

ZfKM

Zeitschrift für Kritische Musikpädagogik

Polarizing interpretations of society as a challenge for music education.
Polarisierende Deutungen von Gesellschaft als Herausforderung für die Musikpädagogik

Sonder-
edition 4 **21**

Jürgen Vogt
The Ghost of a Ghost

DOI: [10.18716/ojs/zfkm/2021.2132](https://doi.org/10.18716/ojs/zfkm/2021.2132)

The Ghost of a Ghost

Critical Music Education and the New Right¹

In 2019, a rather small paperback entered the list of bestselling nonfiction books in Germany. At first sight, this was not very surprising because its title suggested some political relevance and topicality: *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism* (German: *Aspekte des neuen Rechtsradikalismus*). Since the success of the German party “Alternative for Germany” (German: Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) during the elections in 2017 and 2019, the New Right has become a relevant topic in Germany. Some people sincerely believed that right-wing parties would never succeed again in Germany after World War II—what a mistake! The really surprising thing, however, was the fact that this small book contained an unpublished lecture given by the philosopher Theodor W. Adorno in 1967 (Adorno, 2019/1967), after the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) emerged in the sixties with considerable success, but disappeared, more or less, in and after the seventies².

Obviously, a lot of readers seemed to be expecting this fifty-year-old text to provide some kind of explanation for the recent success of the AfD and the New Right. Of course, this expectation had to be disappointed, since Adorno’s text does not even scrutinize or explain the details of the rise of radical right parties in the sixties. Instead, his lecture deals with the question of if, why, and how radical right thinking was able to emerge at all within democratic societies like the young German republic of the sixties (see, e.g., Adorno, 2019/1967, pp. 9-10). As Adorno had put it some years earlier³:

I do not wish to go into the question of Neo-Nazi organisations. I consider the survival of National Socialism *within* democracy to be potentially more menacing than the survival of fascist tendencies *against* democracy. Infiltration indicates something objective; ambiguous figures make their comeback and occupy positions of power for the sole reason that conditions favor them. (Adorno, 1998/1958, p. 90)

In other words: Adorno neither spoke about former Nazis who were still living and had influence in the sixties nor went into the details of new radical right organizations. Instead, he was concerned with the rise of radical right tendencies *within* a democratic society, just because these societies gave room and opportunity for such a rise. In this respect, his lecture proves to be surprisingly relevant in 2021. It shows that the disappearance of the old Nazi regime and the introduction of a formal democracy and its procedures alone is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for what we might call rational, liberal, democratic societies—if this is what we have in mind as a goal for education. At least for my generation, the German baby-boomers of the fifties and sixties, this no longer

¹ Vorbemerkung für deutsche Leser*innen: Der vorliegende Text basiert auf einem kurzen Vortrag, den ich am 4.3.2020 im Rahmen der Konferenz des NNRME (= Nordic Network for Research in Music Education) in Kopenhagen als “Keynote-Lecture” gehalten habe. Wie leicht zu sehen ist, handelt es sich um einen Text, der für ein nicht-deutsches Publikum konzipiert wurde. Vereinfachungen und Verkürzungen der “deutschen Verhältnisse” sind – hoffentlich – diesem Umstand zuzuschreiben. Trotzdem hoffe ich, dass der hier leicht überarbeitete Text auch für deutsche Leser*innen von einigem Interesse sein könnte.

² <https://www.mediathek.at/atom/014EEA8D-336-0005D-00000D5C-014E5066> [15.10.2021].

³ In the meantime, Adornos lecture has been translated into English (Adorno, 2020).

seemed to be something we really had to be concerned about: old and new Nazis had vanished (more or less), democracy had been successfully established, and we were utterly perplexed some years ago, when we had to learn that all this was not as self-evident as it seemed to be. Something must have gone wrong! I do think, however, that this problem is not just an internal German matter. The rise of the New Right, which will be used here as an umbrella term, is an international phenomenon, and it is my impression that not only democratic politicians and the media, but also educational theory and music education were simply confounded, not knowing to react to this in an adequate way. I would thus like to follow this basic intuition of a certain “wrong turn” and go back to Adorno’s original suspicion.

Adorno was not only the most prominent member of the Frankfurt School and of critical theory. Moreover, without being an educational philosopher in the first place, he had an enormous influence on educational theory and especially on music education (Vogt, 2019). In the German-speaking world, critical education and critical music education were both inaugurated by the Frankfurt School, specifically by the writings of Adorno and his successors, most prominently among them Jürgen Habermas. This is why whenever I write about critical music education I will not do so in respect to Paolo Freire or others who are most influential in the English-speaking world and elsewhere⁴, but I will stick to the version inspired by the Frankfurt School (see Blake & Masschelein, 2002).

Just like critical theory, critical music education had its heyday in Germany in the sixties and seventies, and quite a few educational philosophers proclaimed its end in the nineties (see, e.g., Peukert, 1991; Schäfer, 1991). Critical music education seemed the victim of its own success, with most of its aims reached and most of its demands fulfilled (cf. Stroh, 2002; Vogt, 2012). Music education, as it was criticized by Adorno and others, did not exist any longer and so it seemed for quite a lot of people—and I am one of them (Vogt, 2005; Vogt 2015)—that critical music education could be transformed into a more refined analysis of (educational) power, in the manner performed by Michel Foucault and others (Rieger-Ladich, 2014). I do think, however, that this diagnosis has been made somewhat too hasty, and that the aims of critical music education have not either been fully reached in the past or are in danger again in the present.

In this paper, I will try to develop this idea in three steps. First of all, I will sketch a very short history of critical theory and of critical music education in a few lines. After that, I will deal with certain strategies of the New Right that can be interpreted as a direct attack on critical theory and its impact on all kinds of cultural fields. And finally, I will present some preliminary thoughts on how music education could react in this situation.

⁴ “It is generally agreed that critical pedagogy has its origins in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School” (Portfilio & Ford, 2015, xvi). This, however, seems to be highly improbable if we take into account that, for instance, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was not translated into English before 1972 and Adorno’s seminal *Aesthetic Theory* as late as 1984, and that his pedagogical writings have been hardly translated into English at all (see Powell, 2019). As I. Gur-Ze’ev wrote in 2003: “I believe I do not run a risk of exaggeration that in fact *all current versions of Critical Pedagogy have lost their intimate connections to the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School*” (Gur-Ze’ev, 2003, p. 13).

1. A Very Short History of Critical Theory and Critical Music Education

My main thesis is that the different phases of this history are only comprehensible in light of the generational background of its main authors. This background shaped their ideas of how to deal with social and political problems through education and music education in particular. All in all, we can identify three different generations of Frankfurt School theorists and three different kinds of educational reception (see Blake & Masschelein, 2002; Anderson, 2011).

First of all, there is what might be called the first generation of the Frankfurt School. This generation joined the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt in the twenties and had to leave Germany after the Nazis assumed power. Most of them worked in the United States after 1933, and some of them returned to Germany (and Frankfurt) after the war was over. Most famous were, of course, Max Horkheimer, the head of the Frankfurt institute, and his friend and colleague Theodor W. Adorno. But there were also people like Walter Benjamin, who never really belonged to the institute, Herbert Marcuse, who never returned to Germany, or Erich Fromm, who lost contact with the institute in the United States and became famous in his own way (for the history of the Frankfurt School and its members see Wiggershaus, 1994; Jay, 1996; or Jeffries, 2017).

The members of this first generation were born around 1900; they were neo-Marxists in their theoretical approach and they came from Jewish bourgeois families. Their generational background was World War I, the short Weimar Republic, the rise of fascism, years of exile, and then the careful attempt to reeducate western—not eastern—Germany in the fifties and sixties. Their main theoretical concern was at first capitalistic society and how it changed in the early twentieth century. Their further question was how fascism had been made possible—especially *within* and *by* capitalistic societies.

All the numerous essays and lectures that Adorno wrote after his return to Germany in the fifties can be read as a single intellectual attempt to not only analyze fascism but also prevent it from occurring again. In his famous essay “Education after Auschwitz” one reads: “The demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again. Its priority before any other requirement is such that I believe I need not and should not justify it” (Adorno, 1998a/1966, p. 191). Auschwitz, the most horrifying of all concentration camps, stands *pars pro toto* for fascism in general, and it is obvious here that Adorno defines education as a political and moral task and not primarily as a way of teaching isolated contents and abilities.

Therefore, the major tool for creating a postfascist society seemed to be the critical search for all facets of fascism, not only in its manifest but also in its *potential* forms. Music education was certainly not the most important field for this critique, but it was typical for Adorno to look for this potential fascism in areas that might have seemed marginal to most of his colleagues. Therefore, when Adorno massively attacked the German music education of the fifties, he did not look for manifest fascism within the aims, contents, and methods of music education, which did not exist any longer. Instead, he looked for potential elements or risks that might make pupils susceptible to right-wing, antidemocratic thinking in the future. Adorno’s critique was nothing less than a full frontal attack, demonstrating music education to be at its heart a nationalistic, anti-intellectual, premodern and regressive enterprise (Vogt, 2019). This critique took German music educators completely by surprise, who considered singing German folk songs of the nineteenth century and making music together to be politically utterly harmless. They even located such activities in a prepolitical field of some premodern, music-making community. For Adorno, however, and for

the younger members of critical music education, this ostensible harmlessness had to be the primary target of their critique. For them, postwar German music education had to be severely criticized because it was “wrong,” by which they meant “ideological” at all levels (see Stroh, 2002; Vogt, 2017):

- It was *sociologically* and *politically wrong* in its premodern ideas about community (*Gemeinschaft*) instead of society (*Gesellschaft*).
- It was *musically wrong* in its aesthetic and practical presuppositions (making music is more important than the music itself).
- And it was *pedagogically wrong* in its traditional organization of teaching and learning.

Again: German music education of the fifties and sixties was most probably not fascist in a manifest way (see Hodek, 1977). However, Adorno and his successors suspected that it did not contribute to the development of rational and responsible citizens (Adorno, 1999/1969) within a liberal, democratic, and modern society, to say the least. Unfortunately, this unity of political, aesthetic, and pedagogical critique represented by Adorno got lost in the years to come. Critical music education in Germany never formed any kind of a real theoretical paradigm but appeared in various forms ranging from aesthetic education as an education of the senses to the integration of popular music—something Adorno, who died in 1969, certainly would have utterly disliked.

All in all, the memory of fascism and of World War II faded, and quite a few educational philosophers discussed the question of whether “education after Auschwitz” could still be the main problem for any kind of education. In the seventies and eighties a new generation of critical theorists entered the stage, preeminently represented by Jürgen Habermas, Adorno’s former assistant professor in Frankfurt. Habermas, born in 1929, belongs to what was known as the anti-aircraft generation: young boys, too young to be sent to the frontlines, who were to do homeland service instead during the allied aircraft attacks on Germany. This generation lacked any personal experience of both the rise of fascism in the twenties and thirties and of persecution and exile. Moreover, they were not Jewish! Their main concern was not to work through the fascist past anymore, but to establish and defend a democratic and liberal society in the Federal Republic of Germany, combined with a political orientation towards Western Europe and the United States.

Consequently, Habermas was much less concerned with critique than his sceptical and pessimistic teacher Adorno was, although he always intervened whenever he sensed danger for the young German democracy (see, e.g., Jeffries, 2017, pp. 370-377). Instead, Habermas worked on a much more positive basis for a rational society, which he found finally in the rationality of open, communicative action. This approach was immensely successful in German philosophy of education and—to a certain extent—in music education as well. Democratic procedures and communicative rationality, as far as it was possible, became a part of interaction in schools, although communication in schools could never be as ideal as Habermas demanded. All in all, however, Habermas was always more interested in the formal and institutional requirements of a democratic society than in the individuals who were supposed to put democracy into practice. Moreover, the aesthetic and musical dimension was nearly completely missing in Habermas’s concept of rationality. Adorno’s and other people’s experience that Nazism was always more than the result of weak democracies was almost entirely forgotten as long as German democracy worked well. In the seventies and eighties, the heyday of Habermas’s influence, the old and new right both seemed to

have vanished once and for all. Critical education had new problems to solve and new tasks to fulfill.

Habermas had left the path of Frankfurt orthodoxy by opening critical theory to a number of other philosophical traditions, such as analytic philosophy or the pragmatism of Dewey, Peirce, or Mead. In the same way, his former assistant and main representative of the third Frankfurt generation, Axel Honneth, did so by opening critical theory to various forms of postmodern influences. Honneth was born in 1949, and he represents the first generation of critical theorists who had no personal experience with fascism at all. Hence Honneth tried to reformulate critical theory without referring to this experience. Honneth's 1992 "opus magnum," *The Struggle for Recognition*, tried to give critical theory a new beginning by going back to its very roots, even behind Karl Marx, in defining social struggles as the main driving forces of social development. By describing those struggles as struggles for "recognition," Honneth reintroduced the moral and subjective dimension into social philosophy that was missing in Habermas's rather formal theory. This turn in critical theory led to overlaps with theories of class, culture(s), race, and gender, although Honneth noticed quite early that the pure feeling of discrimination alone could never be the basis for a rational claim for recognition. In German music education, recognition has become a major topic since the nineties, mainly conceived as concepts of intercultural or gender-sensitive music education—unfortunately without any longer referring to critical theory.

Critical theory and critical music education, so it seems, have fulfilled their task. The first generation had succeeded in "working through the past," as Adorno had called it; the second generation had built the basis for a rational and democratic society; and the third generation is still dealing with the rights of oppressed minorities in a diverse society and with social pathologies that prevent the enforcement of those rights.

2. Political and Cultural Strategies of the New Right

However, the story of critical theory and critical music education obviously has not been told to its real end. If we take a closer look, the political and cultural strategies of the New Right in Germany can be interpreted as a direct attack on the achievements of all three generations of critical theory and critical music education. I will start, again, with Generation One of the Frankfurt School. In 2018, Alexander Gauland, then chairman of the AfD, held an infamous speech, in which he stated that the twelve years of fascism in Germany were nothing more than "a bird's shit in more than thousand years of successful German history"⁵. Please note the strategy behind this statement: it tempts us to believe that the Nazi years had been a terrible time—no doubt!—but if we take a look at the bigger picture of German history, these years will finally lose their importance and no German should bother with them any longer. Apart from the question what is supposed to be meant by a "successful history", this is a typical attempt to qualify fascism in a relativistic way

⁵ "Hitler und die Nazis sind nur ein Vogelschiss in über 1000 Jahren erfolgreicher deutscher Geschichte." Quoted here from <https://www.zeit.de/news/2018-06/03/empowerung-wegen-gaulands-relativierung-der-ns-zeit-180603-99-560879> [03.06.2021].

and to normalize German history: these twelve years belong to the past; other nations have committed terrible crimes as well; so let us concentrate on the positive aspects of being German—which is basically, being German.

If we take this relativistic approach seriously, then something such as “music education after Auschwitz” becomes completely obsolete and with it, Adorno’s critique of German music education. In this case, fascism appears to be just an accident of history that will never happen again, and therefore nobody should care about potential dangers of harmless singing and music-making, of being together in a community of equals, and of being proud of German music again. It goes without saying that the New Right would even deny the danger of a *potential* fascism within democracies as Adorno diagnosed it, because they *are* this danger, and they are the living proof that such a “working through the past” has never happened, at least with them.

But the second generation of critical theorists is being attacked as well, although this might not be quite so obvious. Another main strategy of the New Right is to discard the idea of modern Western democracies and their rules and standards, in addition to fomenting mistrust or even hatred in democratic institutions, in politicians, and in the media (“fake news,” “alternative facts”). For music education, this kind of strategy might result in sowing mistrust in schools and in democratic procedures as a part of music teaching and learning. Schools, their curricula, and their teaching methods could be considered as a product of a ruling elite, which, for example, is accused of ignoring real German music while promoting all kinds of music from different cultures considered dangerous for German national identity. Habermas’ basic idea of a patriotism that is mainly grounded in the German constitution and therefore open for all other kinds of cultures, tastes, etc. must appear as the very embodiment of treason in this perspective.

Quite obviously, the third generation of critical theory and of critical music education is the main target of the New Right nowadays. In a twisted way, the New Right victimizes itself as the “oppressed majority” of German society, struggling to be politically and culturally recognized. In 2016, another AfD politician, Jörg Meuthen, accused Germany of being “left-green infested” by the former members of the student revolution of the sixties⁶. The New Right pictures itself as a majority in a country where they are oppressed by a dictatorial minority; and it views this minority as a mysterious mixture of former student movement communists and new ecologists who have in common that they are a kind of a plague which has befallen the normal, healthy body politic of Germany—a rhetoric that obviously belongs to the fascist language of the thirties.

The ideological mindset behind this viewpoint is the idea of an ethnically and culturally homogeneous people preexisting any political nation-state (Lück, 2017). If we look at Germany in particular, this idea was already out of place in the first half of the twentieth century, and that is why Adorno called the new Nazi-nationalism the “ghost of a ghost” (Adorno, 2019/1967, p. 25)—a historical ideology that was wrong from its very beginning. But of course this “second hand ghost” has at least two functions. First, it feeds racist ideas of a superior people (*Volk*), especially in the light of forced migration; and second, that the “people” can feel themselves to be a unity with a single will that is constantly ignored and betrayed by politicians, by “the government” or by an elite

⁶ “Das ‘links-grün-verseuchte 68er Deutschland,’” in Weiß, 2019, p. 77. Sometimes “verseucht” is replaced by “versifft,” which refers to “syphilis.”

that has no interest in the German nation and the German people at all⁷. In that respect, the New Right overlaps with certain forms of populism, which are not necessarily fascistic themselves but are susceptible to nondemocratic thinking (Müller, 2017, pp. 129-135).

Most of the time, the ethnic nationalism of the New Right is combined with or veiled by a cultural nationalism that in Germany is often called the “German dominant culture” (*Leitkultur*). Here again I quote, for the last time, former AfD Chairman Alexander Gauland: “Yes, there is a being-German through immigration, too. Through assimilation. Through acceptance of our culture. Through living with us and the acknowledgement of the German dominant culture as the ruling culture in our country, to which everything else has to be subordinated” (translated by JV)⁸.

It is not surprising that the New Right remains rather vague whenever they are supposed to explain what they actually mean by “German culture.” Generally speaking, they favor everything that promises to strengthen a feeling of national identity. I quote from an AfD election manifesto: according to it, the main duty of museums, orchestras, and theaters should be “to support a positive relation to our homeland” (Lück, 2017, p. 11; translated by JV). Theaters ought to play “classic German works and to stage them in a way that stimulates identification with our country” (ibid.). As ill-defined this may be in terms of content, the New Right opposes all forms of cultural modernity, just as they oppose multiculturalism and, of course, feminism in all its political, social, or cultural manifestations. Moreover, the cultural policy of the New Right tends to attack the artistic freedom of museums, orchestras, and theaters, while at the same time threatening to cut all cultural government aids (Laudenbach & Goetz, 2019)⁹.

The education policy of the New Right shows a certain resemblance to their cultural policy. It goes without saying that multicultural or gender-sensitive education should be abolished and that something like social justice is no aim for education at all. Instead, the principle of achievement (*Leistungsprinzip*) should be the only criterion for teaching and learning in order to improve German pupils’ performance in a future economic competition. Of course, the New Right does not expect immigrant children to succeed in this competition, and therefore their position is often that education should concentrate on some kind of elite German pupils who will be the dominant group within the classic German gymnasium (see Schaffarczyk, 2018). All in all, the policy of the New Right seems to be a form of what Nancy Fraser recently called “regressive neoliberalism” (Fraser, 2017), a mixture of rigorous state regulation in the cultural field and freedom of the market in the economic field. In contrast, “progressive neoliberalism,” as Fraser calls it, stresses individual freedom in all fields. In the cultural field, the New Right uses “cultural Marxism” as an umbrella term for everything they detest, and it is quite easy to see that critical theory always considered itself as

⁷ Within a broader context, Schmidt (2013) pleads for a “cosmopolitan framework” (p. 104) as a means of educational policy, in order to prevent what he calls the “balkanisation” (p. 110) of music education, “that is, the ostensive, albeit not always easily perceptible, segregation of groups or practices from voice and sight” (ibid.). Ironically, this “balkanisation” is just what the New Right suggests.

⁸ “Ja, es gibt ein Deutschsein auch durch Einwanderung. Durch Anpassung. Durch Annehmen unserer Kultur. Durch Annehmen unserer Traditionen. Durch ein Leben mit uns und die Anerkennung, dass die deutsche Leitkultur die entscheidende Kultur in diesem Lande ist und alles andere sich unterzuordnen hat” (Gauland in *FAZ*, 2016).

⁹ For the New Right, cultural politics are extremely important. As long as they do not have any real political power in parliaments, all kinds of “metapolitics” (see Weiß, 2017, pp. 54-57) are helpful in order to occupy certain cultural fields of discourse, such as political correctness, same-sex marriages, gender mainstreaming, etc. By doing so, they establish contacts with frightened conservatives or fundamental Christians.

exactly just that, as a combination of neo-Marxism with elements of cultural theory. But of course, the “cultural Marxism” of the New Right “depends on a crazy-mirror history” (Wilson, 2015), according to which “cultural Marxism” is a powerful conspiracy, a “shadowy, omnipresent, quasi-foreign elite who are attempting to destroy all that is good in the world” (ibid.).

3. What to Do?

So far, so bad. But perhaps things are not so bad at all. Perhaps the German AfD and other New Right parties are peaking right now and will vanish sooner or later. But that is not my point here and now. Like Adorno, I am not particularly interested in certain New Right parties; but I am interested in the people who might vote for them. What has happened? In his brilliant book *Returning to Reims* from 2009, French sociologist Didier Eribon describes his family of industrial workers, who used to vote socialist or communist for decades but suddenly switched to the former Front National. How is that possible? The New Right might not have a direct political grasp on music education (yet), but obviously, critical music educators—like everyone else—have underestimated a *change* in mentalities or, most probably, if we follow Adorno’s diagnosis, a certain *continuity* in mentalities.

What, then, are (critical) music educators supposed to do if we keep in mind that music education is just a very small piece in the much bigger picture? The very first suggestion sounds quite simple, although it is not, in the end: *(re)discover the political within music education!* With “political” I do not mean any preconceived relation of music education to “politics” in a rather restricted sense, as it may be associated with forms of critical music education in the sixties or seventies (see Stroh, 2002; Vogt, 2017). Rather, “the political” should be understood as a potential that always exists in music education and its practices and does not necessarily have to come from the outside. In other words: music education (and music itself) are not “political” in an essentialistic way, but they may become “political” if they are transformed into the public sphere (see Antholz, 1979; for the difference between “the political” and “politics” see Bedorf, 2010; also Negt & Kluge, 1993).

Second: *resharpen the tools of critique!* The success of critical music education has led to its factual disappearance, but obviously this has been a mistake. I am convinced that we need a new discussion about what ideology critique means today (Vogt, 2015), just as Adorno criticized the different ideological layers of German music education in the fifties. However, these layers were quite obvious in those years, whereas they are not so obvious nowadays and some authors even plead for a “post-critical pedagogy” (Hodgson, Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2017; cf. Hodgson, 2020). Critique has thus become much more complicated than it used to be because in the heyday of critical music education it was quite easy to be always on the right side. If we take Axel Honneth’s theory of recognition as an example, it is not self-evident that every group that *feels* disregarded or even suppressed should have the right to be recognized in music education. The New Right uses exactly this normative weakness, claiming they are victims, being suppressed by some “cultural-Marxist” minority. Obviously, they are wrong, but we need a rational discussion in the sense of Habermas to prove why and how those claims are justified or not.

The third suggestion, however, seems to be the most important one for me. While Adorno reflected on the continuity of fascism within democracies, he was very sceptical of whether educa-

tion could actually achieve a democratic consciousness. As an example, he mentioned some attempts to work against anti-Semitism by organizing contacts between young Germans and young Jews from Israel. Adorno doubted whether such attempts could be successful at all:

All too often the presupposition is that anti-Semitism in some essential way involves the Jews and could be countered through concrete experiences with Jews, whereas the genuine anti-Semite is defined far more by his *incapacity for any experience whatsoever*, by his unresponsiveness. (Adorno, 1998/1959, p. 101; my italics)

In other words: anti-Semitism has little or nothing to do with Jews, but much more with anti-Semites themselves, with their inability or unwillingness to make any experiences at all. As Erich Fromm put it in 1941: “Nazism is a psychological problem, but the psychological factors themselves have to be understood as being molded by socio-economic factors; Nazism is an economic and political problem, but the hold it has over a whole people has to be understood on psychological grounds” (Fromm, 1994/1941, p. 206).

Consequently, if educational endeavors are to have any chance of success, they must concentrate on potential fascists and not on their potential victims. In Adorno’s view, a “working through of the past understood as enlightenment is essentially such a *turn toward the subject*, the reinforcement of a person’s self-consciousness and hence also of his self” (Adorno, 1998/1959, p. 102; my italics).

Of course, this “turn toward the subject” as the very gist of every education after Auschwitz has its basis in the sociological work, as it was carried out by Adorno and others in the forties in American exile¹⁰. The aim of this work was to find out whether one could find, even in the very heart of Western democracy, the United States, the type of a “*potentially fascist* individual, one whose structure is such as to render him particularly susceptible to antidemocratic propaganda” (Adorno et al., 1997/1950, p. 149). The outcomes were published as *Studies in the Authoritarian Personality* in 1950 and became a sociological classic. The result of these studies proved to be quite sobering: even within American democracy one could find a remarkable number of people who appeared susceptible enough for antidemocratic, totalitarian thinking. The ideal type for this group of persons was famously called “the authoritarian personality.” All in all, the authoritarian personality, who considers himself as perfectly normal, shows the following character traits:

a mechanical surrender to conventional values; blind submission to authority together with blind hatred of all opponents and outsiders; anti-introspectiveness; rigid stereotyped thinking; a penchant for superstition; vilification, half-moralistic and half-cynical of human nature; projectivity. (M. Horkheimer, “The Lessons of Fascism,” in *Tensions That Cause War*, ed. Hadley Cantril, Urbana, Ill., 1950, quoted in Jay, 1996, p. 240)

Years before the *Authoritarian Personality* was published, American journalist Dorothy Thompson wrote a brilliant essay for *Harper’s Magazine* with the provocative title “Who Goes Nazi?,” which anticipates many of the results from Adorno’s study. As early as in 1941, Thompson wrote:

Nazism has nothing to do with race and nationality. It appeals to a certain type of mind. ... Sometimes I think there are direct biological factors at work—a type of education, feeding, and physical training which has produced a new kind of human being

¹⁰ For the empirical projects, which were run by members of the Frankfurt School in the United States, see, e.g., Jay, 1996, pp. 143–172 and 219–252.; Wiggershaus, 1994, pp. 149–176.

with an imbalance in his nature. ... His body is vigorous. His mind is childish. His soul has been almost neglected. (D. Thompson, 1941)

As Adorno suspected in the fifties and sixties, there is no reason to assume that the authoritarian personality has vanished, and will it not vanish in the 2020s, either. A perfect example for this assumption may be seen in mass murderer Anders Breivik, “obsessed with the apparent decline of traditional standards, unable to cope with change, trapped in a hatred of all those not deemed part of the in-group and prepared to take action to ‘defend’ tradition against degeneracy” (P. Thompson, 2013).

Perhaps the main focus of music education should be on what Adorno called the capacity for experiences. In that respect, music education can teach how to become and remain open, curious, and responsive to unfamiliar and new people and musics. If this is true, then music education might be most political when it is not political at all. But this, of course, is a very dialectical and very Frankfurt-style idea.

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