

*Precautions against fan(atic)s: a re-evaluation of Adorno's uncompromising philosophy of popular culture*

Article

Accepted Version

Hellings, J. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8934-791X>  
(2013) Precautions against fan(atic)s: a re-evaluation of  
Adorno's uncompromising philosophy of popular culture. New  
German Critique, 40 (1). pp. 149-174. ISSN 1558-1462 doi:  
10.1215/0094033X-1812604 Available at  
<https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/114046/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

To link to this article DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/0094033X-1812604>

Publisher: Duke University Press

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

[www.reading.ac.uk/centaur](http://www.reading.ac.uk/centaur)

**CentAUR**

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

## **Precautions Against Fan(atic)s: A Re-evaluation of Adorno's**

### **Uncompromising Philosophy of Popular Culture**

**Dr James Hellings**

**(Summary):** Should one laugh at, cry or be inspired by Adorno's engagements with popular culture? It would, perhaps, be a somewhat risky, ridiculous and disingenuous enterprise to position Adorno as either an enthusiast or a fan. Rather, being an, 'uncompromisingly critical thinker [*kompromißlos kritisch Denkende*],' is Adorno's preferred approach to philosophising culture. Yet I will argue that Adorno's conceptualisation of being uncompromising unintentionally supports an amorous subject and comportment, which is not altogether dissimilar to being an enthusiastic fan.

**(Word Count: 7,246 minus notes)**

## Precautions Against Fan(atic)s:<sup>1</sup> A Re-evaluation of Adorno's

### Uncompromising Philosophy of Popular Culture<sup>2</sup>

Dr James Hellings

Should it be necessary for our age to have the ridiculous appearance of an enthusiast in order to find something to laugh at, or is it not rather more necessary that such an inspired character would remind it of what has been forgotten?<sup>3</sup>

Should one laugh at, cry or be inspired by Adorno's engagements with popular culture? It would, perhaps, be a somewhat risky, ridiculous and disingenuous enterprise to position Adorno as either an enthusiast or a fan. Rather, being an, 'uncompromisingly critical thinker [*kompromißlos kritisch Denkende*],<sup>4</sup> is Adorno's preferred approach to philosophising culture. Yet I will argue that Adorno's conceptualisation of being uncompromising

---

<sup>1</sup> My title repeats that of a short film by Werner Herzog (1969), wherein it is impossible to distinguish the amateur *fanatics* from the professional *experts*.

<sup>2</sup> I would like to acknowledge the support and criticism of my readers at *New German Critique*, especially Andreas Huyssen and Andrew Oppenheimer. I would also like to recognise the tremendous contribution made by the editors of the journal, which has uncompromisingly, intelligently and critically, argued for a more balanced and refined understanding of Adorno. On the important distinctions between 'popular culture' 'mass culture' and the 'culture industry' in Adorno (and Horkheimer) see both Peter U. Hohendahl's, 'Introduction,' and Andreas Huyssen's, 'Adorno in Reverse: From Hollywood to Richard Wagner,' in *New German Critique*, Number 29, Spring-Summer 1983, 3-38. The journal has to date published four special issues dedicated to Adorno's work and/or work on Adorno: 'Theodor W. Adorno,' *New German Critique*, Number 56, Spring-Summer 1992; 'Adorno and Ethics,' *New German Critique*, Number 97, Winter 2006; 'Arendt and Adorno,' *New German Critique*, Number 100, Winter 2007 and most recently, 'Adorno's Aesthetics,' *New German Critique*, Number 104, Summer 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling: Dialectical Lyric*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 101-2.

<sup>4</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Resignation,' in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 292. Hereafter cited as *R*. For the German see Theodor W. Adorno, *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft II: Eingriffe, Stichworte, Anhang*, Gesammelte Schriften: Band 10.2, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, with Gretel Adorno, Susan Buck-Morss and Klaus Schultz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 798. Hereafter cited as *GS10.2*.

unintentionally supports an amorous subject and comportment, which is not altogether dissimilar to being an enthusiastic fan.

Adorno's work is little called upon in fan studies yet when an address is made and his work is forced to speak, this discourse is, I claim, often disparaging - replete with both fear and spite.<sup>5</sup> My simple objective is to redress this over-determined, imprecise and uncritical, use of his work – to balance the scales, as it were. The major aims of this article are twofold: (1) simply to provide a thorough conceptual commentary, invocation and exegesis, of *fandom* - incorporating its derivatives, i.e.; 'fans,' 'fanatics,' 'fanaticism' - in selected works of Adorno<sup>6</sup> and, (2) to argue against divisive attempts at separating fandom and philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

Before concentrating on Adorno, it is worth outlining the generally accepted etymology of the noun 'fandom' and its abbreviated form 'fan,' which – as the Oxford English Dictionary asserts - is a late Nineteenth century import from the US, and is, itself, a derivative of the adjective 'fanatic.' 'Fanatic' first appeared in Latin as the adjective '*fanaticus*,' circa. Sixteenth century, from '*fanum*' meaning 'a temple,' and denoted 'of a temple, inspired by a god' and 'originally described behaviour or speech that might result from possession by a god or demon.' The OED also states that a fan is, 'a person who has a strong interest in or admiration for a particular sport, art form, or famous

---

<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of fan studies that do cite Adorno see Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002), 31. Hereafter cited as *FC*.

<sup>6</sup> For a fanatically comprehensive account of fandom in Adorno's *oeuvre* see James Hellings, *The Love of Thought: Essays on Freud, Adorno and Deleuze* (University of London: Senate House Library (PhD Thesis), 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Russell's standard introduction may well have fewer entries for philosophy than for variations on the theme of fandom ('fanatic,' 'fanatical,' 'fanatically,' 'fanaticism'). There are twenty-two entries by my count, two of which are reserved for his concluding paragraph. Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1996) 265, 267, 313, 315, 339, 342 (x2), 347, 349, 391 (x2), 392, 394, 416, 509, 545 (x2), 551, 616, 712, 744 (x2).

person.’ Moreover, the OED defines a fanatic as, ‘a person filled with excessive and rigidly single-minded zeal or enthusiasm, especially for an extreme religious or political cause.’ The commitment to a cause coupled to connotations of (neo)religiosity and/or false idolatry, with emphasis on ‘negative’ possession by something external to a *fan(atic)*, exist to this day. I agree that fans are scandalous, roguish, demonic followers armed with unregulated devotion, mad love and passionate enthusiasm<sup>8</sup> – and I choose to actively encourage these aspects of fandom as, ‘the capacity of being in uncertainties,’ as uncompromising behavioural forms replete with ‘negative capability.’<sup>9</sup>

I suspect that there is, in fan comportment, a critical edge – what I refer to as ‘perfidious fidelity.’<sup>10</sup> I have written this article as a fan, as a lover of Adorno’s thought. My own experience of working with love and its knowledge confirms my suspicion that philosophical fidelity cannot be presupposed. This article, therefore, attempts precisely what Adorno suggests an article essay should do, namely, confronting - ‘disrupting’<sup>11</sup> and ‘interrupting,’<sup>12</sup> not capturing nor

---

<sup>8</sup> In *History of Western Philosophy* Russell argues against variations on fandom yet values and argues for enthusiasm, which I wish to attribute to fan(dom). ‘The Bacchic ritual produced what was called ‘enthusiasm’, which means, etymologically, having the god enter into the worshipper, who believed that he became one with the god. Much of what is greatest in human achievement involves some element of intoxication, some sweeping away of prudence by passion. Without the Bacchic element, life would be uninteresting; with it, it is dangerous. Prudence versus passion is a conflict that runs through history. It is not a conflict in which we ought to side wholly with either party’ 26.

<sup>9</sup> Gillian Rose, *Paradiso* (London: Menard Press, 1999), 31.

<sup>10</sup> I am indebted to Düttmann for this turn of phrase, see Alexander García Düttmann, ‘What Remains of Fidelity after Serious Thought,’ in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. Peter Hallward (London: Continuum, 2004), 202-7.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander García Düttmann, *Philosophy of Exaggeration*, trans. James Phillips (London: Continuum, 2007), 14. ‘Without a *disruption*, without an interruption of attention, whose increase is an *exaggeration* of concreteness, one does not observe with precision, one simply sees what one wants to see, one side of things.’ 21.

<sup>12</sup> Cohen’s ‘interruption’ insists on the following paradox, witnessed in Adorno’s work, that positing an urgent moral imperative is, at once, to posit the impossibility of fulfilling it - this impossibility rather than paralysing the imperative actually makes it more necessary. ‘The

catching out - a thinker and their thoughts, 'with the truth that each one intends even if it does not want to intend it:' recognition of their blind spot.<sup>13</sup>

The question I would like to pose in this article is whether or not a fan can make strategic use of the fanaticism of a fanatic, folding it back against a fanatic so as to extract the maximum quantity and quality of potential from such an excessive and uncompromising comportment thereby creating their very own serious and meaningful participation.

It is necessary to make one more minor diversion before following Adorno with the same roguish devotional reading strategy exercised by an enthusiastic fan by considering a contemporary occasion when the question of fandom and philosophy becomes paramount. Arthur C. Danto *outs* a fellow American philosopher as a fan.

Cavell's sensibility as a thinker is thoroughly saturated by what one might call movie culture. The overall relationship in which he stands to the star philosophers in his own intellectual firmament, for example, is essentially that of a fan: he is a Wittgenstein fan, a Nietzsche fan, just as he is an Alfred Hitchcock and a Groucho Marx fan, but also, which is rarer, both for the form of the relationship and its target, a fan of Emerson and of Thoreau.<sup>14</sup>

Cavell's prose style, according to Danto, 'has something of the character of artistic expression in its own right,' 'a kind of willed outrageousness,' is evident in Cavell's writing which is also described by Danto as, 'so personal,

---

impossibility of actualizing the imperative prevents thinking from coming to rest.' Josh Cohen, *Interrupting Auschwitz: Art, Religion, Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2005) 26.

<sup>13</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Essay as Form,' in *Notes to Literature: Volume One*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) 20.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur C. Danto, 'Review of: *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises*,' in *Artforum*, Volume XXXII, No. 10, Summer 1994, 3 (of *Bookforum*).

so confessional and confiding, so caught up with the history of his enthusiasms and his disaffection' that any potential reader of Cavell is expected to, 'relive with him the history of his philosophical and esthetic crushes.' Danto's problem with such an artisanal and amatory approach to philosophising, a philosophy of exaggeration or principled over-interpretation, lies in his belief that one is left with, 'the sense that one has undergone a journey,' without arrival. Or, to put it differently, that one cannot easily detach Cavell's thesis from its expression of and engagement with – in Danto's pejorative words – 'philosophical detritus.'<sup>15</sup>

Cavell, himself, does take up the subject of taking fandom seriously, specifically in relation to film, in, 'Appendix: Film in the University,' to his 1981 book, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*. Cavell asks whether or not there exists, 'an honorable objection to the serious, humanistic study of film,' in other words, whether film itself is a 'proper' object for serious philosophical analysis and teaching.<sup>16</sup> Choosing to take film and by extension fandom seriously, of necessity in the university, means displacing other subjects. That said, Cavell finds the very idea of submitting, 'the objects of its study [film] to a kind of cult,' dangerous, ugly and abhorrent,<sup>17</sup> thereby seemingly ruling out any fandom on his part. It appears as if Danto accuses Cavell of the very thing the latter occludes. Yet, Cavell goes on to remark that if a teacher has, 'something to love and something to say and a talent for

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981) 265. Hereafter cited as *PH*.

<sup>17</sup> Cavell, *PH*, 269.



communicating both,<sup>18</sup> (love's knowledge and work<sup>19</sup>), then this danger is of little significance.

I have spoken of a university, with its commitment to rational discourse toward some public goal, as if it too is an agent of the destruction of cults; but I have also admitted its own propensity to cultism. And I have spoken as if, for example, Wittgenstein and Heidegger, and perhaps Thoreau and Nietzsche, were clear candidates for a university curriculum, yet I know that each of them is mainly the object of a cult.<sup>20</sup>

What matters for Cavell, as for me, is that either a fan's or a professor's love is taken seriously, that love can be known, learnt and taught, transposed into and transformed in a work, ultimately that one can stand in relation to objects (of knowledge) as a lover - both as an enthusiastic amateur fan and as an impassioned professor of philosophy – entangled or immersed emotionally and intellectually.<sup>21</sup> There exists a fine line differentiating this fandom (love and its communication) from fanaticism (imitation and/in worship), which I agree with and aim to expose and complicate in this article. Cavell self-

---

<sup>18</sup> Cavell, *PH*, 270.

<sup>19</sup> On this point I have been guided by two thinkers exclusively: Nussbaum and Rose – both of whom have, perhaps, done most to argue for love's knowledge and love's work understood as a practical philosophy, which locates in the emotions a 'cognitive dimension,' a form of thinking. See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) and her, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of the Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). See also Gillian Rose, *Love's Work* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1995) and her aforementioned, *Paradiso*. This is the same claim made by Adorno and Cavell *et al.* – the power to philosophise comes from being affected, from being interested, from wonder, fascination and curiosity. This affirmation of human potentiality from a position of weakness is relevant to fans.

<sup>20</sup> Cavell, *PH*, 273. Hills cites this section of Cavell, yet makes no mention of Danto. Hills, *FC*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> See Stanley Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994) 131.

describes as both, 'a professor,' and as, 'an advocate of film,'<sup>22</sup> in Danto's language he is a fan of film. He has no problem, for instance, in taking the films of Buster Keaton seriously - from the perspective of Heidegger. What I take from Cavell is this belief in an amatory and affective relation to thought, a richer entanglement,<sup>23</sup> a love of thought or intellectual love, which is worth taking seriously.<sup>24</sup> Cavell is, therefore, what I would like to describe as an artisanal-philosopher-fan.

I would like to position the fan accordingly - as an uncompromising figure whom via love and passion, affect and admiration (so many emotional ties and uncompromising interests and identifications), reconfigures the relation between thinking and living, knowing and loving, while also expanding one's more ordinary, everyday, relationships with others. Fans, through their fandom - their weak, exposed and vulnerable relation to an outside, conditioned as it is affectively - experience themselves differently (in a sane

---

<sup>22</sup> Cavell, *PH*, 270.

<sup>23</sup> 'But there are  
Richer entanglements, enthrallments far  
More self-destroying, leading, by degrees,  
To the chief intensity: the crown of these  
Is made of love and friendship, and sits high  
Upon the forehead of humanity.'

John Keats, 'Endymion: A Poetic Romance,' in *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, ed. John Barnard (London: Penguin, 2006 edition), 128.

<sup>24</sup> The love of thought or wisdom is drawn from the Plato of the *Phaedrus*: 'I'm a lover of learning'; '(...) a lover of discourse'; '(...) the love of wisdom'; "lover of wisdom." Plato, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 479, 484, 499, 502, 524. Intellectual love, although indebted to Spinoza, is platonic as Russell implies in his *History of Western Philosophy*, 'philosophy, for Plato, is a kind of vision, the 'vision of truth'. It is not *purely* intellectual; it is not merely wisdom, but *love* of wisdom, Spinoza's 'intellectual love of God' is much the same intimate union of thought and feeling' 124. 'But then wherever there really is a love of wisdom – or call it the passion for truth – it is inherently, if usually ineffectively, revolutionary; because it is the same as hatred of the falseness in one's character and of the needless and unnatural compromises in one's institutions.' Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002 (Updated Edition)) xxxix.

sense).<sup>25</sup> In so doing, I would like to argue against the conclusion arrived at by many otherwise intelligent commentators on Adorno that he is elitist, a 'mandarin' and guardian of anachronistic culture,<sup>26</sup> avant-garde art and divisive outmoded theories of taste,<sup>27</sup> who had 'taken up residence in the

---

<sup>25</sup> 'With thinking we may be beside ourselves in a sane sense.' David Henry Thoreau, *Walden, or, Life in the Woods* (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), 87. Thoreau goes on to write, in the fifth chapter of *Walden* entitled, 'Solitude,' 'By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good and bad, go by us like a torrent. We are not wholly involved in Nature. (...) I *may* be affected by a theatrical exhibition; on the other hand, I *may not* be affected by an actual event which appears to concern me much more. I only know myself as a human entity; the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections; and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it; and that is no more I than it is you.' Cavell refers to this being beside oneself in a sane sense as a 'pre-philosophical' experiencing of ecstasy, as a doubling of self (pre-philosophical signifies thought's primitivism before, 'the sophistication or professionalization of philosophy.') Stanley Cavell, *The Senses of Walden: An Expanded Edition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), xiii. This ecstatic entanglement is, I believe, the comportment particular to fans.

<sup>26</sup> In an otherwise interesting chapter on Adorno Eagleton reverts to precisely this stereotype, 'It is ironic in its turn that this nostalgic *haut bourgeois* intellectual, with all his mandarin fastidiousness and remorseless tunnel vision, should join the ranks of Mikhail Bakhtin and Walter Benjamin as one of the most creative, original cultural theorists Marxism has yet produced.' Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 363-4.

<sup>27</sup> 'The concept of taste is outmoded,' Theodor W. Adorno, 'On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening,' in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein, trans. Maurice Goldbloom (London: Routledge, 1991) 29. Hereafter cited as *FCMRL*. It is, perhaps, worth noting that this essay is the only text by Adorno that Jenkins includes in the bibliography to his own (seminal fan study) text, tendentiously dismissive of Adorno's work. Jenkins certainly does not consider taste to be outmoded. Fans and fandom, he argues, may not be to everyone's taste, but in this rupture of sensibility lies the scandal (of taste). Jenkins cites both Bourdieu's classic, 1979, *Distinction*, and de Certeau's, 1984, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, to shore up the political, social and economic impact such scandalous activity can effect in culture. What Jenkins refers to as 'good taste' becomes, in someone like Bourdieu's hands, a signifier for one's educational capital, cultural capital, class capital etc. 'Good taste' is only a part of the larger sphere of social relationships and exchange in the market place that forms culture. Taste is, in short and so reductively, class bound and essentially discriminatory. Social distinctions rest on such ideological constructions and for Jenkins, following Bourdieu, such taste 'is always in crisis.' Ideological conflict is a constant, one cultural group claims their taste as the highest, another class competes, and with such hierarchization comes the necessity of policing whichever order succeeds, of maintaining the distinction (read separation), between 'good taste' (read bourgeois high culture) and 'bad taste' (read working class Kitsch). The former comprising the world of rational, educated, detached interest. The latter signals the all too human world of desire, immersion, enjoyment and satisfaction. Fans, according to Jenkins, disrupt and pervert the status quo, 'The stereotypical conception of the fan, while not without limited factual basis, amounts to a projection of anxieties about the violation of dominant cultural hierarchies. The fans' transgression of bourgeois taste and disruption of dominant cultural hierarchies insures that their preferences are seen as abnormal and threatening by those who have a vested interest in the maintenance of these standards. (...) Fan culture muddies those boundaries, treating popular texts as if they merited the same degree of attention and appreciation as canonical texts. Reading practices (close scrutiny, elaborate exegesis,

“Grand Hotel Abyss.”<sup>28</sup> Rather, I would position him, à la Cavell, as an artisanal-philosopher-fan.

Adorno’s first text to draw an explicit reference to the cultural phenomena of fandom was published in 1938 and entitled, *On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening*. In this relatively early provocation, Adorno’s uncompromisingly critical stance toward popular culture can almost be reduced to a single formula expressed negatively as the ‘all-encompassing exchange relationship’<sup>29</sup> of the culture industry illustrated in the fetishism of the commodity, which Adorno following Marx argues is, ‘the veneration of the thing made by oneself which, as exchange-value, simultaneously alienates itself from producer to consumer.’<sup>30</sup> The ‘tired businessman,’<sup>31</sup> the ‘woman

---

repeated and prolonged reading, etc.) acceptable in confronting a work of “serious merit” seem perversely misapplied to the more “disposable” texts of mass culture. (...) Fan interpretative practice differs from that fostered by the educational system and preferred by bourgeois culture not simply in its object choices or in the degree of its intensity, but often in the types of reading skills it employs, in the ways that fans approach texts. From the perspective of dominant taste, fans appear to be frighteningly out of control, undisciplined and unrepentant, rogue readers. Rejecting the aesthetic distance Bourdieu suggests is a cornerstone of bourgeois aesthetics, fans enthusiastically embrace favored texts and attempt to integrate media representations into their own social experience. Unimpressed by institutional authority and expertise, the fans assert their own right to form interpretations, to offer evaluations, and to construct cultural canons. Undaunted by traditional conceptions of literary and intellectual property, fans raid mass culture, claiming its materials for their own use, reworking them as the basis for their own cultural creations and social interactions. (...) Fan culture stands as an open challenge to the “naturalness” and desirability of dominant cultural hierarchies, a refusal of authorial authority and a violation of intellectual property.’ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 16-8 (51 for dismissal of Adorno). Fans, for Jenkins, treat ‘light’ cultural objects ‘highly,’ and are ‘active producers and manipulators of meaning:’ *textual poachers* as the title of his book suggests. Ibid., 23. Fans are, therefore, firmly locked into relations of power. I differ from Jenkins in not viewing fans as possessors (poachers, thieves, borrowers etc), whether or not this possession is legitimate or not, as poaching only reinforces the paradox of there existing an official, regulated, area out of bounds to fans.

<sup>28</sup> Lukács, Georg, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971) 22. On this bone of contention see the excellent Martin Jay, *Adorno* (London: Fontana, 1984) 22 and Martin Jay, ‘Adorno in America,’ in *New German Critique*, Number 31, Winter 1984, 157-82. ‘Rather than reduce Adorno to any one star in his constellation, be it Western Marxist, elitist mandarin, aesthetic modernist, or whatever, we must credit all of them with the often contradictory power they had in shaping his idiosyncratic variant of Critical Theory’ 161.

<sup>29</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974) 239. Hereafter cited as *MM*.

<sup>30</sup> Adorno, *FCMRL*, 38.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 42.

who has money,' and the 'jazz enthusiast' [*Jazzenthusiasten*], all succumb to the mysterious intoxication of the 'act of buying.'<sup>32</sup> Both producers and consumers in the culture industry fetishise or become fixated upon the tit for tat 'act of exchange,'<sup>33</sup> which 'destroys use values'<sup>34</sup> by masking, under the appearance of immediacy, mediation (i.e., the 'crystallisation of social labour'<sup>35</sup>).

'The counterpoint to the fetishism of music is a regression of listening.'<sup>36</sup> If the culture industry has become one great fetish, reifying everything in its wake, then the mode of participation within it, listening to and consuming music, so Adorno warns, has not progressed and then regressed, rather, it has been, 'arrested at the infantile stage' of 'deconcentration.' Such a distracted listener is 'childish' not 'childlike,' an important distinction, and the listener's development, concentration and experience, is blocked along with

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 39. For the German see Theodor W. Adorno, *Dissonanzen; Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie*, Gesammelte Schriften: Band 14, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, with Gretel Adorno, Susan Buck-Morss and Klaus Schultz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973), 26. Hereafter cited as *GS14*. I will, hereafter, provide the German for equivocal phrases related to fandom. 'Jazz fans [*fans*], short for fanatics [*Fanatiker*],' so Adorno informs, do - to a certain extent - 'see through' the spectacle halfway yet passively accept it regardless. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms: Cultural Criticism and Society*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1981), 123. Hereafter cited as *P*. For the German see Theodor W. Adorno, *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft I: Prismen, Ohne Leitbild*, Gesammelte Schriften: Band 10.1, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, with Gretel Adorno, Susan Buck-Morss and Klaus Schultz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977) 125. Hereafter cited as *GS10.1*. Adorno's use of language and his conceptualisation are, in this essay, confusing (as is the English translation). Fans and fanatics, jazz enthusiasts and jazz fanatics, and followers of jazz more generally are here made synonymous, similar if not identical. 'There is a striking similarity between this type of jazz enthusiast [*Jazzenthusiasten*] and many of the young disciples of logical positivism, who throw off philosophical culture with the same zeal [*Eifer*] as jazz fans dispense with the tradition of serious music.' Adorno, *P*, 128. For the German see Adorno, *GS10.1*, 131. 'Fans,' it must be noted, are nowhere mentioned in this sentence.

<sup>33</sup> Karl Marx: *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 474.

<sup>34</sup> Adorno, *FCMRL*, 39.

<sup>35</sup> Karl Marx, *Value, Price and Profit*, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1865/value-price-profit/ch02.htm>, accessed 21 July 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Adorno, *FCMRL*, 46.

the belief in the possibility that there might come into existence something unheard of, something unforeseen, something 'new.'<sup>37</sup>

Adorno, here, identifies three specific childish participants or immature personality 'types,' which can be extracted, 'from the masses of the retarded.' This infantile triad share the following regressive *modus operandi*, 'whenever they attempt to break away from the passive status of compulsory consumers and 'activate' themselves, they succumb to pseudo-activity,'<sup>38</sup> which accurately reflects the deceptive economy administered from above by the stultifying and standardizing system of social control that is the culture industry.

The first type of regressive personality, what I understand Adorno to understand when he writes 'fans,' is sketched as 'enthusiasts' [*Enthusiasten*], who write 'fan letters' [*Begeisterungsbriefe*].<sup>39</sup> Adorno subsequently and unsympathetically refers to them as cranks or 'bigots who complain.'<sup>40</sup> These *fans* also, Adorno asserts, refer to themselves as, 'jitterbugs, as if they simultaneously wanted to affirm and mock their loss of individuality.'<sup>41</sup> Being an enthusiast of jazz is, for Adorno, a double misfortune and the jitterbugging

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 46-9. 'The regression of the masses today lies in their inability to hear with their own ears what has not already been heard.' Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 28. Hereafter cited as *DE*.

<sup>38</sup> Adorno, *FCMRL*, 52.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. For the German see Adorno, *GS14*, 41. It ought to be stated that Adorno does not, consistently, differentiate between enthusiasts [*Enthusiasten*] and fans [*Fans*], in the same way he distinguishes enthusiasts [*Enthusiasten*] from fanatics [*Schwärmerei*]. This equivocality of language is compounded when Adorno confuses the latter difference in a later text where he writes of the 'ambivalent relation to authority,' peculiar to the psychology of, 'the jazz fanatic' [*Jazzfanatiker*]. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 135. Hereafter cited as *PNM*. For the German see Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, *Gesammelte Schriften: Band 12*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, with Gretel Adorno, Susan Buck-Morss and Klaus Schultz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1975), 168.

<sup>40</sup> Adorno, *FCMRL*, 56.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 53.

practiced by these fans is apparently not dissimilar to the 'fanatical love [*fanatischen Liebe*] (...) [which] is at the bottom of what the bourgeois were wont to call, mistakenly, the flight from oneself, from the inner void.'<sup>42</sup> Fans, here, like the bourgeoisie are caught in negotiating positions of authority – power relations<sup>43</sup> - with the aid of 'parody'<sup>44</sup> and 'caricature.'<sup>45</sup> However, the possibility of advancing beyond mere 'pseudo-activity,' becoming individuated and progressively active, is not open to them. Integration, adaptation and conformism are the culture industry's catchwords but as Adorno hazards, 'he who integrates is lost.'<sup>46</sup> Adorno describes fans thus,

Their ecstasy is without content. That it happens, that the music is listened to, this replaces the content itself. The ecstasy takes possession of its object by its own compulsive character. It is stylized like the ecstasies savages go into in beating the war-drums. (...) But the ecstatic ritual betrays itself as pseudo-activity by the moment of mimicry. (...) The imitative assimilation to commodity models is intertwined with folkloristic customs of imitation.'<sup>47</sup>

Fans are charged with practicing commodity fetishism. Lacking the requisite faculty they skip productive listening and regressively rest content by dancing

---

<sup>42</sup> Adorno, *MM*, 139. For the German see Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*, Gesammelte Schriften: Band 4, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, with Gretel Adorno, Susan Buck-Morss and Klaus Schultz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1951), 158.

<sup>43</sup> There must be more to life than this bare recognition? The inability to evade domination is echoed in the following lines, 'the awakening of the subject is bought with the recognition of power as the principle of all relationships.' Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, p. 5. Adorno goes farther still, 'the almost insoluble task is to let neither the power of others; nor our own powerlessness, stupefy us.' Adorno, *MM*, p. 57.

<sup>44</sup> Adorno, *FCMRL*, 52.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>46</sup> Adorno, *MM*, 240.

<sup>47</sup> Adorno, *FCMRL*, 53.

along to the music. Dancing substitutes for listening, reactive letter writing replaces active productivity. Fans identify with, imitate or mimic, 'stages of sexual excitement,'<sup>48</sup> rituals that are fixed upon at the expense of an active libidinal ecstasy. Fans parody or caricature the ecstasies of 'savages.'<sup>49</sup> The ecstasy of fans is not of this magnitude – it borrows its vernacular but has not the breath to speak. 'Means and end are inverted.'<sup>50</sup> I can only assume that, for Adorno, parody and caricature are childish, not childlike, activities. Fans are phony.<sup>51</sup>

The second personality type practicing pseudo-activity, 'the eager person' [*Eifrige*], is more private in their occupation. 'He is shy and inhibited, perhaps has no luck with girls.'<sup>52</sup> For this type, 'it is irrelevant to him what he hears or even how he hears; he is only interested in the fact that he hears and succeeds in inserting himself, with his private equipment, into the public

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. See also Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Schema of Mass Culture,' in, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein, trans. Nicholas Walker et al. (London: Routledge, 1991), 95-6. Hereafter cited as *SMC*. For the German see Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente*, Gesammelte Schriften: Band 3, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, with Gretel Adorno, Susan Buck-Morss and Klaus Schultz (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag GmbH, 1969 (revised edition, 1981)), 334. Hereafter cited as *GS3*. Adorno's unsympathetic language is echoed in Freud's account of the fetish, 'Such substitutes [for the sexual object] are with some justice likened to the fetishes in which savages believe their gods are embodied.' Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001); Standard Edition VII, 153.

<sup>50</sup> Adorno, *MM*, 15. Adorno, elsewhere, comes close to Jenkins' perspective, 'The preponderance of means over ends which holds sway throughout the culture industry is manifested in popular music as a waste of egregious interpreters on unworthy products. That so many who know better let themselves be thus misused is due, of course, to economic reasons; but their bad conscience creates a climate perfect for poisonous rancor. With cynical naïveté, yet not without a certain measure of awful justification, they tell themselves that they are holding the patent on the spirit of the times.' Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976), 32-3.

<sup>51</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda,' in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein, trans. Nicholas Walker et al. (London: Routledge, 1991), 152.

<sup>52</sup> Adorno, *FCMRL*, 53. For the German see Adorno, *GS14*, 42.



mechanism, without exerting the slightest influence on it.’<sup>53</sup> Everyone knows that such boys and young men of today (pejoratively referred to as ‘techies,’ ‘nerds’ and/or ‘geeks’), are either DJs or ‘heroes’ of the guitar. This type are technically advanced, they are ‘up-to-date’ - as it were. However, this very same technology which the eager ‘users’ believe sets them free through engagement merely sustains a fantasy of and withdrawal from participation – creating an entire virtual world that cannot be played out ‘for real,’ which is actually determined and controlled by the programmers who (contrary to opinion) ‘use’ the ‘users.’ Once again means, by privatisation, are divorced of their relation to an end. Turn on, tune in and drop out.

The third and final type is the ‘expert’ [*sachverständiger*]<sup>54</sup> an example of which is the ‘jazz amateur’ [*Jazzamateurs*].<sup>55</sup> More rational than an *enthusiastic fan* and more sociable than an *eager person* this knowing type, ‘can identify every band and immerses himself in the history of jazz as if it were Holy Writ.’<sup>56</sup> However, even this heightened degree of *exegetical* expertise on the part of the amateur expert ultimately fails to resist the domination exercised by the status quo. Their childishness is witnessed in the self-delusion of believing that they actually do make a difference to the whole. Such a type, for Adorno, has nothing to say of ends but knows a great deal about means.

These men, for they all appear to be males in Adorno’s eyes, who fetishistically and regressively engage in pseudo-activity, do so in order to differentiate themselves from the crowd, to elevate themselves above the

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. For the German see Adorno, *GS14*, 43.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 55. For the German see Adorno, *GS14*, 44.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 54.

mass. Yet, in endeavouring to rise from the rabble, 'he is simultaneously betraying the possible and being betrayed by the existent.' It appears as if, according to Adorno's criticism of 'the 'new possibilities' in regressive listening,' the fan is not fanatical enough, the eager person is neither personable nor public enough and the amateur is not expert enough to destructure the whole wrongness of the situation.<sup>57</sup>

Adorno does not leave the case entirely closed and without hope, however, as witnessed in the following statement, '[o]ne might be tempted to rescue [regressive listening] if it were something in which the 'auratic' characteristics of the work of art, its illusory elements, gave way to the playful ones.'<sup>58</sup> If (and it is a big IF), play overcomes illusion, art and for that matter music (not to mention the personality types who participate), may prove to have all the more serious consequences.

This furnishes my commentary with a further point. Enthusiastic fans, eager persons and amateur experts, for Adorno, are not playful enough – or, rather they are playful in the wrong way – fan play is a 'disrespectful play.'<sup>59</sup> Fan play is misplaced and disrespectful insofar as it transforms play into a duty by taking popular culture and its commodities too seriously. 'The infantile play [of the regressive listener] has scarcely more than the name in common with the productivity of children. (...) Its bestial seriousness consists in the fact that instead of remaining faithful to the dream of freedom by getting away from purposiveness, the treatment of play as a duty puts it among useful purposes

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 56-7.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 58.

and thereby wipes out the trace of freedom in it.<sup>60</sup> Childish fans misunderstand the importance of being earnest and also lack the childlike ability and productivity of play.<sup>61</sup> The disrespectful play, bestial seriousness and 'sadistic humour,'<sup>62</sup> of fans where, 'something so completely useless is carried on with all the visible signs of the strain of serious work,'<sup>63</sup> attests to the instrumentalised reality they inhabit where 'the whole of life must look like a job.'<sup>64</sup> Such regressive personality types pervert play and sacrifice seriousness. Play, for Adorno, is lighthearted and purposeless - therein lies both its value and its seriousness, which fans devalue.

Fans, if I may use this term as a catch-all category, begin from co-option not from options. Fans negotiate with this reduced reality, whether its mode is caricature or parody, and in their negotiations lose something of the *purposiveness without purpose* – freedom, in a word - necessary for, 'the liberation of things from the curse of being useful.'<sup>65</sup> Fans instrumentalise, reify and fetishise - they make the useless useful. In order to negotiate fans presuppose the necessity of the existent and in so doing block the possible - dreaming new realities. Fans, according to this view, cock a snook at both

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>61</sup> 'Infantilistic music behaves toward its models like a child who takes apart a toy and puts it back together again faultily. Something not entirely domesticated, an untamed mimetism, nature itself is lodged in what is contrary to nature: Thus in dance may savages have portrayed a missionary prior to devouring him. But the impulse for this is due to the civilizing pressure that proscribes loving imitation and tolerates none that is not mutilated.' Adorno, *PNM*, 137. For Hills, Adorno's text, 'Toy shop,' in *Minima Moralia*, shows how child's play - using the toy differently than was intended by the toy maker - may be understood as a privileging of use-value over exchange-value. Adorno, on Hills view, becomes childlike not, as Jenkins argues in *Textual Poachers*, the toy maker. The child embodies a non-commodified, acapitalist order while situated in the heart of a marketplace dedicated to exchange precisely. See Hills, *FC*, 31-5.

<sup>62</sup> Adorno, *FCMRL*, 58.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>64</sup> Adorno, *MM*, 138.

<sup>65</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Letters to Walter Benjamin,' in *Aesthetics and Politics*, trans. ed. Ronald Taylor, trans. Anya Bostock et al., Afterword by Fredric Jameson (London: Verso, 1977), 110.

reality and possibility while they, unknowingly, remain alienated from each sphere.

This is, for certain, an idiosyncratic and uncompromisingly negative vision of the status of thought and culture, not to mention the position and mode of participation within it. Fans are pathologized in no uncertain manner. Collectively, this trio of mass cultural consumers constitute Adorno's first attempt at conceptualising fandom.<sup>66</sup> Reading Adorno 'against the grain' is, when faced with such 'theoretical limitations' and partisan 'blindnesses,' crucial if fans are to find a positive expression in the margins or passages of his work.<sup>67</sup> The wider necessity for re-evaluating the position, understanding and importance, culture - together with its accompanying forms of engagement - holds in regard to Adorno's philosophy has long been required, acknowledged and argued for. Andreas Huyssen, writing in 1975, identified just this imperative to undermine Adorno's one-sidedness while, in the process of critical revision, restoring to his philosophy its value to radically reconsider and alter the situation, 'today we must rethink the concept of

---

<sup>66</sup> To give Adorno his due there are at least two possible interpretations of the position of mass or popular culture, its products and participation therein, present in his *oeuvre*. The former, which is most widely recognised and repeated is, perhaps, his 'negative' vision as outlined in this article. However, there exists a more 'positive' interpretation offered by Adorno in the concluding chapter of his book with Eisler. There Adorno writes, '[e]ven under the regime of the industry, the public has not become a mere machine recording facts and figures; behind the shell of conventionalized behavior patterns, resistance and spontaneity still survive. To imagine that the demands of the public are always 'bad' and the views of the experts always 'good' is to indulge in dangerous oversimplification. It must not be forgotten that the notion of 'the expert' is part of the same machinery that has reduced art to an administrative and commercial matter.' Theodor W. Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (London: Continuum, 1994), 120-1.

<sup>67</sup> Andreas Huyssen, 'Adorno in Reverse: From Hollywood to Richard Wagner,' in *New German Critique*, Number 29, Spring-Summer 1983, 12-3. I fully subscribe to Huyssen's reading strategy, 'to open Adorno's account to its own hesitations and resistances and to allow it to function in slightly different frames' 13. For a like-minded reading of Adorno see Miriam B. Hansen, 'Introduction to Adorno, "Transparencies on Film" (1966),' in, *New German Critique*, Numbers 24-25, Autumn-Winter 1981-2, together with her later article, 'Mass Culture as Hieroglyphic Writing: Adorno, Derrida, Kracauer,' *New German Critique*, Number 56, Spring-Summer 1992 (fans are mentioned: p. 51 note 13; p. 52), and Peter U. Hohendahl's, 'Introduction: Adorno Criticism Today,' in the same issue.

culture industry and both analyze and activate the contradictions between a passive acceptance of cultural commodities and the possibility of an emancipatory cultural production.’<sup>68</sup> Analyzing fandom, then, may provide a discursive site wherein these contradictions become activated. However, before making the difficult yet necessary argument for fandom to be reconsidered and understood as an ‘emancipatory cultural production’ - in and against Adorno - it is a relatively easier operation to repeat how it may be understood as a ‘passive acceptance of cultural commodities’ in his uncompromising philosophy of popular culture.

Adorno’s next engagement with fandom takes place in his, 1938-41, *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory*. In the opening chapter entitled, ‘Radio Physiognomics,’ the reader may find a section sub-titled, ‘Ubiquity-Standardization and Pseudo-Activity’, making it a relatively simple affair to predict Adorno’s critical position. The ‘essence of radio itself’ - ubiquity-standardization - is Adorno’s real target and is defined as, ‘[t]he standardization which (...) is the more or less authoritarian offer of identical material to a great number of people.’<sup>69</sup> ‘Fan mail,’<sup>70</sup> though listed as one of a

---

<sup>68</sup> Andreas Huyssen, ‘Introduction to Adorno,’ in *New German Critique*, Number 6, Autumn 1975, 5. Huyssen continues, ‘If a critique of present-day mass culture is to have any practical effect it must recognize the public’s needs as legitimate and at all costs must avoid the automatic denunciation of desires for fun and entertainment, for action stories and romantic novels, for sports shows, horror movies and catastrophe ‘spectaculars.’ Keeping in mind Wilhelm Reich’s analysis of the duality of conformist and emancipatory moments in the psyche of the mass audience, we must resist one-dimensionality as well as orthodox and puritan moralizing’ 10. This issue of the journal also published for the first time a complete version of Adorno’s important essay, ‘Culture Industry Reconsidered,’ translated into English by Anson G. Rabinbach, 12-19.

<sup>69</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory*, Nachgelassene Schriften: Abteilung I; Fragment gebliebene Schriften, Band 3, ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2006), 148. Hereafter cited as *CMERT*. ‘Culture today is infecting everything with sameness.’ Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, 94.

<sup>70</sup> Adorno, *CMERT*, 163.

number of '[c]ountertendencies'<sup>71</sup> to ubiquity-standardization, is, again, one of Adorno's points of reference for the pseudo-activity and irrational psychology symptomatic of consumer culture.

'The listener's attempt to impress his will upon broadcasters usually takes the form of letter writing,' and is framed as an attempt to further understand what, psychologically, motivates the *resistance* or *countertendency* of 'the dial-twirler.'<sup>72</sup> Without getting into a sticky debate on normativity, Adorno does concede that those writing letters, the fans, have a 'different' 'psychological make-up' from 'the normal listener's,'<sup>73</sup> and their "spontaneous" letters are, here, differentiated from the 'the extensive correspondence of radio-amateurs,' 'any sort of pressure-groups,' and those, 'letters inspired by an offer of reward.'<sup>74</sup> It is left to Adorno's reader to speculate on the nature of this difference. Perhaps, it could be conjectured that, for Adorno, fans are less passive than 'normal' listeners, but their efforts to transform the whole – by uncompromisingly following their enthusiasms - remain essentially inactive.<sup>75</sup>

Notwithstanding the inadequacy of Adorno's delineation - I see no reason why, 'the extensive correspondence of radio-amateurs,' should not be considered as fan mail - it is worth following his argument to understand how

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 149. Other 'countertendencies' include; the 'selection' of radio programs, the various technical 'adjustments' to facilitate improved reception; 'interactive' programs and 'switching off.'

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> 'To call their 'spontaneity' a sign of resistance or self-identification with the power resisted, of course, would be premature. But they contain positive clues allowing such an interpretation. (...) They seem to justify their ['objective'] suggestions by considering their particular viewpoints as expressions of their particular personalities.' Ibid., 164.

it is that fans, though promising, fail to get beyond pseudo-activity. Fans, as Adorno understands them, are equally 'neurotic' and 'sensible',<sup>76</sup> though,

Apparently these letter-writers feel somewhat lost and neglected in the face of 'ubiquity-standardization.' Thus, even while they are criticizing the phenomenon, they compensate for this lost feeling by attempting to re-establish personal participation in the phenomenon and by trying to attract the attention of the institution from which it originated. (...) The fan-letter as a psychological indicator becomes more valid the more the subject matter of the broadcast lies beyond the writer's understanding and his sphere of rational thinking. This must be considered an interpretation of fan mail.<sup>77</sup>

Fans do and do not understand whatever prompts them to write.<sup>78</sup> Adorno's complaint is that in drawing on their personality to facilitate and validate their written requests and observations, and in recognising the overwhelming power of the institution, fans actually repress their own power in order to identify and ingratiate themselves - 'establish a bond' - with the powers that be.<sup>79</sup> The desire driving such an emotional tie, identification or social bond, is interpreted along Freudian parameters by Adorno and Horkheimer thus,

The attraction stems from excessive attachment or develops at first sight; it can emanate from great figures, as in the case of malcontents and murderers of presidents, or from the most

---

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 165, 165 n. 1.

<sup>78</sup> Adorno confirms this view in a note, 'political speeches, meetings and news are really understood by the listeners.' Fan letter-writers have a right to respond in the manner in which they do ('bestial seriousness,' 'disrespectful play,' 'sadistic humour') to such events, however, they are not in an 'adequate situation,' when they write of things they do not understand – Adorno's examples being, 'the torturing discords of modern music,' and the 'sadistic mutilation in 'jamming' our precious folk-tunes.' Ibid., 165 n. 1.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 166.

wretched as in the pogrom itself. The objects of the fixation are replaceable like father figures in childhood.<sup>80</sup>

The 'positive' promise of spontaneous resistance is broken as soon as fans instrumentalise themselves in negotiating. Fans feel lost and disempowered, and worst of all they exhibit and exchange this impotence. 'In other words, [a fan] overcompensates his feeling of being lost as an individual by making his cause common with the cause of the subjugating power.'<sup>81</sup> In wishing to eke out some place of resistance, a point of difference from where they may speak and be heard, fans give up too much too soon and capitulate. Under the auspices of 'individual resistance,' a fan, actually, 'deserts to the other side of the fence.'<sup>82</sup> Fans start with co-option not options, they self-identify with the authority of the institution before attempting to revise and reform it. But, the existent whole is not an option.

The fan is, then, not so 'different,' not as 'exceptional' a personality as *he* would wish.<sup>83</sup> Adorno's bleak perspective refuses to acknowledge any real difference between consumer and producer, 'tired businessman' and fan, listener and broadcaster.<sup>84</sup> For, 'the listener can really influence ubiquity-standardization only when the phenomenon no longer exists and he is no longer a listener.'<sup>85</sup> This is an exaggerated claim; logically, the dissolution of standardization and pseudo-activity witnessed in the culture industry would only emerge in concert with the end of radio itself (industrialized culture and/or

---

<sup>80</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, 159.

<sup>81</sup> Adorno, *CMERT*, 166.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.



popular forms of entertainment). For Adorno, radio must be radicalised beyond recognition. Who is lost and lacking concretion; fans or Adorno?

These inaugural and fragmentary encounters with fandom are greatly enriched by the wider critical scrutiny afforded the theme in the double-headed project first published in 1944, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. The phenomena of fandom are present even when absent by name.<sup>86</sup> 'Fans' [*fans*], are in fact mentioned once only, and in the context of a discussion centring on the concordance between the advertising magnitude of both the Nazi propagandist Goebbels and that of American cultural magazines such as *Life*.

Advertising becomes simply the art with which Goebbels presciently equated it, *l'art pour l'art*, advertising for advertising's sake, the pure representation of social power. In the influential American magazines *Life* and *Fortune* the images and texts of advertisements are, at a cursory glance, hardly distinguishable from the editorial section. The enthusiastic and unpaid picture story about the living habits and personal grooming of celebrities, which wins them new fans [*neue fans*], is editorial, while the advertising pages rely on photographs and data so factual and lifelike that they represent the ideal of information to which the editorial section only aspires. (...) The montage character of the culture industry, the synthetic, controlled manner in which its products are assembled (...) predisposes it to advertising: the individual moment, in being detachable, replaceable, estranged even technically from any

---

<sup>86</sup> See Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, 99-100.

coherence of meaning, lends itself to purposes outside the work.

(...) Advertising and the culture industry are merging technically no less than economically.<sup>87</sup>

This is the first, albeit not the final, twinning of both fandom with fascism and fanaticism with anti-Semitism,<sup>88</sup> wherein impatience, intolerance and 'love-cum-hatred' – the fountain of paranoia, false projection and leader fixation constituting the authoritarian personality - are confirmed as the *modus operandi* of fanatical comportment.<sup>89</sup> The fascist's totalitarian control over all cultural manifestations (production, distribution and consumption) axiomatically confirms, so Adorno and Horkheimer argue, 'the advance[ment] toward the administered world.'<sup>90</sup> Culture, 'merges with the advertisement'<sup>91</sup> transforms into an industry of spectacle and representation and in the process becomes barbaric. Fans, here, do not resist the conflation of image and reality engendered in the mass deception and 'lunacy'<sup>92</sup> of the culture industry, but *actively* propagate and perpetuate its maniacal fantasy. Fans are framed as

---

<sup>87</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, 132-3. For the German see Adorno and Horkheimer, *GS3*, 186.

<sup>88</sup> Fanatics are discussed in the fragment entitled, 'Elements of Anti-Semitism: Limits of Enlightenment,' where Adorno and Horkheimer narrate the genealogy of 'evangelistic fanatics [*evangelistischen Schwarmgeister*]' from 'Wagnerian knights of the Grail,' to 'conspirators of blood communities and elite guards.' Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, 144. (Translation modified). Jephcott translates the phrase as, 'evangelistic zealots.' Cumming translates the phrase as, 'evangelistic fanatics,' Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997), 176. Hereafter cited as *DE*, Cumming. For the German see: Adorno and Horkheimer, *GS3*, 200.

<sup>89</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, Cumming, 234. Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, 144-5. For the German see Adorno and Horkheimer, *GS3*, 201. See also Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda,' in, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein, trans. Nicholas Walker et al., (London: Routledge, 1991), 137.

<sup>90</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, xii.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>92</sup> Adorno, *SMC*, 64. 'The curious individual who falls victim here, the raving autograph-chaser at the film studio, the child under fascism who suffers under the new-fangled disease of compulsive reading, is simply the citizen who has come to terms with reality and whose apparent insanity merely confirms the objective insanity which men have finally succeeded in catching up with.' Adorno, *SMC*, 86.

consumers groomed by producers who engage in leader worship, who suffer from 'blind conformity'<sup>93</sup> and who swallow the falseness of the whole – ideology - *wholesale*, as it were.

'Fanaticism' [*Fanatismus*],<sup>94</sup> 'fanatic(s)' [*Schwärmerei*]<sup>95</sup> and, 'fanatical' [*Fanatisch*]<sup>96</sup> behaviour are more common expressions, here synonymous with the multifaceted psychological make-up and mode of participation or comportment of fans.

Fanaticism is likened to a 'militant religiosity,' blocking any reconciliation between faith and knowledge.<sup>97</sup> By pushing faith to its limit point fanaticism makes faith faithless. 'The paradox of faith' - to *know faith* is, in fact, to be faithless - 'degenerates finally into fraud, the myth of the twentieth century and faith's irrationality into rational organization in the hands of the utterly enlightened as they steer society toward barbarism.'<sup>98</sup> Fanaticism is a crude exaggeration of faith that exposes the impossibility of the latter's overcoming knowledge.

---

<sup>93</sup> Adorno, *MM*, 36. 'In contrast to the Kantian, the categorical imperative of the culture industry no longer has anything in common with freedom. It proclaims: you shall conform, without instruction as to what; conform to that which exists anyway, and to that which everyone thinks anyway as a reflex of its power and omnipresence. The power of the culture industry's ideology is such that conformity has replaced consciousness.' Theodor W. Adorno, 'Culture Industry Reconsidered,' in, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein, trans. Anson Rabinbach, (London: Routledge, 1991), 104.

<sup>94</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, 14, 73, 214. For the German see Adorno and Horkheimer, *GS*3, 36, 112, 296.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 112, 144, 177. For the German see *Ibid.*, 162, 200, 242. Jephcott, throughout his translation of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, chooses the English word 'zealots' for variations on the German word *Schwärmerei*. Adorno does not write *Zelot*, the closest German word to 'zealot.' With this in mind Jephcott's translation seems somewhat at odds with Adorno's own language. Cumming, in his earlier translation of this text, translates *Schwärmerei* and its derivatives as both 'fanaticism' and 'fanatic,' which, I believe, is closer to Adorno's words. Of course *Schwärmerei* cannot be done into English without remainder and other terms could just as well be substituted for it; enthusiast, mystic, dreamer, romantic, visionary, sentimentalist, gusher. I will continue to include the German in my citations and footnote the variations by which Jephcott and Cumming respectively translate the phrase in question.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 74, 144. For the German see *Ibid.*, 114, 201.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 14. For the German see *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 15,

An extension of this argument, to be found in the texts second *Excursus*, sees fanaticism explicitly appended to the conjunction of enlightenment and radicalism.

From the disgust aroused by excrement and human flesh to the contempt for fanaticism [*Fanatismus*], idleness, and poverty, both spiritual and material, a line connects behavioral forms which were once adequate and necessary to those which are abominated. This line is at once that of destruction and of civilization. (...) in the glare of enlightened reason any devotion which believed itself objective, grounded in the matter at hand, was dispelled as mythological.<sup>99</sup>

Enlightened reason in demythologizing devotional behaviour and practices is, following Adorno and Horkheimer's argument, no less guilty of practising an uncompromising radicalism with which it charges faith, 'militant religiosity' or fanaticism. The two are linked dialectically and the necessary contradictions must be rigorously analysed not ignored. The outcome of thinking fanaticism may be an interruption or disruption of 'enlightened' thinking, whose imperative is renewed and enriched through just such an encounter.

Stupidity is a scar. (...) Such scars lead to deformations. They can produce "characters," hard and capable; they can breed stupidity, in the form of deficiency symptoms, blindness, or impotence, if they merely stagnate, or in the form of malice, spite, and fanaticism [*Fanatismus*], if they turn cancerous within. Goodwill is turned ill will by the violence it suffers. And not only the forbidden question but

---

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 73. For the German see Ibid., 112.

the suppressed imitation, the forbidden weeping or the forbidden reckless game, can give rise to such scars.<sup>100</sup>

The above citation, drawn from the concluding paragraph of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, provides the final expression of fanaticism in this text. Before proceeding to an analysis of this last fragment it is worth noting the title of the opening fragment, 'Against Knowingness,' which begins the paralipomena collected at the end of this text. This title is ambiguous; it is both excusatory and accusatory. Knowingness is clearly the aim of enlightened reason critiqued by Adorno and Horkheimer throughout their text. Accepting that one does not always know as one should would then be a positive outcome of their criticism, relinquishing reason as tool and power of domination.<sup>101</sup> This title, however, also supports stupidity – a symptom of deficiency that Adorno and Horkheimer criticise with equal force. Stupidity is the occasion of blocked or deformed experience, it is the untruth of cleverness – whether it is the scars of impotence, of love-cum-hatred, of fanaticism or, 'the exaggerations of speculative metaphysics.'<sup>102</sup> Indeed, being clever or "in the know" often proves to be nothing short of stupidity and, '[t]hat this turns clever people all at once into dunces convicts reason of its own unreason.'<sup>103</sup> As enlightenment and mythology dialectically embrace then so too must cleverness and stupidity be entangled. 'The contradiction of the stupidity of cleverness is

---

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 214. For the German see Ibid., 296.

<sup>101</sup> Adorno, elsewhere, puts the problem succinctly, 'To understand that one does not understand is the first step towards understanding, but not understanding itself.' Theodor W. Adorno, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 150. This Adornian (non)understanding echoes Corinthians, 'He who thinks he knows something, does not yet know as he ought to know.' Corinthians I, Chapter 8, Verse 2.

<sup>102</sup> The full sentence reads, 'The exaggerations of speculative metaphysics are scars of reflecting reason.' Adorno, *MM*, 128.

<sup>103</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, 173-4.

necessary.<sup>104</sup> The tension must not be allowed to lapse, the impossibility of detaching one from the other renews the imperative, the drive, to overcome the situation.

I will now trace the argumentation that considers the *individuation* of fanaticism; the ‘fanatics.’ The stem of the German word Adorno and Horkheimer use is *Schwärmerei*, and a brief note on its history within critical theory is perhaps overdue. *Schwärmerei* is a term distinguished in Kant’s critical philosophy. In the latter’s, 1790, *Critique of Judgement*, Kant clearly differentiates ‘enthusiasm’ [*Enthusiasmus*, *Begeisterung*], from ‘fanaticism’ [*Schwärmerei*]. The latter, according to Kant, is a, ‘delusion [*Wahn*] of wanting to SEE something beyond all bounds of sensibility, i.e., of dreaming according to principles (raving with reason). (...) If enthusiasm is comparable to madness [*Wahnsinn*], fanaticism is comparable to *mania* [*Wahnwitz*]. (...) [I]n enthusiasm, an affect, the imagination is unbridled, but in fanaticism, a deep-seated and brooding passion, it is ruleless. Madness is a passing accident that presumably strikes even the soundest understanding on occasion; mania is a disease that deranges it.’<sup>105</sup> This relation between an idea and an affect inextricably links passion to fanaticism (Adorno and Horkheimer’s *turning cancerous*), and affect to enthusiasm (Adorno and Horkheimer’s *stagnation*). Whereas the latter is very much located in the world, the former cannot claim such worldliness. Fan’s fantasy (collapsing reality and image) is nothing more than reality, as reality has become so perverted - it almost seems lunacy itself

---

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>105</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 135-6. It is also worth noting, due to the contestation over translating *Schwärmerei*, that both Bernard and Meredith translate *Schwärmerei* as ‘fanaticism.’ See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard (London: Macmillan and Co, 1914), 144-5. See also Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 128.

to call it thus. The fan's 'lunacy' [*Wahnsinn*] or 'insanity' is symptomatic of the pathological deficiency of society at large, its particular untruth testifies to the truth of the whole untruth. Kant's aforementioned distinction between enthusiasm and fanaticism helps to clarify Adorno's position. Fans are enthusiasts, Adorno does not differentiate on this point. They share with fanatics a delusional character. Fans suffer both 'madness' and 'insanity,' yet they are not all, *à la* fanaticism, infected by delusions more extreme disease; 'cancerous' 'mania.' The fan's insanity dissolves into blind obeisance if insanity conditions the whole situation.

The first use Adorno and Horkheimer make of this term is located in the *chapter* or *fragment* entitled, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,' which most poignantly brings together the major motifs and arguments of the aforementioned texts. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that beneath the sign of the dollar, under the authority of business,<sup>106</sup> culture shamelessly transforms itself into an industry as efficiently and transparently as one-time participants metamorphose into 'dependants.'<sup>107</sup> The ideological underbelly of enlightenment is here exposed in all its candour, and supports the texts major dialectical thesis; '[m]yth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology.'<sup>108</sup> '[T]he total power of capital,'<sup>109</sup> like the Charybdis, integrates, organises and instrumentalises, cultures as it encounters them. Both producers and consumers are firmly inside its remit, 'The producers no more function as subjects than do their workers and

---

<sup>106</sup> 'Their ideology is business.' Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, 109.

<sup>107</sup> Adorno, *MM*, 133.

<sup>108</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, xviii.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

consumers, but merely as components in a self-regulating machinery.<sup>110</sup> 'Desire' has become the name of a factory; it is manufactured. Deception and delusion are the achievements of the enlightenment and the fanatics of the culture industry assist in prolonging this maniacal lie.

(...) the secret of aesthetic sublimation [is] to present fulfilment in its brokenness. The culture industry does not sublimate: it suppresses. (...) Works of art are ascetic and shameless; the culture industry is pornographic and prudish. It reduces love to romance. (...) The mass production of sexuality automatically brings about its repression. Because of his ubiquity, the film star with whom one is supposed to fall in love is, from the start, a copy of himself. Every tenor now sounds like a Caruso record, and the natural faces of Texas girls already resemble those of the established models by which they would be typecast in Hollywood. The mechanical reproduction of beauty – which, admittedly, is made only more inescapable by the reactionary culture fanatics [*reaktionäre Kulturschwärmerei*] with their methodical idolization of individuality – no longer leaves any room for the unconscious idolatry with which the experience of beauty has always been linked.<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Adorno, *MM*, 205.

<sup>111</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, 111-2. (Translation modified). Jephcott translates the phrase as, 'reactionary culture zealots.' For the German see Adorno and Horkheimer, *GS3*, 162. See also Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, Cumming, 140. Cumming translates the phrase as, 'reactionary cultural fanaticism.' It is worth noting that Jenkins values this 'romance,' in stark opposition to Adorno and Horkheimer. This is interesting insofar as Jenkins does not differentiate levels of affective intensity, qualities he consistently claims are specific to fandom. See Jenkins, *TP*, 122-38.



The promise of accessing beauty and happiness - through unconscious idolatry, imitation, mimesis ('behavioral forms which were once adequate and necessary') - is always already broken by the culture industry yet it offers the illusion of fulfilment by prolonging the moment of rupture. Fulfilment is actually outlawed, desire is excoriated and lack is glossed-over. 'The promissory note'<sup>112</sup> is trash; it is not worth the paper it is printed on. Art, which represents for Adorno, the 'ever broken promise of happiness'<sup>113</sup> is never broken by itself, whereas the culture industry is solely responsible for its inadequacies – though it would tell it otherwise. Art sublimates its desire, channelling it productively into opposition to the same society from whence it came, thereby holding true to its promise of happiness - no matter how broken - in the fulfilment of desire. Art's promise, 'is as necessary as it is hypocritical.'<sup>114</sup> The brokenness of its promise consists, 'in the necessary failure of the passionate striving for identity,' 'by which it transcends reality.'<sup>115</sup> The culture industry represses and suppresses both dream and desire and with *downcast eyes* rests content with a reduced reality, 'the surrogate of identity,'<sup>116</sup> devoid of transcendence. Extending this metaphor I might be tempted to consider the culture industry in relation to St. Luke's description of the publican's encounter with Christ, 'And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his eyes* unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to

---

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>113</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), 135-6. Hereafter cited as *AT*.

<sup>114</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, 103.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

me a sinner.<sup>117</sup> The 'supreme law [of the culture industry] is that its consumers shall at no price be given what they desire.'<sup>118</sup>

Castration is certainly not the (mode of) operation beloved of the culture industry; it cannot say, "No." The latter attempts to fuse the division between 'light' and 'serious' art, subsuming and uniting their irreconcilability 'under a single false denominator.'<sup>119</sup> The *true*, the mythical element, is the subsumption of art to life, but the broken promise of art - its claim to seriousness - lies precisely in exposing, 'its opposition to existence.'<sup>120</sup>

The 'producing, controlling, disciplining,'<sup>121</sup> of pleasure and amusement, which the culture industry practices, 'is indeed escape, but not, as it claims, escape from bad reality but from the last thought of resisting that reality.'<sup>122</sup> Resistance is never activated when work and leisure march to the same drum roll. 'Where the culture industry still invites naïve identification, it immediately denies it. It is no longer possible to lose oneself in others. (...) Everyone amounts only to those qualities by which he or she can replace everyone else: all are fungible, mere specimens.'<sup>123</sup> In its reproducibility of 'types recurring cyclically as rigid invariants'<sup>124</sup> the culture industry is essentially reactionary, ideological and irrational. Fanatics, here, both fail to penetrate to the heart of the matter – practicing Adorno's artisanal and 'uncontrolled mimesis'<sup>125</sup> or 'unconscious idolatry' – and thereby fail to radically resist reduced reality.

---

<sup>117</sup> St. Luke, Chapter 18, Verse 13.

<sup>118</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, 112-3.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-7.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

Asceticism and materialism, those opposites, are ambiguous in the same way. Asceticism as a refusal to participate in the bad existing order coincides, in face of oppression, with the material demands of the masses, just as, conversely, asceticism as an agent of discipline, imposed by cliques, aims at adaptation to injustice. The materialistic acceptance of the status quo, individual egoism, has always been linked to renunciation, while the gaze of the unworldly fanatics [*unbürgerlichen Schwarmgeists*] roving beyond the existing order, rests materialistically on the land of milk and honey. Asceticism is sublated in true materialism, and materialism in true asceticism.<sup>126</sup>

The fanatic is, here, one of those rare ‘uncompromising figures’ [*Kompromißlosen*]<sup>127</sup> or ‘uncompromising spirits,’<sup>128</sup> armed with, ‘uncompromising ideas,’<sup>129</sup> who certainly does not toe the line.<sup>130</sup> The fanatic’s ‘gaze’ is not *downcast* but fixes on the utopian image of exodus and is directed toward a promised land.<sup>131</sup> ‘The gaze that rises above what is closest

---

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 177-8. (Translation modified). Jephcott translates the phrase as, ‘unworldly zealot.’ Cumming translates the phrase as, ‘non-bourgeois fanatic,’ Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, Cumming, 214. For the German see Adorno and Horkheimer, *GS3*, 242.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 176. For the German see Ibid., 240.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>130</sup> See Ibid., 175-8. St. John the Baptist and the Cynics represent, for Adorno and Horkheimer, such *uncompromising figures*. Nietzsche, rather unsurprisingly, may be included too. Perhaps, however, Adorno has the wrong man if the right philosophers? Alain Badiou cites the life and faith (not works) of Paul, both saint and militant, as *the* condition for a, ‘universal singularity,’ in his revisionist text, *Saint Paul, The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 13. Nietzsche, so Badiou argues, shares with Paul, ‘(...) the same – sometimes brutal – combination of vehemence and saintly gentleness. (...) The truth is that both brought antiphilosophy to the point where it no longer consists in a “critique,” however radical, of the whims and pettiness of the metaphysician and sage. A much more serious matter is at issue: that of bringing about through the event an unqualified affirmation of life against the reign of death and the negative’ 72.

<sup>131</sup> See Exodus, Chapter 3, Verse 8.

at hand leaves it behind as something bad and hindered in its functioning.’<sup>132</sup>

Fanatics are convinced, ‘of [their] youthful radicalism [and of their] revolutionary opposition to the dominant reality.’<sup>133</sup>

In a much later paper, written and broadcast in the year of his death, Adorno reaffirmed the potential of a certain type of individual whom shares many qualities with this fanatic, ‘(...) the uncompromisingly critical thinker [*kompromißlos kritisch Denkende*], who neither signs over his consciousness nor lets himself be terrorized into action, is in truth the one who does not give up.’<sup>134</sup> I could append the names of Beethoven and Balzac to this list of uncompromising figures, ‘Balzac attacks the world all the more the farther he moves away from it by creating it. There is an anecdote according to which Balzac turned his back on the political events of the March Revolution and went to his desk, saying, “Let’s get back to reality”; this anecdote describes him faithfully, even if it is apocryphal. His demeanour is that of the late Beethoven, dressed in a nightshirt, muttering furiously and painting giant-sized notes from his C-sharp minor quartet on the wall of his room. As in paranoia, love and rage are intertwined.’<sup>135</sup> I could also, following Adorno, point to Webern’s and Benjamin’s,<sup>136</sup> Klee’s and Kafka’s uncompromising behaviour, even Flaubert’s – all of which shares a great deal with

---

<sup>132</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Reading Balzac,’ in *Notes to Literature: Volume One*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 131. Hereafter cited as *RB*.

<sup>133</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, 176.

<sup>134</sup> Adorno, *R*, 292. For the German see Adorno, *GS10.2*, 798.

<sup>135</sup> Adorno, *RB*, 125.

<sup>136</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Sound Figures*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 94. Hereafter cited as *SF*. For the German see Theodor W. Adorno, *Musikalische Schriften I-III: Klanfiguren (I), Quasi una fantasia (II), Musikalische Schriften (III)*, *Gesammelte Schriften: Band 16*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, with Gretel Adorno, Susan Buck-Morss and Klaus Schultz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag), 113.

fanaticism.<sup>137</sup> Perhaps, a particular pathology is supported by Adorno, one which comprises uncompromising love and art?

This is the first, marginally, positive interpretation of the possibilities allotted to a certain idea of fandom. 'But the theoretical and practical systems of such historical outsiders were unstructured, without a center, and differed from the successful systems by a streak of anarchy. The idea and the individual mean more to them than administration and the collective. They therefore provoke anger.'<sup>138</sup> The *deficiency* of these 'historical outsiders,' these fanatics, is that 'they themselves [do not] reflect the world as it actually was.'<sup>139</sup> For Adorno the great refusal of reality by uncompromising figures and spirits actually blocks possibility, 'Because there is nothing that can avoid the experience of the situation, nothing counts that purports to have escaped it.'<sup>140</sup> Problematically, both their theories and ideas could not be transformed, cohesively, into domination and power.<sup>141</sup> By turning away from reality fanatics forgo the possibility of changing it. Their intolerance for the status quo makes the latter spiteful and fearful.

In the light of Adorno's comments on the wrongness of the world this militant and radical, uncompromisingly fanatical opposition to the false whole still seems slightly to its favour. If it is true that, 'life no longer lives',<sup>142</sup> then living a different type of life, creating a new emancipatory comportment, is urgently required. Whereas, before, the deficiency of fans and fanatics lay in their

---

<sup>137</sup> Adorno, *SF*, 104. For Flaubert see Adorno, *AT*, 7. For the German see Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, Gesammelte Schriften: Band 7, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, with Gretel Adorno, Susan Buck-Morss and Klaus Schultz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag), 18.

<sup>138</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, 176-7.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>140</sup> Adorno, *AT*, 33-4.

<sup>141</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *DE*, 178.

<sup>142</sup> Adorno, *AT*, 301.

willed or passive subsumption beneath the false whole – their resignation to the reduced reality offered by the culture industry - it now appears as though these figures are being criticised for positioning themselves outside the whole. The principle of their reality and reflection is neither *in* nor *on* the untrue world but so very far, ‘*from* Damaged Life.’ With this distance it may be possible for fanatics to raise, ‘the question about the right and the wrong *life*,’<sup>143</sup> for, as Adorno himself claims, ‘Only at a remove from life can the mental life exist, and truly engage the empirical. (...) Distance is not a safety-zone but a field of tension.’<sup>144</sup> But, this possibility is not open to the fanatic, as the tension between being *a part of and apart from* life is, by privileging extremes, allowed to collapse.<sup>145</sup> Fanatics are, here at least, too fanatical, too uncompromising - fanatics neither tolerate nor face up to concrete social antagonism - idealism and utopianism are the events of their untruth. But, can Adorno have it both ways? Can fans be criticised both for their co-option and for their optioning, their resignation and their refusal? Can we not see fans, like artists, as purveyors of childlike (not childish) parody and caricature, as possessing, ‘(...) the sharpest sense of reality [which is] joined with estrangement from reality.’<sup>146</sup> What can be done?

---

<sup>143</sup> Alexander García Düttmann, ‘Adorno’s Rabbits; or, Against Being in the Right,’ trans. James Phillips in *New German Critique*, Number 97, Winter 2006, 182.

<sup>144</sup> Adorno, *MM*, 126-7.

<sup>145</sup> I am indebted to O’Sullivan for this turn of phrase. Simon O’Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 40.

<sup>146</sup> Adorno, *AT*, 9.

'If I did not fear,' Adorno comments, 'being mistaken for a sentimentalist, then I would say that culture requires love: what is lacking is probably the ability to love.'<sup>147</sup> Elsewhere, Adorno puts the problem in the following way,

Understand me correctly. I do not want to preach love. I consider it futile to preach it; no one has the right to preach it since the lack of love (...), is a lack belonging to *all* people without exception as they exist today.<sup>148</sup>

The tired businessman *et al.* - emptied of desire, affects and passions, unable to love and unexcited by the world - reflects only this discontentment, disenchantment and delibidinalisation. Such figures have, 'a deficient libidinal relationship to other persons.'<sup>149</sup> Empty enthusiasm and ecstasy are their lot. What they believe to be abnegation of the external metamorphoses into self-abnegation. Indifference to the world becomes self-indifference - the tired businessman is untouchable. Love, now impossible, is transformed into hatred. But, what about that fan who is not in the *business* of loving, who does not want to exercise possession, who does not conform to the idolisation of personality and practice intolerant love but who loves uncompromisingly, obsessively and permanently – all of which behavioural 'irregularities' are privileged by Adorno in other contexts?<sup>150</sup> This fan, then, through commitment to love would enact something like a second childhood or a becoming-immature of the mature – where it is possible to recognise and acknowledge thoughts dependence on and immersion in the emotions, where philosophy is

---

<sup>147</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Philosophy and Teachers,' in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 28.

<sup>148</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Education After Auschwitz,' in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 202.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>150</sup> See Adorno, *MM*, 79, 172.

brought down from its highness, its detached and disinterested empyrean – only to allow it to fly more freely, for a second time ... in the vicinity of (popular) culture, perhaps.

Adorno, himself, confesses loving the thought of Balzac and produces an article essay testifying to his love.<sup>151</sup> Could this be the beginning of a new Adorno? Adorno as fan or as, 'the theoretician of love?'<sup>152</sup>

If Adorno's conjecture is correct, that what culture lacks 'is probably the ability to love,' then my thesis is that the amorous process of subjectivation and relationality particular to my artisanal-philosopher-fan might offer a way of rectifying this inability. Enable yourself; who do you love?

---

<sup>151</sup> 'I do not know whether I have succeeded in saying clearly enough why I love these pages.' Theodor W. Adorno, 'On An Imaginary Feuilleton,' in *Notes to Literature: Volume Two*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber NicholSEN (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 36.

<sup>152</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'On the Legacy of Frank Wedekind,' in *Notes to Literature: Volume Two*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber NicholSEN (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 277.