

Adorno on “Culture Industry”
SAIC ARTHI 4804 Spring 2010 MC 620 Fridays 1 - 4 PM
Instructor: Christopher Cutrone


Course title:

Adorno on “Culture Industry:” Critical Theory of Art as Social Subjectivity

Instructor: Chris Cutrone (e-mail: ccutrone@speedsite.com), tutorial meetings by appointment

Course description:

Theodor W. Adorno has been best known for his scathing critique of “culture industry.” What is usually missed is that Adorno’s critique of 20th Century cultural forms was dialectical, concerned with their critical potential for both emancipation and domination, and sought to comprehend modern practices of both “hermetic” art and “popular” culture, implicating reflexively the categories and concerns of his own cultural criticism, and thus anticipating issues in “post”-modernism. For Adorno, reflecting critically upon the significance of modern aesthetic forms such as those of the media of cinema, radio, television (and now, the internet) involves the critical theory of the viewer/listener/subject, common to both “high” art and “culture industry.” In this course we address the Frankfurt School critical theory of the historical transformations of experience and aesthetic subjectivity in modern social life in context, reading works of the 1920s-30s by Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin, and then focusing on works by Adorno in considering the analytical and explanatory as well as critical power of certain enduring if problematic and contested categories such as “commodification” and “democratization” for a dialectic of modern forms of art and culture as forms of social subjectivity.

Course books:  for purchase - bookstore price (amazon.com price)



Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* [Columbia Univ. Press, 1998 / 2005: ISBN 0231076355 (1998) / 023113505X (2005)] - \$23.00 (\$23.00) / \$24.50 (\$24.50)

Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* [Routledge, 2002: ISBN 0415253802] - \$18.00 (\$13.00)

Adorno, *Essays on Music* [Univ. of California Press, 2002: ISBN 0520231597] - \$40.00 (\$36.00)

Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott [Stanford Univ. Press, 2002: ISBN 0804736332] - \$25.00 (\$17.00)

Readings in addition to selections from these books will be available at

<http://docutek.artic.edu> (password: “adorno”) as PDF files or as web resources:  


Flaxman Library course reserves:

Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995]

Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971]

Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (1924) [Ann Arbor, MI: Univ. Michigan Press, 1960]

Robert C. Tucker, ed., *Marx-Engels Reader* [New York: Norton, 1978]

Additionally, there will be 2 audio CDs available containing music for listening in conjunction with readings for certain class sessions: 

Intention of the course:

This will be a reading-intensive course focusing on works by Theodor W. Adorno (1903-69) elaborating the concept of “culture industry,” a category of Frankfurt School Critical Theory for characterizing the social-historical context for the development and transformations of artistic forms and aesthetic subjectivity in the 20th Century. The category of “culture industry” will be considered through a sustained reading of Adorno’s writings on popular culture. Additional course readings will be selected from among Weimar- and Nazi-era writings by Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer. We will address the origins of Adorno’s thought in what has been termed “Western” Marxism (contrasted with “Eastern,” or Russian-Soviet Marxism), in the context of issues of developments of “mass” society in the 20th Century. We will consider the seminal debate between Adorno and Benjamin on the social significance of modern popular cultural forms that continued to inform Adorno’s subsequent elaboration of a dialectic of modern aesthetic form as social form. We will evaluate the coherence, the analytical and explanatory as well as critical power for present-day, post-20th Century social life, of the attempt at a dialectic of “culture industry,” with such attendant critical concepts in Adorno’s writings as “authoritarian personality,” “eclipse of the individual,” etc., considered as being not merely “negative” or pejorative, but grasping emergent social-historical formation and its actual, determinate possibilities for transformation and emancipation. The latter part of the course will focus on Adorno’s work as exemplary of such a dialectic.

Course requirements:

This is an advanced, discussion-based undergraduate and graduate course organized as a seminar that meets once per week. Attendance is mandatory; no unexcused absences are allowed.

This course is **Socratic** in method. Class participation consists of student **attendance** and **discussion**. Students volunteer for **10-15 minute** class **presentations** of the readings to lead discussion of them, including printed **outlines** of the texts **to be handed out** in class, critical reactions to the text(s), beyond summary overview, and focusing on 2 or 3 passages from the text(s) to discuss in depth. Student presentation outlines will be emailed to me before class for photocopying. I will write my feedback to student presenters after class. All students will be expected to attend every class session and bring one or two written reaction questions for each of the assigned readings. Student reactions to the readings (presentations and reaction questions) will guide the class discussions.

This course will require the completion of two writing assignments on topics chosen by students within the following general parameters: (a.) a mid-term paper (4-5 pages) on the form and address of the culture-critical essay; and (b.) a final paper (10-12 pages) on a chosen cultural object, reflecting upon Adorno’s critique of “culture industry” in the sustained dialectic across the breadth of the course readings and beyond, in considering the continuing analytical, explanatory and critical claims for art as form of social subjectivity in the present.

The grade evaluation of student performance in the course will consist of two components, written assignments (75%), and class participation (25%), as follows:

1. **75%: written assignments:** (a.) 25%: mid-term paper (4-5 double-spaced pages, or ~1,000 words); and (b.) 50%: final paper (10-12 pages, or ~2,500 words)
2. **25%: class participation:** (a.) 10%: in-class presentation(s); and (b.) 15%: class discussion participation (~1% per class session; however, per school policy, more than 3 absences may result in no credit for the course)

Note on Frankfurt School Critical Theory and Cultural Studies:

Frankfurt School Critical Theory developed after the failed and betrayed revolutions of 1917-19 in Russia, Germany and elsewhere, and sought to develop upon Marxist thought for a dialectic of 20th Century social forms. Frankfurt School critical theorists such as Adorno were concerned with how social discontents found expression through forms of the reconstitution of domination after struggles for emancipation were defeated, failed, or gave rise to highly ambiguous, contradictory and paradoxical outcomes. Frankfurt School thought has served as an important if ambivalent foundation for the development of popular cultural studies in the aftermath of the 1960s. Perhaps the most widely read work in this founding tradition of cultural studies is the chapter on “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” from the book by Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (1944-47), a book which became influential for the post-WWII generation’s political discontents, and whose themes were elaborated in Marcuse’s writings of the ’60s such as *One-Dimensional Man*. However, in the subsequent development of cultural studies, especially after the ebbing of the radicalism of the social upheavals of the 1960s-’70s, Adorno’s work in particular has suffered obscurity. Cultural criticism after the 1960s has taken a cue from Frankfurt School Critical Theory’s attention to so-called cultural determinants of social-historical continuity and change. But since Adorno’s critique of culture industry has been mistaken for an elitist rejection of popular culture, it remained a stumbling block to the intention of discovering an authentic democratic and egalitarian basis for the appeal of modern popular cultural forms. Since the ’80s, cultural studies approaches have emphasized the production of meaning in reception, in contrast to the formal analysis of cultural objects, which emphasizes problems of subjectivity. This course will consider the continued relevance of the latter approach to problems of culture and society provided by Frankfurt School Critical Theory, especially through the work of Adorno, which seeks to apprehend, explore and socially-historically specify fundamental problems of subjectivity in transformations of the nature of social equality and democracy that might otherwise be taken for granted and naturalized, for a dialectic of emancipation and domination that constitutes social modernity.

Course schedule:

Adorno on "Culture Industry" (Spring 2010) Fridays 1 - 4 PM
School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 112 S. Michigan Ave., room 620

Week 1: Introduction, modernity in crisis 1/29/10

- 📺 Screening: Margarethe von Trotta, dir., *Rosa Luxemburg* (film on video, 1986, 122 min.)
- 📖📄 Terry Eagleton, "The Politics of Amnesia," *After Theory* (NY: Basic Books, 2003), 1-22
- 📖📄 *In-class reading*: Theodor W. Adorno, selection from "Commodity Music Analyzed" (1934-40), *Quasi Una Fantasia* [London: Verso, 1998], 49-52 [photocopy handout]

Week 2: Politics (1), after the Revolution, its betrayal and failure 2/5/10

- 📖📄 Rosa Luxemburg, selection from *The Crisis of German Social Democracy* (a.k.a. the "Junius Pamphlet," 1915); and "Order Prevails in Berlin" (1919)
- 📖📄 Wilhelm Reich, "Ideology as Material Power," *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933; English translation 1946) [New York: Orgone Institute Press, 1946], 1-27 [2]
- 📖📄 Georg Lukács, "The Phenomenon of Reification," Section I, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" (1923), *History and Class Consciousness*, 83-110 (209-210n) -also- [web resource] [2]

Week 3: Context and concept (1), Americanism from Weimar to Nazi Germany 2/12/10

- 📖📄 Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography," "The Mass Ornament," and "The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies" (1927-28), *The Mass Ornament*, 47-63 (354-356n), 75-86 (356-357n), and 291-304 (383-385n)
- 📖 Adorno, "The Curves of the Needle" (1927), *Essays on Music*, 271-276 -also- *October* 55 (Winter, 1990), 48-55 [2]
- 📖📄 Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography" (1931), trans. Rodney Livingstone, *Selected Writings, vol. 2: 1927-34* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1999], 507-530
- 📖📄 Benjamin, "Mickey Mouse" (1931) and "On the Mimetic Faculty" (1933), *Selected Writings, vol. 2: 1927-34* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1999], 545-546 and 720-722 -also- "On the Mimetic Faculty," *Reflections* [NY: Schocken, 1986], 333-336 [2]

Week 4: Politics (2), critical theory of modernity 2/19/10

- 📖📄 Karl Marx, selections from: the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* ("Estranged Labor," "Private Property and Communism," and "The Meaning of Human Requirements"); the *Grundrisse* (1857-58) ("A. Introduction: Independent Individuals. 18th Century Ideas," "B. Society and the Individual," and "C. The Dynamics of Capitalism"); and the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) (Prefaces to Various Language Editions, I. "Bourgeois and Proletarians," II. "Proletarians and Communists," and IV. "Position of the Communists in Relation to the Various Existing Opposition Parties"), *Marx-Engels Reader*, 70-101, 222-223, 246-250, 469-491, and 499-500 -also- [web resource] [2]
- 📖📄 Trotsky, "Proletarian Culture and Proletarian Art," "Communist Policy Towards Art," and "Revolutionary and Socialist Art," *Literature and Revolution* (1924), 184-256 -also- [web resource] [2]

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Week 5: Context and concept (2a), critical social theory of art 2/26/10

- 📖 Adorno, "On the Social Situation of Music" (1932), *Essays on Music*, 391-436
- 📖 Adorno, "Farewell to Jazz" (1933), *Essays on Music*, 496-500 [2]
- 📖🔊 Adorno, "Commodity Music Analyzed" (1934-40), *Quasi Una Fantasia* [London: Verso, 1998], 37-52
- 🕒 Please listen to Adorno CD 1, music selections for Adorno, "Social Situation" and "Commodity Music"

Week 6: Context and concept (2b), critical social theory of art (continued) 3/5/10

- 📖 Adorno, "Form of the Phonograph Record" (1934), *Essays on Music*, 277-282
-also- *October* 55 (Winter, 1990), 56-61
- 📖🔊 Benjamin, "Experience and Poverty" (1933), *Selected Writings, vol. 2: 1927-34* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1999], 731-735
- 📖🔊 Benjamin, "The Author as Producer" (1934), *Selected Writings, vol. 2: 1927-34* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999], 768-782
-also- *Reflections* [New York: Schocken, 1986], 220-238 [2]
- 📖🔊 Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939), *The Collected Essays and Criticism: vol. I Perceptions and Judgments 1939-1944* [Chicago: Univ. Chicago, 1986], 5-22
- 📖🔊 Trotsky, "Art and Politics in Our Epoch" (letter of 18 June 1938), *Fourth International* 11.2 (March-April 1950), 61-64 [2]

Week 7: Dialectic of progress, Adorno-Benjamin debate 3/12/10

- 📖🔊 Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (1936; 3rd version, 1939), *Selected Writings, vol. 4* [Cambridge: Harvard, 2003], 251-283
-also- *Illuminations* [New York: Schocken, 1969], 217-251
- 📖 Adorno, "On Jazz" (1936), *Essays on Music*, 470-495
- 📖🔊 Adorno, "Letter to Walter Benjamin, London, 18 March 1936," *Aesthetics and Politics* [London: Verso, 1977], 120-126 [2]

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Week 8: [Spring break, no class session] 3/19/10

[Please read ahead for Week 9]

Week 9: Exile, dialectic of social form, Adorno in America (1) 3/26/10

📖 Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music and Regression of Listening" (1938), *The Culture Industry*, 29-60 -also- *Essays on Music*, 288-317

📖 Adorno, "The Radio Symphony" (1941), *Essays on Music*, 251-270 [2]

🎧 Please listen to Adorno CD 2, music selections for Adorno, "Fetish Character in Music"

> > > Mid-term paper of 4-5 pages (1,000 words) due Week 9 < < <

Week 10: Exile, dialectic of social form, Adorno in America (2) 4/2/10

📖 Adorno, "On Popular Music" (with George Simpson, 1941), *Essays on Music*, 437-469
-also- *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science IX* (1941), 17-48

📖 Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda" (1951?), *The Culture Industry*, 132-157

📖🎧 Adorno, "Messages in a Bottle" (selections orphaned from *Minima Moralia*, 1944-47),
New Left Review 1/200 (July-August 1993), 5-14 [2]

Week 11: War years, dialectic of culture criticism, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1) 4/9/10

📖 Horkheimer and Adorno, "Preface 1944 and 1947" and "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xiv-xix, and 94-136

📖 Adorno, "The Schema of Mass Culture" (orphaned from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1944-47), *The Culture Industry*, 61-97 [2]

Week 12: War years, dialectic of culture criticism, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2) 4/16/10

📖 Horkheimer and Adorno, "Elements of Anti-Semitism" and "Notes and Sketches,"
Dialectic of Enlightenment (1944-47), 137-214 [2]

📖🎧 Adorno, et al., "Introduction to *The Authoritarian Personality*" (1950), Bronner and Kellner, eds., *Critical Theory and Society*, 219-232

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Week 13: Dialectic of society (1), critique of liberal democracy 4/23/10

- 📖 Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered," *The Culture Industry*, 98-106
- 📖 Adorno, "How to Look at Television" (1954), *The Culture Industry*, 158-177
- 📖 Adorno, "Prologue to Television" (1953) and "Television as Ideology" (1953), *Critical Models*, 49-70 (326-330n) [2]

Week 14: Dialectic of society (2), emancipation and domination 4/30/10

- 📖🔗 Herbert Marcuse, "The Obsolescence of the Freudian Concept of Man" (1968), Bronner and Kellner, eds., *Critical Theory and Society*, 233-246
- 📖🔗 Adorno, "Perennial Fashion -- Jazz" (1953), Brian O'Connor, ed., *The Adorno Reader* [Oxford: Blackwell, 2000], 267-279 -also- *Prisms* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981], 119-132
- 📖 Adorno, "Those Twenties" (1961-62), "Sexual Taboos and the Law Today" (1963), "Opinion Delusion Society" (1961), and "Gloss on Personality" (1966), *Critical Models*, 41-48 (324-326n), 71-88 (330-337n), 105-122 (343-346n), and 161-165 (356-358n) [2]

Week 15: [Critique Week, possible extra class session] 5/7/10

[Please read ahead for Week 16]

Week 16: Endgame, closing the 1960s 5/14/10

- 📖 Adorno, "Transparencies on Film" (1967), *The Culture Industry*, 178-186
- 📖 Adorno, "Opera and the Long-Playing Record" (1969), *Essays on Music*, 283-287 -also- *October* 55 (Winter, 1990), 62-66
- 📖 Adorno, "Free Time" (1969), "Education after Auschwitz" (1966), "Critique" (1969), and "Resignation" (1969), *Critical Models*, 167-176 (358-360n), 191-204 (364-368n), 281-288 (383-388n), and 289-294 (388-389n) -also- "Free Time" (1969), and "Resignation" (1969), *The Culture Industry*, 187-197, and 198-204 [2]

> > > Final paper of 10-12 pages (2,500 words) due at end of semester < < <

[additional readings:]

- 📖🔍 Adorno, "Commitment" (1962), *Can One Live after Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader* [Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2003], 240-258 (496-497n)
-also- Bloch, et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, 177-195
- 📖🔍 Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society" (1949), *Can One Live after Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader* [Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2003], 146-162 (501-513n) -also- *Prisms* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981], 17-34
- 📖🔍 Adorno, "The Essay as Form" (1958), *Notes to Literature, vol. 1* [New York, Columbia Univ. Press, 1991], 3-23 (277n)
- 📖🔍 Adorno, "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?" (1968-69), *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader* [Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2003], 111-125 (491n)
- 📖🔍 Adorno, "The Liquidation of the Self," "Metaphysics and Materialism," "Consciousness of Negativity," and "Dying Today" (lectures on Metaphysics 14-17, 1965), *Can One Live after Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader* [Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2003], 427-460 (501-513n)
- 📖 Adorno, "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis" (1969), *Critical Models*, 259-278 (378-383n)
- 📖 Adorno, "The Relevance of Wagner Today" (1963), *Essays on Music*, 584-602
- 📖🔍 Adorno, "Sociology and Psychology" (1955), *New Left Review* 46 (Nov.-Dec. 1967), 67-80; and 47 (Jan.-Feb. 1968), 79-97
- 📖🔍 Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, "Correspondence on the German New Left" (1969) (with introduction by translator Esther Leslie), *New Left Review* 1/233 (January-February 1999), 123-36 (118-122)
- 📖🔍 Max Horkheimer, selections from *Dämmerung [Dawn]*, *Dawn and Decline: Notes 1926-31 and 1950-69* [NY: Seabury, 1978]: "The Little Man and the Philosophy of Freedom," 50-52; "A Discussion about Revolution," 39-41; "Indications," 72; "Socialism and Resentment," 73-75; "Progress," 93-94; "Idealism of the Revolutionary" 94-95; "Change of Thought," 34-35; and "Skepsis and Morality," 35-37
- 📖🔍 Andreas Huyssen, "Adorno in Reverse: From Hollywood to Richard Wagner," *New German Critique* 29 (1983) 8-38
-also- Nigel C. Gibson and Andrew Rubin, eds., *Adorno: A Critical Reader* [Blackwell, 2002], 29-56
- 📖🔍 Herbert Marcuse, "The End of Utopia" and "The Problem of Violence" (1967), *Five Lectures* [Boston: Beacon, 1970], 62-82, and 83-108
- 📖🔍 Marcuse, "The Question of Revolution" (interview, 1967), *New Left Review* 45 (Sept.-Oct. 1967), 3-7
- 📖🔍 Moishe Postone, "History and Helplessness: Mass Mobilization and Contemporary Forms of Anticapitalism," *Public Culture* 18:1 (Winter 2006), 93-110