

talked in his inaugural address of merging American social science research methods with speculative social theory, the Institute undertook few multidisciplinary projects, and never really returned to serious work on developing a systematic social theory of the current epoch.

Instead, Adorno and Horkheimer turned once again to philosophy, which they taught in most of their lecture and seminar courses upon resetting in Germany. Horkheimer, as already noted, hardly produced any independent work of value thereafter; and while Adorno became the most prolific and fascinating writer of his generation, his work is highly idiosyncratic and cannot be taken as an expression of a multidisciplinary research program, even though he continued to express his ideas concerning social research and theory and to defend Critical Theory against positivism. 51

In the following four chapters, I shall focus on the contributions of the Critical Theorists to theories of art and mass culture and communication (Chapter 5), the consumer and administered society (Chapter 6) and developments within contemporary capitalist societies and their perspectives on social change (Chapters 7 and 8). The reason for a more systematic focus than in previous chapters is that, in the absence of Institute attempts to develop a systematic and comprehensive social theory of the present age, the elaboration of Critical Theory henceforth took place in a variety of essays, books and lectures produced by various members of the Institute at different times, which often exhibit great differences, even conflicts.

Critical Theory also became more highly theoretical, for the most part, and less closely connected with either empirical research or radical politics than in the earlier phases. The major contributions of Critical Theorists would now be to philosophy and cultural analysis and critique, rather than to social theory per se – though I shall attempt to show that fragments of a theory of society are still evident in their works. Consequently I shall focus on those aspects of Critical Theory which I believe constitute some of its central contributions to radical social theory and cultural criticism. Since the work of Critical Theorists at this stage is even more fragmented and less systematic than in preceding stages, I shall draw on a variety of works, often from different periods, to present what I consider their major contributions and deficiencies. The following chapters will thus be especially concerned with what aspects of classical Critical Theory are most useful for radical social theory and politics today, and what elements should be discarded or significantly modified and developed.

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From 'Authentic Art' to the Culture Industries

Critical Theory's analyses of the functions of culture, ideology and the mass media in contemporary societies are among its most valuable legacies. The Critical Theorists excelled as critics of both 'high culture' and 'mass culture', and produced many important texts in these areas. Their work is distinguished by the close connection between social theory and cultural critique and by their ability to contextualize culture within social developments. In particular, their theory of culture was bound up with analysis of the dialectic of enlightenment. Culture, once a refuge of beauty and truth, was falling prey, they believed, to tendencies toward rationalization, standardization and conformity, which they saw as a consequence of the triumph of the instrumental rationality that was coming to pervade and structure ever more aspects of life. Thus, while culture once cultivated individuality, it was now promoting conformity and was a crucial part of 'the totally administered society' that was producing 'the end of the individual'.

This pessimistic analysis of the fate of culture in modernity was part and parcel of Institute pessimism concerning the rise of the totally administered society in its fascist, democratic state capitalist, and state Communist forms. Yet the Institute continued to privilege culture as an important, and often overlooked, source of social knowledge, as well as a potential form of social criticism and opposition. As Adorno wrote:

The task of [cultural] criticism must be not so much to search for the particular interest-groups to which cultural phenomena are to be assigned, but rather to decipher the general social tendencies which are expressed in these phenomena and through which the most powerful interests realize themselves. Cultural criticism must become social physiognomy. The more the whole divests itself of all spontaneous elements, is socially mediated and filtered, is 'consciousness,' the more it becomes 'culture'.

This passage points both to the position of Critical Theory that administered culture was coming to play ever more fundamental roles in social production and reproduction, and that analysis of culture can provide crucial insights into social processes. Critical Theory thus assigned a central role to cultural criticism and ideology critique precisely because of the central role of culture and ideology within contemporary capitalist societies. This focus on culture – which corresponded to some of the Institute members' deepest interests – took the form of a systematic inquiry into the different types, forms and effects of culture and ideology in contemporary capitalist societies. These ranged from theoretical reflections on the dialectics of culture – that is, the ways in which culture could be both a force of social conformity and one of opposition – to critiques of mass culture and aesthetic reflections on the emancipatory potential of high art.

In this chapter I shall discuss some of the cultural phenomena with which the Critical Theorists were concerned, though, given the wealth of material in this field, I shall necessarily have to be selective. I begin with a discussion of the Institute's distinction between 'high art' and 'mass culture' (5.1), and continue with more detailed analyses of its critique of the culture industries (5.2). Then I offer some alternative perspectives on mass communication and culture and some criticisms of the Institute's cultural theory (5.3). Focus will be on the extent to which classical Critical Theory continues to be valid and useful for cultural criticism today.

5.1 Dialectics of Culture

In the first issue of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, articles appeared by Lowenthal and Adorno which set forth, respectively, programs for a sociology of literature and a theory and critique of mass culture.² In 'On Sociology of Literature', Lowenthal argues against dominant idealist and philological approaches in favor of a practice which analyzes texts and other cultural objects within their social and historical contexts. Refusing to study literature as a self-contained object, Lowenthal would become a pioneer in the development of the sociology of literature, as well as a trenchant critic of mass culture.

Rejecting a positivistic historicism which would putatively produce a 'science of literature', as well as all metaphysical and idealist approaches to art which would see it as an autonomous expression of creative genius, Lowenthal proposes a historical and sociological approach based on the principles of historical materialism:

Such concern with the historical and sociological dimensions of literature requires a theory of history and society. . . . the historical explanation of literature has to

address the extent to which particular social structures find expression in individual literary works and what function these works perform in society. Man is involved in specific relations of production throughout his history.³ These relations present themselves socially as classes in struggle with each other, and the development of their relationship forms the real basis for the various cultural spheres. The specific structure of production, i.e. the economy, is the independent explanatory variable not only for the legal forms of property and organization of state and government but, at the same time, for the shape and quality of human life in each historical epoch. . . . A genuine, explanatory history of literature must proceed on materialistic principles. That is to say, it must investigate the economic structures as they present themselves in literature, as well as the impact which the materialistically interpreted work of art has in the economically determined society. (pp. 247–8)

Lowenthal stresses the importance of a theory of mediations which will articulate the interconnections between society and the work of art, including class, psychology, ideology and the artistic materials currently available. These and other mediations constitute the aesthetic object, though for a historical materialist approach, 'the concept of ideology' will be decisive for the social explanation of all phenomena of the superstructure from legal institutions to the arts. Ideology is false consciousness of social contradictions and attempts to replace them with the illusions of social harmony. Indeed, literary studies are largely an investigation of ideologies' (p. 248).

Lowenthal illustrates his position by addressing issues of form, motif and content central to literary analysis. He shows how a historical materialist approach provides access to aspects of a work of art overlooked by conventional literary theories, and thus enriches our approach to literature without necessarily being reductive. He concludes with a call for an 'aesthetics of reception' as part of this problematic which would analyze the reception and social functions of literature:

It has always been of great interest to me why a task as important as the study of the reception of literature among various social groups has been so utterly neglected even though a vast pool of research material is available in journals and newspapers, in letters and memoirs. A materialistic history of literature, unhindered by the anxious protection of the literary arts by its self-styled guardians and without fear of getting stranded in a quagmire of routine philology or mindless data collection, is well-prepared to tackle this task. (p. 254)

In addition to pioneering attempts to develop a sociology of literature, the Institute was among the first to apply the Marxian method of ideology critique to the products of mass culture. Whereas Critical Theorists like Horkheimer and Marcuse never really analyzed any artifacts of mass culture, others, like Adorno and Lowenthal, developed global theories and critiques, while carrying out detailed studies of what they came to call the 'culture industries'. Adorno began the Institute critique of mass culture in

his 1932 article 'On the Social Situation of Music', and continued it in a series of studies of popular music and other forms of mass culture over the next decades.³ Initially Adorno criticized popular music production for its commodification, rationalization, fetishism and reification of musical materials – thus applying the key neo-Marxist social categories to culture – while subsequently criticizing as well as the 'regression' in hearing produced by popular music. The framework for his critique was thus the Institute theory of the spread of rationalization and reification into every aspect of social life and the resultant decline of the individual.

A remarkable individual on the margins of the Institute, Walter Benjamin, contested the tendency to sharply separate 'authentic art' from mass culture and to valorize one at the expense of the other.⁴ For Benjamin, mechanical reproduction – his term for the processes of social rationalization described by Adorno and others in the Institute – robbed high art of its 'aura', of the aesthetic power of the work of art, related to its earlier functions in magic and religious cults and as a spiritual object in the religions of art celebrated in movements like Romanticism or 'art for art's sake'. In these cases the 'aura' of the work derived from its supposed authenticity, its uniqueness and individuality. In an era of mechanical reproduction, however, art appeared in the form of commodities like other mass-produced items, and lost its special power as a transcendent object, especially in mass-produced objects like photographs and films with their photo negatives and techniques of mass reproduction. Benjamin regarded this process – which he believed to be irreversible – ambivalently:

For the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an even greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics. (p. 224)

Whereas Adorno tended to criticize precisely the most mechanically mediated works of mass culture for their standardization and loss of aesthetic quality, while celebrating those works that most steadfastly resisted modification and mechanical reproduction, Benjamin saw progressive features in high art's loss of its auratic quality and its becoming more politicized. Such art, he claimed, assumed more of an 'exhibition value' than a cultic or religious value, and thus demystified its reception. Furthermore, he believed that proliferation of mass art, especially through film, would bring images of the contemporary world to the masses, and would help raise political consciousness by encouraging scrutiny of the world, as well as by bringing socially critical images to millions of spectators:

By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. Our towers and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling. (p. 236)

Benjamin claimed that the mode of viewing film broke with the reverential mode of aesthetic perception and awe encouraged by the bourgeois cultural elite who promoted the religion of art. Montage in film, its 'shock effects', the conditions of mass spectatorship, the discussion of issues which viewing films encouraged, and other features of the cinematic experience, produced, in his view, a new sort of social and political experience of art, which eroded the private, solitary and contemplative aesthetic experience encouraged by high culture and its priests. Against the contemplation of high art, the 'shock effects' of film produce a mode of 'distraction' which Benjamin believed makes possible a 'heightened presence of mind' and cultivation of 'expert' audiences able to examine and criticize film and society (pp. 237–41).

In some essays on popular music, and later in his famous studies (with Max Horkheimer) of the culture industries, Adorno attempted to provide a critical response to Benjamin's optimistic appraisal of the socially critical potential of popular art. In a 1938 essay entitled 'On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening', Adorno analyzed in detail the various ways in which performers of music, conductors, instruments, technical performance and arrangement of works were fetishized, and how this signified the ways in which exchange value was predominating over use value in musical production and reception, thus pointing again to how capitalism was able to control aspects of life once resistant to commercial concerns. In Adorno's words:

The works which are the basis of the fetishization and become cultural goods experience constitutional changes as a result. They become vulgarized. Irrelevant consumption destroys them. Not merely do the few things played again and again wear out, like the Sistine Madonna in the bedroom, but reification affects their internal structure. They are transformed into a conglomeration of fragments which are impressed on the listeners by climax and repetition, while the organization of the whole makes no impression whatsoever. (FSR, p. 281)

In this situation, musical listening regresses to mere reaction to familiar and standardized formulas (FSR, pp. 285ff.), which increases social conformity and domination. Regression closes off

the possibility of a different and oppositional music. Regressive, too, is the role which contemporary mass music plays in the psychological household of its victims. They are not merely turned away from more important music, but they are confirmed in their neurotic stupidity, quite irrespective of how their musical capacities are related to the specific musical culture of earlier social phases. The assent to hit songs and debased cultural goods belongs to the same complex of symptoms as do those faces of which one no longer knows whether the film has alienated them from reality or reality has alienated them from the film, as they wrench open a great formless mouth with shining teeth in a voracious smile, while the tired eyes are wretched and lost above. Together with sport and film, mass music and the new listening help to make escape from the whole infantile milieu impossible. The sickness has a preservative function. (*FSS*, p. 287)

Adorno's infamous attack on jazz should be read in the context of his theory of musical fetishism and regression.⁵ For Adorno, the often faddish taste for jazz also exhibited features of fetishism, reification and regression that he observed in other forms of popular music. Contrary to popular belief, Adorno argued, jazz was as standardized, commercialized and formulaic as other kinds of popular music, and encouraged cultural conformity (to dominant models, tastes and so on) in its devotees as much as did other forms of mass culture. Its seeming spontaneity and improvisation are themselves calculated in advance, and the range of what is permissible is as circumscribed as in clothes or other realms of fashion.

Horkheimer and Adorno also attempted to counter Benjamin's optimistic appraisal of the progressive elements of film through critique of Hollywood film production. Film in the culture industries was organized like industrial production, and utilized standardized formulas and conventional production techniques to mass-produce films for purely commercial – rather than cultural – purposes. Films reproduced reality as it was, and thus helped individuals to adjust and conform to the new conditions of industrial and mass society: 'they hammer into every brain the old lesson that continuous friction, the breaking down of all individual resistance, is the condition of life in this society. Donald Duck in the cartoons and the unfourtunate in real life get their thrashing so that the audience can learn to take their own punishment' (*DoE*, p. 138). Finally, films

are so designed that quickness, powers of observation, and experience are undeniably needed to apprehend them at all; yet sustained thought is out of the question if the spectator is not to miss the relentless rush of facts. Even though the effort required for his response is semi-automatic, no scope is left for the imagination. Those who are so absorbed by the world of the movie – by its images, gestures, and words – that they are unable to supply what reality makes it a world, do not have to dwell on particular points of its mechanics during a screening. All the other films and products of the entertainment industry which they have seen have taught them what to expect; they react automatically. (*DoE*, pp. 126–7)

During the late 1930s and the 1940s, when Adorno was developing his critique of popular music (and culture), he was working with Paul Lazarsfeld on some of the first academic studies of the communications industry, and was thus being exposed to some of the more debased and commercialized forms of popular music.⁶ Yet, while the Institute generally criticized mass culture, it did not surrender its belief in the emancipatory potential of high culture. In an important essay entitled 'On Affirmative Culture', Marcuse provides a dialectical analysis of bourgeois high culture and the ways in which it is a vehicle of both emancipation and mystification of existing social reality. In his view, culture provides a higher, compensatory realm for escape and diversion from the cares of everyday life, as well as a refuge which preserves higher ideals and claims to freedom, happiness and a better life denied in the existing organization of society.⁷ Hence bourgeois culture is 'affirmative' of higher cultural ideals which provide both ideological and potentially critical and emancipatory functions.

Many later analyses of high culture within Critical Theory preserve this tension, seeing both regressive and progressive elements within the aesthetic dimension. Yet the Institute tended to ascribe the higher, more progressive functions of culture to 'art' – that is, 'high culture' – and its more debased ideological functions to mass culture. For example, Max Horkheimer argued in 'Art and Mass Culture' that 'authentic art' was diametrically opposed to 'mass culture', a position shared by most in the Institute. He begins by describing the concept of aesthetic experience as the product of a highly individualized society, in which the private subject abstracts from prevailing social conditions and standards to make what appears to be a pure 'aesthetic judgement':

In his aesthetic behavior, man so to speak divested himself of his functions as a member of society and reacted as the isolated individual he had become. Individuality, the true factor in artistic creation and judgment, consists not in idiosyncrasias and crotchets, but in the power to withstand the plastic surgery of the prevailing economic system which carves all men to one pattern. Human beings are free to recognize themselves in works of art in so far as they have not succumbed to the general leveling. The individual's experience embodied in a work of art has no less validity than the organized experience society brings to bear for the control of nature. Although its criterion lies in itself alone, art is knowledge no less than science is. (*CT*, p. 273)

For Critical Theory 'authentic art' is thus a preserve of both individuality and happiness, as well as a source of critical knowledge. Further, an 'element of resistance is inherent in the most aloof art. Resistance to the restraints imposed by society, now and then flooding forth in political revolution, has been steadily fermenting in the private sphere' (*CT*, p. 274). Art resists incorporation into existing society, while providing standards and ideals by which to criticize its limitations:

practical world – harbor principles through which the world that voice them appears alien and false. Not only Shakespeare's wrath and melancholy, but the detached humanism of Goethe's poetry as well, and even Proust's devoted absorption in ephemeral features of *mondainé*, awaken memories of a freedom that make prevailing standards appear narrow-minded and barbarous. Art, since it became autonomous, has preserved the utopia that evaporated from religion. (CT, p. 275)

Horkheimer celebrates the classics of bourgeois high culture as 'authentic art'. With the advance of industrialism and mass society, however, the private sphere and the individual to whom bourgeois art appealed have become steadily threatened, as has the family, which once provided a sphere of intimacy and support. With the rise of industrial society, the family in turn loses its power, and 'even well-to-do parents educate their children not so much as their heirs as for a coming adjustment to mass culture' (CT, p. 276). At this point, Horkheimer begins a critique of mass culture that will subsequently characterize the Institute's work:

The gradual dissolution of the family, the transformation of personal life into leisure and of leisure into routines supervised to the last detail, into the pleasures of the ball park and the movie, the best-seller and the radio, has brought about the disappearance of the inner life. Long before culture was replaced by these manipulated pleasures, it had already assumed an escapist character. Men had fled into a private conceptual world and rearranged their thoughts when the time was ripe for re-arranging reality. The inner life and the ideal had become conservative factors. But in stuns not in modern settlements – man has lost his power to conceive a world different from that in which he lives. This other world was that of art. (CT, pp. 277-8)

Henceforth, with some qualifications, Critical Theory would make a sharp distinction between authentic art and mass culture, between 'high' art and its ideological functions to mass culture. Lowenthal, for example, writes:

The counterconcept of popular culture is art. Nowadays artistic products having the character of spontaneity more and more are being replaced by a manipulated reproduction of reality as it is, and, in so doing, popular culture sanctions and glorifies whatever it finds worth echoing. Schopenhauer remarked that music is 'the world once more.' This aphorism exhibits the unbridgeable difference between art and popular culture: it is the difference between an increase in insight through a medium possessing self-sustaining means and mere repetition of given facts with the use of borrowed tools.⁸

As far as the Institute was concerned, mass culture merely reproduced the status quo, and thus helped reproduce personality structures which

would accept the world as it is. By contrast, high culture is conceptualized as at least a potential force of enlightenment and emancipation. For Adorno, however, only the most radically avant-garde works could provide genuine aesthetic experience. Against the false harmonies of kitsch and affirmative art, Adorno defended the 'de-aestheticization' (*Entkultung*) of art, its throwing off of false veils of harmony and beauty in favor of ugliness, dissonance, fragmentation and negation, which he believed provided a more truthful vision of contemporary society and a more emancipatory stance for socially critical art. In Adorno's view, art had become increasingly problematical in a society ruled by culture industries and art markets; and to remain 'authentic', art must therefore radically resist commodification and integration. This required avant-garde techniques which would enhance art's shock value and its critical, emancipatory effects. In his volumes of critical writings, Adorno always championed precisely the most negative, dissonant artists: Kafka and Beckett in literature, Schönberg and Berg in music, Giacometti in sculpture and Celan in poetry. Through de-aestheticization, autonomous art would undermine specious harmonization and reconciliation with the existing world, which could not legitimately take place, Adorno believed, until the world was radically changed.

In 'Commitment', his well-known critique of 'politically committed art', for example, Adorno writes:

It is not the office of art to spotlight alternatives, but to resist by its form alone the course of the world, which permanently puts a pistol to men's heads. . . . Kafka's prose and Beckett's plays, or the truly monstrous novel *The Unnameable*, have an effect by comparison with which officially committed works look like pantomimes. Kafka and Beckett arouse the fear which existentialism merely talks about. By dismantling appearance, they explode from within the art which committed proclamation subjugates from without, and hence only in appearance. The inescapability of their work compels the change of attitude which committed works merely demand.⁹

Thus, for Adorno, 'authentic art' provided insight into existing reality, expressing human suffering and the need for social transformation, as well as providing an aesthetic experience which helped to produce critical consciousness and awareness of the need for individual and social transformation. Art for Adorno was thus a privileged vehicle for emancipation. Aesthetic experience alone, he came to believe, provided the refuge for truth and a sphere of individual freedom and resistance. The problem was that only authentic art could provide aesthetic experience, and it was precisely authentic art which was disappearing in the administered society.

It is impossible here to go into the complexities of Adorno's theory of authentic art, or even to discuss the full range of the various Institute contributions to the sociology of culture, ideology critique and aesthetic theory

and political aesthetics. Before appraising and criticizing the Institute's celebration of 'authentic art' and its identification with high culture (5.3), however, I wish to discuss in more detail its critique of mass culture and the important effects which its theory of the culture industry had on theories of mass culture, communications and society.

5.2 Critical Theory and the Culture Industry

The origins of the Critical Theorists' approach to mass culture and communications are visible in Adorno's early writings on music (see 5.1), though the Institute did not really develop a theory of the culture industries until its emigration to the United States in the 1930s.¹⁰ During their exile period from the mid-1930s through the 1940s, members of the Institute witnessed the proliferation of mass communications and culture and the rise of the consumer society, experiencing at first hand the advent to cultural power of the commercial broadcasting systems, President Roosevelt's remarkable use of radio for political persuasion and the ever growing popularity of cinema during a period in which from 85 to 110 million Americans paid to see 'the movies' each week.¹¹ They also experienced the widespread popularity of magazines, comic books, cheap fiction and the other flora and fauna of the new mass-produced culture.

From their vantage point in California, where many of their exiled compatriots worked for the film industry, Adorno and Horkheimer were able to see how business interests dominated mass culture and to observe the fascination which the entertainment industries exerted within the emerging media and consumer society. Marcuse, Lowenthal and others, who worked in Washington during this period for the Office of War Information and the United States Intelligence services, were able to observe government use of mass communications as instruments of political propaganda. The Critical Theorists thus came to see what they called the 'culture industries' as a central part of a new configuration of capitalist modernity, which used culture, advertising, mass communications and new forms of social control to induce consent to the new forms of capitalist society. The production and transmission of media spectacles which transmitted ideology and consumerism by means of allegedly 'popular entertainment' and information were, they believed, a central mechanism through which contemporary society came to dominate the individual.

Adorno and Horkheimer adopted the term 'culture industry', as opposed to concepts like 'popular culture' or 'mass culture', because they wanted to resist notions that products of mass culture emanated from the masses or the people.¹² They saw the culture industry as involving administered culture, imposed from above, as an instrument of indoctrination and social

control. The term 'culture industry' thus contains a dialectical irony typical of the style of Critical Theory: culture, as traditionally valorized, is supposed to be opposed to industry and expressive of individual creativity while providing a repository of humanizing values. In the culture industries, by contrast, culture has come to function as a mode of ideological domination, rather than of humanization or emancipation.

The culture industry was perceived as the outcome of a historical process in which technology and scientific organization and administration came to dominate thought and experience (see 4.1). Although Horkheimer and Adorno carried out a radical questioning of Marxism and the development of an alternative philosophy of history and theory of society in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, their theory of the culture industry provided a neo-Marxian account of the mass media and mass culture which helps to explain both the ways in which the culture industries reproduce capitalist societies and why socialist revolutions have failed to take place in these societies. In this sense, the Institute's theory of 'culture industry as mass deception' provides a rebuttal of both Lukács's theory of revolution and 'class consciousness' and Brecht's and Benjamin's belief that the new forces of mass communications, especially radio and film, could serve as instruments of technological progress and social enlightenment which could be turned against the capitalist relations of production and used as instruments of political mobilization and struggle.¹³

By contrast, Horkheimer and Adorno saw these new technologies as instruments of ideological mystification and class domination. Against Lukács and others who argued that capitalist society necessarily radicalized the working class and led to class consciousness, Adorno and Horkheimer argued that the culture industries inhibit the development of class consciousness by providing the ruling political and economic forces with a powerful instrument of social control. The conception of the culture industry therefore provides a model of technically advanced capitalist society which mobilizes support for its institutions, practices and values from *below*, making class consciousness more difficult to attain than before. In Gramsci's terminology, the culture industries reproduce capitalist hegemony over the working class by engineering consent to the existing society, thereby establishing a socio-psychological basis for social integration.¹⁴ Whereas fascism destroyed civil society (or the 'public sphere') through politicizing mediating institutions or using force to suppress all dissent, the culture industries coax individuals into the privacy of their homes or the movie theaters, where they produce consumer-spectators of media events and escapist entertainment while subtly indoctrinating them with dominant ideologies.

The analysis of the culture industry stands, therefore, in a quite ambivalent relationship to classical Marxism. On one hand, the theory is part of

the foundation for the Critical Theory of society, replacing the critique of political economy which had previously been the foundation for social theories in the Marxian tradition. It also served as an important part of the explanation of why the Critical Theorists no longer placed faith in the revolutionary vocation of the proletariat. Yet, in other ways, the analysis of the culture industry employs Marxian arguments by stressing capitalist control of culture, the commodification and reification of culture, its ideological functions and the ways in which it integrates individuals into capitalist society.

For example, Horkheimer and Adorno utilize a model that pits the individual against its 'adversary – the absolute power of capitalism' (*DoE*, p. 120), and describe the tendencies toward conformity, standardization and depection in the culture industry in terms of its control by monopoly corporations, which themselves are central to the capitalist system (pp. 120ff.). The very processes of production in the culture industry are modeled on factory production, where everything is standardized, streamlined, coordinated and planned down to the last detail. Indeed, Adorno and Horkheimer use their analysis of the culture industry to call attention to what they perceive as the fundamental traits of the administered society and to carry out a radical critique of capitalism. They suggest that reflection on the culture industries illuminates the processes promoting standardization, homogenization and conformity that characterize social life under what they call 'totalitarian capitalism'. The tendencies toward manipulation and domination in the culture industry illuminate similar trends throughout capitalist society.

The mass deception present in the culture industries is similar to the deception, false promises and manipulation in the economic, political and social spheres. In this conception, one of the main trends of contemporary capitalist societies is the synthesis of advertising, culture, information, politics and manipulation that characterizes the culture industries.¹⁵ This dialectical focus on the relationship between the culture industry and capitalism points to a basic methodological position within Critical Theory that in turn marks its affinity with Marxian dialectics. For Critical Theory, every social phenomenon must be interpreted in terms of a theory of society which itself is part of a theory of capitalism. The theory of the relationship between society and the economy illuminates phenomena like the culture industry, and analysis of the latter in turn sheds light on the economy and society. Consequently, Critical Theory operates with a dialectic between its topics of analysis (the culture industry or anti-Semitism or whatever) and its theory of society. In this dialectic, the theory of society illuminates the topic under investigation, which in turn illuminates the fundamental social trends – commodification, reification and so on – described in the social theory.

After describing the style of culture industry products and the formulas, conventions and stereotypes that constitute them, Adorno and Horkheimer analyze several of the strategies used to indoctrinate consumers into acceptance of the existing society. 'Entertainment' as they claim, accustoms audiences to accept existing society as natural by endlessly repeating and reproducing similar views of the world which present the existing way of life as the way of the world. The eternal recurrence of the same in the culture industry changes the very nature of ideology, they suggest.

Accordingly, ideology has been made vague and noncommittal, and thus neither clearer nor weaker. Its very vagueness, its almost scientific aversion from committing itself to anything which cannot be verified, acts as an instrument of domination. It becomes a vigorous and prearranged promulgation of the status quo. The culture industry tends to make itself the embodiment of authoritative pronouncements, and thus the irrefutable prophet of the prevailing order. It skillfully steers a winding course between the cliffs of demonstrable misinformation and manifest truth, faithfully reproducing the phenomenon whose opaqueness blocks any insight and installs the ubiquitous and intact phenomenon as ideal. Ideology is split into the photograph of stubborn life and the naked lie about its meaning – which is not expressed but suggested and yet drummed in. To demonstrate its divine nature, reality is always repeated in a purely cynical way. Such a photographic proof is of course not stringent, but it is overpowering. . . . The new ideology has as its objects the world as such. It makes use of the worship of facts by no more than elevating a disagreeable existence into the world of facts in representing it meticulously. (*DoE*, pp. 147–8)

The culture industry thus tries to induce the individual to identify with society's typical figures and models:

Pseudo-individuality is rife: from the standardized jazz improvisation to the exceptional film star whose hair curls over her eye to demonstrate her originality. What is individual is no more than the generality's power to stamp the accidental detail so firmly that it is accepted as such. The defiant reserve or elegant appearance of the individual on show is mass-produced like Yale locks, whose only difference can be measured in fractions of millimeters. (*DoE*, p. 134)

The culture industry thus serves as a powerful instrument of social control, which induces individuals to accept their fate and conform to existing society. Advertising progressively fuses in style and technique with the entertainment of the culture industry (*DoE*, pp. 156–67), which in turn can be read as a series of advertisements for existing society and the established way of life (see Chapter 6 for further discussion of this point).

Like every theoretical conception, the notion of the culture industries was a product of its historical period, and its insights and limitations result primarily from the fact that it theorized features of a past historical conjuncture. The Institute theorists' conception of the role of mass culture and

communications was first shaped in the period of Nazi Germany, where they witnessed Hitler's extraordinary use of mass communications and fascist spectacles. Obviously the experience of fascism shaped the Critical Theorists' views of the rise of a belated state and cultural apparatus combined with an eclipse of democracy, individuality and what they saw as authentic art.¹⁶ And in exile in the United States, they observed Roosevelt's impressive use of the media and the propagandist uses of the mass media during World War II. Consequently political use and control of the media during conditions of warfare, with an enlarged war-time state and a subordinate war-time economy, coupled with capitalist control of the entertainment industries, provided the historical roots of the Institute model of the culture industries as instruments of social control. Indeed, the media under this type of militarized social system and war conditions – whether liberal democratic, fascist or state socialist – are bound to be rather one-dimensional and propagandist. Moreover, the Critical Theory model of the media and society described rather accurately certain dominant trends and effects during the post-World War II Cold War period, when the media were enlisted in the anti-Communist crusade and when media content was subject to tight control and censorship, a situation signaled by Adorno's and Horkheimer's allusions to 'purges' (*DoE*, p. 123).¹⁷

Critical Theory, Communications Research and Social Theory

The culture industry theory was thus developed in the United States during the heyday of the Press, radio and cinema as dominant cultural forms; and it was published just before the first wave of the introduction of television, whose importance Adorno and Horkheimer anticipated and whose forms and effects were analyzed by Adorno in a classic article originally entitled 'How to Look at Television'.¹⁸ Interest in the new communications media was growing, and a new discipline was emerging to study its social effects and functions. Research into media communications in the United States was largely inaugurated by the Institute for Social Research, then located at Columbia University, and by Paul Lazarsfeld and his associates in the Radio Research Project¹⁹ and later the Bureau of Applied Social Research²⁰ at Princeton and then Columbia. Lazarsfeld was connected with the Institute in various ways, and for several years the groups interacted and undertook common projects.¹⁹

Not only did the Institute provide an early model of critical communications research, but Institute theorists were among the first to see the importance of mass communications and culture for social theory, and influenced some of the early attempts to incorporate such themes into critical social theory. In his major works of the 1950s, C. Wright Mills, for instance, tended to utilize the Institute models of the media as agents of

manipulation and social control, although, in the spirit of Lazarsfeld, he sometimes qualified its power to directly and consistently manipulate the public. In *White Collar* (1951) Mills stressed the crucial role of the mass media in shaping individual behavior and inducing conformity to middle-class values.²⁰ He argued that the media were increasingly shaping individual aspirations and behavior, and were above all promoting values of 'individual success'. He believed that entertainment media were especially potent instruments of social control, because 'popular culture is not tagged as "propaganda" but as entertainment; people are often exposed to it when most relaxed of mind and tired of body; and its characters offer easy targets of identification, easy answers to stereotyped personal problems' (p. 336).

Mills analyzed the banalization of politics in the media due to the fact that 'the mass media plug for ruling political symbols and personalities'. Perceiving the parallel between marketing commodities and selling politicians, Mills analyzed tendencies toward the commodification of politics; and in *The Power Elite*, he focused on the manipulative role of the media in shaping public opinion and strengthening the power of dominant elites.²¹ In an analysis that anticipated Habermas's theory in *Structural Changes in the Public Sphere*, Mills discusses the shift from a social order consisting of 'communities, of publics', in which individuals participate in political and social debate and action, to a 'mass society' characterized by the 'transformation of public into mass' (pp. 298ff.). The impact of the mass media is crucial in this 'great transformation', for it shifts 'the ratio of givers of opinion to the receivers' in favor of small groups of elites who control or have access to the mass media. Moreover, the mass media engage in one-way communication which does not allow feedback, thus obliterating another feature of a democratic public sphere. In addition, the media rarely encourage participation in public action. In these ways, they foster social passivity and the fragmentation of the public sphere into privatized consumers.

Like the Institute, Mills makes *manipulation* the central feature of his theory of the media. He paid explicit homage to the Institute in a 1954 article in which he described the dominant types of social research as those of the scientists (quantitative empiricists), the Grand Theorists (structural functionalists like Talcott Parsons) and those genuine sociologists who inquire into '(1) What is the meaning of this – whatever we are examining – for our society as a whole, and what is this social world like? (2) What is the meaning of this for the types of men and women that prevail in this society? and (3) how does this fit into the historical trend of our times, and in what direction does this main drift seem to be carrying us?'²² Mills then comments:

I know of no better way to become acquainted with this endeavor in a high form of modern expression than to read the periodical, *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*,

published by The Institute of Social Research. Unfortunately, it is available only in the morgues of university libraries, and to the great loss of American social studies, several of the Institute's leading members, among them Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno, have returned to Germany. That there is now *no* periodical that bears comparison with this one testifies to the ascendancy of the Higher Statisticians and the Grand Theorists over the Sociologists. It is difficult to understand why some publisher does not get out a volume or two of selections from this great periodical. (ibid.)

Following the lead of Adorno and Horkheimer, other Critical Theorists like Fromm, Marcuse and Habermas also attributed a fundamental role to the culture industries in their critical social theories. Their books helped lead many social theorists to perceive the importance of mass culture and communications in social reproduction. Fromm's first book published in the United States, *Escape from Freedom* (1941), applied the culture industry model to a critique of advertising, mass culture and political manipulation. After discussing some of the techniques of modern advertising, Fromm writes: 'All these methods are essentially irrational; they have nothing to do with the qualities of the merchandise, and they smother and kill the critical capacities of the customer like an opiate or outright hypnosis. They give him a certain satisfaction by their daydreaming qualities just as the movies do, but at the same time they increase his feeling of smallness and powerlessness.'²²

Fromm then calls attention to how mass communications dull the capacity for critical thinking and contribute to the decline of the individual (pp. 128ff.). Summarizing his argument, he writes:

Vasiness of cities in which the individual is lost, buildings that are as high as mountains, constant acoustic bombardment by the radio, big headlines changing three times a day and leaving one no choice to decide what is important, shows in which one hundred girls demonstrate their ability with clocklike precision to eliminate the individual and act like a powerful though smooth machine; the beating rhythm of jazz - these and many other details are expressions of a constellation in which the individual is confronted by uncontrollable dimensions in comparison with which he is a small parrot. All he can do is to fall in step like a marching soldier or a worker on the endless belt. He can act; but the sense of independence, significance, has gone. (pp. 131-2)

In *Escape from Freedom* Fromm also analyzes how public opinion is shaped by news media (pp. 192ff.) and how socialization patterns contribute to the decline of the individual (pp. 250ff.). The Institute critique of the culture industries also played a central role in Fromm's book *The Sane Society* and Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*, both published in 1955.²⁴ Using Freudian and Marxian categories, Marcuse described the process by which sexual and aggressive instincts are tamed and channeled into socially necessary, but unpleasant, labor. Following the Institute analysis of changes in the

nature of socialization, Marcuse notes the decline of the family as the dominant agent of socialization and the rise of the mass media:

The repressive organization of the instincts seems to be *collective*, and the ego seems to be prematurely socialized by a whole system of extra-familial agents and agencies. As early as the pre-school level, gangs, radio, and television set the pattern for conformity and rebellion; deviations from the pattern are punished not so much in the family as outside and against the family. The experts of the mass media transmit the required values; they offer the perfect training in efficiency, toughness, personality, dream, and romance. With this education, the family can no longer compete. (p. 97)

In Marcuse's view, the mass media were becoming dominant agents of socialization which were displacing the primacy of the family - the role of the mass media in both Freudian and many United States social science theories. The result was the decline of individual autonomy and the manipulation of mind and instincts by mass communications: 'With the decline in consciousness, with the control of information, with the absorption of individuals into mass communication, knowledge is administered and confined. The individual does not really know what is going on; the overpowering machine of education and entertainment unites him with all the others in a state of anaesthesia from which all detrimental ideas tend to be excluded' (p. 104). Marcuse continued to stress the manipulative effects of the culture industries in his major works, and contributed to the widespread adoption of the so-called manipulation theory of the media by the New Left and others in the 1960s. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse claims that the inanities of commercial radio and television confirm his analyses of the decline of the individual and the demise of authentic culture and oppositional thought in 'advanced industrial society'.²⁵ Throughout the book, he assigns an important role to the media as 'new forms of social control' which engender 'false needs' and the 'one-dimensional' thought and behavior necessary for the smooth reproduction of advanced capitalism.

In his first major work, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* of 1962, Habermas analyzed the rise of the culture industries and the decline of the public sphere within liberal democracy.²⁶ He provided a historical analysis of the transition from a form of liberal capitalism that contained a democratic public sphere in which 'public opinion' was formed by debate and consensus and in which an educated public critically discussed political and social issues to a form of monopoly capitalism in which public opinion was formed by the mass media, and culture was passively consumed by culture industry spectators.

The Critical Theorists therefore were among the first to see the important role of mass culture and communications in social reproduction, and deeply influenced social theorists like C. Wright Mills, David Riesman,

Alvin Gouldner, Stanley Aronowitz and a later generation of the New Left.²⁷ Furthermore, critical communications researchers like George Gerbner were directly influenced by Adorno and Critical Theory, and continued to work in this tradition to some extent.²⁸ Yet, what eventually became the dominant tradition of critical communications research in the United States (the work of Dallas Smythe, Herbert Schiller, Eric Barnouw and others) focused more on the political economy of the media, and engaged in historical and empirical communications research.²⁹ Consequently the impact of Critical Theory on critical communications research is often indirect. Yet a direct influence on theories of society and on United States debates over 'popular culture' can be attributed to the Institute for Social Research.

Critical Theory and the Debates over Mass Culture

Despite problematical elements of the Institute critique of mass-mediated culture, there is no question that its radical attacks provoked a lively discussion of its merits and deficiencies that is still important and topical.³⁰ Institute theorists' critiques of mass culture helped shape the first major anthology published in the United States on *Mass Culture* (1957), which in turn helped foster an important debate over its nature and effects. The anthology contained articles by Adorno, Lowenthal, Kracauer and Lazarsfeld, as well as many other studies influenced by the Critical Theory model. One of the editors, Bernard Rosenberg, attacked mass culture in terms reminiscent of Adorno and Horkheimer, while the other editor, David Manning White, defended it as the culture of the people appropriate to a democratic society, a culture which has made significant contributions to modern society, which in White's view would increase in the future.³¹

Lowenthal, in an essay in *Mass Culture* entitled 'Historical Perspectives of Popular Culture', outlines the theoretical, historical and critical approach toward mass culture which he defends against mainstream approaches.³² In a sharp polemic, he attacks the contemporary 'modern social science' approach to culture and communication:

Empirical social science has become a kind of applied asceticism. It stands clear of any entanglements with foreign powers and thrives in an atmosphere of rigidly enforced neutrality. It refuses to enter the sphere of meaning. A study of television, for instance, will go to great heights in analyzing data on the influence of television on family life, but it will leave to poets and dreamers the question of the actual human values of this new institution. Social research takes the phenomena of modern life, including the mass media, at face value. It rejects the task of placing them in a historical and moral context. In the beginning of the modern era, social theory had theology as its model, but today the natural sciences have replaced theology. This change in models has far-reaching implications. Theology aims at

salvation, natural science at manipulation; the one leads to heaven and hell, the other to technology and machinery. Social science is today defined as an analysis of painstakingly circumscribed, more or less artificially isolated, social sectors. It imagines that such horizontal segments constitute its 'research laboratory, and it seems to forget that the only social research laboratories that are properly admissible are historical situations. (LPCS, p. 52)

Against the critiques of mass culture by Institute theorists and others, Edward Shils attacked its critics as elitist, socialist radicals who had no sympathy for the tastes of the common people. Shils designated Horkheimer and his circle as 'Marxian socialists' who were leading the onslaught against mass culture:

It is not accidental that most of the recent critics of mass culture are, or were, Marxian socialists, some even rather extreme, at least in their past commitment to the socialist ideal. . . . Prof. Max Horkheimer, who is the leading exponent of the 'critical' philosophy of the Frankfurt circle, is an apolitical Marxist whose Hegelian sociological terminology obscures his Marxism. Prof. T. Wiscengrund-Adorno and Prof. Leo Lowenthal, the former at Frankfurt University, the latter at the University of California, are both leading adherents of this school in which a refined Marxism finds its most sophisticated expression. Dr. Erich Fromm is a psycho-analyzing Marxist.³³

Shils claimed that disappointed Marxian hopes led these radicals to turn with fury on mass culture, which they blamed for seducing the proletariat away from its revolutionary vocation. Shils insinuated that these 'European anti-American intellectuals' were full of unjustified contempt for the common people and do not understand the culture, people or society which they so vehemently criticized.

If one were to take seriously the two fountainheads of the interpretation of mass culture, namely, the Frankfurt *Institut für Sozialforschung*, led by Professor Horkheimer, and *Pittius* under the editorship of Mr. MacDonald, one would believe that the ordinary citizen who listens to the radio, goes to films and looks at television is not just *Homo noster sensual* known to past ages. He is something new in the world. He is a 'private atomic subject,' utterly without religious beliefs, without any private life, without a family which means anything to him; he is standardized, ridden with anxiety, perpetually in a state of 'exacerbated' unrest, his life 'emptied of meaning,' and 'trivialized,' 'alienated from his past, from his community, and possibly from himself,' cretinized and brutalized. (pp. 596-7)

This picture of the victims of mass culture has its parallel, Shils claims, in the German romantic, elitist and Marxian attacks on industrialism. All the critics, Shils confidently maintains, were 'ideologists, hostile to human beings as they are' (p. 598), and their critique is fueled, he claims, by 'the frustrated attachment to an impossible ideal of human perfection, and a distaste for one's own society and for human beings as they are' (p. 606). In

short, their critiques are 'unrealistic' and should be rejected by men of 'sound common sense and good judgement' (*ibid.*).

The Institute never responded to Shils directly, and I shall indicate to what extent his critique is justified in the next section. There is a suggestion of an answer to Shils, however, in a later essay by Adorno, in which he writes: 'The bourgeois is tolerant. His love for men as they are arises out of hate for the correct man.'³⁴ Critical Theory maintained that accepting people 'as they are' and 'realistically' accepting the status quo precluded conceiving of potentialities for a higher mode of human being and a better society. Critical Theorists claimed that the uncritical acceptance and celebration of mass culture promoted a conformist attitude toward established society. Critique of mass culture was perceived as an important part of social critique by Institute theorists, and they believed that renouncing this task by either celebrating or failing to take seriously mass culture simply strengthened the power of existing society. They believed that theory could help break the hold of mass culture by de-naturalizing it, by developing critical perspectives that would interrogate and criticize the forms, messages and effects of mass culture and communications.

5.3 New Critical Perspectives on Mass Communications and Culture

The critique of the culture industries was one of the most influential aspects of Critical Theory, and its impact on social theory and on theories and critiques of mass communications and culture accounts in part for the continuing interest in Critical Theory today. In particular, from the 1960s to the present, there has been renewed interest in Critical Theory and a wealth of radical critiques of mass culture, many of them influenced by Institute theories or quite similar in intent and practice.³⁵ There have also been critiques of the Institute's theory of mass culture, which stressed the similarity of the Critical Theory analysis to conservative critics of mass culture, and which condemned the Institute for its cultural elitism.³⁶

Despite its limitations, which I shall outline in this section, the Institute theory of the culture industries contains several novel features, and makes many important contributions to the study of mass communications and culture. Critical Theory conceptualizes culture and communications as part of society, and focuses on how socio-economic imperatives helped constitute the nature, function and effects of mass communications and culture. By conceptualizing these important social forces as part of socio-economic processes, Critical Theory integrates study of culture and communications with study of the economy and society. And by adopting a

critical approach to the study of all social phenomena, Critical Theory is able to conceptualize how the culture industries function as instruments of social control, and thereby serve the interests of social domination.

On the whole, later critical approaches to the media and culture tended to separate communications research from the study of mass culture, thus failing to provide a unified account of cultural production, distribution and reception. Consequently, Critical Theory is more than a piece of history, because it contains a unified, critical approach to the study of culture and communications within the context of critical social theory. Likewise, its mode of cultural criticism situates artifacts of analysis within the context of their social environment, and uses social theory to help interpret cultural artifacts, while using culture to help decipher social trends and processes. Critical Theorists' use of psychoanalytic theory leads them to decipher cultural works as exhibiting traits of individual and social psychology, as well as socio-historical content. Yet, despite its contributions, the Critical Theory model has serious limitations, for much of the criticism of popular culture is limited to denunciation of its ideological features. Since much in popular culture deserves and demands severe condemnation, Critical Theory's method of ideology critique provides some useful tools for cultural criticism; but it also suffers some limitations.

In contrast to the mode of condemnatory criticism associated with Critical Theory, radical cultural criticism today should develop more complex strategies, and should attempt to develop a more multidimensional approach to mass culture. Rather than seeing its artifacts simply as expressions of hegemonic ideology and ruling-class interests, it is preferable to view popular entertainment as a complex product that contains contradictory moments of desire and its displacement, articulations of hopes and their repression. In this view, popular culture provides access to a society's dreams and nightmares, and contains both ideological celebrations of the status quo and utopian moments of transcendence, moments of opposition and rebellion and its attempted containment.³⁷ Recent studies of popular culture also show how social struggles and conflicts enter into works of popular entertainment, and see culture as a contested terrain, rather than a field of one-dimensional manipulation and illusion.³⁸

New Critical Theories of culture and communications must therefore be able to develop more complex methods of cultural interpretation and criticism which pay attention to and conceptualize the contradictions, the articulation of social conflicts, the oppositional moments, the subversive tendencies and the projection of utopian images and scenes of happiness and freedom that appear within mainstream commercial culture. The classical Critical Theory approach, especially Adorno's work, generally limits itself to attacking the ideology and purely retrogressive effects of radio, popular music, films, television and so forth. In this sense, the model

of cultural interpretation and criticism is remarkably similar to the crude Marxian critique of ideology which resists cultural analysis to denunciation of ideology. Part of the problem is that for Adorno and many of his colleagues, the artifacts of the culture industry are simply beneath contempt. In *Mimesis Moralia*, Adorno writes: 'Every visit to the cinema leaves me, against all my vigilance, stupider and worse' (*MM*, p. 25). Such an arrogant, grandiose gesture of absolute disdain, however, precludes understanding what gratifications popular culture actually provides and what needs it serves, in however distorted a fashion. This attitude also leads Critical Theorists to neglect, albeit with some exceptions, analysis of specific films, television programs or artifacts of popular culture, since they presume in advance that such artifacts are merely a debased form of culture and a vehicle of ideology which are not worthy of detailed study or critique. Thus, when Adorno does analyze examples of popular music and television, he generally limits himself to arraiging their ideologies and 'regressive' effects on consciousness, without analyzing their contradictions, critical or oppositional moments, or potential to provide insight into social conditions or to elicit a critical response.³⁹

But while popular music may, as Adorno argued, exhibit features of commodification, reification and standardization, which may in turn have retrogressive effects on consciousness, such a theoretical optic cannot adequately account for the genesis and popularity of many forms of popular music such as the blues, jazz, rock and roll, reggae, punk and so on. Since music is the most nonrepresentational of all arts, it provides vehicles for the expression of pain, rage, joy, rebellion, sexuality and so forth, which might have progressive effects. Historically, the production of certain types of popular music was often carried out by oppressed groups, like blacks or hispanics, or by working-class whites or marginalized youth. Much popular music thus articulates rebellion against standardization, conformity, oppression and so on, however much this oppositional articulation is expressed in standard musical forms and types. Moreover, the forums of reception of popular music have frequently been dances and festivities in a context of transgression of propriety through drinking, making love, wild dancing, communal singing and the rest. Ragtime, jazz, bop, swing and rock have been more at home in the brothel, dance-hall or bedroom than within His Master's Voice in the living room. Though contemporary forms of punk and hard rock may provide background for young fascists and conservatives, they may also provide the social cement for a culture of political mobilization and struggle, as the Rock against Racism and Rock against the Right concerts in England and Germany proved. And music like reggae can be bound up with a subculture of protest as much as with the commodification of culture for profitability and harmless catharsis. Adorno's model of the culture industry does not allow for the hetero-

geneity of popular culture and contradictory effects. Instead it sees popular culture in terms of reification and commodification and hence as a sign of the total triumph of capital and the total reification of experience. To be sure, much popular culture lends itself to Adorno's categories and critique, though as suggested, other examples resist his categories and require a more nuanced approach to cultural interpretation and critique. Yet occasionally, Adorno qualified his one-dimensional condemnation of popular culture, and allowed for the possibility of audience resistance to media manipulation. In 'Transparencies on Film':⁴⁰ Adorno uncharacteristically indicated that a certain sort of film might contain socially critical potential, and that mass culture itself reproduces existing conflicts and antagonisms: 'In its attempts to manipulate the masses, the ideology of the culture industry itself becomes as internally antagonistic as the very society which it aims to control. The ideology of the culture industry contains the antidote to its own lie' (p. 202). In particular, Adorno believed that the technique of montage (the juxtaposition of images to create multiple effects of meaning and socially critical associations) developed by Sergei Eisenstein and the revolutionary Soviet cinema provides models for a socially progressive cinema: 'Film is faced with the dilemma of finding a procedure which neither lapses into arts-and-crafts nor slips into a more documentary mode. The obvious answer today, as forty years ago, is that of montage which does not interfere with things but rather arranges them in a constellation akin to that of writing' (p. 203).

Yet Adorno believed that pure montage and cinematic shock effects (such as were celebrated by Benjamin) 'without the addition of intentionality in its details, refuses to accept intentions merely from the principle itself' (p. 203). Progressive film would thus have to combine montage in image construction with other effects, like advanced music (and progressive political intentions and insights?), to turn the images of film in a socially critical direction: 'The liberated film would have to wrest its *a priori* collectivity from the mechanisms of unconscious and irrational influence and enlist this collectivity in the service of emancipatory intentions' (pp. 203-4).

In another late article, 'Leisure', Adorno pointed to limitations in the ability of the culture industry to manipulate spectator consciousness. Reflecting on a study of the media's presentation of the marriage of a Dutch princess to an upper-class German, Adorno stressed that the audience saw through the media hype of this event, and realistically perceived its insignificance. He thus concluded: 'The integration of consciousness and leisure is obviously not yet entirely successful. The real interests of the individuals are still strong enough, at the margins, to resist total control.'⁴¹

Following these models, new critical approaches to popular culture

should not simply limit themselves to denouncing bourgeois ideologies and escapist functions. Even conservative mass culture often provides insights into forms of dominant ideologies, and sometimes unwittingly provides images of social conflict and opposition. Recent studies of Hollywood films, for instance, reveal that this form of commercial culture exhibits a conflict of representations between competing social ideologies over the last several decades.⁴² Particularly in the period from around 1967 to the present, a variety of competing ideological standpoints have appeared in mainstream Hollywood film. Consequently there is no one, monolithic, dominant ideology which the culture industries promote: indeed, the conflicting ideologies in contemporary culture industry artifacts point to continuing and intensifying social conflict within capitalist societies.

Yet in the Institute critique of mass culture, there is no consideration of oppositional and emancipatory uses of the media and cultural practices. There is neither a strategy for cultural revolution, as is found in Brecht, Benjamin and Enzensberger, nor a media politics to overcome the harmful effects that Horkheimer and Adorno describe.⁴³ In an era of media saturation, however, such withdrawal would only further marginalize already marginalized critical intellectuals (or the Left, feminists and others). Consequently, a radical media politics should replace the pessimistic denunciation found in classical Critical Theory, a point I shall take up in 8.2.

Part of the problem is that most Critical Theorists rigidly pit their concepts of 'authentic art', modeled on masters of the avant-garde like Schönberg, Kafka and Becker, against mass culture, which they denounce for failing to have the qualities that they find in their preferred aesthetic models. But the very distinction between 'high culture' and 'popular culture' has come under attack, and it seems perverse to expect products of the culture industries to have the qualities of works of previous 'high culture' or the avant-garde. Yet, by limiting his model of authentic art to those few avant-garde examples of highly negative art, Adorno rules out in advance the possibility of any broad-based cultural politics, and his model of emancipatory aesthetics is intolerably ascetic and narrow, limited to those avant-garde productions which resist assimilation and co-optation.

In a sense, Adorno's aesthetics is completely undialectical. He operates with a binary contrast between 'authentic' art and mass culture, in which the latter is completely debased, and emancipatory effects are limited to the former. This stance reproduces the German religion of high art and its inevitable elitism, and completely excludes the 'popular' from the domain of the 'authentic', thus falling behind the critiques of Brecht and Benjamin - and Adorno's own critique of 'the authentic' in his book *Jargon of Authenticity*. Indeed, Adorno's own esoteric aesthetic theory itself becomes a jargon motivated by a dual fear of co-optation and regression.⁴⁴ Yet his

uncompromising radicalism provides a healthy antidote to all affirmative and idealist aesthetics, and his obstinate obsession with art provides a wealth of insights into the mediations between art and society which might become productive for materialist social theory and cultural criticism of the future.⁴⁵

I would propose in conclusion that Critical Theory today should take mass culture as seriously as Adorno and his colleagues previously took high culture, by applying the same sophisticated arsenal of critical strategies and categories to the reading of contemporary mass culture as it once applied to 'high culture'. While cultural discrimination can be made, the absolute dichotomy between so-called 'high' and 'low' culture should be overcome; and radical cultural criticism today should pursue articulation and critique of ideological and emancipatory qualities - and their contradictory imbrication - with regard to a vast range of cultural artifacts.

Adorno's cultural criticism also helped produce the first neo-Marxian theory and critique of the consumer society, and it is to this theme that we shall now turn.