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ADORNO ON: THE EFFECTS OF CAPITALISM ON MODERN LISTENERS OF MUSIC

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Theodor Adorno (1903-69), the preeminent 20th century Frankfurt School philosopher, sociologist of music, and composer, wrote extensively on the effects of technology, economics, and social conditions on art and music in books such as The Philosophy of New Music, Prisms, and The Sociology of Music. In these and other books and essays, he examined the relationship between 20th century listeners and popular music, avant-garde music, and traditional classical music of the western art canon. He believed that music has a function and that there are a few basic kinds of listeners who react to this function or, more interestingly, don't react to this function.

Adorno thought that music should challenge the listener and that he or she must resist the pull towards easy consumption. He held that music that is easily digested or that doesn't challenge the listener suppresses the listener's ability to recognize problems with music and society itself. Adorno wanted to stress the importance of music in our society. He believed that music reflects its listeners and the culture of the society around it.

Adorno believed that as a capitalist society, we in the United States have turned music into a commodity, valuing it more for its exchange value than for its ability to inform and challenge us, a process known as reification. Adorno believed that over time, this process has left people feeling powerless to stop or to change this process at all. Adorno believed that this process of reification has dulled our sense of personal individualism, causing us to more easily conform to the ideals of everyone around us.

Adorno believed that listeners could be categorized into five basic types of listeners: the expert; cultural consumer; the emotional listener; the resentment listener; and the entertainment listener. Adorno believes that by understanding these five categories of listeners, we will be able to identify the characteristics of our society concerned with music and how music affects the society we live in. My paper examines and explores Adorno's critique of modern listening skills and habits.