

CENTER for EXPERIMENTAL LECTURES

Honey

by Amalle Dublon

February 26, 2020—Artists Space
11 Cortlandt Alley, New York, NY
<http://www.experimentallectures.org>

HONEY/ CEL /amalle

it's a shame to be so euphoric and weak
Mariah Carey, Heartbreaker

And it's just like honey
When your love comes over me
Oh, baby, I've got a dependency
Always strung out for another taste of your honey
Mariah Carey, Honey

[PLAY ASMR VIDEO DURING SETUP?? Hanse Home Cafe Compilation 10 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnizeAPA0Cg> (22 minutes, mb this is silly bc it will be too loud in the room to hear it)]

Robyn, Honey (play lyrics video & song)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7LxdQUpQjgc>

- fade in audio
- pink light comes up
- start to lower volume @ 2:49 & read over the rest of the song
- total time is 4:53

ADORNO

Over the years of gathered notebooks that comprise the book *Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction*, Adorno uses the word "culinary" repeatedly to describe a way of listening to or playing music that he cautions against.

He never really defines culinary listening or culinary playing thoroughly, at least not here – [although to be honest, I didn't read the whole thing, I did ctrl-F search the PDF for any mentions of the word culinary – and] he just kind of tosses it in there as a modifier.

But the culinary seems to describe a way of listening or playing that involves not being able to help oneself; or taking too big of a helping; not having a sense of proportion; not distributing one's enjoyment thoughtfully throughout the work, but lavishing it too readily on any one part. It's a kind of gluttony that augments one part of the work at the expense of the whole, or the idea of a whole, deforming it through one's partiality for it.

In one passage from 1959, Adorno describes culinary enjoyment as an untimely "surrender" to the materiality and feel of musical sound: [quote]

Highly organized music always means the presence of the non-present, i.e., recollecting and glancing ahead, and for the performer this is always a mental and categorical function. Only one who does not simply feel music, but also thinks it, can feel it properly. – At the same time, from the work's perspective – leaving aside the critique of mass culture – this is the argument against culinary listening and playing, 'easy listening', and against any passive attitude. **Whoever simply surrenders themselves falls short of whatever they are surrendering to.**

[it's like he's saying if you let the music fuck you up too fast and too fully, you won't have time to let it show you everything it's doing, you won't be able to let it fuck you up to its fullest extent, on its own time.] Like the music is giving itself to you gradually, and you have to give yourself to it gradually too; u have to mentally shuffle back and forth across its shifting forms, and not surrender too readily to the overwhelming enjoyment of the way any particular moment sounds and feels. To give in to the pressure of that feeling without holding back a little bit and pacing yourself would be premature, and again, almost gluttonous. I think that's what he means by "culinary listening."

Song ends

[ACCESS INFO --

- Hi I'm Amalle, thank you for coming;
- *Visually describe myself and what I'm wearing; [thank you joey lubitz & gordon hall & artists space & jordan lord & tina zavitsanos & sandra wazaz and patrick! coble who is doing asl !]*
- The Robyn song that was just playing had a lyrics video with it that was projected behind me, and the images in the video were abstract close-ups of honey flowing and dripping over various objects like a gem, a flower, and some feathers; the room we're in has a lot of dim pink/ multicolored light

There's a table with food and drinks to your left behind the columns; please feel free to eat and wander around and do whatever feels comfortable; accessible non-gendered bathrooms are behind you and to your right; there is an upstairs space that's a little quieter if you want to get away and chill.

Should I say a cw: i'm going to be talking about a fatphobic text later, after a mariah carey song

****o*o*o*o****

Culinary enjoyment is something that the listener can succumb to if they get carried away. Performers are often guilty of it too, particularly, according to Adorno, "virtuosos" who feel themselves too much, "when the means" -- the flavor of their playing -- "becomes the end," rather than subordinating itself to the work. "'Tone'," he writes, "is much the same. As soon as it begins to relish itself, the musical context suffers. ... The culinary qualities are regressive." [I think he's saying they're regressive because what he's calling culinary is like the literal basis, the first thing, the sound material that the artwork rides in on.]

2



Jordan Lord
Feb 2, 2020



Yes, something like: also, just a content warning: one of the texts I'm going to be talking about is very fatphobic, and that's going to be one of the main things I'm going to be critical of in it. But also just fyi, I won't be talking about that until after we listen to a Mariah Carey song. (I think you need to do it here because if you do it later, it doesn't give anyone time to do anything about it).

[Show less](#)

Even the music itself can fall prey to what he calls a kind of "self-relish." Anthony Gritten describes Adorno's notion of the culinary in terms of an oscillation, "an oscillating connective link between performing and listening." This lush nonlocality of enjoyment, its circulation through the listener, the performer, and the music **FINISH SENTENCE**

The adjective "culinary" also comes up in relation to music's excessive beauty. In notes after an August 1954 lecture, Adorno writes: "Concerning the problem of the culinary -- the beautiful tone."

Or in 1953: "Concerning the B flat major Trio by Beethoven, performance by Heifetz-Feuermann-Arthur Rubinstein. -- 'Too beautiful'. Here that means: the sensual euphony of the sound eclipses the realization of the construction. Everything is smoothed out." (which is funny because in the Mase part of Mariah Carey's song Honey, which we're about to listen to, Mase says "what we're going to do right here is smooth it out for you").

It's as though, for Adorno, if the beauty is too loud, you can't hear the work itself. I am interested in the sexual dimension of this account of surrender and resistance, matter and form. In his notes from August 1966, Adorno recounts a disagreement he had with his cousin, Franz and the harpsichordist Edith Picht-Axenfeld. Quote:

*

Concerning the reproduction theory. The strongest argument against me came from my cousin Franz,²⁴⁷ and Edith Picht²⁴⁸ presented it to me as that of Herr von Karajan. Namely that one should present only the sensual appearance, as the structure communicates itself. 'If I love a woman, I want her body, not her x-ray image.' But this, as plausible arguments usually are, is pure sophistry. Apologia for the pre-artistic culinary element. For the hidden structural aspect is that which lends sense. If it is not realized in the appearance, then this latter becomes mere sound material and thus senseless. To be shown through the more subtle questions of punctuation. They are a function of the latent structure, of the subcutaneous. Without them, however, the overall sound, as polished as it might be, becomes gibberish. 'The essence must appear.'²⁴⁹

Black octavo book "W", pp. 115f.; August 1966

*



Jordan Lord
Feb 2, 2020



This word means something really different from what it sounds like. Maybe say what you mean by that in another sentence. Or if not that's cool, too. It can also just be poetry.

He's saying basically, the girl or the music is just flesh, is just sound, if the structure or form that lends her meaning doesn't appear on her surface.

And his cousin and his friend are like, the deep interior skeletal structure you're hoping to feel the trace of is actually just an x-ray, or a kind of belated diagnostic image without feeling or substance.

The x-ray photograph is actually Adorno's favored shorthand for how performance can reveal the interior structure of the work, all that he calls "subcutaneous" within it, which "otherwise lie[s] concealed both under the mensural notation and the sound's sensory surface." The score and the sound of its performance enflesh the work but also, in this particular way of thinking about flesh, obstruct and cover its form. The thicker and more irresistible the sound or one's enjoyment of or one's appetite for it, the more it necessarily distorts the unfolding of the work as a whole.

What Adorno terms "culinary sound" thus tends to mess up the apprehension and development of aesthetic form: it threatens to circumvent the artwork's dynamic structure through a kind of premature sensory and affective gratification, an unbalanced partiality that causes one part of the work to augment itself too much, makes it swell up and deform the whole.

The fullness, richness, or elaboration of a tone, a passage, or a player's interpretation begins to pull away from the overall shape of the work which it was meant to support and gradually disclose.

The culinary thus describes a kind of deformative pressure that commingled need, pleasure, and enjoyment bring to bear on form, performance, and aesthetic judgement. It's like with actual food: you don't just like its *form*, you also need it materially, nutritionally. But you also still *like* it, and in the sensory and aesthetic experience of its flavor, your enjoyment and your need for it can't be teased apart.

Play MARIAH Honey here? [describe video]

Lyrics video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LbHmVN7giwY>

[that was a lyrics video with a yellow background and a silly font]

BERLANT

Partly this all started because I got really upset about *Cruel Optimism*, a book by Lauren Berlant that came out in 2011. Berlant is an influential queer theorist who became famous in the 1990s (or as famous as an academic can be at least) for making it okay and cool to seriously consider ordinary feelings and regular sentimentality and other things like that that I guess at some point in the past, in some academic circles, had been considered unrigorous or apolitical. [Berlant's work was also important to me personally; I remember being in Labyrinth Books in 1999 2000

and pleasure, no one knows what causes it, or rather no one knows how to make people stop being fat.

"The obesity epidemic," writes Berlant, "is also a way of talking about the destruction of life, of bodies, imaginaries, and environments by and under contemporary regimes of capital."

Epidemiology -- the medicalized/ social-scientific study of how something becomes widely contagious -- offers Berlant a way into what, for her, is a troubling concomitance of growth and decay on the scale of populations:

The phrase *slow death* refers to the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence ... It [the phrase "slow death"] takes as its point of departure David Harvey's polemical observation...that under capitalism sickness is defined as the inability to work. This powerful observation about the rationalization of health is an important part of the story, but it is not the whole story either. Through the space opened up by this concept I offer a development in the ways we conceptualize contemporary historical experience, especially ... where life building and the attrition of human life are indistinguishable, [and where it is hard to distinguish modes of incoherence, distractedness, and habituation from deliberate and deliberative activity, as they are all involved in the reproduction of predictable life.

Eating is interesting to Berlant because it's a thing you do on purpose but also habitually, without really thinking, and where small scale feelings and larger scale effects have an ambiguously causal relationship. Part of the conceptual knot she claims to discover is that eating, admittedly "necessary to existence, part of the care of the self, the reproduction of life," and the evident cause of growth, is, in an apparent paradox, deemed by her and her medico-sociological bibliography to be **debilitating**. So I am particularly interested in Berlant's remark about the difficulty of establishing a clear distinction between decay and growth: fatness is where [quote] "life building and the attrition [or decay] of human life are indistinguishable." **[food makes u live and makes u die, it's nutritive, an intoxicant, a poison, whatever]**

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In a pretty direct way I agree with her that life is debility and vice versa, though my feelings about life, death, debility, and fatness are pretty much the exact opposite of hers. (cut?) If fatness for her represents a confluence of growth and decay on a personal level and a social one. Epidemic fatness is a social problem, a problem with sociality itself.

In other words, it's not so much slow death that bothers Berlant, or at least not death in the sense of finitude. It's actually the promiscuous reproductivity of fatness and debility which is of concern to her. The obesity epidemic is a contagion that moves through families, friends, and social life, which is why so-called childhood obesity is the most upsetting to her...

What Berlant discovers as a problem – the blur of social reproduction, pleasure, need, and debility – I would describe as quite obviously a profound aesthetic and social resource.

If we were to accept the nonopposition of life and death as a precept, "Slow death" would I guess be a technically accurate, if rude, way of describing life as a mode of progressive dependency, or the growing decay of individual figures and, as with any epidemic or contagion, of individuation itself (bc ppl have to take care of one another).

Berlant's suspicion of the culinary, like Adorno's, is concerned with *when* to surrender to enjoyment and need, the timing required in order to maintain the proper form and figure. Diet conjoins austerity to futurity, and fatness is seen as evidence of a failure to budget, resulting in a quote-unquote "premature" curtailment of life: "Paradoxically, of course, at least during this phase of capital, there is less of a future when one eats without an orientation toward it." In Berlant's account, dietary frugality must accrue as investment or incur bad, fatally reproductive debt. However, it's not, as she claims, the curtailment of a future that troubles Berlant, but rather the form of debility's specific futurity [the specific futurity of disabled fatness]: its *reproductivity* and contagion, its spread and movement, its heritability and sociability, **the way it extends itself through enjoyment and need.**

[HONEY]



Jordan Lord
Feb 2, 2020



1/1

I think that's good



[a video still of Mariah Carey from the music video for Honey; she is looking back over her shoulder with her hair flowing and green glowing water in the background. The subtitle at the bottom of the image reads "Oh baby I've got a dependency."]

Honey is kind of similar to a lot of love songs in that it's about dependency, in this case a kind of chemical dependency.

Play clip here? Fade in at 1:11

And it's just like honey
When your love comes over me
Oh, baby, I've got a dependency
Always strung out
For another taste of your honey

It's like honey when it washes over me
You know sugar never ever was so sweet
And I'm dying for ya
Crying for ya
I adore ya
One hit of your love affected me
And I'm strung out on you, darling
Don't you see
Every night and day I can hardly wait
For another taste of honey

Fade out at 1:54

I listened to Honey a lot in the car this summer, in a particularly culinary way; and what I mean by that is exactly what Adorno means, which is the expressive distension of meaning and form through interpretive augmentation.

In the song honey isn't just a food, but an addictive intoxicant, one that induces the slurring together of desire, pleasure, and need, blurring together whose need is whose. One of the kinds of intoxicated slurring I'm thinking about is the misprision of pop lyrics, like when people think "hey jude" is "hey dude."

Culinary enjoyment is about the way that vocals can expressively thicken meaning, but also about the way that the sensual or emotional experience of the listener can also distort things.

Sometimes the more you like a song the more you mishear the words and get attached to the version that you made up, or didn't exactly make up but allowed to emerge from the way the singer's performance of being overcome or intoxicated, their words giving way to expressive sonic materiality, blurs together with your own desire. the circulation between a performance distended by or surrendered to an excessive desire and enjoyment and the listener's experience of that surrender.

In particular I really like the way that the word Honey seems to decay into the phrase "I need" at the end of the track

Fade in Mariah Carey Honey -- 3:35 when Mase says about smoothing it out -- play til the end

pronounce HONEYyyy — HONEE-EEE-EE

Sounds like AHNEEEEE AH-Neeee I NEEDED it need it

Sexual need is an interesting thing, because it demonstrates a way in which need and provision, dependency and care, are indistinguishable. It's a case in which a need can be met by being redoubled and combined with someone else's, such that the more need you have, the more you have.

I NEED HONEY -- sounds like I NEED NEED

The phrases layer onto one another, devolving and decaying into a surplus pile. The slurring isn't just an expressive function, a function of the virtuoso feeling herself, but also the slur between whether she got carried away by the moment or you did

The last thing I wanted to say -- was if, according to Berlant, thickness leads to debility or disability; we could also say, inversely, disability produces the kind of thickness that we like. What I mean by that is the way that when everyone is contributing their need, the variety of their needs, it makes the party thicker, and lush, and noisier.

We could think about this in terms of the literal multiple ways of entering or being in an actual space; or on the level of an image, a text, an artwork, a song, the layering of access information that becomes a distracting augmentation or enrichment.



[a meme showing a swolo wrestler in a silky blue singlet standing with their hands on their hips; their chest is labeled MOVIE and their crotch is labeled SUBTITLES. A shorter figure labeled ME is talking to the wrestler, but looking down wistfully at their crotch]

Access -- as in captions for example -- is sometimes regarded as a kind of ungainly addition to an art work or a film, meant to make up for a perceptual "deficit" on the part of disabled people. It may be a translation, as in a displacement, but it's also an addition, which makes the form bulkier, and then that bulkiness violates the imagined elegance and completeness of an artwork's form or concept.

[When Jordan, whose work deals a lot with captioning, was helping me write this, they described captioning as "an addition that is also a subtraction." In other words, access

is not the kind of impartial policy-driven equality that it is sometimes purported to be – but a way of adding more partiality, more moving parts. It is necessarily choral.

Access is often bemoaned as burdensome standardization, but it's actually always improvisatory. Because improvisation is also this operation of taking a "given" artwork or pattern and elaborating it, and access is a similar distension, bulking up, or swelling of the artwork. It is necessarily choral. What is understood as a decay or delay of the artwork is also its increase or growth. It makes the artwork fatter, thicker, slower, and richer. It happens a lot with CART (communication access real-time translation), or live captioning, or automatic captions on youtube, for example

That gain (tina adds, and grain) is a thickness that you could fall in love with, because it involves you in the means of getting around, or communicability, and the poetry or choreography of that means. That thickness slows you down. Pretty much every love song and every sex song are about disability and dependency and being slowed down or falling down. Call the doctor, don't call the doctor, I get so weak in the knees, I can hardly speak. How people then treat that debt of love and need is pretty much everything.

Diana Ross, *Love Hangover*

start at 00:58 (or fade in a few seconds before)

fade out 1:57

If there's a cure for this,
I don't want it, I don't want it
If there's a remedy, I'll run from it, from it

Think about it all the time
Never let it out of my mind
'Cause I love you

I've got the sweetest hangover
I don't wanna get over
Sweetest hangover
Yeah, I don't wanna get over
I don't wanna get
I don't wanna get over
Sweet love, I don't want a cure for this

Don't call a doctor (sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet)
Don't call her momma
Don't call her preacher (love)

End with

SWV, Weak -- lyrics video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBczCuv_Zwc