
THE ESSENTIAL FRANKFURT SCHOOL READER

Edited by
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Introduction by
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Contents

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Preface

The critical theory of the Frankfurt School is no longer a stranger to an English-speaking audience. Several volumes of Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin have recently been published, not to speak of the already available works of Marcuse, Neumann, Kirchheimer, Lowenthal and Fromm. There is a significant semiofficial biography of the school by Martin Jay as well as a whole range of treatments both sympathetic and hostile in the recent books of Russell Jacoby, William Leiss, Trent Schroyer, Susan Buck-Morss, George Lichtheim, Zoltan Tar, Perry Anderson, Philip Slater and Alasdair MacIntyre, and in the journals *Telos*, *New German Critique* and *Social Research*.

In this context, the purpose of our anthology is threefold. (1) We want to concentrate on the social theories of the School, usually interpreted from the point of view of the somewhat later socio-philosophical synthesis, impressive but far less flexible, that correctly goes under the name of "critique of domination" and "critique of instrumental reason." (2) We want to correct some widespread misconceptions about the political and intellectual purposes of the School, as well as refute the myth of a single, unified critical theory of society. At least eight authors are, therefore, represented in the volume. (3) We want both to introduce undergraduate students of sociology, political science, philosophy and intellectual history to critical theory, and to provide advanced students as well as working scholars with a number of hitherto untranslated or inaccessible texts. Almost no selection from an easily available source is therefore reproduced. These three criteria have served as our guiding principles of selection. For rea-

34. Robert A. Brady, "Policies of National Manufacturing Spitzenverbände," in *Political Science Quarterly*, LVI, p. 537.
35. *The Thought and Character of William James*, ed. R. B. Perry, Boston 1935, II, p. 265.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 315.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 383.
38. *Democracy in America*, transl. H. Reeve, New York 1904, p. 584.
39. Quoted in E. Mims, *The Majority of the People*, New York 1941, p. 152.
40. See for example Oswald Spengler, *Man and Technics*, New York 1932, p. 96f., and Roy Helton, "The Anti-Industrial Revolution," in *Harpers*, December 1941, pp. 65ff.
41. In National Socialist Germany, the ideology of blood and soil and the glorification of the peasant is an integral part of the imperialistic mobilization of industry and labor.
42. For examples of the degree to which this physiological individualization has been utilized see *Changes in Machinery and Job Requirements in Minnesota Manufacturing 1931-36*, Works Projects Administration, National Research Project, Report No. 1-6. Philadelphia, p. 19.
43. See Max Horkheimer, "The End of Reason," above.
44. Henry James, "Democracy and Its Issues," in *Lectures and Miscellanies*, New York 1852, p. 47f.

Esthetic Theory and Cultural Criticism

The Concept of Culture*

The concept of culture is significantly ambiguous in normal usage. More often than not, "culture" is represented as the sum total of activities that possess the aura of intellectuality or spirituality, that is, the arts and the sciences. But there is also an important usage especially, but not only, in the social sciences that defines culture as the ensemble of those intersubjective traditions, meanings, values, institutions, rituals, customs and typical activities characteristic in space and time of a given social formation. The ambiguity has been noticed by the Frankfurt School even if the brunt of their critical concern focuses on culture in the first sense.¹ The two concepts of culture may in fact be related to one another. In the history of sociology and social theory, no one did more to elaborate a comprehensive and dynamic concept of culture than the turn-of-the-century German thinker Georg Simmel.² Drawing heavily, if implicitly, on Hegel and Marx, Simmel defined all culture as human self-creation in the context of cultivating things, or self-cultivation in the process of endowing the things of nature with use and meaning. However, for Simmel, the self-cultivation ("subjective culture") of individuals and the cultivation of things ("objective culture") by ensembles of individuals are neither parallel nor harmonious. He postulated a gradually and linearly increasing

*First four sections by Andrew Arato; last section by Eike Gebhardt.

division of labor as the red thread of history that leads not only to the powerful growth of *objective culture*, but also to the corresponding one-sidedness, deformation and overspecialization of individuals, i.e., to the crisis of *subjective culture*. True "subjective culture" was to Simmel the cultivation of the *whole* personality, and although this is ambiguous in his work, Simmel's restriction of the achievement of totalization to the great cultural "forms," art, philosophy, theology, historiography, and science, did imply the highly privileged and philosophically preferable nature of some human activities³, i.e., what Marx more than fifty years before had called "mental work." Thus, Simmel systematically related culture in the narrow sense of intellectual self-cultivation and culture in general, the objectification and externalization of all human activities. He defined the relationship of the two in terms of an increasing split that he called the "tragedy of culture."

Marx wrote nothing on "culture" as such. Indeed, his methodological remarks on the dependence of "superstructure" on the "base" (and in particular the forms of consciousness on the contradictory structure of a mode of production) have generally been interpreted by Marxists as reason enough to disregard the "epiphenomena" of culture. However, much of Frankfurt cultural theory begins with one singularly fruitful distinction of Marx's: that between mental and manual labor. In distinction to almost all bourgeois theories of the division of labor (including Simmel's), for Marx "the division of labor proper" begins with the separation of mental and manual labor, and moreover presupposes private property and therefore the beginning of the contradiction between the interest of the separate individual (or family) and the "communal interest of all individuals," now in the alienated form of the state.⁴ In this complex, mental labor, private property and the state are on the same side. From this point on, according to Marx, consciousness (i.e., mental labor) can flatter itself as being independent of the social life process, though the forms of consciousness continue to belong to the complex of the division of labor and hence possess neither independent life nor history. Aside from its illusory self-representation, consciousness or mental labor continues to represent in an illusory manner (generally on the side of real powers) the real struggle of the world. Even the post-Christian dreams of universality, liberty and equality express *both* world-historical potentialities brought about by the development of a universally interdependent and highly productive system of civil society and the cultural-ideological illusions that mask the particularity, unfree-

dom and inequality of class rule.⁵ Thus, Marx located culture in the narrow sense in terms of mental labor, whose pretensions he criticized. He also had a concept corresponding to the more general concept of culture, for which he used the terms "mode of production" or "social formation" interchangeably. We will follow one of his usages and refer to "culture" in general as social formation.

The concept of mental labor marks the limits of the Frankfurt concept of culture, both in the narrow sense of "high" culture and also in its popular and mass substitutes. At times the passionate hatred of critical theory toward what Marcuse called "affirmative culture" (i.e., the mode of "high" culture that in spite of its utopian anticipations suppresses its relationship to the social life process) surpassed that of Marx:

The products of art and science owe their existence not merely to the effort of the great geniuses that created them, but also to the unnamed drudgeries of their contemporaries. There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.⁶

Thus wrote Walter Benjamin in a 1937 text reproduced below. But lest we assign the argument to his lonely and idiosyncratic position within (or without) the School, let us quote from Adorno in 1966:

All post-Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage. In restoring itself after the things that happened without resistance in its own countryside, culture has turned entirely into the ideology it had been potentially—had been ever since it presumed, in opposition to material existence, to inspire that existence with the light denied it by the separation of mind from manual labor.⁷

The quotations represent what Adorno himself called *transcendent critique* of culture, an attack from an imaginary point of reference outside culture. Since for most Marxists and even for the sociology of knowledge the theoretical key to cultural or "superstructural" phenomena lies in investigating the conflicts/contradictions of the social-economic "base" that supposedly subordinates culture to the interests of a given ruling class, these modes of cultural analysis (including Marx's own in the *German Ideology*) also fall under the heading of *transcendent* or *external* critique. The danger—also present in the above quotations—is that transcendent critics, "wishing to

wipe away the whole as if with a sponge . . . develop an affinity to barbarism." On the other hand, the opposite mode of procedure, the one Adorno usually practiced, "immanent critique," faces the danger of loving immersion in the object criticized.⁸ Even the above lines from *Negative Dialectics* about Auschwitz and culture end, therefore, with an ambiguous formulation:

Whoever pleads for the maintenance of this radically culpable and shabby culture becomes its accomplice, while the man who says no to culture is directly furthering the barbarism which our culture showed itself to be.⁹

The dialectical critique of culture is forbidden either to celebrate autonomous mind or to hate it; the critique "must both participate in culture and not participate."¹⁰ While the main Frankfurt theorists of culture, Adorno, Benjamin, Horkheimer, Marcuse and Lowenthal indeed moved between these poles—or better still attempted to indicate the missing *tertium* through criticizing each pole—no secure single meaning of dialectical culture critique emerges from their works.

The various answers which emerge from critical theory's confrontation with and involvement in culture had to negotiate not only between the poles of transcendent and immanent critique. Other dualities or "antinomies" (in Kant's sense: contrary positions which could be more or less equally defended by logical argument) quickly appeared. Is culture (in the narrow sense) to be considered as a sphere of "autonomous ends in themselves" or as a socially-politically-economically fungible subsphere in which even the useless becomes useful? Is there more "truth" latent in the "ideologies" of high culture or in those of "mass" culture? Should the critic concentrate on "works," or on the production and reception of "products"? Are politically radical works more or less critical of the existing world than autonomous works? Are the works of the past or the present the repositories of utopia? Is the reintegration of mental and manual labor, of art and life, the content of a positive utopia of liberation or of a negative administered one? The answers vary from author to author, from article to article and even at times within the same article. In 1936, Max Horkheimer concentrated on the role of culture (including high culture) in producing legitimating beliefs for political domination.¹¹ In 1941, he stressed instead, following Kant, the critique of instrumental reason latent in the purposelessness of genuine works.¹²

In a 1937 article, Herbert Marcuse criticized the survival of affirmative culture in the present (hoping for its revolutionary abolition). In another, he focused on the utopian contents of the affirmative culture of the past.¹³ And much later, in his *Essay on Liberation* (1969), he called once again for the reintegration of culture and life through the abolition of "art" and the estheticization of daily life and work, only to claim still a few years later in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972), the need to protect autonomous works even in the future. And most important, Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, two close friends, engaged in a set of controversies in the 1930s about art, mass culture and politics in which Adorno used Benjamin against Benjamin and Benjamin, as we will see, could have used Adorno the sociologist against Adorno the philosopher of art.

In the context of such diversity, what is the justification for presenting the culture and the esthetic theory of the Frankfurt School under a simple heading? First, all of our theorists shared more or less the same theory of social formations [i.e., theory of culture in the general sense] inherited from Hegel, Marx, Tönnies, Weber and Lukács. Second, the esthetic alternatives [in the area of culture in the narrow sense] they developed in response to this theory of social formations matured in the context of a dialogue characterized by the mutual and complementary adequacy of their critiques of one another.

Theory of Social Formations

Under this heading, we have in mind the historical specification of the "formation" of civil society or, more narrowly, capitalism, by the epoch-making investigations of Hegel, Marx, Weber, Tönnies and Lukács. Here we can focus only on some of these theorists and such of their concepts as pertain to the Frankfurt critique of culture in the narrow sense. The system that Hegel called *bürgerliche* (civil or bourgeois) *Gesellschaft* (society) was located by Marx, especially in the 1867 *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*, in an imposing framework of historical social formations. Marx called this framework one of organic, naturally arisen (*naturwüchsig*) communities, i.e., the "precapitalist" social formations. What is common to all three great forms of organic communities (Asiatic, Classical Antiquity and Germanic) is direct personal dependence of human beings on natural (land) and quasi-natural (the community itself) presuppositions of existence.¹⁴ Though individuality (the presupposition of which is some private property) is mentioned by Marx in the case of classical Greece and Rome, he stresses that even here individu-

ality can operate only within restricted and "provincial" communal limits.¹⁵ Hegel's civil society, founded on more independent individuality, is located by Marx, in spite of all earlier anticipations, only after the end of the European Middle Ages. Fully unfolded as capitalism, this system of the socialization of society [*Vergesellschaftung der Gesellschaft*] is abstractly characterized as that of "personal independence founded on objective dependence . . . in which a system of general social metabolism, of universal relations, of all-round needs and universal capacities is formed for the first time."¹⁶ Evidently Marx's attitude to the capitalist social formation was profoundly ambiguous, and he was willing to declare it as progress only if a third great stage of history based on "free individuality" and the subordination of wealth to a new freely formed community were realized.¹⁷ It is, however, a characteristic of capitalism that all substantial communities disintegrate under the onslaught of market, competition and large-scale, industrial division of labor, forcing the subordination of the newly freed individuals to a new system of mechanically objective dependence, e.g., economic laws of the market and production. Furthermore, the new dependence and interdependence of individuals is not only regulated by objective laws, but is also masked by the system of exchange of things, i.e., commodities. Domination and the exploitation of labor become anonymous when "the social connections of persons is transposed into a social relation between things." Here is the origin of Marx's concept of commodity fetishism. Marx stresses that the resulting objective context with its deterministic laws tendentially reduces the newly emancipated individual to an abstract individual emptied of all formally internalized communal norms, customs and habits. The "birth and decline" of the individual are thus located by Marx in the same social order which becomes the proper historical terrain of Simmel's transhistorical "tragedy of culture." For Marx in contradistinction to Simmel, the "socialization of society" represented the objective possibility of a new social individuality, a possibility that could be realized only through radical social transformation. It should be stressed that Marx did not consider the creation of "national communities" as in the French Revolution to be identical with this social transformation. The continued existence of a state, "an illusory community" separate from civil society, reveals the noncommunal nature of the realm of social reproduction.

Marx's historical theory of social formations, worked out in the *Grundrisse*, became available only after World War II. Nevertheless, theorists like Tönnies, stressing the movement from community

[*Gemeinschaft*] to society [*Gesellschaft*] as the backbone of modern history, and Lukács were able to piece much of it together from the deliberately nonhistorical volumes of *Das Kapital*, where Marx attempted to work out the systematic nature and general tendencies of capitalism. Lukács in this context was able to utilize the work of his older friend Max Weber. The Frankfurt theorists in turn projected their version of Marxian historical sociology through the conceptual spectacles of Weber and Lukács.

Max Weber's question¹⁸ about the specificity of modernity is complementary to that of Marx—though not the Marx whose works Weber knew—even if the respective methodologies were entirely different. Weber's answers in terms of concepts like rationalization, bureaucratization and de-magicization fill in crucial aspects of what Marx only outlined as the "socialization of society" under industrial capitalism. Weber's depiction of the imprisonment of the individual in the iron cage of modernity is the point on which Marx and he were in full agreement, except that Marx also envisioned a post-capitalist liberation of the individual that would not abolish the material gains of capitalism. Weber's key concepts provide the cultural and political context of the "iron cage" that Marx largely neglected, and at the same time they challenge the plausibility of Marx's post-capitalist vision. It was to be the unsolved task of Lukács and all of critical Marxism to use Weber against Marxist orthodoxy and yet to move beyond Weber in the spirit of Marx.

Let us examine Weber's key categories of rationalization and de-magicization [*Entzauberung*, usually translated as "disenchantment"].¹⁹ Rationalization, for Weber the key to all modernization and industrialization, represents the historical (originally under capitalism) penetration of all spheres of social life: the economy, culture (art, religion and science), technology, law and politics, and everyday life by a single logic of *formal rationality*. This "logic" is defined by the principle of orientation of human action to abstract, quantifiable and calculable, and instrumentally utilizable formal rules and norms. The key to formal rationality is the phrase "without regard for persons" which was first expressed in its purity in the battle of early modern science against anthropomorphic nature philosophy. In a more general form, the de-anthropomorphizing tendency of rationalization is expressed by Weber's concept of *Entzauberung* or de-magicization, the elimination of all that is unpredictable, "irrational," qualitative, sensuous and mysterious from both theoretical explanation and the practical conduct of life. Weber always refused to present rationaliza-

tion as the self-unfolding logic of history.²⁰ Furthermore, he made neither the historically prior rise of science (as did 19th century positivism) nor the historically late emergence of industrial capitalism (as did the Marxists) the cause or the essence or the *telos* of rationalization. Formal rationality and/or de-magicization are first of all present in the most diverse historical settings and contexts. Roman law could rise to a higher degree of formal systematization than the English common law of the period of the Industrial Revolution. Biblical Jewish theology based on monotheism and the prohibition of images was more "disenchanted" than all forms of Christianity until at least Calvinism. Partly rational bureaucracies existed in China thousands of years before modernization in the West. Nor were the particular logics of these "rational" spheres identical except on the highest level of abstraction. The question is: Why were the somewhat heterogeneous and relatively underdeveloped spheres of formal reason combined together *only* in Western Europe? The "elective affinity" of the spheres of commercial capitalism, early nation-state, early modern science, Roman law etc., i.e., the abstract presence in all of some mode of the same formal rationality, was a necessary, but not yet sufficient condition. The formal rationality and especially the calculability of one sphere is of course directly enhanced when combined with that of another, or the others. But to Weber even this explanation smacked of unacceptable teleology. His own explanation, one that he never considered more than the best alternative hypothesis, was that a process of rationalization was blocked everywhere by the survival of traditional, quasi-magical, irrational elements within the economic ethics of world religions, everywhere except in the context of the inner-worldly ascetic ethics of Protestantism. Without the irrationally motivated²¹ yet staunchly rationalistic ethics of Calvinism, and Puritanism in particular, the hallmark of Western modernity, the rational organization of free labor, based on saving and work discipline, could never have been attained.

Weber's thesis on the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism rejoins the context depicted by Marx as the socialization of society, by Tönnies as the movement from community to society and by Simmel ahistorically as the general "tragedy of culture." The stress on the role of religion is no residue of an "idealist" interpretation of history, but instead locates that region of everyday consciousness which must be changed as a presupposition of wider historical transformation. In the movement from community (based on quasi-natural, irrational and traditional norms) to society (based on the emergence of individuality

in a formally rational context) Weber was able to focus on those communal modes of conduct, meanings, justification and norms of Protestantism that destroyed precisely the communal foundations of life, and facilitated both the emergence of individuality and its integration in formally rational systems.²²

Finally, one more concept of Weber's needs to be stressed, the concept of bureaucracy. For Weber the rationalization of the state, the legitimation of domination in terms of the rational rule of law always takes the hierarchical organizational form of bureaucracy.²³ But in the fully rationalized modern world, bureaucracy does not remain within those original limits. With the possible exception of the capitalist market, bureaucracy reveals itself as the most efficient mode of organization of all spheres of life from the state to the military, from religion to education, thus finally penetrating the cultural sphere itself.²⁴ The concept of bureaucracy also supplied Weber's key argument against Marx. Once bureaucratized, the system of modern production could be democratized only at the cost of industrial efficiency. Once bureaucratized, the modern state and its military arm can be destroyed and replaced only by enemies equally well organized. The Marxist *goals* of freedom and material wealth are therefore incompatible with one another and with the proposed *means* of the political conquest of power. Here lay the challenge to those critical Marxists who sought the synthesis of Marx and Weber.

We can focus only on the consequences of a Marx-Weber synthesis for the theory of culture. The concepts of loss of community and decline of the individual subject were expertly brought together by Georg Lukács at several points of his early career. Best known to the Frankfurt theorists were the pre-Marxist *Theory of the Novel* (1914-1916) and the key text of early critical Marxism, *History and Class Consciousness* (1920-1922). However as early as 1909-1910,²⁵ Lukács brought together Marx's concept of socialized, civil society and Weber's "rationalization" to indicate the simultaneous emergence and crisis of individuality. Here Lukács stressed not only the fateful integration of the individual in an objective, impersonal system, but also extended the category of de-magicization to those symbols and sensuous life-contents that had hitherto provided the materials for artistic formation. Thus he was able to discover the crisis of culture not only on the subjective side (as did Simmel) under the heading of the crisis of the individual, but also on the objective side, on the side of works and even whole genres that are becoming problematic. Lukács's history of drama thus presented the crisis of the

drama form, his theory of the novel that of the ancient epic and its modern descendant, the novel. The destruction of community and the new linking of individuals through things or "thingified" (i.e., reified, *verdinglicht*) social relations leads to the crisis of all esthetics based on communication. The 1919 Marxist essay "Old and New Culture" draws the terse conclusion that Marx himself at times suspected: culture has collapsed during the capitalist epoch. But Lukács, before he came to Marx, tried to be a bit more careful. He detected in this context, for example, a decline from the beginnings of bourgeois society based on the "virtual communities," especially of early small town Protestantism, to the modern urban setting of bourgeois civilization characterized by loneliness and anomie.²⁶ And in *Theory of the Novel* he was able to present the modern novel as a symptomatic (and internally crisis-ridden) yet still esthetic form of the period of the crisis of the individual.

In *Theory of the Novel*, the dominating motif is the contrast between the idealized, harmonious, closed and limited organic communities of ancient Greece and the reduction of the social world of civil or bourgeois society (the site of the rise and crisis of individuality), to a *mechanical* system Lukács called "second nature." The first is expressed by the ancient epic, the second by the modern novel whose hero is the problematic individual—lonely, isolated, homeless, creative in principle but without the substantial ties that real creativity presupposes. For Lukács, a completed esthetic form implied a utopian reconciliation between creator (subject) and created (work), or harmony between intention and technique. In the case of the novel, however, a complete, harmonious, self-evident form was never attained, and the utopias internal to novels always turn out to be mere extensions of present tendencies. As a result, the possibility of moving beyond the present cannot be conceptualized within art: Lukács, foreshadowing Benjamin and Adorno, staunchly condemned all attempts to re-estheticize the bad present that led to the crisis of art and culture in the first place. The theory of reification in *History and Class Consciousness* both deepened the analysis of cultural crisis and projected a political solution to the problem the sources of which did not lie in the restricted sphere of culture.

"Reification" [*Verdinglichung*] represents an uneasy conceptual synthesis of Weber's "rationalization" and Marx's commodity fetishism.²⁷ Lukács took great pains to demonstrate that Marx's concept of fetish, that is, the appearance of relations of human interdependence through the market ["commodity fetish"] and those of

human domination in capitalist production ["capital fetish"] as a relationship of "things" (money to money, commodity to commodity, labor power to wage), was at the very center of Marx's whole critical project.

Furthermore, he sought to show that in a developed capitalist system the fetishism of commodities penetrates all spheres of social life, the factory becoming the model of all social relations, the fate of the worker the typical human fate. In other words, he attempted to extend and expand the category of commodity fetishism beyond the merely economic—hence the new term "reification"—by translating it in terms of that rationalization which Weber discovered in all the spheres of modern capitalism. On the other hand, he tried to make Weber's category of rationalization more dynamic by identifying commodity fetishism, under a developed capitalist system, as its paradigmatic form and even more important as its hidden dynamic. He then sought to show that commodity fetishism moves toward its own self de-fetishization and self-abolition. All these intentions which attempt to give a Marxist answer to Weber's social theory are incorporated in the concept of reification.

It is important to stress that to Lukács reification was not a subjective illusion. Human relationships under capitalism are in fact "thinglike [*sachliche*] relations of persons and social relations of things [*Sache*]."²⁸ Lukács systematically uncovers both the objective and the subjective sides of this reduction.²⁹ The world of commodity exchange objectively constitutes a "second nature" of pseudothings, which from the subjective point of view appears as the estrangement of human activity and the de-activization of individuals. On the objective side, human labor is abstracted in exchange when it is reduced to labor power with a price and in production where it is made increasingly interchangeable with other abstract labors. On the subjective side, the abstraction of laboring activity appears to the worker as "de-magicization," as the "progressive elimination of the qualitative human and individual attributes of the worker."³⁰ Taylorism, the final step in the mechanization of the worker, separating and controlling "his psychological attributes," is the final step in de-magicization. Atomization and fragmentation characterize not only the objective subdivision of the product and the work process but also the reduction of the worker to a single, partial operation. "The laborer is mutilated into a fragment of a man."³¹ He is reduced to mere spectatorship, to mere *contemplation* of his own estranged activity and that of his fellows. Atomization among workers is the consequence, as

one would also expect from the broad movement described by Tönnies as that from community to society.

Lukács insists he is not merely describing the reification of the worker in capitalist production, but that the fate of the atomized, fragmented, reduced worker becomes the typical human fate in capitalist society. Having identified narrow specialization as one of the shapes of reification, he had no difficulty in extending the concept to bureaucracy and to the contemporary organization of knowledge. Having identified the passive, contemplative attitude of the specialized worker toward his own activity and toward the product (of which he produces only a small part) with the *reification of consciousness*, he was also able (though not without some distortion) to bring the narrowly specialized and anti-philosophical social and natural sciences under this heading. And even where he could identify some conscious recognition of the destructive consequences of reification, as in classical German philosophy and in art, he was able to show that the inability to imagine the conquest of commodity fetishism and reification in social practice leads to regression even in the case of the most promising attempts at "de-fetishization." It was however Lukács's belief that the social theory which is able systematically and essentially to link the phenomena of reification to the total society would be a small step toward de-fetishization if it corresponded to (or met halfway) another step, a step toward class consciousness on the part of those to whom the theory was addressed: the industrial proletariat. Lukács even attempted to work out a conception that would make the self-consciousness of workers about the reduction of the qualitative aspects in their life at least objectively possible.³²

Lukács's answer to Weber ultimately depended on his ability to demonstrate commodity fetishism as the secret dynamic behind the rationalization of all the social spheres, and even more on his conception of the working class as ultimately the "identical subject-object" of capitalist society. The theory of reification clearly shows how workers are objects of the system. It even demonstrates that "immediately" the consciousness of workers is perhaps the most victimized by reification. Lukács's claim for their potential subjectivity depends less on the labor theory of value (which he does use) than on his belief (never really grounded) that the objectively possible self-consciousness of workers is already a practical action, an action that moreover would prepare the ground for the successful reception of revolutionary theory by its proper addressees.³³ The working class is thus only potentially the subject of the capitalist period, and is *actual-*

ly the subject only of revolutionary transformation. It is a paradox of Frankfurt theory that of its theorists, T.W. Adorno did more than anyone to interrogate contemporary culture with the concept of reification even after the main line of the School had more or less abandoned the proletariat as the subject of history.³⁴ On the other hand, Walter Benjamin, in his debate with Adorno, based himself on the subjectivity of the proletariat,³⁵ disregarding the heavy consequences of the theory of reification which at the very least showed the difficulties facing class consciousness.

The Concept of Critique

The concept of reification enabled Lukács to surpass the schematic reading of Marxism either as merely a better version of political economy and or as a theory of history based on the primacy of the economic in all social formations. In terms of his concept of the reification of consciousness, classical political economy qualifies as a more or less accurate rendition of the surface phenomena of the "second nature" of civil society. The ideological distortion of political economy becomes especially evident when its main proponents project specific characteristics of capitalism onto all social life, past and future. Marxism is first of all a *critique* of political economy because it destroys this unhistorical illusion by uncovering (as did the *Grundrisse* especially) the specificity of precapitalist social formations and by pointing out the objective possibility (for Marx generally, necessity) of a future order based on entirely new and liberated formative principles. But the best-known economic deterministic version of historical materialism does not escape the fate of political economy in the medium of critique.³⁶ Even if it does not project all the characteristics of capitalism into the past and the future, historical materialism does illegitimately so project the primacy of a relatively independent economic base. However, the self-critique of historical materialism, i.e., the application of the method of ideology critique to orthodox historical materialism cannot be completed, according to Lukács, until the establishment of socialist society. For the time being, the crude version of the theory remains an important weapon in the class struggle.³⁷ Thus, the bulk of Lukács's reification thesis is anchored in a critique of political economy, and not yet a more general concept of ideology critique that the self-critique of historical materialism (itself partly under the aegis of the reification of the economy) would have necessarily inaugurated. But as we have seen, the integration of Max Weber's work already meant that the descrip-

tive aspects (not the dynamic) of the critique of political economy are unfolded rather as a general critique of sociology. It was through the use of the strongly Hegelian concept of "mediation" that Lukács was able to distinguish the *critique* of political economy (and sociology) from the *sciences* of political economy (and sociology).

Hegel's concept of *mediation* reformulated is a key to both Lukács's and Adorno's reconstruction of Marxism as the *critique* of political economy. For Lukács³⁸ a theory mediates the frozen, immediately given, "reified" surface of reality (presented by political economy and sociology) to the extent that it first recognizes [*Anerkennung*] and reduplicates, and second raises to self-consciousness [*Aufhebung*] the immanent tendencies of its object moving toward self-realization. Mediation is de-fetishization. The appearances of reality are first recognized as such, then detached from their immediate context and are finally related to the social whole, the vision of which is fragmented by reification. But this "relating" *mediates* only because the addressees of the theory—the proletariat—de-fetishize themselves in the practical recognition of themselves as commodities, as object of the capitalist system. The addressees (i.e., practical mediation when already in motion) discover the full form of their self-consciousness [*Klassenbewusstsein*] in the theory. The theory (i.e., theoretical mediation) discovers its reality (and that of its categories) in its being so recognized by its addressees. This is elegant Hegelian theorizing, but it sounds rather hollow fifty years later. Adorno's adoption of the concept of reification and mediation carries the burden of the most crucial part of these fifty years.

In spite of the tendency of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Negative Dialectics* to inflate reification as the fate of civilization itself, and eventually to deny the key role of the category in an analysis with emancipators intent, Adorno's cultural critique surely accepted and worked with Lukács's exposition of the immediate forms of reification under advancing capitalism.³⁹ The main conceptual refinement Adorno added in this context was the already mentioned shift in emphasis to the "technological veil" spread by the logic of administration as the fullest subsumption of reality under the form of fetishism. For Adorno too the immediate, "objective" facts of fully developed civil or bourgeois society constitute a second nature. The thinglike facts of this administered second nature, facts that administrative research copies, hide not only social relations but specifically human relations of domination and control. All unreflective empirical research, by fetishizing the "false consciousness" that adheres to the

frozen *immediacy* of given factuality, serves the technocratic interest of control.⁴⁰ The alternative of a critical theory of culture is therefore indicated by the category of de-fetishization, or even more generally by mediation.

The category of mediation which both Lukács and Adorno discuss extensively is the *locus classicus* of the difference between the revolutionary optimism of the former and the profound, critical pessimism of the latter. Adorno's definition of ideology and critique can best be understood in terms of this difference, one that we would like to explore. Here we will restrict ourselves, for the sake of the clearest contrast, to Lukács's 1923 position, ultimately grounded in the myth of the proletariat, and Adorno's late antinomic view, based on the dissolution of all mythology. (1) Adorno, like Lukács, always accepted the notion that mediation must be grounded in the essential nature of the object itself.⁴¹ But where Lukács (like the early Adorno) understood this object in the sense of a unified, dynamic, social totality that comes to practical self-consciousness in revolutionary theory, in the late Adorno the unity and identity of the object itself is in doubt. On the one hand, Adorno reproduces a rather static version of the historical materialist premise that the relationship of economic base and superstructure is present in all "ideology"; on the other hand, he insists that we can have knowledge of total society only in the form of micrology—i.e., through the intensive, critical examination of single, totalized works in art and philosophy. Mediation, then, in the form of "transcendent critique," is the totalization that locates works in a social totality, economically structured but without a future-oriented dynamic. This totality, the *Gesamttotalität*, is therefore false: "the whole is untrue." Of course, the false whole does exist as the social totality totalized by the means of total, administrative-bureaucratic or even totalitarian practice.⁴² Mediation, in the form of micrology, in the form of an "immanent critique" that has not forgotten its interest in a future-oriented transformation of the false whole of society, is therefore the only possible avenue for a conceptual unfolding that involves a dynamic relation of subject-object in Lukács' sense. (2) Of course, Adorno's bleak picture of the *Gesamttotalität* presupposes one crucial anti-Lukácsian premise: the nonexistence of a social *Gesamtsjekt* of action.⁴³ The human beings of the administered world are fragmented subjects of damaged intersubjective knowledge that cannot constitute genuine intersubjectivity of action (collective subject) from the traces of meaning in the rubble of *objective spirit*. While in the 1930s the proletariat was for him still the potential revolutionary subject, the

late Adorno only had profound fear for the emergence of a collective subject composed of the human fragments of today. The Lukácsian project of a mediation or de-fetishization in which revolutionary theory is met half-way by the self-mediation or self-de-fetishization of reality in the emergence of class consciousness, collapses in Adorno's work. (3) Therefore, Adorno could not admit an objectively possible identity of theoretical mediation and the practical self-mediation of the addressees of theory, and hoped only for a parallel and incomplete mediation of micrological theory and those of its objects that themselves incorporate the project of critique, i.e., autonomous works of art. Where Lukács in the manner of Hegel mediates reification toward subject-object identity, Adorno's mediation ("through the extremes") does not lead beyond antinomy, beyond unresolved contradiction. The micrological analysis of antinomic objects in a common field ("the extremes of modern music," for example) may unfold the idea behind each object until "the inherent consequence of the object is transformed into their self-criticism," but no overcoming of the initial antinomy is thereby achieved.⁴⁴ We must stress here that Adorno from the early 1930s on insisted on the cognitive function of great works of art.⁴⁵ Beethoven's achievement, for example, is often compared to Hegel's⁴⁶: the method of each is characterized as the unfolding of a "dynamic totality." But in a period in which Hegel's theoretical object is portrayed as "untrue,"⁴⁷ Adorno was forced to re-evaluate the limits of possible cognition in both art and theory. To hold on to their essential cognitive function, both must appear as negative, as critique. In both art and theory, "the successful work . . . is not one which resolves objective contradiction in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure."⁴⁸ No lines offer a better characterization of Adorno's own self-understanding. When he moves from critique to self-critique, in the great essay "Cultural Criticism and Society,"⁴⁹ he too is able to express the harmony and unity of critical theory only negatively, by the dialectical-antinomic juxtaposition of the thoroughly criticized poles of immanent and transcendent modes of ideology critique.

The concept of ideology has a long and contradictory history.⁵⁰ Within the Marxian tradition⁵¹ the best-known version is that in the *German Ideology*, which reduces ideology to the ideas of the ruling class—composed of falsehood or inverted truths—to be measured against the truth of science. Neither this definition nor Engels' revision in terms of reciprocal influences between superstructure and base

was useful to the Frankfurt theorists.⁵² What they took from Marx instead was the increasingly uneasy combination of *ideology as normatively true and empirically false consciousness (Marx in 1843 especially) and of ideology as objectively and socially necessary illusion, "fetishism" (the Marx of the mature Critique of Political Economy)*. Herbert Marcuse, for example, uses both of these concepts in his 1937 essay "Affirmative Culture": the first to the extent that he juxtaposes and confronts the true, utopian and the false, legitimating, "affirmative" moments of art, and the second to the extent that he hopes to resolve the contradiction of art by the total social, revolutionary abolition of socially necessary illusion, opening the way to a new culture based on the unity of art and life. The second move especially firmly locates the critical theory of the 1930s within the realm of Lukácsian Marxism. For Lukács, too, the dialectic of true and false consciousness implied the same two notions of ideology. (1) The images of subject-object identity (reconciliation) in German classical philosophy, from Kant and Fichte to Hegel and Schiller, were truths that turned into falsehood when the philosophers, on the basis of conceptual mythologies, mistook theory for reality. (2) The empirically correct and rational presentation of social appearances (phenomena) in political economy represented "truth" in a limited, empirical sense, truth that turns out to be false when *mediation* discovers the distortion of the past, present and future dynamic-historical context of these "truths." The two notions of ideology are linked together by Lukács in that process of mediation that reveals the *objectively possible* aspiration of empirical reality to the heights of thought. For Adorno, as we have seen, it is just this process of mediation toward identity that falls apart. According to him, under late capitalism ideologies in a genuine sense collapse and give way to the antinomic alternatives of critical thought, illusionless but impotent, and mere reduplication in consciousness of the world of administered controls.⁵³

Adorno locates his own difficulty in defining ideology precisely in the administered world. He gives us at least three definitions, and each fares differently in the present historical context. (1) Ideology is "objectively necessary and at the same time false" consciousness, true because it is a rational, scientific or social scientific expression of the established state of affairs, false because it is not the whole truth of that state of affairs (suppressing its history, its interest structure, etc.)⁵⁴ (2) Ideologies "in the genuine sense" are ideals and norms true in themselves but false in their pretension to be already realized,⁵⁵ (e.g.,

the idea of justice as *more than* just equivalent exchange). (3) Ideologies that are *not* such, "in the genuine" sense, are mere reduplication of the existing reality. They appear when "purely immediate relations of power predominate." Adorno means here not so much reduplication in the sense of conceptual copy (that could still have a moment of rational representation) but irrational ideas (e.g., fascism) that are mere instruments of power in a world in which everything is instrumentalized.⁵⁶ Such a world has no "ideology," but is itself ideological, in the sense that *ideas* are merely part of the seamless web of administered reality that forces compliance (also of concepts and artistic representations) ultimately through power. But even in this context, Adorno seeks to discover through critique the hidden interest structure behind irrational "ideologies" and the "anthropological" changes in human beings that leads to the instrumental efficiency of irrational ideas. Here lies the importance for Adorno of the *critique* of fascist "ideology" and of the culture industry.

It seems to us that Adorno under the historical impact of fascism, Stalinism and the culture industry, drastically downplayed the first meaning of ideology in relation to the second and third, (absorbing it ultimately in the third).⁵⁷ He was ready often enough to utilize the results of social science, but as we will see, the relationship of empirical social science to critical philosophy was always antinomic in his work. The ultimate reason: Adorno lost hope of discovering behind present social facts dynamic objective possibilities in the manner of Marx and Lukács before him, or even Habermas after him. He responded, therefore, to the antinomy of critical thought and instrumental reason, emerging from the debris of genuine ideologies, with his own antinomic combination of immanent critique *addressing* (and mediating) the critical potentialities of genuine works and transcendent critique *denouncing* the one-dimensional world of the culture industry.

Adorno was never smugly complacent about the antinomic structure of his own critique. Turning the reflective power of critique against itself, he demonstrated in many of his writings⁵⁸ the inadequacy of either immanent or transcendent critique, and the necessity of maintaining both in uneasy opposition. To be sure, the weight of each mode of critique in their antinomic combination is for Adorno not an absolute matter. In a period (classical liberalism) when genuine ideologies play a major role in social integration, the demonstration of their interest structure (as in classical Marxist ideology critique) from

the "transcendent" or "outside" point of view of total society may be the most crucial task. But in an epoch that threatens all realms of consciousness with subsumption and one-dimensional reduction, immanent criticism, immersion in the internal form and structure of cultural objects plays a redeeming, protective function. In the earlier epoch, Marxist theory had to confront liberal ideology with its moment of falsehood. In the present, critical theory must insist on the moment of truth of ideologies against technocratic reason, and even the sociology of knowledge. Adorno's own sympathies are clearly with immanent critique.⁵⁹ Both immanent and transcendent critique, however, suffer from deep internal problems. Immanent critique all too readily celebrates the autonomy of mind, postulating—as Adorno seems to do at times⁶⁰—an almost completely independent logic of cultural forms. Measuring culture against its own normative ideal, immanent critique all too readily forgets about the ambiguous role of ideas in social conflicts and distracts from the true horrors of the social world.⁶¹ And even if it manages to discover dynamic contradictions between idea and pretense in works—or culture as a whole—immanent critique is powerless to resolve the contradictions, to liberate mind from their explosive results, or even to discover social truth through the work.⁶² But transcendent critique (which includes most socialist writers on cultural issues), by suppressing all independent logic of cultural forms, is complicitous with present and future administrations seeking to level and integrate culture. Transcendent critique is interested in the uniform whole and spares itself the conceptual effort of examining the particular "in its difference."⁶³ Nevertheless, only transcendent critique reproduces the image of the reified totality that all genuine critique must take into account, and only it has that total intransigence against all reification required by any future radical politics.⁶⁴ And yet, the conceptual reproduction of the reified world on its own reproduces nothing worth saving; transcendent critique cannot ultimately suppress its affinity to barbarism.

To Adorno, dialectical critique of culture or ideology is the extremely uneasy, antinomic synthesis of immanent and transcendent critique. We can take seriously his claim that dialectical critique "heightens cultural criticism until the notion of culture is itself negated, fulfilled and surmounted"⁶⁵ only if we drop the last word. Dialectical critique can, on the basis of Adorno's self-presentation, hardly be more than the successful work "which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradiction." Adorno's

dialectic as against Hegel's "is obliged to be mindful of the duality of the moments." "The dialectical critic of culture" has no alternative but to "participate in culture and not participate."⁶⁶

The consequences of Adorno's redefinition of cultural criticism were momentous for the development of the very form of his critical theory. The demand to liberate the critical power of the works of culture by the stringent combination of both transcendent and immanent critique is satisfied only by the analysis of those works that avoid the fetishization of culture, by taking reflection into their very structure. The culture that is possible only as culture critique exists according to Adorno only in the "post-esthetic" works of the avant-garde. On the other hand, an ideology critique that has criticized its own "transcendent" and often scientific pretense of locating function of culture in a completely understood whole is forced to accept the self-critique of culture (especially art) on an equal footing with critical theory itself.⁶⁷ The precondition, however, is that modern art "incorporate the cracks and crevices of a world torn mercilessly apart into its representations."⁶⁸ Here lies the special importance of presenting cultural theory in terms of the critical essay form which is best suited to micrology.⁶⁹ Its critical function affirms and preserves the cognitive dimension of works of art. The parallel critique of autonomous works, however, destroys the totalizing and systematic illusion of critical theory itself, still present in Lukács's and even the early Horkheimer's and Marcuse's versions of the critical Marxist enterprise. If behind the curtain of mediation Hegelian theory discovered itself, and Lukács's version of Marxism discovered the proletariat whose proper class consciousness the theory supposedly was, then it is Adorno's view that any version of transcendent and totalizing ideology critique in the old sense will discover only the totality of the administered world. In Adorno's late pessimistic theory, only the brittle and precarious essay form of primarily immanent critique can discover the self-critique of reality which is today restricted for Adorno to critical art and philosophy. His last major works, *Negative Dialectics* and the posthumously published *Esthetic Theory*, are best understood as themselves collections of essays and, at times, even aphorisms in the manner of *Minima Moralia*.

Even though Adorno as early as 1932 began to stress the analogous tasks of art and social theory, and especially the cognitive character of an art that expresses social antinomies in its own rigorous formal language,⁷⁰ the reduction of critique of ideology to the essay form does not characterize the early self-comprehension of critical

theory. Many positions of the 1930s of Marcuse and Horkheimer especially fall under what Adorno called transcendent critique.⁷¹ The attack of course was primarily directed at orthodox historical materialism and Mannheim's general notion of ideology. But the critical theory of Horkheimer in the 1930s, with its "hidden orthodoxy," falls under the charge to the extent that in its general vision it assigned superstructure (hence cultural phenomena) in the "last instance" the relatively insignificant role of retardation and acceleration of social change.⁷² In other (though not all) respects, the self-definition of "critical theory" in the 1930s reveals the name as a code term for Marxism (or Lukácsian Marxism) and not its drastic reinterpretation as primarily negative, immanent dialectical critique. Horkheimer's list of the *differentia specifica* of critical versus traditional theory consists of the recognition of the theory's own interest structure, self-correction in terms of the up-to-date results of social science, *the point of view of totality* and a dynamic relationship to its potential addressees, the proletariat.⁷³ To be sure, Marcuse⁷⁴ and Horkheimer both argued that critical theory receives present confirmation of its interest in a future liberated society in the fantasy (read: advanced art) of the present that anticipates an entirely new utopian sensibility and the philosophy of the past. But even on this point there was some ambiguity. Both theorists accepted the thesis of the *German Ideology* about the abolition (*Aufhebung*) of philosophy in dialectical social theory. And Marcuse at least in his critique of "affirmative culture" used the ideology-critical confrontation of the utopian elements of high culture (with its politically conservative functions) to call for the "*Aufhebung der Kultur*," the abolition of culture as such and the end of art in the reintegration of mental and manual labor.⁷⁵ We should recall that the second and more secret characteristic of "transcendent critique," according to Adorno, is its hidden affinity for barbarism.⁷⁶ In his last major opus, Adorno specifically locates Marcuse's critique of affirmative culture in this dangerous neighborhood.⁷⁷

In the context of the definition of critique, the clash between Walter Benjamin and the older critical theory is decisive. Benjamin's specific attitude toward history, even when he professed a higher degree of Marxist political commitment than the members of the "Frankfurt School," represented a more decisive break with the evolutionist theory of progress than any Marxism of his time. To Benjamin, the history of development was always that of domination. Only moments that rupture the continuity of history have anything to do with future liberation, and toward these moments, "now-times"

[*Jetztzeiten*] in which the dialectic stands still [*Dialektik im Stillstand*], he had a "conservative" attitude that has been best described as one of "*rettende Kritik*," a critique that saves or redeems.⁷⁸ For Benjamin, this attitude, which coincided with both his theological interest and his self-understanding as a collector,⁷⁹ was first combined with political resignation and melancholy, and subsequently with his defense of Brecht's political theater.⁸⁰ In neither context did he attack a culture already in dissolution in his estimation.⁸¹ Nor did he ever propose that he had a transcendent, evolutionary scheme or even a systematic reconstruction of the totality of the present which could unambiguously guarantee a dialectical abolition-preservation of art in a society of full reconciliation. "He saw his task not in reconstructing the totality of bourgeois society but rather in examining its blinded, nature-bound and diffuse elements under a microscope."⁸² Benjamin always understood the task of critique or criticism in the sense of the search for the truth of works (against mere commentary) but at the same time in terms of a strongly anti-systematic, we might⁸³ say essayistic impulse.⁸⁴ Many years before Adorno, Benjamin moved to recognize the critical spirit inherent in at least those works of modernity (the baroque, romanticism, Baudelaire and surrealism) which eschewed the task of symbolic reconciliation in the medium of "beautiful appearance." Benjamin hardly elevated theoretical critique higher than the immanent critique latent in works themselves. The task of his own critique was simply surgically to remove (or "to blast open"), collect and save the critical fragments of the past that could help transform "cultural heritage" from a burden to a possession, to moments of "secular illumination" which he defined in terms of the earthly promise of happiness. Thus the multitude of quotations in his *Origins of the German Trauerspiels* and the intention to compose his study of the Parisian arcades (*Passagenarbeit*) entirely of quotations. While such concepts of Lukácsian Marxism as "second nature" fetishism and praxis had already had a strong effect on him in the 1920s, Benjamin always did without the concept of *mediation*.⁸⁵ To Benjamin, even dialectic could only reveal and express antinomy and not surpass it. This is what he meant by the expression "*Dialektik im Stillstand*." On the one hand, a dialectic at standstill brings to the sharpest focus the reified, frozen "second natural" elements of bourgeois culture,⁸⁶ while on the other hand, those elements are antinomically and statically related to dreams or wishes or memories of the present ("dialectical images") concerning free collectives.⁸⁷

The difference between the Lukácsian Marxism of early critical theory and Walter Benjamin's notion of critique was clearly noticed by Adorno in his criticism of Benjamin in the 1930s. Nevertheless, Adorno's own position eventually emerged as the uneasy synthesis of the opposing poles: critical theory and *rettende Kritik*. His critique and appropriation of Benjamin needs to be presented primarily in terms of their clashing evaluation of the relationship of art and modern technology, and of art and politics.

Modern Art and Culture Industry

Having presented some of the conceptual parameters presupposed by the Frankfurt theory of culture, we should now indicate in detail how these parameters were used. Horkheimer's "End of Reason" could equally serve as the lead article of this section. The essay, a critique of late capitalist culture and politics, gives convincing proof of its author's adherence to what we outlined as the theory of social formations which emerges from the work of Marx, Weber, and Lukács, and of his ability to adopt this model to current needs and experiences. Marx, Weber and even the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* saw only a unified epoch of civil society as against its historical background and future perspectives, while Horkheimer confronted an internal process of development from liberal to authoritarian versions of civil society. Thus in 1941 he was able to locate historically "the emergence of the individual" (as against a traditional Greek and medieval background in which a harmony existed between individual and the symbols of collectivity) in the liberal period, and the increasing crisis and decline of the subject in the period of the authoritarian state.⁸⁸ Furthermore, under the impact of new theories as well as experiences, he was able to specify new aspects of this decline: among them the destruction of the family, the weakening of the ego (in the psychoanalytic sense) and the emergence of false, manipulated collectives under the impact of mass culture and especially fascism. Horkheimer, Marcuse and Lowenthal (in the Hamsun article below) understood fully that in the context of the destruction of community, of urban loneliness, industrial degradation of nature and economic crisis, the weakened egos of the present are especially exposed to the charm of demagogic movements proclaiming the fake restoration of national community, the false return to nature and the very real end of economic crisis through the militarization of the economy.⁸⁹

As in political sociology, the cultural theory of the School unanimously declared that all attempts to return to a supposed golden

age were bankrupt and mortally dangerous. No one was more emphatic on this point than Walter Benjamin.

Benjamin's 1925 pre-Marxist volume *The Origin of the German Trauerspiels*⁹⁰ ["sad play" as against tragedy] was next to Lukács's *Theory of the Novel* the most important background text of Frankfurt *Kulturkritik*. Its concept of allegory has been construed by the old Lukács, by Adorno and Habermas among others, as the key to the interpretation of modern art. For the moment, we are interested in Benjamin's depiction of the historical context of the emergence of allegory as an anti-esthetic principle within art itself. This context is the "second nature" of civil society, elaborated by the art of the baroque, according to Benjamin, in terms of a "natural history" of decay, decline and disintegration. The allegories of the baroque (but also by implication those of romanticism and of the twentieth century) represent the dominant modes of expression of periods in which things lose their immediate relationship to intersubjective, evident meanings.⁹¹ The allegories of many cultures are tightly woven, deliberately simplified schemes that unmistakably point to an external referent, usually transcendence for those members of a community who possess the key (e.g. the Bible, the Koran). The allegories of civil society are however *ruins*, and point only to the "metaphysical homelessness" (cf. Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*) of lonely creatures in despair about transcendence despite their conventional religiosity. The allegorization of art means that art has become problematic to itself, to the extent that the genuine esthetic principle of rounded, closed, *symbolic* totalities of "beautiful semblance" are accessible only to artistic epigones. The unmistakable problematic of Benjamin's study is that of the disintegration of community,⁹² and the fate of the human creature in the context of a "second nature" over which he is powerless.

The theme of the decline of community accompanies Benjamin's lifework, to be later complemented by the hope for the construction of a new type of free collective. His now famous theory of the disintegration of esthetic aura⁹³ was connected by Benjamin himself to the destruction of the traditional, cultic fabric of natural communities and to the decline of the communal context of communicable experience. In some contexts he welcomes this decline as the condition of possibility of "a pure situation," opening up the road toward a new, collective, democratic art form. In other, less optimistic contexts that recall the *Trauerspiels* book he may be saddened about what is lost, but he is always careful not to make even the least concession to a political

mobilization of lost traditions *against* modernity. In this, though certainly not in all respects, Benjamin was of one mind with Marcuse, Lowenthal, Horkheimer and Adorno.

The theory of the decline of the aura is a specific use of Weber's category of *Entzauberung* in the domain of art, a use that leads to the thematization of the "end of art." Best known in this context is Benjamin's "Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility" (1936) but equally important for the sake of a many-sided picture of the concept of the aura are "The Storyteller" (1936) and "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," (1939).⁹⁴ Two related yet distinct lines of thought emerge from these studies, and with two different cultural-political consequences. The line of thought characteristic of the "Work of Art" is determined by the struggle against the fascist utilization of tradition and by the struggle in alliance with Bertolt Brecht for a new collective-political art form. This essay defines "aura" in several, related ways. The authenticity of a nonreproducible work, unique existence in a fabric of tradition, the living relationship of a work to a religious cult and the phenomenon of distance that separates us not only from a natural landscape but from all unique, total, harmonious works of art, these are the major definitions. Works with aura produce concentration, empathy, absorption and identification on the part of the reader, or audience—modes of response that lead according to Brecht and Benjamin to political and esthetic passivity. Benjamin depicts the decline of the aura primarily in terms of technological, but also economic and social tendencies. The growth of technological methods of reproduction which Benjamin deduces from the Marxian dialectic of forces and relations of production leads to a "tremendous shattering of tradition." Modern reproduction techniques produce genres without unique, authentic works, and tear even the genres of the past from their traditional fabric which was the implicit foundation of their mystery, their uniqueness. Modern mass society (i.e. bourgeois or civil society) means the destruction of the social bases of religious cults, and the contemporary masses suspicious of cult and mystique tend to bring things closer to themselves "spatially and humanly," thereby abolishing esthetic distance. Photography, the film, radio and newspapers destroy the traditional context of auratic works and inaugurate a crisis of the traditional forms: painting, the theater and the novel in particular. The new technological means not only make the modes of response corresponding to the old, esthetic quality obsolete, but also produce new ones. The audience of a film is distracted, is bombarded by the shock

inherent in *montage* and is unable to identify with actors who "play" for an objective apparatus. Benjamin, following Brecht, insists that these characteristics of film produce a distanced estrangement (*Verfremdungseffekt*) on the part of the audience that leads to a critical-active attitude toward what is seen. The audience as a result, acting collectively and critically has a chance to reject or to complete an intrinsically unfinished work.⁹⁵

To the Benjamin of the "Work of Art" essay all art, all culture is necessarily functionalized. The concept of function is presented in terms of a secularization thesis rather than a Marxist class analysis. In the distant past cultic-religious functions predominated. The last form of cult value is *l'art pour l'art* which replaces religion by the "theology of art." In the age of commodification "exhibition value" replaces cult value in relationship to traditional works. But in the case of the new means of mechanical reproduction political value or political function predominates.⁹⁶ The urgency of this new situation lies in the possible alternative of a fascist politicization of art which uses the remnants or traces of older, quasi-cultic values to beautify reactionary politics. To Benjamin the only answer to the fascist challenge is that politicization of art which unites artistic production to the struggle of the worker's movement for self-consciousness.

The alternative, so sharply posed in a primarily political essay that is intrinsically related to the somewhat earlier "Author as Producer," reproduced below, and also to Brecht's *Dreigroschenprozess* is softened in Benjamin's more scholarly contemporary work. It is essential to look at this more subtle side of his argument that was worked out primarily in the 1936 "The Storyteller" and (after Adorno's criticisms to which we will later turn) the 1938 "Some Motifs in Baudelaire." Here the element of technological determinism implicit in the above argument is relativized to the extent that these essays thematize the substratum of aura that is lost: communicable experience and community. Both essays point to the destruction of genuine experience which rests on communication and to its replacement by information. There can be no communication without a shared structure of meanings in a collective memory, but the movement from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* that capitalism completes destroys the communal bases (ritual, ceremony, festival) of such memory. "Where there is experience in the strict sense of the word, certain contents of the individual past combine with materials of the collective past."⁹⁷ To Benjamin in the absence of community the individual is detached from a collective past. Furthermore the structure of percep-

tion in mass, industrial society is explicitly modified by the experience of shock; only the shielding of the personality as a relatively inaccessible unconscious protects against a superabundance of nonabsorbable outside stimuli. The consequences of modern technology, urbanism, and information converge with those of the dissolution of communities during the original accumulation of capital in the destruction of experience. Benjamin relocated "the decline of aura" in this context of the crisis of perception and experience. Redefined, aura is the transposition of human relations of reciprocity, "reciprocal gaze," to inanimate things—works of art (or nature). In the mechanical objective products of photography, film, the newspaper etc. we find no traces of human subjects, and unaccustomed to shared experience, modern man will not find his gaze returned in traditional works or nature itself.⁹⁸

The 1936 and 1939 treatments of aura ("Work of Art" vs. "Some Motifs in Baudelaire") are different in three respects. (1) The 1936 essay focuses on and rejects the authoritarian implications of the traditional ("cultic") foundation of aura; whereas the 1939 essay (and even more "The Storyteller") stresses the communal, communicative, nonauthoritarian aspects of this tradition and is nostalgic (at the very least) about its decline. (2) The new means of reproduction, the new media, are evaluated in 1936 as more or less the causes of the decline of the aura, whereas in 1939 they are interpreted only as parts of an overall context that is generated by other social factors (e.g. decline of community). (3) In 1936 auratic works are unambiguously presented as the context for passive reception (the new media are the terrain of the new active and collective reception of works), whereas the "Storyteller" and "Some Motifs in Baudelaire" imply that the traditional communal context of reception was an active one and that a few works of modern art (those of Kafka, Proust, and Baudelaire) in spite of fantastic obstacles managed to combine the very experience of the loss of aura into works implying a fabric of residual communication and the anticipation of qualitatively different society or at least the reduction of the present one to ruins. We would like to focus only on the last point here. From the point of view of Benjamin's book on the baroque, the theses of which are consciously incorporated into his much later studies on Baudelaire, the attack on aura in the "Work of Art" essay is justified only by the fascist attempt to estheticize politics in the medium of symbol and beautiful illusion. From the same earlier point of view the 1936 essay can be faulted however for not recognizing that allegorical works which renounce the ideal of beauty, and

present in an uncompromising and "non-affirmative" manner the present as ruin and crisis are not open to fascist mobilization but are possible contexts of critical and active reception. In fact, as Adorno was to show (and Benjamin himself noted), the new media themselves were open to a fake and manufactured aura which a capitalist culture industry might develop for a sales effort equally functional for the advertisement of movie stars, merchandise and fascist regimes.

Since Benjamin anticipated this last objection which relates to the industrial manufacture of fake, artificial aura, it becomes clear why he attributed only a negative, destructive function to the capitalist use of the new mechanical media.⁹⁹ Fake aura does not restore weakened traditions. However, not one, but two positive alternatives emerge from this thesis. The first reaches back to Benjamin's own concept of allegory. Different interpreters of Benjamin (and of allegory) stress two major characteristics of modern allegories: their built-in obsolescence and their completion only in interpretation.¹⁰⁰ The work, in itself fragmentary, *implies* the critical completion and reconstruction which saves its truth content even when the work itself becomes obsolete. The concept of allegory—in spite of Benjamin's historical focus—prepares the ground for three types of interpretation of modernism. First, and perhaps best known, is Lukács's claim (curiously analogous to one of the points of Adorno's *early* critique of Benjamin) that the allegories of the avant-garde fetishize the fragmented ruins of civil society and eliminate the possibility of the defetishizing totalization (in Adorno's mediation) which points beyond our world.¹⁰¹ Second is Habermas's argument (derived from Adorno's *later* essayistic practice) that modernism "incorporates the cracks and crevices of a world torn apart mercilessly into its representations . . . through creating an artificial distance, it lays bare the world constructed as crisis."¹⁰² Finally, there is the argument derived through the prism of Ernst Bloch's appropriation of Benjamin¹⁰³—certainly justified by Benjamin's anti-authoritarian stylistic predilections—that the presentation of a world as ruin or as fragments defines modern art as experimental and in particular open to the active participation and intervention of the receivers. Benjamin's own conscious utilization of his earlier theory of allegory in his Marxist period, which presents a rather strong contrast to his two essays reproduced below, must be considered in light of these heterogeneous interpretations of the meaning of his work.

To Benjamin the collective, intersubjective moments of historical experience do not disappear without traces even in the period of

civil society that is characterized by the disintegration of tradition supporting substantial experience. Paradoxically it is the experience of shock, so characteristic of industrial civilization, that involuntarily (as in Proust's "memoire involontair") stimulates remembrance. What is remembered? Collective rituals, festivals and a different, qualitative relationship to nature.¹⁰⁴ Who remembers? Benjamin postulates a collective memory, repressed but not totally inaccessible, which is recalled by individuals when the "correspondence" between its symbols and events of our everyday life is attained. When is such a "remembrance" possible? Benjamin explores in this context the material texture of everyday urban life, and he lets strange and unusual correspondences emerge as unintended consequences of speech, of work, of strolling (the "flânerie" of the "flâneur"), of literary or theoretical activity. But in two instances at least the correspondences, now called "dialectical images" are consciously pursued. The poet Baudelaire, confronted with the disappearance of those experiential materials that historically supported poetry, raises the principle of this disappearance, the transformation of perception by shock, to a new poetic principle. He thus managed to fashion out of the disappearance of aura a new mode of art.¹⁰⁵ The result is an allegorical art that reveals once again the natural physiognomy of the present as "ruin" and juxtaposes to the ruins of the bourgeoisie elements of dream, memory and fantasy stimulated by shock but recalling or anticipating a different, collective character of experience. It is this juxtaposition that is called the "dialectical image," standing still without resolution (*Dialektik im Stillstand*) but inviting the dreamer to awake.¹⁰⁶ The second procedure that consciously pursues the dialectical images of the present is Benjamin's own. We believe that this was his own principle of form: to collect and reproduce in quotation the contradictions of the present without resolution. This formal principle is the outer limit of a non-authoritarian essayistic attitude to a potential audience, one that was never reached even by Adorno, who sought a more active dialectic.

It is very controversial whether the inner logic of Benjamin's esthetic theory stops with the anti-authoritarian theory of the *dialectic at a standstill*. The fact that the second major alternative within his esthetic theory implies the discovery of the identical principle in Brecht's epic theater,¹⁰⁷ where the audience is ultimately never completely spared explicit political solutions and resolutions, has aroused the understandable skepticism of his friends Adorno and Scholem, recently echoed by Habermas. And yet the steps to Brecht follow from

a crucial difference between Benjamin's and Adorno's esthetics. Benjamin's stress in analyzing a work is displaced (*vis-à-vis* Adorno) in the direction of the conditions of production and reception. The formal characteristics of the work itself were less important to Benjamin. It was of greater importance to him to insist on the liberating possibilities of the works of the past and the future in relationship to *collective* modes of production and reception. He was ready to surrender the aura of the creative personality even where, as in the case of Baudelaire, Kafka, Proust and himself, the works produced were open and critical. In this context he welcomed those technologies that made all individual genius obsolete, and even more the one author, Bertolt Brecht, who attempted to raise this moment of the decline of aura (along with other elements) to the formal principle of a *collective, political art*.

The 1937 essay "The Author as Producer" reproduced below is the best summary of Benjamin's defense of Brecht, but it is also remarkable for its apology for the instrumentalization of art in the Soviet Union. To be sure Benjamin attacks artistic autonomy not in the name of administration but in the name of a collective, open, experimental, technically innovative political art form. Brecht's theater is a "dramatic laboratory" which uses all of its technical sophistication to make the self-education of audiences possible. The play, "an experimental setup," fosters two dialogues: one between the producers of the play with the advanced technical means of communication, and another between actor, author, technical personnel and the "reduced men of today." The two dialogues allow the audience to become coauthor, coactor of the production. Benjamin imagined that the Soviet films of the 1920s and Soviet newspapers were already prototypes of the new active relationship between work and audience. In the 1930s this illusion could only legitimate the increasingly repressive cultural policies of the Soviet state, and Benjamin naively for a moment affirmed the right of this state to its interference with artistic autonomy.¹⁰⁸ This confusion of free collectivity with authority already revealed the uneasy tension of those two elements of Brecht's plays which Benjamin sought to *immediately* unify: revolutionary technique and the politics of the existing revolution. The confusion is present in the terminology. Brecht's and Benjamin's reference to "the masses" as "the matrix" of current esthetic discussion smacks of the same revolutionary instrumentalization that culture is to undergo. The full identification of industrial production (as we now know it) and

artistic production points in the same direction, if we keep Marx's description of capitalist production in mind.

Even if his turn to Brecht involved some sacrifice, Benjamin was not fully inconsistent with his esthetic in turning to an author who himself had a great deal of affinity with the allegorical avant-garde. To the extent that Benjamin focused on the open, fragmentary works of the avant-garde as a terrain of critique and action, Brecht was not an unlikely object of great interest. Benjamin's interest in Brecht was facilitated above all by his interest in community, which unfortunately came to be expressed as a turn to the "masses." The problem was that both Brecht and Benjamin in the 1930s presupposed the existence of a mass revolutionary subject (if not a community, at least a political collective) whose self-recognition in the new open works somehow seemed plausible. The empirical difficulties with this self-recognition were eventually (as always) met by a preconstructed and administered political line. The discussion of the problem of community under the heading of "mass" already implies this "solution." We should note that near the end of his life Benjamin was not disposed to follow a line. Under the impact of the Moscow Trials and the Hitler-Stalin Pact, he decisively rejected Communist politics.¹⁰⁹ It would nonetheless be a mistake to assume his earlier acceptance of that politics was not one of the possible alternatives to a mind seeking to work out a satisfactory relationship between Marxism and modern art. It is precisely in this area that Adorno in the 1930s exposed the work of his friend to rather devastating criticism. The paradox of this debate is that Adorno himself, in spite of his greater knowledge of Marxian theory, does not emerge unscathed or unaffected.

It would be a mistake to derive Benjamin's revolutionary romanticism from the Lukács of the 1920s.¹¹⁰ If Benjamin derived his stress on the subjectivity of the masses (*sic*) from Lukács, he clearly omitted the Lukácsian requirement that the reification of empirical consciousness must be "mediated." Adorno's attack proceeds exactly from this Marxist point of view. (On the other hand, Benjamin's 1940 "Theses on the Philosophy of History" will represent a break not only with Brecht's, but also with Adorno-Horkheimer's early Marxism. The authors of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* are as much Benjamin's followers as those of Lukács).

Let us list Adorno's criticisms as they emerge in his letters of 1935-1938.¹¹¹ (Some of it was incorporated in the essay reproduced below, "The Fetish Character in Music.") The criticisms fall into five

groups: 1. Adorno was very critical of Benjamin's "nondialectical" reception of Marxism. He opposed Benjamin's often technologically determinist reading of the relationship of culture and economic base, as well as the assumption that culture "copies" or "reflects" the economic base directly. From almost the reverse point of view, however, Adorno felt that the concept of "dialectical image" had no relationship to the existing social totality. Who is the subject of the "dialectical image" he asked. Implicit in Adorno's argument is the position (abandoned in the 1940s) that the dialectical transition beyond bourgeois society is to be found in the point of view of the class struggle and not in isolated individuals who dream, nor in an "archaicizing" collective¹² memory. 2. Adorno was extremely critical of what he took to be the anarchist romanticism of Benjamin and Brecht, i.e., "the blind confidence in the spontaneous power of the proletariat in the historical process." In making this criticism Adorno mobilized in the name of revolutionary intellectuals the authority of Lenin's critique of "spontaneism" and the almost-literal words of the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*. He spoke of "the actual consciousness of actual workers, who have absolutely no advantage over the bourgeois except their interest in revolution, but otherwise bear all the marks of the typical bourgeois character."¹³ 3. Adorno, inaugurating the critique of the "culture industry," denies even the negatively, destructively progressive function of the film, the radio etc. The artificial aura of films, movie stars, etc., is not a mere addendum but reveals the commodification of the forms themselves, which develops modes of response on the part of audiences and introject the commodity fetish into their psychic structure, reducing them to mere consumers of cultural commodities. Passivity or totally manipulated and controlled response is the aim, as in advertisement, and Adorno believes the aim is usually achieved. Adorno's "Fetish Character in Music," which was meant, as we have said, partly as a reply to Benjamin's thesis on mechanical reproduction, explores both the objective and subjective sides of the *culture industry* and we do not have to repeat its thesis. The essay represents a brilliant extension of Lukács's concept of reification in the direction of the study of culture,¹⁴ and therefore the mobilization of almost classical Marxist arguments versus Benjamin. The culture industry indeed represents for Adorno the tendency toward the "Aufhebung" of art—but it is a false and manipulative abolition in mass culture.¹⁵ 4. Adorno accepted, defended and eventually extended Benjamin's use of Weber's concept of de-magification or disenchantment in the realm of culture. But anticipating his

own later argument from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* he was violently afraid of a critique that de-magifies too much, that all too willingly consents to the false abolition of art by the culture industry. In Adorno's own view autonomous art, *when it reflects on the contemporary crisis of culture and takes the reduced fragments of the present into its form principle*, severs itself of all historical connection to authoritarian magic. To Adorno the autonomous works of the avant-garde meet both of Benjamin's demands: de-magification (but without reducing critical reason itself) and advanced technique. They thus represent *a third term* between the modern culture industry and the surpassed tradition. We should notice that Adorno refuses to apply *in this context* at least, the concept of de-magification to individual synthesis. But for a consistent Marxist the defense of the esoteric avant-garde already implied renunciation.¹⁶ It is revealing that in this context Adorno utilized Benjamin's allegory concept against the thesis of the decline of aura. The concept of the allegory saves some autonomous works from the charge of magical residue. The use of the concept allowed Adorno, in the footsteps of Benjamin, to construe some modernist works as critiques of the present. But he renounced Benjamin's stress on collective reception. 5. Adorno attacks finally those technical devices which Benjamin, in Brecht's footsteps, considered critical in mobilizing a mass audience *unless* those devices are integrated in the most rigorous, advanced esthetic totality, as in the case of Kafka and Schönberg. In particular, distracted, segmented, fragmented relationship to works is rejected by Adorno, especially in the "Fetish Character in Music," in the name of concentration and totalization. There is an interesting relationship of Adorno's rejection of jazz to his critique of Benjamin and Brecht: the presence of some advanced elements (shock, montage, collective production, technological reproduction) does not validate the "whole." Adorno's article against Brecht ("On Commitment," below) will extend this argument even in the case of an artist whose greatness he recognized. In the case of Brecht the linking of advanced technique with explicit social contents (the result: socialist realism) and a political line (the result: manipulation) was to Adorno disastrous. The link between jazz and Brecht was the *immediate* appeal to collectives whose *immediate* consciousness in Adorno's eyes was severely deformed by mass culture. Adorno understood the authoritarian implications of the concept of "the masses" so well that he refused to derive any clues from what is collectively or communally accessible, at least *immediately*.

Indeed all the objections of Adorno to Benjamin can be summed up in a phrase used in his third and last critical letter: "your dialectic lacks one thing: mediation."¹¹⁷ Even though Adorno specifically meant Benjamin's immediate, direct and unreflective linking of "base" and "superstructure" in "correspondences," the argument penetrates deeper than just the Lukácsian claim (later slightly revised) that "materialist determination of cultural traits is only possible if it is mediated through the total social process." It was specifically Adorno's belief that Benjamin and Brecht did not relate the immediate consciousness of their supposedly revolutionary collective to the total society that reproduces reification. The result was the *antinomy* of a determinism leading to the overemphasis on the progressive nature of technology as such (for Adorno an ideological expression meaning capitalist technology), and of a voluntarism which overemphasized the present potentialities of the masses. Adorno, on the contrary not content merely to reproduce phenomena in their static opposition, took his stand for both a speculative theory and a form of art that mediate, that *totalize* the results of the objective process of rationalization, reification and de-magicization in dynamic wholes which deprive the fetishized facts of their self-evidence. He hoped for concentration and totalization also on the part of the reader, the listener, and perhaps in the 1930s the addressees of theory. But as he lost his faith in the call being answered his own theory became *antinomic*.¹¹⁸

In their exchange of the 1930s there was a noticeable desire on the part of both Benjamin and Adorno to present their positions as alternatives within a single project. Adorno quite correctly called the Benjamin of the theory of allegory his teacher, and Benjamin accepted the "Fetish Character in Music" as a necessary depiction of the "negative side" of the collapse of the aura. Adorno furthermore even incorporated several aspects of the theoretical framework he criticized into his own. The attack on "magical" aura and artificially restored aura and the affirmation of shock and dissonance are staples of his defense of the "post-auratic" art of Schönberg and Kafka. Nevertheless in the 1930s the ways have parted over the issues of collective or communal reception, the hope of which Benjamin defended, and *totalizing synthesis* and *mediation*, for the sake of which Adorno was eventually to consent even to privatization. Adorno's later sociology of music in particular systematically demonstrates the increasing confinement of *genuine* reception of *genuine* works to experts whom he hated for their specialized ignorance.¹¹⁹ However Adorno under-

stood."¹²⁰ While the proper goal of autonomous art is the restoration of lost esthetic capacities, art paradoxically is able to resist the reality that destroys its potential audience only by even greater esotericization. This is the antinomy of modern art.

In Kantian language an antinomy is the duality between equally defensible but opposite theoretical arguments. It is the concept of antinomy that after all reunifies the projects of Adorno and Benjamin. In both of their cases the antinomy of culture blocked the way to systematic philosophy. For both of them in the end only the essay form allowed the maintenance of contradictions without spurious harmony and yet in a common field. Whether to save the posture of uncompromising critique even at the cost of privatization, or to save the relationship of art and theory to a mass audience even if critique is partly compromised—this was the bad alternative which neither could satisfactorily resolve. The opposition penetrates into the works of both Adorno and Benjamin, and yet they are ultimately at its two poles. The work of each is the only corrective for that of the other. They are the "torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up."¹²¹

Alternatives In Esthetic Theory

The subject to which art appeals, is socially anonymous at the present time. (Marcuse)

Enchantment disappears when it tries to settle down. (Adorno)

A crucial part of Adorno's esthetics, its utopian thrust, remained largely in the background in his exchange with Benjamin. Rooted in the conception of art as a mode of cognition, it was a concern he shared most with Marcuse; both paid a degree of attention, therefore, to "formal" issues in the arts that made them highly suspect to more orthodox Marxists. Not only did Adorno reject out of hand any esthetic potential of "socialist realism" or "littérature engagée" (which mandated a content regardless of its formal mediation), but like Marcuse, he gave a weight to the so-called "subjective factor" as the principle of negation (drawing violent attacks from Lukács, who frequently equated formal concerns with bad subjectivism, and with

bourgeois decadence) and elevated the radical rupture with *any* status quo, the discontinuity with anything merely given, to represent the very "logic of modern art."¹²

For critical theorists, of course, the function of a theory was very much part of its content, and the reasons for the focus on subjective and formal dimensions were themselves historical. In societies thoroughly integrated by the "culture industry" (a term Adorno coined), where exchange and technological rationality have become total life forms and screens of experience, where rational alternatives were literally inconceivable, where the traditional agent of change, the proletariat, seemed to have surrendered this role, in such tendentially "one-dimensional" societies, it was difficult to maintain Hegel's (also the late Lukács's and the late Brecht's) faith that the true is the whole. Today, the empirical whole is the untrue, Adorno resignedly asserted; the historical project of "substantive reason" may no longer be vested in the "bad objectivity" of any visible agent or any status quo, but in *whatever* contained the potential for its transcendence. Even an indeterminate negation, such as Marcuse's Great Refusal, may thus be legitimate at first—to secure an arena in which alternatives become conceivable again. "In a conceptual [*geistigen*] hierarchy which relentlessly demands responsibility on its terms, irresponsibility alone is capable of calling the hierarchy by its proper name,"¹³ Adorno charged.

The thrust of this argument derives from the later Frankfurt School's, especially Adorno's, perception of the ultimate evil: heteronomy—a kinder (and more inclusive) word for domination. Today, a quieter, more insidious bondage of consciousness has taken the place of older, more "immediate" forms of oppression (which had allowed at least for opposition in thought). Exchange rationality (reification) and administrative rationality, the prevalent contemporary forms of reason, are forms of *instrumental reason* which reduce the identity of people and things to functions of something else. Such historical shifts do not leave esthetic functions and goals unaffected. "Insofar as one can speak of a social function of works of art, it lies in their functionlessness."¹⁴ In the face of overall instrumentalization, "the useless alone represents what at one point might become the useful, the happy use: contact with things beyond the antithesis of use and uselessness."¹⁵ Where reason has lost the capacity for self-transcendence and even the capacity to perceive this as a loss, alternatives have to be conceived from (what looks like) the outside. Philosophically, this conclusion also entails the final dismissal of the

idealist residues in Marx, such as his belief in an immanent logic of social formations to develop in a specific direction. "Esthetics" once meant theory of perception, and when the term assumed its present meaning, it became perception "disinterested" in the (pseudoobjective) "interests" structuring a given reality. "Everything esthetic is something individuated," Adorno stressed, "and is thus an exception by virtue of its own principle."¹⁶

It is well to keep in mind, however, that both Adorno and Marcuse relentlessly opposed "bad subjectivism", i.e. the particular in abstract, "unmediated" opposition to the (equally illusory) objective or general. "Subjectivity is the epitome [*Inbegriff*] of mediation," as Adorno formulated in "Subject and Object" (in this volume): it is the transcendental form, literally the terms in which the objective/general appears to us. As such, subjectivity coincides with the concept of technique in the arts; "technique is the very essence of mediation."¹⁷ The "esthetic principle of individuation" that Adorno kept invoking means the directive for the artist to devise alternative forms of objects, trial objects, or counterrealities through alternative transcendental ideas which retrieve the previously invisible, ignored or suppressed, but concrete potentialities of given historical situations.

This is why an "advanced consciousness" is not something the artist may or may not have, or something which essentially does not affect his/her creativity; it is the *sine qua non* of authentic art in a situation where the content of consciousness tends increasingly to be preformed. "Problems in the theory of knowledge reemerge immediately in esthetics; how the latter can interpret its objects depends on the concepts of these objects developed in the former,"¹⁸ Adorno concluded in his *Esthetic Theory*; similarly, Marcuse postulated that art should become "*gemälte oder modellierte Erkenntniskritik*." In the course of this process, the artist has to work with given materials and meanings, and thus must know them thoroughly if he/she wants to avoid merely reproducing bad objectivity. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same holds for the audience: "If you do not know what you are seeing or hearing, you are not enjoying an 'immediate' relation to the work of art; you are simple incapable of perceiving it. Consciousness is not a layer in a hierarchy, superimposed on perception; but all moments of the esthetic experiences are reciprocal."¹⁹

Such a need to control all the determinations and mediations [*Bestimmungen*] of the material explains Adorno's preference for highly conscious and critical artists, such as Kafka, Valéry, Mann,

Schönberg, and Beckett, who do not just leave the "objective" (and heteronomous) meaning intact. For "art's innermost principle, the utopian principle, revolts against the principle of definition whose tendency is to dominate nature."¹³⁰ Defining is an arresting, ontologizing act, working at cross-purposes with the processual character of art. The moment we want to express something particular, we have to use collective, general terms, thereby eliminating the very particularity. A merely transcendent position thus can never represent esthetic individuation. Only the *act* of negating the objective or given, the act of transcending (not its result, cf. the antinomies of communicability above) embodies the principle of individuation. Not only does Adorno polemicize against the idea of timeless art ("the idea of lasting works is modeled after the categories of property"¹³¹), but he makes it the very principle of art to seek out and "synthesize the incompatible, unidentical elements in the process of friction with one another."¹³² Adorno would contend that this is not a whim of the esthetician. For, "the processual nature of art is constituted by its needs (as an artifact, as human-made, with its a priori place in the mind) for the nonidentical, the heterogenous, the not-yet-formed. Works of art need the resistance of the other against them—it induces them to articulate their own formal language. This reciprocity constitutes art's dynamism."¹³³ Thus, authentic art, independent of the artist's intent, continuously confronts a given reality with what it is not, but could very well be. "There is something contradictory to the idea of a conservative work of art,"¹³⁴ Adorno insisted, and Marcuse agreed: "a subversive potential is in the very nature of art."¹³⁵ In the separate realm of art, the antagonism between the real and the possible can be momentarily and partially reconciled; and although it is an illusory (*scheinhaft*) reconciliation, it is "an illusion in which another reality shows forth."¹³⁶ While unreal, the work of art may thus be true, and true to that reality with its potential than that reality itself. The opposite of truth is not illusion but reality (as is).

In a sense art is the future-oriented pursuit of truth (*vérité à faire*), just as science is the past-oriented pursuit, i.e. oriented toward the already given. Its form and its terms have yet to be created. This is what Adorno means when he insists that the artist sustain the subject-object dialectic which forces art to "articulate its own formal language," rather than collapse the dialectic into either pole (e.g. into "pure" tone or color or into mere "reflection"). "Hegel's logic taught that essence must manifest itself in appearance; that means that a presentation of an essence which ignores its relation to its appear-

ance is false in itself [*an sich*]"¹³⁷ To be sure, the meaning of "form" is not always clear in either Adorno or Marcuse: style, idiom, tone, strictly technical devices, or configuration in general all occur under the heading "form." Moreover, Adorno's correlations of formal and stylistic levels with social meanings are often highly idiosyncratic, however suggestive. The seemingly self-evident nature of some of these correlations should instead be reason for suspicion, and should itself become a topic for investigation. E.g., "Pale and faded is the light over his [Stifter's] mature prose, as if it were allergic to the happiness of color."¹³⁸ Whether these analogies hold is a matter for discussion. Yet, more often than not, they reveal striking formal and even terminological similarities between esthetic and social spheres and illustrate how form, i.e. subjective mediation, is at the same time the "locus of social content."¹³⁹

And whereas the fetishization of art would, on the whole, fall under the general critique of fetishism, it is precisely the fact that art is exempt from immediate social function or praxis which permits it to be a trial arena for alternatives. To be sure, society protects itself from the "subversive potential" of art by creating a special sphere for it in which it is declared autonomous but also, therefore, socially irrelevant. While society can thus safely, and even justly, worship art, this fetishization is also the social protection of such a qualitative enclave. The artist must not share in the fetishization, but must avail him/herself of it. The "Social essence" of works of art, therefore, always needs dual reflection: "reflection on its *Fürsichsein*, and on its relation to society."¹⁴⁰ It must remain beyond the constraint of immediate application to the very reality it is to transcend. Marcuse fully agreed when he called for a kind of "second [voluntary] alienation" from the "established reality."¹⁴¹ Given the objectivity of the latter, its transcendence is always subjective, and will thus remain a form of alienation, of productive alienation, unless the "impossible final unity of subject and object"¹⁴² occurs.

Marcuse had once envisaged the possibility of an *Aufhebung* of art through its concrete realization. In *Eros and Civilization*, and as early as "The Affirmative of Culture" in 1937, and still in *Essay on Liberation* (1969), he projected the alternative world of harmony, nonalienation, playfulness, happiness and liberation of mind and senses which would make life itself "esthetic."¹⁴³ Since *Counterrevolution and Revolt* however, Marcuse too has reaffirmed the dialectical function of art as immanent transcendence, as the critical wedge in any body politic. "At the optimum, we can envisage a universe

common to art and reality, but in this common universe, art would retain its transcendence."¹⁴⁴ Authentic art, i.e. qualitative transcendence of experiences homogenized by the culture industry, is not tied to a specific movement or social stratum. Proletarian art is not inherently more progressive than any other: "if such transcendence is an essential quality of all art, it follows that the goals of the revolution may find expression in bourgeois art, and in all forms of art."¹⁴⁵

Much more than Adorno, Marcuse was willing to specify what the esthetic sensibility would entail in terms of attitudes and social relations. He emphasized the liberation of the senses and, at times, seemed to plead for concrete anticipations of utopian forms even in everyday spheres; analogously, he seemed (for a moment only) to see such anticipation in a number of movements of the 1960's. Via the conception of alternative forms of objects or counterrealities, art can try out new modes of relations to objects as well, including different needs, drives, sensibilities.

Although Adorno clearly put more weight on consciousness and theory as esthetic functions than did Marcuse, their views do converge on the rational status of imagination—a status it had held since Aristotle. Imagination operates consciously as the "covetous anticipation" or creation of alternatives, not as variations or refinements, but in terms of qualitatively new values and goals. In this sense, art was a social force of production for critical theorists. The "formal principle" of art is thus "the New" per se, a category in its own right for Adorno. And whereas Benjamin too saw "the new as a quality independent of use value," he thought it "the quintessence of false consciousness whose never-tiring agent is fashion." Adorno took precisely the opposite position, trusting its transcendent nature even prior to any content: the new undercuts "false consciousness" by preventing the enshrinement (and repetition) of any particular heteronomy. Its subject (for Benjamin, the *flâneur*) does not yet exist, but is anticipated in the autonomous esthetic act. Hence the resentment against modernism by orthodox Marxism and bourgeois culture alike: they rightly experience it as a crisis ("decadence") and attack it for being "a qualitative category, not a chronological one."¹⁴⁶ Fond of invoking Rimbaud's dictum "*il faut être absolument moderne*," Adorno insisted that modernism was both a moral and (thus) esthetic imperative as long as any given reality is not "reconciled" with its own possibilities.

Eduard Fuchs: Collector and Historian

By Walter Benjamin

First published in Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung [Vol. VI (1937)], the essay documents Benjamin's particular attitude toward the past, focusing on the special detail to be preserved for a projected future. Our interest is not in Eduard Fuchs, a relatively insignificant Social Democratic intellectual, but in Benjamin's penetration precisely of those "insignificant" events, products and lives that rupture the continuum of cultural development called "progress." Linear progress for Benjamin could only be that of domination. Furthermore, the presentation of Fuchs, the collector and often crude historical materialist, must also be read as one of Benjamin's self-presentations, and even as an apologia pro vita sua in the face of criticism.

There are many kinds of collectors and each of them is moved by a multitude of impulses. As a collector Fuchs is primarily a pioneer. He founded the only existing archive for the history of caricature, of erotic art and of the genre picture (*Sittenbild*). More important, however, is another, complementary, circumstance: because he was a pioneer, Fuchs became a collector. Fuchs is the pioneer of a materialist consideration of art. What made this materialist a collector, however, was the more or less clear feeling for the historical situation in which he saw himself. This was the situation of historical materialism itself.