the contrast between Adorno's and Nietzsche's view. Contrasting their views involves examination of how pop music is understood through its structure and its power to affect individuals. Through this contrast, I aim to delineate how the Dionysian musical experience can be useful in understanding pop music despite its commodified nature. Continuously, this thesis is predominantly addressed to critics of pop music, that assume this genre to be a form of shallow, oversexualised entertainment, rather than interacting with it on a critical level.

I will start with a chapter delving into Adorno's critique of the culture industry. Delineating its origins in the Critical Theory, I intend to present how the concept of the culture industry shifted the thinking of arts and culture from special, almost sacred human creations to objects of mass production and consumption. Continuously, I will focus on Adorno's views on music, and music is affected by the culture industry in order to present implications for the contemporary pop music. This will be followed by a chapter introducing a Nietzschean concept of the Dionysian and its application to contemporary pop music while considering its potential as an alternative to Adorno's approach. This will be executed through the analysis of the Dionysian element and its manifestation in art, and how this can be linked with experiences that pop music creates today. The final chapter will build on the

Dionysian being an alternative to the culture industry. It also investigates how these two concepts can be combined while reflecting on contemporary pop music. In doing so, I aim to present Adorno's critique and Nietzsche's concept of the Dionysian as contrasting, yet complementary approaches towards today's music.

Additionally, I would like to include a disclaimer, that popular music and pop music are not used interchangeably. Pop music, for the purpose of this thesis, is defined as a particular genre that has emerged mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and can be recognised by its mass appeal, commercial orientation, simplicity of melodies and lyrics. It is a sub-genre of popular music, that is a term including several sub-genres that are appreciated by large audience, such as Electronic Dance Music (EDM), rock, or hip-hop.

# 1 Chapter 1: Adorno and the industry of pop music

## 1.1 The culture industry as mass deception

### 1.1.1 Dialectic and the emergence of the culture industry

The concept of the culture industry was introduced in the collaborative work *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Adorno and Max Horkheimer in order to broaden their critique of modern society.<sup>5</sup> The authors, having seen the violence of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that ensued from the rise of monopoly capitalism since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, delineated the Enlightenment as a failed project of humanity. The project failed, because instead of bringing forth scientific development and eliminating prejudice, it ultimately turned itself against humanity and facilitated dominance of instrumental reason, novel forms of repression and commodification, alienation, and social control. The Enlightenment is here understood as a failed undertaking, because instead of eliminating the prejudice and bias and replacing it with science, it has created another myth – the myth of reason, which contradicts its own principles against mystical thinking, “myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology”.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, dialectics comes from the opposing forces in enlightenment rationality, such as reason and myth, domination and emancipation, individuality and conformity. *Dialectics of Enlightenment* entails the dynamic process of these forces interacting in such a way that leading towards reason and progress also produces forms of irrationality and domination, which defeats the goal of the Enlightenment project.

Adorno and Horkheimer through *Dialectic* intended to examine various elements of modern society in order to present a comprehensive critique of modernity and their concern of how this might unfold in the future. One of the central aspects of their critique demonstrate a system of mass production and distribution of cultural objects, for which they coined the term of the culture industry. The industrialisation of culture can be seen as an aftermath of the dominance of myth of reason, as the said industry functions on the principles of standardisation, commodification, and mass production, that are no different than other sectors. The emergence of the culture industry is derived from the rapid development of technology forces, and its importance in the economy and relations of production. The technological dominance is seen as the overarching coercive nature of society, which “has made technology of the cultural industry no more than the achievement of standardisation

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<sup>5</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception.” 120.

<sup>6</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “Introduction,” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Allen Lane, 1973), xvi.

and mass production, sacrificing whatever involved a distinction between the logic of the work, and that of the social system".<sup>7</sup> In the chapter "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception", authors pinpointed how the industrial processes, which are guided by efficiency, profit-maximisation and satisfaction of mass audience, are to be found in the construction and circulation of cultural objects. Nonetheless, it needs to be emphasised that the term "industry" ought to be understood as an enclosed and comprehensive system of production and consumption of culture.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the culture industry encompasses various forms of culture, such as movies, music, literature and shapes them into commodities according to the standards of this system.

### 1.1.2 Deception and manipulation

The reason why the culture industry is a part of the critique of modernity is because it presents how modern societies aim to manipulate and control the masses through the means of media and entertainment. This concept allows for envisioning the mechanism of reinforcement of conformity and loss of individuality that is masked under the form of cultural objects. Adorno observed that the object does not belong to a person, but it is the opposite, the illusion created by the industry makes people believe that the objects exist for them.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, the culture industry encompasses various forms of culture, such as movies, music, and literature and shapes them into "digestible" commodities that are meant to entertain the masses. These cultural objects are characterised by fragmentation and loss of coherence of artworks. The industry manufactures its products in such a manner that they are limited to a series of repetitive effects to evoke a predictable emotion.<sup>10</sup> This superficial form of entertainment solely fills the empty time of powerless masses consuming the produce of the said industry.<sup>11</sup> This mode of bringing cultural objects forth leads to the loss of spontaneity and imagination, which become default features of these objects.<sup>12</sup> The culture

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<sup>7</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." 121.

<sup>8</sup> Juliane Rebentisch and Felix Trautman, "The Idea of the Culture Industry," in *The Routledge Companion to the Frankfurt School*, ed. Peter Gordon E., Espen Hammer, and Alex Honneth, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 26, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429443374>.

<sup>9</sup> Theodor Adorno, "Commodity Music Analysed," in *Quasi Una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London, New York: Verso, 1992), 45.

<sup>10</sup> György Markus, "Adorno and Mass Culture: Autonomous Art Against the Culture Industry," *Thesis Eleven*, no. 86 (August 2006): 83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513606067786>.

<sup>11</sup> Theodore A. Gracyk, "Adorno, Jazz, and the Aesthetics of Popular Music," *The Musical Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (January 1, 1992): 529, <https://doi.org/10.1093/mq/76.4.526>.

<sup>12</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." 126.

industry, through its formulae trains its audience to react automatically to their produce, “the culture industry, as a whole has moulded men as a type unfailingly reproduced in every product”.<sup>13</sup> This mechanism is not only a result of applying market tactics, but it takes a form of domination that manipulates consumers and their needs.<sup>14</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer intended to uncover the social relations that are reflected in the production and consumption of cultural objects. Manipulation inherent in the culture industry can be observed in manufacturing needs and desires through advertising and marketing, so they align with what is being produced, rather than adjusting to the preferences of individuals. The cultural objects, turned into commodities, are presented as if they are necessary for the sense of fulfilment and happiness, which ultimately serves those in power deciding on the content of the culture.<sup>15</sup>

Nonetheless, the suppliers of mass-produced entertainment justify the shallowness of cultural objects claiming that they merely provide what is desired by the masses.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, as mass entertainment is so immensely pervasive and omnipresent, individuals are no longer capable of escaping the industry.<sup>17</sup> Their taste is altered so it aligns with the standards of the mass culture while sacrificing their individuality for the sake of conformity.<sup>18</sup> Additionally to the manipulative tactics of the promoters, it is also the very nature of popular music that is manipulative, as it can be reduced to the system of response-mechanisms utterly opposing the ideal of a free, liberal society.<sup>19</sup>

Continuously, Adorno and Horkheimer argued that the main consumers of the culture industry are people of the working/lower middle class, and through the means of cultural productions they become confined, physically and mentally.<sup>20</sup> Mass-produced media are infused with an ideology beneficial for those in power and make the working class fully accept their living conditions, perpetuating their enslavement. Through this distorted vision of reality, the authorities reinforce the status quo, which allows them to keep power, while keeping the majority of the society falsely happy.

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<sup>13</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception.” 127.

<sup>14</sup> Rebentisch and Trautman, “The Idea of the Culture Industry.” 26.

<sup>15</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception.” 133.

<sup>16</sup> Theodor Adorno, “On Popular Music [With the assistance of George Simpson],” in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 458.

<sup>17</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception.” 123.

<sup>18</sup> Theodor Adorno, “On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening,” in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 280.

<sup>19</sup> Adorno, “On Popular Music [With the Assistance of George Simpson].” 442.

<sup>20</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception.” 133.

### 1.1.3 Music in the industry

As Adorno was trained as a musicologist, music takes a quite special place in his cultural critique. According to him, music is to be divided into two categories: serious music and popular music, and he further delineated that the differences are on the musical and social levels. Serious music is to be described as: “[E]very detail derives its musical sense from the concrete totality of the piece which, in turn consists of the life relationship of the details and never of a mere enforcement of a musical scheme.”<sup>21</sup> Music of Alban Berg, Anton Webern, and Arnold Schoenberg is considered by Adorno to fit into this description.<sup>22</sup> The most fundamental characteristic that defines popular music is standardisation which can be traced to the smallest technical detail of how the songs of this genre are constructed. Consequently, popular music is considered to lack the complex relationship between details, because songs of popular music are compared to “cogs in the machine”.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, in *Dialectics*, popular music is analysed within a framework of the culture industry, which was not elaborated in *Essays on Music* and *Quasi Una Fantasia* yet creates a cohesive view on this cultural phenomenon. Popular music, as a product of the culture industry, demonstrates the end of thinking of an artwork as a whole.<sup>24</sup> The culture industry in its formulae prioritises gaining economic success over promoting an artistic activity. The role of music has been reduced to being a tool, a conveyor of ideology, social control, manipulation, and deception.

## 1.2 Critically on pop music

### 1.2.1 Deceptive tunes in the radio

Understanding the role of music within the framework of the culture industry allows us to comprehend how music transformed into popular music and how it has gained its role as a tool of the masses. With his committed hostility, he deemed popular music “consisting of this form corrupted by the culture industry, designed and operated for the sole purpose of enriching a system that is quite content with the evil mediocrity it produces and reproduces on a planetary scale”.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Adorno, “On Popular Music [With the Assistance of George Simpson].” 439.

<sup>22</sup> Agnès Gayraud, *Dialectic of Pop* (MIT Press, 2020). 19.

<sup>23</sup> Adorno, “On Popular Music [With the Assistance of George Simpson].” 440.

<sup>24</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception.” 125.

<sup>25</sup> Gayraud, *Dialectic of Pop*. 24.

Nonetheless, Adorno expanded his analysis of popular music beyond it being a part of the culture industry. In his detailed analysis of particular elements, he illustrates its detrimental effects on its consumers.<sup>26</sup> Firstly, he analysed the musical material of popular music to show a strong tendency to adhere to standardised structures and formats, that can enhance the economic success of the promoters. Additionally, these standards of the industry were obtained on the path of competition between promoters, who have been copying the “successful” hits. Furthermore, Adorno observed another feature of the musical material, which is pseudo-individualisation, which aims to cover the homogeneity of cultural mass production, while keeping consumers in a false satisfaction of their individuality. This aspect of popular music promoters allows them to keep their used formulas yet maintain the consumers under control.

Moreover, Adorno argued that the very presentation of the musical material of popular music implies several manipulative techniques. Plugging, for example, is a process that is applied to songs in order to make them successful through relentless repetition facilitated by media, advertising or radio. The application of repetition violently ingrains the songs into the minds of listeners to ensure recognisability. In connection to advertising, Adorno stressed the need for glamor. Musical glamor is a mechanism applied to popular music songs in order to present a success story, that is being told to the masses and is meant to give alternative avenues for them to find satisfaction and fulfilment.<sup>27</sup> Glamor can be discussed as an attention-grabbing technique, which is used in excess and consequently deepens the homogeneity of cultural production. The usage of these techniques demonstrates how the culture industry caters for the mind control of the masses as they feed them with formulaic content. This power dynamic transformed the role of the listener from an active participant to a passive consumer who needs to be amused, which perpetuates social conformity and excessive consumerism.

### 1.2.2 The industry and the autonomy of art

Reflecting on the major changes that arts and culture have undergone due to the emergence of the culture industry, it is relevant to reconsider the notion of the autonomy of art. Adorno argued that art offers social and conceptual emancipation. Despite its immersion in a social

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<sup>26</sup> Adorno, “On Popular Music [With the Assistance of George Simpson].” 441-468.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph, “On Popular Music, by Theodor Adorno,” Listen to Better Music, August 16, 2014, <https://listentobettermusic.wordpress.com/2014/08/16/on-popular-music-by-theodor-adorno/>.

context, autonomous art generates new and original meanings regardless of its worldly content. Autonomous art is able to do so because the meaning and value it creates goes beyond its physical origins, and thus raises questions towards dominant structures of understanding.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, the autonomy of art does not only resolve around its form of an artwork, but it extends to its technique.<sup>29</sup> Because art is not in a social vacuum, but within a given context, it is a subject of societal forces of production, like in an artistic technique, the historical development can be observed as an artist is always to some extend influenced by their predecessors.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, for Adorno, it is within that technique that art becomes a mirror for societal dynamics. Due to this influence of societal forces in art, Adorno defined this autonomy of art as relative. Therefore, the dual nature of artworks emerges, as they exist as superior objects, seemingly detached from the conditions of their production, yet they are also subjected to the labour processes that bring them to their material existence.

The relationship between the concept of autonomy of art and the culture industry appears to be a conflicting one. Adorno believed that autonomous art can exclusively present a negative and critical image of reality.<sup>31</sup> Autonomous art with its function of exposing negative aspects of modernity stands at odds with the jovial image of the society painted by the culture industry. The culture industry and its ideological principles stand at odd with this function of autonomous art, as it produces cultural objects that are meant not to evoke emancipation, rather an appeal of masses. The culture industry, led by commercial interests and profit-maximisation, applies manipulative techniques, and produces in a way that aligns with dominant ideologies, which Adorno would not categorise as autonomous art. This tension between the culture industry and autonomous art highlights the struggle for artistic independence of economic conditions and critical consumption of mass culture. To illustrate the said tension, Adorno focused on jazz music as an example of the application of the above-mentioned techniques and lack of autonomy in popular music.

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<sup>28</sup> Clive Cazeaux, ed., “Theodor W. Adorno.” in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, Second (London, New York: Routledge, 2009), 234.

<sup>29</sup> Antoon Van Den Braembussche, *Thinking Art* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2009). 181.

<sup>30</sup> Van Den Braembussche, *Thinking Art*. 181.

<sup>31</sup> Van Den Braembussche, *Thinking Art*. 182-183.

### 1.2.3 On jazz

In the essay “On Jazz” Adorno strongly expressed his contempt towards jazz music as he perceived it as a prime example of the commodification and standardisation inherent in the objects produced by the culture industry.<sup>32</sup>

Adorno argued for a rigid distinction between serious music and light music, and jazz was categorised as the latter.<sup>33</sup> With this category, jazz for Adorno ought not to be considered autonomous, but rather to be seen as a commodity of popular music.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, it can be further discussed that jazz music, as a product of the culture industry, is subjected to “the pressures of fashion and conformism”.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, Adorno directly categorised jazz as a commodity, stating that “its suitability for use permeates its production in terms, not other than its marketability”, implying that jazz music lacks any artistic authenticity and is predominantly driven by commercial interests, which strongly aligns with the image of the culture industry.<sup>36</sup> For this strong profit-oriented drive, jazz, as a music material, is also subjected to the processes of standardisation and pseudo-individualisation.

The mass appeal of jazz is tightly connected to the formulaic and rhythmic structure of this genre. The technical description of the musical structure demonstrates that Adorno found jazz to be banal and unoriginal.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, Adorno brought forward another relevant aspect to jazz, which is its danceable nature. Jazz creates an illusory sense of freedom for those dancing, as it supposedly allows for more informal dance movement for those dancing. However, jazz as a product of the culture industry is imbued with dominant ideologies, which is the reason why it merely provides an illusion, as it rather distracts the masses than challenges societal norms (like autonomous art). Additionally, Adorno argued that jazz music deliberately emphasises a sexual undertone through its rhythmic structure, as jazz songs “all tend towards an obscene gesture”.<sup>38</sup> The suggestive pace and lyrics allegedly linked to sexual intercourse can be found problematic because of its power to perpetuate the status quo and reinforce the commodification of human intimacy. The notions of standardisation and pseudo-individuality are visible here, as the sexual undertones in jazz music are applied as a

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<sup>32</sup> Theodor Adorno, “On Jazz,” in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 473.

<sup>33</sup> Lee B. Brown, “Adorno’s Critique of Popular Culture: The Case of Jazz Music,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 26, no. 1 (January 1, 1992): 21, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3332724>.

<sup>34</sup> Brown, “Adorno’s Critique of Popular Culture: The Case of Jazz Music.” 20.

<sup>35</sup> Brown, “Adorno’s Critique of Popular Culture: The Case of Jazz Music.” 19.

<sup>36</sup> Adorno, “On Jazz.” 473.

<sup>37</sup> Adorno, “On Jazz.” 479.

<sup>38</sup> Adorno, “On Jazz.” 486.

tool for distraction from critical engagement with social issues and individuals. Jazz giving the sense of immediate gratification that is being compared to a sexual one is another argument for Adorno to categorise this music as a mere product with no artistic value.

## 2 Chapter 2: Nietzsche: the Dionysian musical experience

### 2.1 The Birth of Tragedy

#### 2.1.1 The Greek tragedy and suffering

Nietzsche, drawing on his background of classical philology, came to the realisation that in the art form of classical Greek tragedy, a fundamentally meaningless world can overcome pessimism and nihilism. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche sought to revive the pre-Socratic power of Greek tragedy, that had been stripped away by Platonian idealist metaphysics, which deemed all art a mere copy of a copy, a distraction from intellectual pursuits.<sup>39</sup>

The reason why Nietzsche argued for the importance of this particular artwork in legitimating human suffering is the potential that tragedy has in demonstrating to the audience their own misery and allowing them to embrace it as an inevitable part of their existence, rather than hoping for betterment in another life. This way Nietzsche intended to provide a life-affirming philosophy, instead of purely theoretical one. Nietzsche's philosophical project was to criticise Platonic and Christian perspectives, which imbued people with the idealised and orderly vision of the world, at the same time denying its chaotic and irrational aspects. Philosophy, starting with Plato and carrying on through Christianity and rationalism, has associated virtue and knowledge with "the orderly, sombre, life-denying aspects of existence, at the expense of its more intoxicating, chaotic, dream-like moments."<sup>40</sup> Nietzsche responded to this with a model oscillating between order and chaos, simultaneously did not support extreme hedonism.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, this model is demonstrated through two Greek gods, Apollo and Dionysus that constantly counterbalance each other, which is best manifested in a Greek tragedy, "they [Apollo and Dionysus] appear paired with each other, and through this pairing eventually generate the equally Dionysian and Apollonian art-work of Attic tragedy".<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Cazeaux, "Friedrich Nietzsche." 63.

<sup>40</sup> Cazeaux, "Friedrich Nietzsche." 63.

<sup>41</sup> Cazeaux, "Friedrich Nietzsche." 63.

<sup>42</sup> Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche: The First Complete and Authorised English Translation*. 22.

### 2.1.2 The interplay between the Dionysian and the Apollonian

Continuously, Nietzsche painted the image of two forces embodied in two Greek gods: Apollo, representing order, and Dionysus, embodying chaos. Based on Greek mythology, Nietzsche assigned particular features to both of them. Apollo stands for harmony, individuality, and light, whereas Dionysus embodies ecstasy, collective unity and suffering, further translated into art. The Apollonian element is necessary for artists to harness their inner wild artistic inspiration. It is the ability to give form and to mould the overwhelming creativity.<sup>43</sup> The Dionysian element manifests itself in a chaotic, destructive rapture of emotions, a formless stream of creation.<sup>44</sup> The stark contrast between these two forces finds its outlet in the form of a Greek tragedy. Through this categorisation, the Apollonian element is found in the symbolic representations and the Dionysian in the chorus of the tragedy.<sup>45</sup> The reconciliation of these two creative forces allows the spectators to see the full spectrum of their human condition and arrive at a cathartic moment of affirming their suffering.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, it also demonstrates the synthesis of forces, the synthesis of form and expression.<sup>47</sup> Apollonian power is centred around the form that is allowed to be seen, whereas Dionysian force is predominantly hidden from the daylight. Nonetheless, there exists an interdependence between Apollo and Dionysus; a mutual disclosure of suffering. As described in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

We learn that there existed in the Grecian world a wide antithesis, in origin and aims, between the art of the shaper, the Apollonian, and the non-plastic art of music, that of Dionysus: both these so heterogeneous tendencies run parallel to each other, for the most part openly at variance, and continually inciting each other to new and more powerful births, to perpetuate in them the strife of this antithesis, which is but seemingly bridged over by their mutual term “Art”.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Van Den Braembussche, *Thinking Art*. 89.

<sup>44</sup> Van Den Braembussche, *Thinking Art*. 89.

<sup>45</sup> Van Den Braembussche, *Thinking Art*. 90-91.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas M. Hawley, “Dionysus in the Mosh Pit: Nietzschean Reflections on the Role of Music in Recovering the Tragic Disposition,” *Western Political Science Association* (Eastern Washington University, April 1, 2010), 2, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1580791](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1580791).

<sup>47</sup> Van Den Braembussche, *Thinking Art*. 89.

<sup>48</sup> Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche: The First Complete and Authorised English Translation*. 21.

The duality of the Apollonian and the Dionysian illustrates this Nietzschean interplay of forces; Apollo provides the structure and form, while Dionysus brings forth intensity and expression. In the artistic process, the Dionysian power manifests itself through an overwhelming flow of inspiration and intense emotions. However, the Apollonian is seen as the form of artwork, that the artist strives to present. This dynamic interplay is applied by Nietzsche to demonstrate that both artistic and existential fulfilment arise from oscillating chaos and order, rather than falling for a one-sided approach that is not able to account for the complexities of human experience.

## 2.2 The Dionysian in art and music

### 2.2.1 Dionysian manifestation in art

Nietzschean conceptualisation of Dionysus connects tightly to the Greek image of this god, as he symbolised wine, revel and ecstasy.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the Dionysian element plays an essential role in emphasising the primal, emotional, corporeal aspects of human life and creation. Nonetheless, Nietzsche appears to perceive this god to have a more ominous layer, whose influence can consume individuals in flames of their own unleashed passions, which also bridges with the origins of Dionysus, “dying [Semele], she gave birth to Dionysus, who was born among fire”.<sup>50</sup> The strong association of Dionysus with the bodily experiences of human beings might be interpreted as a part of the Nietzschean project of breathing life into philosophy. Standing in a stark contrast to Apollo, Dionysius is an embodiment of liberation, intoxication, and licentiousness, and also has his own particular manifestation in art; “[H]e embodies the pre-Hellenic “titanic” and “barbaric”, the primal anguish and the ecstatic tone of delirium and excessiveness, which is seen as a threat to harmony”.<sup>51</sup>

In order to recognise the Dionysian element in art, it is necessary to identify the Dionysian features such as emotional intensity, chaos, and frenzy. Therefore, the manifestation of the Dionysian power in art can be observed in vibrant colours, dynamic compositions, expressive gestures and faces, themes of rituals, festivals, and strong contrast between shadow and light. Moreover, the Dionysian power involves a collective human experience – Primordial Unity. Dionysus brings individuals to the state of Primordial Unity

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<sup>49</sup> Evslin Bernard, “Gods, Demigods and Demons: An Encyclopedia of Greek Mythology,” in *ProQuest Ebook Central*, 2012, accessed June 1, 2024. 57.

<sup>50</sup> Evslin, “Gods, Demigods and Demons: An Encyclopedia of Greek Mythology.” 57.

<sup>51</sup> Van Den Braembussche, *Thinking Art*. 89-90.

through communal rituals, festivals, and dances, which results in the ecstatic transcendence of everyday life and the dissolution of individuality to bring together to an intense emotional state. Therefore, the representation of the collective experience in art happens through intense music and dance; “In art: In song and in dance man exhibits himself as a member of a higher community: he has forgotten how to walk and speak, and is on the point of taking a dancing flight into the air”.<sup>52</sup> Continuously, due to its characteristics and manifestation in art through intensity, collectivity, ecstasy, the Dionysian power is mostly associated with art forms such as music and dance.

### 2.2.2 Dionysian music

Through this categorisation of the Apollonian and the Dionysian art, there exists a strong association of music being exclusively a Dionysian domain. However, it needs to be noted that Nietzsche also sees an Apollonian aspect of music, when created under specific conditions and structure; “only as the wave-beat of rhythm, the formative power of which was developed to the representation of Apollonian conditions. The music of Apollo was Doric architectonics in tones, but in merely suggested tones, such as those of the cithara”.<sup>53</sup> Music, as an expression of these artistic forces, gains more depth as Nietzsche allows us to further scrutinise it as a Dionysian domain as well. The Dionysian music, however, can be recognised through its intensity and its ability to invoke dancing and exhilaration. Nietzsche noted that the Dionysian music is to be considered as un-Apollonian. It is impetuous, dynamic, and rhythmic. Additionally, to the intense sound of the Dionysian music itself, Nietzsche considered that it is the Dionysian quality of music that enables transcending the physical and emotional suffering, to which human beings are doomed. This quality of music facilitates the acceptance of the said suffering, the affirmation of life in its entirety that comes with the intrinsic harshness and pain.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, Dionysus has a transformative power, as his artistic manifestation alters despair into meaning.

Continuously, the ability of the Dionysian music to invoke the state of Primordial Unity also includes the artist himself; “Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: the artistic power of all nature here reveals itself in the tremors of drunkenness to the highest

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<sup>52</sup> Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche: The First Complete and Authorised English Translation*. 27.

<sup>53</sup> Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche: The First Complete and Authorised English Translation*. 31-32.

<sup>54</sup> Chloe M. Guidry, “Amor musicae: A study of Nietzsche, the Dionysian and music,” by Johannes Bulhof (McNeese State University, 2021), 6, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.33319.21923>.

gratification of the Primordial Unity".<sup>55</sup> Through the intense and intimate experience of the Dionysian music, artists also become a part of the collective state, dissolving their individuality into a shared musical experience.

### 2.2.3 Ecstasy in a musical experience

Nietzsche considered ecstasy as an integral component of the Dionysian musical experience, which falls outside the power of the Apollonian experience. Moreover, the association between Dionysus and the state of ecstasy creates an extraordinary relationship between this Greek deity and the people, as he "is loved beyond the other gods, because he has taught men to escape the narrow bounds of their own personalities, and yield to the ecstasy of natural forces period, an ecstasy that permits them to know the gods in the deepest mystery".<sup>56</sup> In the context of a musical experience, ecstasy surpasses a psychological state and becomes a visceral one. The ecstatic element is relevant for the experience of the Dionysian in music because, in this heightened state, the abandonment of individuality and the everyday façade becomes possible.

Furthermore, the rhythmic aspect of Dionysian music facilitates the state of ecstasy and affects the bodies, which eventually start to move to the rhythm. Dance emerges as another manifestation of the Dionysian power in art. Continuously, dance and music, as dynamic forms of art, engage both artists and audiences. Artists actively shape their artworks through their creativity. However, the creative process goes beyond the artists themselves and expands to the audience members.<sup>57</sup> Taking these features of music and dance as art forms into account leads to the unifying experience when both creators and listeners contribute to the art piece.

The Dionysian element is tightly connected to the bodily character of human beings, which Nietzsche linked with a particular mode of self-awareness that facilitates the state of unity with others. Continuously, this Dionysian mode allows individuals to experience self-abandonment in their sexuality.<sup>58</sup> For this reason, the Dionysian element is also connected to sexual licentiousness. Moreover, sexual licentiousness is recognised as a central theme of the

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<sup>55</sup> Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche: The First Complete and Authorised English Translation*. 27.

<sup>56</sup> Evslin, "Gods, Demigods and Demons: An Encyclopedia of Greek Mythology." 59.

<sup>57</sup> Guidry, "Amor Musicae: A Study of Nietzsche, the Dionysian and Music." 21.

<sup>58</sup> Kathleen Higgins, "Nietzsche on Music," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 47 (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 666, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2709725>.

festivals devoted to celebrating Dionysus.<sup>59</sup> As a way of dismantling social norms in the contexts of these festivals, the musical experience has become key to arriving to the state of ecstasy, unity and thus sexual liberation.

## 2.3 Contemporary pop music through the Dionysian lens

### 2.3.1 Connection to the contemporary music in general

Considering the delineated features of the Dionysian musical experience, the connection between Nietzschean conceptualisation of music and contemporary genres can be drawn. Chloe M. Guidry makes an attempt to analyse several contemporary artists, such as the Grateful Dead, Joy Division, Slipknot and Evanescence, through the lenses of the Dionysian element.<sup>60</sup> The study, through the process of the emergence of new music genres in the late 1960s and 1970s (the Grateful Dead and Joy Division), and in the 1990s and early 2000s (Slipknot and Evanescence) intended to scrutinise a contemporary Dionysian in the musical creation of these bands. Despite a remarkable historical distance between Nietzsche and these genres, Guidry creates a link through the strong emotional states that the music of these artists have left, the strong association with counterculture and intoxication. It is worth emphasising mutual features of the Dionysian power and contemporary music genres of counterculture, such as emotional intensity (addressing angst, sadness, escapism), collective experience (creating subcultures and attending music festivals), transcendence into primal states (through intoxication, seeking after emotional expression), and notions of sexual liberation.

Interestingly, Thomas M. Hawley also makes a connection to Slipknot as a band that truly depicts music being powered by a strong emotional state, which in this case is rage.<sup>61</sup> In order to experience pleasure from Slipknot's music, rage needs to be understood as a necessary step. Such a strong emotional state as rage can be harmonised with this specific music as a way to accept it, which adds a therapeutic value to the Dionysian musical experience.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche: The First Complete and Authorised English Translation*. 30.

<sup>60</sup> Guidry, "Amor Musicae: A Study of Nietzsche, the Dionysian and Music." 15.

<sup>61</sup> Hawley, "Dionysus in the Mosh Pit: Nietzschean Reflections on the Role of Music in Recovering the Tragic Disposition." 29-30.

<sup>62</sup> Hawley, "Dionysus in the Mosh Pit: Nietzschean Reflections on the Role of Music in Recovering the Tragic Disposition." 31.

Consequently, it can be discussed that the notion of the Dionysian musical experience goes beyond Nietzsche's vision and his understanding of Dionysian music. From a philosophical standpoint, this contemporary manifestation of the Dionysian element raises a question of whether the Dionysian musical experience is a universal human experience of music or whether it is inherent to particular types of music. As arguments of Guidry and Hawley indicate it is feasible to draw a parallel between particular contemporary music genres and artists, and the Dionysian, while Nietzsche had never been exposed to Slipknot or Evanescence. Therefore, the discrepancy between the Dionysian music understood by Nietzsche, being "the strophic form of lyric poetry and the folk song", and the genres/bands analysed by contemporary scholars, such as Guidry and Hawley, can be said to potentially undermine the idea that the Dionysian is connected to a particular type of music genre.<sup>63</sup> Having observed the connections between alternative rock and metal bands and contemporary genres, and the Dionysian done by other scholars, I would like to propose a conceptualisation of the Dionysian that is able to manifest itself in contemporary art forms and it does not reside in specific artworks, but it might be found more in emotional states of audience members.

### 2.3.2 Connection to pop music

Along the lines of the reflection of the Dionysian might be residing in the eye (or rather the ear) of a beholder, it needs to be emphasised that pop music "is not dependent on a fixed boundary or a given musicological limit beyond which it would no longer be pop."<sup>64</sup> For this reason, pop music gains a sense of flexibility and diversity as a genre. The lack of rigid structural requirements for pop music might facilitate the primacy of emotional responses, which resonates with the Dionysian element. Consequently, the connection between pop music and the Dionysian element will be created based on the features of the Dionysian musical experience: ecstasy, danceability, and collectivity.

Pop music has the ability to induce ecstatic experiences reminiscent of the Dionysian one by means of its uplifting tones, emphasis on choruses, emotional expressiveness, and strong association with festivities and joy. Pop music with its rather happy undertone is strongly connected to celebration, leisure, and pleasure, which is a robust ground for its

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<sup>63</sup> Christoph Cox, "Nietzsche, Dionysus and the Ontology of Music," in *A Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson (Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 506.

<sup>64</sup> Gayraud, *Dialectic of Pop*. 419.

association. These characteristics allow pop music to take its audience beyond the confines of the everyday and provide them with a joyous state. Moreover, festivities tend to be places of intoxication and uninhibited celebration, which are also tightly connected to the Dionysian musical experience. The rhythmic and energetic beats with strong choruses in the context of a festivity facilitate dancing, which enhances the Dionysian allure of pop. Furthermore, due to its mass appeal, pop music can be discussed as having a strong power to facilitate communal experiences. Through catchy melodies and lyrics, that enable audience members to physically synchronise, but also on a psychological base as they share moments of joy.

### 3 Chapter 3: Dionysian shining through the industry

#### 3.1 Contemporary pop music vs Adorno; limitations

##### 3.1.1 Inadequate interpretation of jazz

In order to justify the application of the Dionysian to the understanding of contemporary pop music, I would like to present the limitations of the culture industry framework proposed by Adorno.

Adorno's strong hostility towards popular music has given him quite a reputation.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, his hatred was predominantly targeted towards jazz. Jazz having become the beacon of Adorno's hatred towards popular music has marked him as a prime slanderer. As several decades have passed since his published essays, a more elaborate critique towards Adorno has emerged, that delineates the limitations of his culture industry perspective and accounts for the development of jazz, and further popular music. While Adorno presented a relevant aspect of the production of culture, as demonstrated by the study conducted by Serrà et al., his perspective fails to present a more nuanced view on jazz.<sup>66</sup>

According to Adorno, “serious” music demonstrates a strong notion of inevitability, which means the elements building up the music are not arbitrary and are placed based on a particular logic. Adorno finds such structure in music pieces such as Rachmaninov's Prelude in C-sharp minor, Dvorak's *Humoresque* or Tchaikovsky's E-minor Symphony.<sup>67</sup> Whereas the elements of popular music are interchangeable and can be shifted around.<sup>68</sup> Along the lines of delineating the limitations of Adorno and his perspective on music, it is useful to mention observations by Brown, who stresses that jazz is an art of spontaneity, therefore it seems unreasonable to expect this genre to exhibit a sense of inevitability.<sup>69</sup> If inevitability entails unpredictability, it appears the requirement of inevitability is designed to discredit jazz.

Moreover, the musical inevitability, in Adorno's understanding is limited through his Europocentrism. He applies the categories of the European music, such as tonality and harmony, which ought not to be applied towards jazz, a non-European genre. Brown stresses that jazz is centred on inflection and rhythmic accentuation, which makes it impossible to fit into Eurocentric categories.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Gayraud, *Dialectic of Pop*. 24.

<sup>66</sup> Serrà et al., “Measuring the Evolution of Contemporary Western Popular Music.” 5.

<sup>67</sup> Adorno, “Commodity Music Analysed.” 38-43.

<sup>68</sup> Brown, “Adorno's Critique of Popular Culture: The Case of Jazz Music.” 24.

<sup>69</sup> Brown, “Adorno's Critique of Popular Culture: The Case of Jazz Music.” 24.

<sup>70</sup> Brown, “Adorno's Critique of Popular Culture: The Case of Jazz Music.” 24-25.

Through his rigid categorisation of music, Adorno creates an external hierarchy of music genres that attaches value based on his own personal aesthetic preference. Adorno does not acknowledge the very fact that what the music he considers to be beyond the reach of the culture industry, has become an active part of it. In order for “serious” music to be presented in an opera house or a concert hall, it needs to undergo the process of production. To organise a concert of “serious” music, the culture industry comes into play and employs its techniques of marketing, production, and distribution. Therefore, “serious” music becomes compromised by the industry. Full autonomy of an artwork would imply independence, which does not seem feasible. Adorno acknowledges this necessary compromise without toning down his strict categorisation.<sup>71</sup>

### 3.1.2 Active music consumption

Another weakness of the culture industry perspective is its lack of accountability for active music consumption and its role in the process of construction of one’s subjectivity. DeNora in her study demonstrates that music ought not to be understood as an imposed auditory stimulus, but rather it deserves to be treated as a device of the self.<sup>72</sup>

Continuously, DeNora argues that music, as “the cultural material par excellence of emotion and the personal” participates in the constitution of the self. However, according to Adorno, music becoming a commodity and thus infusing with societal norms cannot be used for forming individuality. What differs DeNora’s approach is allowing for the active consumption of music, which not feasible in Adorno’s perspective.<sup>73</sup> According to DeNora, the listeners are significantly more active and conscious of their musical choices, and they are able to derive personal meanings from it.<sup>74</sup> As a result, this approach indicates a more individualised nature of musical experience and can be further applied as an evaluation of Adorno’s views.

In the image painted by Adorno, having an intimate relationship with music seems impossible. Through his rigid categorisation of “serious” and popular, and what experiences they create, Adorno might be considered to impose a framework that dictates how to evaluate music regardless of one’s personal disposition. Adorno depicts a strong estrangement between

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<sup>71</sup> Brown, “Adorno’s Critique of Popular Culture: The Case of Jazz Music.” 21-22.

<sup>72</sup> Tia DeNora, “Music as a technology of the self,” in *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 73-74, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511489433>.

<sup>73</sup> DeNora, “Music as a Technology of the Self.” 61.

<sup>74</sup> DeNora, “Music as a Technology of the Self.” 49.

music and individual experiences, for which DeNora strives to account. In this more individualised perspective, music itself does not seem to dictate any specific experience, or emotion. Rather, it is within an individual, who is also entangled within social relations, that has an agency in their musical experience. This can be further applied to pop music, as this genre, despite being mass-produced, ought not to be stripped from its potential for the constitution of the self. Considering this impact of music on individuals, pop music might be said to gain more meaning than a sole product of the culture industry, and to become a vehicle for identity and expression.

### 3.1.3 Re-evaluating Adorno

Furthermore, Gayraud discusses that Adorno fails to present the richness of pop music in his studies and writings since he uses a limited selection of songs (the top ten tracks in the charts) in order to justify his views.<sup>75</sup> While condemning all pop to be detrimental for those listening, Adorno does not seem to leave any space for middle ground between his two major categories of music. For this reason, his analysis might be said to demonstrate a rather narrow understanding of pop music and might fail to find any connection with the contemporary state of this genre. Moreover, it can be discussed that due to this lack of recognition of richness and diversity, Adorno does not account for the individual musical experience that pop music provides.

Nonetheless, this hostility of Adorno can be transformed into a productive inquiry into the nature of pop music. Instead of dismissing Adorno's arguments as hateful and outdated, Gayraud proposes a novel approach that involves active engagement with Adorno's critical thinking and pop music.<sup>76</sup> In this pursuit, pop is examined in terms of its form and figures. Musical art and the critical structure of pop are to be scrutinised together with figures that shape aesthetic judgments of pop; "the ambiguities implied by its deterritorialization of folklore, the subjective dilemmas of the individuals who embody it, the rationalised magic of its hits, and the oscillation, in the story of pop, between a penchant for revival and a fascination with progress."<sup>77</sup>

Additionally, it needs to be noted that Adorno displays an original approach towards pop music because he critically engages with it, rather than dismissing it. Therefore, Adorno

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<sup>75</sup> Gayraud, *Dialectic of Pop*. 23.

<sup>76</sup> Gayraud, *Dialectic of Pop*. 27-28.

<sup>77</sup> Gayraud, *Dialectic of Pop*. 28.

can be considered to be the one who engages with pop music instead of utterly disregarding it from a philosophical discussion. Despite the hostility towards pop in the culture industry framework, it might be utilised as an avenue for a more multifaceted conceptualisation of pop. Pop music can be understood through its inherent contradictions, the tensions between autonomy and heteronomy, novelty and revival, aesthetic transcendence, and commodified realm.

### 3.2 Nietzsche as an alternative

Having delineated the limitations of the culture industry framework proposed by Adorno, I intend to propose the Dionysian aspect conceptualised by Nietzsche as an alternative interpretation of pop music. In this pursuit, I will use three arguments: collective experience, emotional impact, and bodily sensation.

#### 3.2.1 Collective experience

As mentioned above (section 2.2.1 on Primordial Unity), the notion of the Primordial Unity is one of the most relevant manifestations of the Dionysian in art, and pop music ought not to be excluded. Considering the strong bonds between individuals that are being created due to pop music indicates that this genre provides a sense of connection and unity. Moreover, the state of Primordial Unity is quite elusive and can occur in a moment of collective ecstasy, intense emotional delirium that transcends the boundaries between individuals, which facilitates a united collective experience.

It might appear as a quite de-individuating experience, in which one's individuality is deserted for the sake of mass ecstasy. However, the Primordial Unity can be further interpreted as a state that enables liberation from the self and its inherited suffering. Continuously, the Dionysian aspect, that fosters the said state, allows individuals to embrace the inherited suffering that comes within existence, which is manifested in the forms of music and dance.<sup>78</sup> In application to pop music, the Primordial Unity can be observed in a deep fervour that audiences exhibit. The said fervour towards pop music can be seen in forms of singing and dancing when thousands of individuals sync their behaviour under the circumstances of a concert of their beloved artist. The state of Primordial Unity is ephemeral,

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<sup>78</sup> Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche: The First Complete and Authorised English Translation*. 27.

however, the fan communities go beyond those moments of shared experience and remain as parts of the identities of their members.

Adorno, in the stark contrast, seems to overlook this unifying ability of pop music. His fixation on the individual experience of “serious” music drives him towards utter dismissal of pop as a meaningful and connecting genre. Since he blatantly prioritises a particular category of music over another one, he fails to recognise the communal and societal importance of pop music, and its role in overcoming suffering. Nonetheless, this argument does not strive to paint a picture of perfect communities around pop music, since the passion for pop music can also take extreme forms, such as ten mortal cases at the concert of Travis Scott due to compressive asphyxiation because the crowd tried to approach the stage.<sup>79</sup> This tragedy is meant here to highlight that pop music generates whole wide array of emotions and behaviours, and it is not useful to take only one perspective when analysing pop music.

### 3.2.2 Emotional impact and bodily sensation

The appeal of pop music that lies within its catchy melodies, rhythms and uplifting lyrics can be connected to the ecstatic musical experience of the Dionysian. Despite Adorno’s perspective that deems pop music to be merely a product of the culture industry, it can also be of emotional value to numerous individuals. Features of pop music afford listeners to feel joy, excitement, and pleasure, which might be interpreted as a possible bridge to the Dionysian ecstasy.

Adorno would likely criticise the frivolity of this genre as being distracting from intellectual emancipation while disregarding the power of pop music and its ability to give people genuine gratification and a sense of collective joy. Finding the Dionysian in pop music allows to conceptualise this genre beyond its entertainment function and commodified nature. Pop music, as it taps into the Dionysian element, becomes a source of ecstatic experience, self-expression and a sense of unity. Moreover, the danceability of pop music becomes its advantage, rather than vice. The Dionysian is tightly connected to dance, and also DeNora recognises in her finding that “music's role as an ordering device at the personal level, as a means for creating, enhancing, sustaining and changing subjective, cognitive, bodily and self-

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<sup>79</sup> Mark Savage, “Travis Scott Still ‘devastated’ by Astroworld Tragedy,” November 16, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd1pd66y9k6o>.

conceptual states.”<sup>80</sup> With its danceability and sex appeal that Adorno actively considers as detrimental to masses, pop music can be discussed to create a space for individuals to experience transcendental connection with themselves and each other.

However, this genuine enjoyment of pop music does not fully undermine Adorno’s arguments. It rather proposes to be more vigilant while assessing pop music, since it is deeply intertwined with the capitalist system, cultural meaning, and emotional impact.

Acknowledging the Dionysian manifestation in pop music can serve as a way of recognising the emotional impact it has on many, while still addressing the commercial aspects of production and distribution. In the pursuit of identifying the Dionysian element in pop music, it can be further discussed that the Dionysian does not lie within particular musical elements.

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<sup>80</sup> Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche: The First Complete and Authorised English Translation*. 49.

## Conclusion

This thesis intends to put forward the Dionysian element from *The Birth of Tragedy* by Nietzsche as a key concept for an alternative interpretation of pop music. The need for an alternative interpretation stems from an insufficient, yet predominant view of pop music rooting from the culture industry perspective by Adorno.

In this pursuit, I have devoted Chapter 1 to presenting Adorno's critique of the culture industry. The culture industry, as a result of progressing industrialisation, mechanisation and rationalisation of society, has majorly impacted the mode of production and distribution of cultural and art objects, turning them into commodities for the masses. The culture industry is a means of distribution of ideologies, mass deception and manipulation, that benefits those in power. According to Adorno, that poses a great threat to the autonomy of art and makes it impossible for individuals to engage with art and culture in a critical and meaningful way.

Moreover, I focus my analysis on the relationship between the culture industry and music. Adorno creates a rather rigid categorisation of music, prioritising "serious" music over popular music. He claims that popular music is produced so it aligns with the principles of the industry such as standardisation and pseudo-individualisation. Because of this origin, popular music is devoid of any aesthetic or intellectual value. Furthermore, chapter 1 is not intended as an attempt to underscore the relevance of Adorno's arguments and his critical approach towards new ways of producing music. It is meant as an application of a critical approach to Adorno and delineating limitations.

The following chapter expands on the Nietzschean perspective in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Through the Dionysian, I intend to present the missing aspects of the culture industry perspective. Adorno disregards the physiological aspects of human beings and their ability to experience ecstasy through art, such as music and dance. Therefore, demonstrating the Dionysian as an embodiment of the ecstatic musical experience that facilitates the immense sense of unity, Primordial Unity, and sexual vitality is discussed to have a potential to contribute to an alternative interpretation of contemporary pop music.

In Chapter 3, I show the limitations of Adorno's perspective using the arguments of Brown, DeNora and Gayraud. Further, I discuss how the Dionysian can be applied as an alternative interpretation of contemporary pop music, and this is executed by referring to the collective experience, emotional impact and bodily sensations. In short, these points bridge pop music and the Dionysian, offering to fill the gaps that Adorno leaves.

The culture industry perspective has a key role in this thesis because it introduces the industrial production and distribution of music, and thus creates a stark contrast with the Dionysian musical experience, which emphasises immediate impact of music. This thesis proposes an alternative approach that involves evaluation of contemporary pop music in such a way that does not discredit its emotional importance it has for many. It is much needed, since pop music has been quite broadly considered to be devoid of any meaning and reduced to shallow entertainment. Through delineating the connection to the Dionysian, pop music gains a more robust theoretical ground, that allows for further philosophical discussion. I would like to propose an alternative theoretical approach that prioritises the Dionysian musical experience in understanding of contemporary pop music to account for agency of listeners and diversity and fluidity of the genre.

Applying the Dionysian can be said to be a parallel move to what Adorno does, because it also investigates a new depth of pop music. In this context, the Dionysian is applied as a concept through which pop music is granted emotional significance as an art form and ability to empower the listeners as active and conscious of their musical experiences, which expands the Adornian, industrial conceptualisation of pop music. This alternative approach incorporates the Dionysian into the evaluation of pop music to challenge totalising claims of Adorno and to create a new, multifaceted understanding. Nonetheless, Adorno's arguments remain valid when discussing the modes of production of pop music and how the capitalist economy shapes the music. The tight connection between pop music and the industry should not be neglected when evaluating the said genre.

A frictionless complementarity between the culture industry and the Dionysian might not be possible, however, it is also not needed. The culture industry and the Dionysian are applied in order to showcase that pop music deserves a nuanced analysis, and they both contribute to new insights regarding this genre. The ultimate method to comprehend pop music is not feasible, however, expanding the existing frameworks through a critical assessment is. Since it is such a heterogeneous cultural phenomenon, several perspectives are needed to evaluate it critically and holistically. In the pursuit of creating a comprehensive understanding of pop music from a philosophical standpoint, it is suggested to remain critical and receptive to novelties and developments that this genre might undergo.

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