"Torn Halves of an Integral Freedom" Adorno's and Benjamin's Readings of Mass Culture

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"Adorno Meets the Cadillacs" is the title of a recent article by Bernard Gendron which suggests a renewed interest in the rapprochement of two hostile positions :

> the aggressively opinionated and elitist stance of the critical theorist towards the products of mass culture—for which the early Adorno is the best example—and the passive attitude of the consumer of mass entertainment.

(1) A new generation of critics takes the compatibility of these two faces of (post) modern culture as the point of departure for a "new"kind of research which brings together cultural critique and the pleasure of the entertainment world. My question is :

> Do these critical analyses of mass culture depart from the Adornian frame of argument, as is often claimed, or do they rather reinscribe certain presuppositions inherent in the critical model of the culture industry ? Can a rewritten model of high theory serve as an adequate tool for the study of low culture ? Or—and this is the other side of the question—do the products of mass culture indeed have critical potentials which Adorno was unable to discover ? In what follows I will reconstruct the historical debate between The odor Adorno and WalterBenjamin, concentrating on the discourse in which their arguments are formulated. I believe that we can draw certain conclusions from this historically prior exchange that bear on the current debate,

Gendrons position maintains that the apparatus of cultural critique is just as relevant for the study of popular culture as it is for the high modernist art on which it was modelled (such as the silent movie or the swing phase in jazz). Although he knows about the weaknesses of Adorno's theory (above all, its ahistorical stance), he nevertheless argues for its applicability and plausibility. The significance of Adorno's questions, according to Gendron, outweighs the internal problems of the model. His aim is "to engage Adorno's productivist approach in a constructive dialogue with the more recent and fashionable reception approaches."(2) Adorno's attack on the standardizing tendency of the music industry calls into question those analyses which celebrate the listener of rock 'n' roll music and his/her capacity for rewriting or rereading the dominant message of the recorded text by lending it personal meaning. Gendron seeks to preserve Adorno's notion of critique,althrough he sees the necessity of changing the critical model so that is can deal better with the critical potential inherent in the mass-produced text itself or to the consumer and his/her rewriting skills.

Another position takes as a point of departure precisely those critical potentials of the mass-cultural product or its consumer which are played down in Gendron's argument and completely negated in Adorno's understanding of the consumer's attitude towards certain forms of mass entertainment. This is currently the most fashionable critical model, and it exists in various forms and contexts. "The Birmingham School of Culture Theory" adopts this view its investigation of how particular groups or subcultures 'negotiate" meaning and rewrite the dominant discourse into their own alternative style.(3) Recently, Tania Modleski's work on film, Kaja Silverman's study on women and fashion, and John Caughie's investigation into television series have argued such a position. They focus on the reception strategies of the consumer and attribute a (politically) progressive meaning to certain ways of rewriting the dominant fication.(4) The persistence of this model is noteworthy, but what is even more striking is the fact that it is nowhere called into question or even theoretically Iustified. My analysis of the historical dimension of this position will show that it is precisely this model of rewriting that Adorno is engaging in when he praises certain forms of "classical" culture over the derivative manifestations of the culture industry. But his work still functions within a theoretical paradigm which can account for, or at least

philosophically derive, rewriting strategies. Research on popular culture in a postmodern society, however, presumably transcends this paradigm and rejects the results of Adorno's analyses. That this is far from the truth will come out clearly, I hope, in the following pages.

Let me give you an example which juxtaposes two applications of either argument and which will lead us directly into a closer investigation of the historical debate between Adorno and Benjamin regarding the assessment of mechanically reproduced products of the culture industry. The first case is taken from Kaja silverman's study. Silverman employs the model of rewriting within the context of a feminist reading of (wo) men's fashions in which she argues for a reappraisal of thrift-shop dressing.

> By recontextualizing objects from earlier periods within the frame of the present, retro is able to "reread" them in ways that maximize their radical and transformative potential — tochart the affinities, for instance, between fashions of the forties and feminism in the eighties, or between fashions of the twenties and the "unisex look" of the late sixties. Vintage clothing is also a mechanism for crossing vestimentary, sexual, and historical boundaries .. Thrift-shop dressing recycles fashion's waste, exploiting the use value that remains in discarded but often scarcely—worn clothing. Because it establishes a dialogue between the present day wearers of that clothing and its original wearers, retro also provides a means of salvaging the images that have traditionally sustained female subjectivity, images that have been consigned to the waste-basket not only by fashion, but by "orthodox" feminism. (5)

Thus by shopping in thrift stores women can reread the dominant dress code in a personalized manner and thereby transform its meaning. An alternative meaning may emerge by way of quoting and juxtaposing different historical styles. But it also may be that such a plurality of styles effectively neutralizes any particular statement that women want to make about certain fashions and certain meanings.

On the other side, there are Horkheimer and Adorno and their radical reading of the family name as the non-identical. They are reacting to the American custom of calling one an other simply by the first name, which can be quite shocking to someone who grew up in a culture that interpreted such a practice very negatively.

First names, those archaic remnants, have been brought up to date either by stylization as advertising trade-marks (film stars' surnames have become first names). or by collective standardization. In comparison, the bourgeo is family name which, instead of being trademark, once individualized its bearer by *relating him to his own past history*, seems antiquated. It arouses a strange embarrassemeni in Americans. In order to hide the awkward distance between individuals, they call one another "Bon" and "Harry," as interchangeable team members. This practice reduces relations between human beings to the good fellowship of the sporting community and is a defense against the true kind of relationship (6) By insisting upon one's family name, one appeals to an individualized history which cannot simply be exchanged for another one. Like Silverman's retro, Horkheimer's and Adorno's insistence on the family name is conceived as contradicting the dominant mode of expression, Whether that is actually so is of no importance here, Both examples, however, employ the rewriting model in a trivializing way which seems to mirror personal preference rather than a theoretically reflected position. Adorno and Horkheimer could have easily noted that it is not the simple fact of how people are addressed which makes a difference but the context in which this act of signification occurs. The mere act of dressing in a retro style means nothing in itself. It can only assume meaning and make a statement within a larger (and politically determined) contaxt.(7) What is taken for granted by this position, but not critically reflected, is a fairly classical concept of the subject or individual which "negotiates" this process of rereading and rewriting. In a similar vein, this position seems to assume that what is rewritten or reread has to be clearly objectifiable. what this juxtaposition demonstrates is that both positions function within one and the same paradigm—that of immanent critique—and that the newer version does not escape the flaws of the older one. On the contrary, it reaffirms them without transforming the model.

But what did Adorno really have to say about popular culture ? Why did he react the way he did to Walter Benjamin's attempt to come to terms theoretically with the new media-in his case the silent film.I will look at documents from the period between 1935, when Adorno wrote his first letter to Benjamin regarding the Arcades project, till his reworkings of his harsh line in the fifties andsixties.He then proposed a transformed model for analyzing the ruptures manifest in popular culture as inherently progressive

elements.(8)   When critics talk about Adorno's sweeping condemnation of popular culture, they usually pick one of these essays at random. This position is then used either as a strawman or as a positive point of departure. Not only do I belive that this practice grossly oversimplifies Adorno's stance (and how it was transformed later), but it also produces well-known results. By focusing on Adorno's and Benjamin's model I wish to give a slightly new bent to the discussion.

From the very beginning of their debate Adorno is concerned about the systematic eradication of the trace of difference inscribed in the cultural text. He is interested in putting this trace "under erasure," thus preserving it in a transformed way. In order successfully to operate his dialectical analysis on a text, Adorno needs this oppositional trace within a dominant discourse which he conceives as *mediated totality*. If a text doesn't exhibit such traces which undermine its general argument, then his Critical Theory can say nothing about it except that it adheres to the logic of identity. Such an identity-logical text is then juxtaposed to other texts which displa ya healthy relationship between the mediated whole and the oppositional elements within. Adorno thus differentiates between "good" and "bad" texts, and mechanically reproduced texts – as well as Benjamin's own theoretical writings—belong for him to the second category. And this is alarming for Adorno. In his first letter to Benjamin from August 2, 1935, he reproaches him for employing a strategy which he calls 'de-dialectici-zatlon," i. e. reducing the dialectical image to one meaning and cutting short its social function :

> "I should like to say that ambiguity is not the translation of the dialectic into an image, but the 'trace' of that image which itself must first be dialecticized by theory."(9)

This becomes more apparent in Adorno's letter to Benjamin from March 18,1936,in which he responds to Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."(10) Adorno speaks of an accord between himself and Benjamin on the subject of technology and how it relates to dialectical theory. "It is this accord," Adorno writes, "which for me constitutes the criterion for the differences that I must now state, with no other aim than to serve our 'general line, which is now so clearly discernible.(11)" It is this general line, the party line of Critical Theory, so to speak, which Adorno is trying to defend against Benjamin's transgression of the dialectical paradigm. Adorno reproaches and reprimands Benjamin

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the "traitor" in a manner totally out of keeping with the dialectical theory Adorno is trying to defend. He demands in a militant tone "the complete liquidation of the Brechtian motifs" in Benjamin's thinking. (12) "(Cinema) and (the great work of art) bear the stigmata of capitalism, both contain elements of change (but never, of cource, the middle term between Schonberg and the American film). Both are torn halves of an intergral freedom, to which however they do not add up. "(13) This passage suggests that no dialectical movement can mediate between the two positions—which, incidentally, are analogous to the two art forms of autonomous and mass produced art. Adorno's praxis, however, says otherwise; and we will see how he reworked his argument into a more pragmatic approach to the phenomenon of mass culture.

I went to reflect on the rift between Adorno's *praxis* of eradicating all oppositional motifs from the critical text and. his *theory* of underwriting such subversive elements within a mediated totality. Benjamin's theory could have functioned exactly as a subversive tendency within the larger context of immanent dialectics. There must be more to Adorno's reaction than simply his rivalry with Brecht or even a factual disagreement with Benjamin over how to assess mechanically reproduced art. And indeed, it seems as if Adorno feels threatened by this new discourse which values reproduction over production, laughtet over reflection and aggressive reasoning. Adorno criticizes this new discourse as something quite reactionary; and not only Benjamin's theory of reproducible art, but jazz, mass culture in general, popular music and television series all belong to this realm of phenomena which the Adorno of the thirties and forties utterly condemns as reaffirming the status quo of social power relations.

In order better to understand why Adorno feels so threatened by the presence of these phenomena, let me specify more precisely the nature of his critique. What is it that makes this new discourse so dangerous ? Adorno hates its connection with *laughter*, as he asserts in his letter to Benjamin, since it seems to undermine the "seriousness" of theory. Furthermore, standardization aims at conditioned reflexes in the listener / viewer which encourages passivity

and obedience as a response. All these features are, as Andreas Huyssen has recently pointed out, stereotypically associated with the feminine. A feminized mass culture becomes the presupposition or the hidden subtext of high culture/high theory, which is the realm of the male, i. e the discourse of production and aggressive reasoning. (14) In light of this theory, Adorno's aggression towards the Other of his theory, on the exclusion of which his dialectical analysis largely depends, seems to follow a certain logic. What is more, he addresses this relation between high art and low culture as the purity of autonomous art which is only possible by *excluding* its other :

> light art, mass culture, women, and the lower classes. What he does not see is that his own discourse of high theory rests on similar exclusions and operates with similar exclusionary strategies.

If this is so, from a feminist position we should be able to derive a thorough critique of the dialectical model Adorno employs. And indeed, Tania Modelski's study links the theory of mass culture with feminism and points to the importance of "deconstructing the hierarchical relation that exists in the opposition production/repreduction and writerly/readerly in order to search out the radical potential of the subordinate terms..."(15) And it is through a feminist reading of a particular work that she puts her theory to work. She argues that, on the one hand, the critical male position itself implies elements of pasivity and that, on the other hand, the so-called obedient feminine can successfully manipulate and critically interfere in the world. Projecting such a feminist reading into the positions discussed above, one could associate Adorno's position with the phallocratic model of speech and Benjamin's strategy with a feminine economy such as the one so forcefully outlined by the French feminist Luce Irigaray. Phallocratic logic is typically an instrumental logic which structures the economy of activity, production, and mediation. And it was precisely the lack of this structural field which Adorno criticized in Benjanmin's study of mechanically reproduced art, as well as in the products of the culture industry themselves. Huyssen has pointed to a passage in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in which the authors claim that mass culture "cannot renounce the threat of castration." (16) In his essay on jazz, Adorno indeed identifies the strategies of mass produced art with this threat of castration :

> "The aim of jazz is the mechanical reproduction of a repressive moment, a castration s)mbolism."(17) A feminist

reading of Adorno's critique of mass culture may strike Critical Theory in its Achille's heal and explain—to the extent that this is possible and desirable—why Adorno so anxiously held onto his privileges.

The more difficult task, however, is establishing the link between Benjamin's transformed version of a critical theory of mass culture and a different, feminine economy, as described by Irigaray. Does a deconstructed "Critical Theory" and "mass culture" really disrupt the model of masculine discourse, and if so, how does it modify it ? That Adorno's dialectical model of Critical Theory is enmeshed in a power structure and an ideology of the patriarchal sort manifests itself in internal contradictions within his work. This has been established on the example of his exclusionary strategies and his threat of castration. The new Benjaminian style, however, follows a different economy.

This 'style,' or 'writing' of women tends to put rhe torch to fetish words, proper names, well-constructed forms. This 'style' does not privilege sight; instead, it takes each figure back to its source, which is among other things *tactile*."(18)

And, what fs more; such a feminine economy of writing "would preclude any distinction of identities, any establishment of ownership, thus any form of appropriation."(19) And as a place where this 'syntax' may be deciphered Irigaray mentions women's laughter.

Isn't laughter the first form of liberation from a secular oppression? *Isn't the phallic tantamount to the seriousness of meaning ?* Perhaps woman, and the sexual relation, transcends it "first" in laughter ?(20)

It seems as if Adorno's appeal to the seriousness of dialectics is predicated on fear of exactly this :

the liberating laughter of the repressed subtext of high art/ theory. And this is also where Benjamin attempts a transformation of Critical Theory :

he questions Adorno's negative interpretation of the fact that music and lyric poetry have become comical.(21) In his rebuttal of Benjamin's essay, Adorno reiterates the necessity for seriousness in music and expresses his shock over the modern comical uses of autonomous art, say a jazz version of

a Bach fugue, which, according to him, is a "disrespectful play" carried ont with "sadistic humor." Let me quote this passage at length, since it is vital for my argument.

> In the face of regressive listening, music as a whole begins to take on a comic aspect. One need only listen to the uninhibited sonority of a choral rehearsal from outside. The experience was caught with great force in a film by the Marx brothers, who demolish an opera set as if to clothe in allegory the insight of the philosophy of history on the decay of the operatic form,. ... Music has become comic in the present phase primarily because something so completely useless is carried on with all the visible signs of the strain of serious work. By being alien to solid people, music reveals their alienation from one another, and the consciousness of alienation vents itself in laughter. In music or—similarly in lyric poetry—the society which judged them comic becomes comic. But involved in this laughter is the decay of the sacral spirit of reconciliation.(22)

Adorno is deeply disturbed by this laughter; his model is incapable of conceptualizing this new form of musical language and he downgrades its significance in a militant fashion. Benjamin doesn't quite understand why Adorno responds in this way. He is already speaking from a level beyond the phallocratic model of critical analysis and is open to new forms of cultural expression. However, his reaction to the advent of the sound film, which he characterizes as "an operation of the cinema industry disguised to break the revolutionary primacy of the silent film, which generated reactions that were hard to control and hence politically dangerous," shows that this is only a small step in the direction of a new discourse.(23)

Here we can identify the point at which Critical Theory begins to transform itself. In the first half of his condemnation of the sound film, Benjamin agrees completely with Adorno's position on the culture industry, which here appears in the metaphor of a corporate cartell that threatens the last remnant of a revolutionary cultural praxis (i e. the silent film). Yet the movement of the sentence leads us beyond this model. Adorno would never have agreed with Benjamin's assessment of the political nature of the immediate. On the contrary, he would have

criticized this idea from the standpoint of determinate negation, which presupposes a mediated relation between individual details and the system as a whole. A politically dangerous phenomenon can, in Adorno's judgment, only emerge in opposition to this system, but never as the manifestation of pure difference. The concept of the undecidable has, according to Adorno, no political value whatsoever, except perhaps a reactionary result. (24) Benjamin has a very different view of politically dangerous nature of the undecidable, and it is of great interest in our context since it was picked up by Jacques Derrida and other contemporary thinkers. To their mind, it is precisely the undecidable nature of a gesture which secures its "political" threat, and Adorno's fear of laughter seems indirectly to support this thesis. He perceives mass culture and its laughing intervention in the pockets of high culture as a dangerous rupture of his own critical discourse.

Dana Polan makes an interesting connection which will lead my investigations into a new series of arguments. He distinguishes between an older conception of mass culture, which is ingrained in an understanding of ideology as creating and manipulating social objects, and a postmodern form of mass culture which operates in an environment where "it may no longer be necessary for capitalism to produce a ready-and-waiting pool of interpellated subjects."(25) If this is so, we need to rethink our model of writing about culture and art in general; this means that we can neither fall back on naive conceptions of a receiving subject which critically rewrites the messages of the culture industry, nor on a model of critical analysis which rests on the concepts of identity and difference, of authenticity and derivativeness. And here an interesting proposal from within Critical Theory should be considered. I am thinking of Albrecht Wellmer who criticizes Adorno for ignoring the possibility of reflecting on a postmodern concept of subjectivity and rationality as a critical alternative to the immanent model of subject philosophy. Wellmer thinks that Adorno's text can be interpreted against the grain by extrapolating from it the notion of a de-centered subjectivity which corresponds to the delimited forms of (post) modern art.

The two concepts can be thought together in the following way :

the inclusion of the non-integrated, the subject-alien and the senseless in modern art makes an ever higher degree of

flexible and individual organization necessary. The 'opening up' or 'de limitation' of the work is to be thought of as the corollary of a progressive capacity to aesthetically *integrate* the diffused and dispersed. (26)

This capacity of modern art can, according to Wellmer, function as a model for a more fluid concept of the subject which aesthetically synthesizes nonidentical moments into a new type of social totality "in which the diffused and the non-integrated, the senseless and the split off would be brought home to a sphere of non-violent communication — within the open forms of art as well as in the open structures of a no longer rigid type of individuation and socialization."(27) This theoretical transformation of a psychological concept of subject and reason into a linguistically grounded model of communicative intersubjectivity figures in Wellmer's theory as an analogy both for the de-limited forms of modern art and for the phenomenon of popular culture. Wellmer accordingly opts for a more Benjaminian understanding of mass culture and its "emancipatory" potentials. It is these ambivalences that need to be salvaged from Adorno's condemnation of popular culture.(28) What is necessary is an aesthetics of (mass) culture which mutually illuminates the phenomenon of (post) modern art and a de-centered conception of ego-identity-a new economy of the subject. According to Wellmer, popular culture can supply such a model.

I began my investigation into the transformation of Critical Theory with a reading of Adorno's debate with Benjamin in the thirties, looking in particular at Adorno's exclusionary rhetoric with regard to Benjamin's position. The question was : Why did Adorno have to exorcize these phenomena from his own critical model ? A feminist perspective suggested a fear of the feminine aspects of mass culture as the hidden subtext of high theory/art. This fear manifested itself in Adorno's threat of the liberating laughter as the undecidable, the unruly detail that escapes every attempt at integration. The (political) danger of uncontrollability thus emerged as an alternative to the traditional model of Critical Theory as determinate negation. Those two models of oppositional intervention may be brought together in Wellmer's dialectics of modernism and postmodernism which suggests a restructuring of the theoretical paradigm of critical analysis: a flexible form of subjectivity and de-limited cultural products can only be conceived when we go beyond the paradigm of subject philosophy and purposeful action.

How could this be done ? How can critical theory be transformed in order successfully to integrate the phenomena of (post) modern life ? To answer this question I want to go babk and reconsider the role of diversity in Adorno's thought. I said earlier that Adorno's theory of the autonomous work of art requires a certain amount of difference within, i.e. oppositional elements within the mediated totality of the system. In jazz, radio music, movies by the Marx brothers, and television series this subversive element has been successfully eradicated. Now, that would truly be an alarming fact and I can certainly understand why Adorno felt it was his duty to point this out. There are, however, several ways of responding to his indictment. One could first of all show that he was wrong, that the products of the culture industry do send out signals of divergence, that they have always done so and that it is up to the audience to determine the meaning of a cultural product. (29) Or, one could point to the historicality of Adorno's arguments and say that in a postmodern society this model no longer makes sense since the strategy of ruptures is no longer at the margin of the dominant cultural praxis. Ruptures in themselves do not have anymeaning, they have to be employed by a (politically) progressive framework in order to come into play as strategies of intervention(30)

This critique arrives at a similar assessment of criticality as determinate negation, i.e. as critique of an oversimplified notion of pure difference. Adorno's own rewriting of his earlier stance in the fifties and sixties seems to point in this direction. About "Television and the Patterns of Mass Culture" he states that it is our duty ''knowingly to face psychological mechanisms operating on various levels in order not to become blind and passive victims. We can change this mechanism of far reaching potentialities only after we look at it in the same spirit which we hope will one day be expressed by its imagery."(31) It almost seems as if Adorno has abandoned the belief that mass culture will shrink under the blows of his devastating critique. Instead, he adopts a more pragmatic perspective and works to employ its mechanisms for emancipatory purposes This new shift in focus weakens one of the most crucial arguments against his analysis of popular culture :

> the ahistoricality which led him to focus on one phase of a particular phenomenon (the swing phase of jazz for example) and generalize on this basis about the entire realm of popular culture. As Miriam Hansen has argued, Adorno's own rewritings of his argument underwrite the progressive elements in his theory that were always already present.(32)

What does not change, however, is Adorno's grounding of
Critical Theory in the classical paradigm of mediation, reification and
the dialectics of identity and difference in which the culture industry
and its products are portrayed as the agents of a hegemonic ideology.
Adorno is very self-concious about the mobel for his arguments :

> it is "serious music" which so favorably differs from popular
> music since "(e)very detail derives its musical sense from
> the concrete totality of the piece which, in turn, consists of
> the life relationship of the details and never of a mere
> enforcement of a musical scheme."(33) In popular music,
> however, the position of the detail is absolute and inter-
> changeable.
> To sum up the difference :
> in Beethoven and in good serious music in general—we are
> not concerned here with bad serious music which may be as
> rigid and mechanical as popular music—the detail virtually
> contains the whole and leads to the exposition of the whole
> while, at the same time, it is produced out of the concep-
> tion of the whole. In popular music the relationship is
> fortuitous.(34)

Adorno thus judges popular music against the model of classi-
cal music which is constructed as mediated totality. And it is this model
which his dialectically conceived version of Critical Theory can best
describe and evaluate. But the fact that his model fails him in his
analysis of popular culture should not be sufficient reason for condemning
it completely. It all culminates in Horkheimer's and Adorno's indictment
of the sound film—and we should keep in mind that Benjamin would have
applauded here :

> The sound film, far surpassing the theatre of illusion, leaves
> no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the
> audience, who is unable to respond within the structure of
> the film, yet deviate from its precise detail without losing
> the thread of the story; hence the film forces its victims to
> equate it directly with reality.(35)

It is the *lack* of structurally included deviations which
Horkheimer and Adorno criticize, employing a Brechtian model of film
aesthetics. This model attributes to the audience the possibility of rewri-
ting what they see and inflecting it with a particular meaning which can

deviate from the overall meaning of the film-text. And at this point Horkheimer and Adorno push the theory of ruptures one step further :

> it is not the total *lack* of deviations that is deplorable, but rather the lack of *liberal* deviations, deviations that are not "calculated mutations which serve all the more strongly to confirm the validity of the system."(36) The silent film, and the radio, for example, still supply the audience with such liberal deviations (the difference between text and image in the silent film, for example) and incorporate (rather than eradicate) the traces of contradictory interpretations.

This model of rewriting / rereading the dominant fiction derives its philosophical legitimacy from Horkheimer's and Adorno's conception of Critical Theory and the function of social critique which they attribute to certain cultural phenomena. It rests firmly on the concept of subjectivity as the nonidentical trace of an integral freedom. The fact that the authors cannot theoretically account for transformations within the cultural sphere indicates the limits of their respective frameworks. To rehabilitate this matrix in a theory in which the subject marks its ruptures in the dominant fiction seems, however, without any theoretical legitimation. One cannot simply apply this model to the phenomena of postmodern culture and hope that the aporias have meanwhile disappeared.

Let me summarize in a concluding note the problematics of my investigation. I have described the model of imminent dialectical critique, its unwritten assumptions about the nature of the critical process and the subjective agent which lends credibility to its concern. I have also discussed several attempts at transforming this ctititical paradigm itself, thereby looking at a broad spectrum of questions :

> What precisely has to be changed and can this change only affect part of the theory and leave other parts untouched ? What occurs when we integrate what was systematically excluded from the paradigm, that on which, in fact, the very essence of this paradigm depends ? What happens when we reasses the political nature of indeterminateness, of uncontrolability ? It is enough simply to rethink subjectivity in a decentered model ? All these questions attempt a transformation of the critical model determined by Adorno's and

Benjamin's discussion about the nature of mechanically reproduced art and lead us beyond the critical impasse of theory in a postmodern age. Is it possible for us today to recombine the "torn halves of an integral freedom" that Adorno mentioned in his letter to Benjamin? Some studies seem to suggest that it is. If we are aware of the shortcomings of the "old" Critical Theory and do not repeat its failing, it should be possible to redefine a new critical theory which not only meets the Cadillacs, but is well equipped for such a meeting.

Notes and References

(1) See Bernard Gendron, "Adorno Meets the Cadillacs," *Studies in Entertainment : Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington : Indiana Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 18-36.

(2) Gendron, "Adorno Meets the Cadillacs," p. 36.

(3) See especially Dick Hebidge's study of *Subcultures : The Meaning of Style* (London : Methuen, 1979).

(4) See Tania Modelski's argument about the manipulative strategies of pleasure consuming in her "Femininity as Mas(s) querade : a Feminist Approach to Mass Culture," *High Theory / Low Culture : Analysing Popular Television and Film*, ed. Colin MacCabe (Manchester : Manchester Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 54ff; She explores the argument in depth in her book *Loving With a Vengeance Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* (Hamden, Conn. : Archon Books, 1982), esp. pp. 113f. See also Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance : Women, Patriarchy, and the Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill : The Univ. of North Carolina Press. 1984). pp. 210ff; Kaja Silverman, "Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse," *Studies in Entertainment*, pp.151ff; John Caughi, "Popular Culture : Notes and Revisions" *High Theory/Low Culture*, p. 169. See also Eric Rentschler's use of the phrase "dominant fiction," which he borrows from Jacques Rancière, in his article on "The Use and Abuse of Memory : New German Film and the Discourse of Bitburg," *New German Critique*, 36 (1985), p. 85; Rentschler implies with the term the "encoding of history in an all but invisible discourse, one

presenting spurious harmonies while repressing all Sources of potential disturbance and contradiction."

(5) Silverman, "Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse," p. 151.

(6) Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1982), p. 165.

(7) Dick Hebdige, who reads the styles of certain subcultures as subversive statements, is aware of the limitations of this argument. He is cognizant of the fact that his reading is nothing more and nothing less than a critical position, not a reflection of an actual statement on the part of the members of a certain subculture. Subculture can be interpreted as "a form of resistance in which experienced contradictions and objections to this ruling ideology are obliquely represented in style" (p. 133). So what is subversive is not the signifying practice of the subculture itself, but the interpretation which elevates it into the realm of critical resistance. She his *The Meaning of Style, pp.* 133ff.

(8) An English version of Adorno's and Benjamin's letters appears in *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1977), pp. 110-141; other works that are available in English are: "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening, *"The Essential Frankfurt School Reader,* ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Urizen, 1978), pp. 270-299; (with the assistance of George Simpson), "On Popular Music," *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science,* 9 (1941), pp. 17-48; with Horkheimer), "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* pp. 120-167; "A Social Critique of Radio Music," *Kenyon Review,* 7 (1945), pp. 208-217; "Perennial Fashion-Jazz.' reprinted in *Prisms,* trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (London: Neville Spearman, 1967), pp. 119-132; "Television and the Patterns of Mass Culture," reprinted in *Mass Culture: The Popular Art in America,* ed, Bernard Rosenberg and David Massing White (Glencoe, Ill. : The Free Press, 1957, pp. 474-488; "The Culture Industry Reconsidered," *New German Critique,* 6 (1975), pp. 12-19; "Transparencies on Film," trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *New German Critique,* 25 (1981-2), pp. 199-205.

(9) *Aesthetics and Politics,* p. 119. Benjamin's theory of pre-history, redemption, and arrested dialectic is, of course, what is meant here; but what is more important in our context is how Adorno uses this strategy of eradicating the trace of ambiguity, which he criticizes

Benjamin for, as a critical weapon against Benjamin and particularly against those theoretical details which Benjamin picked up from Brecht.

(10) "Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), pp. 217-251.

(11) *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 121.

(12) *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 124.

(13) *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 123.

(14) Huyssen,"Mass Culture As Woman: Modernism's Other," *Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, pp. 19 lff.

(15) Modleski, "Femininity as Mas(s)-querade: A Feminist Approach to Mass Culture," p. 42.

(16) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 141; see Huyssen, "Mass Culture As Woman: Modernism's Other," p. 192.

(17) "Perennial Fashion—Jazz," p. 129.

(18) Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), p. 79.

(19) *This Sex Which is not One*, p. 134.

(20) *This Sex Which is not One*, p. 163.

(21) See *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 141.

(22) "On the Fetish-Character of Music and the Regression of Listening," p. 297-8.

(23) *Aesthetics and Politics, p. 140.*

(24) See "Perennial Fashion—Jazz," p. 122.

(25) Dana Polan, "Brief Encounter: Mass Culture and the Evanation of Sense," *Studies in Entertainment*, pp. 182-3.

(26) Albrecht Wellmer, "On the Dialectic of Modernism and Post-modernism," *Praxis International*, 4 (1985), 357.

(27) Wellmer, "On the Dialectic of Modernism and Postmodernism," pp. 357-8. Wellmer at this point borrows extensively from Jürgen Habermas' critique of Horkheimer's and Adorno's reading of mass culture and ideology; she his *The Theory ·of Communicative Action*, vol. I : *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), pp. 372ff.

(28) See Wellmer, *Zur Dialektik von Moderne und Postmoderne* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985), pp. 41-2.

(29) See, for example, Douglas Kellner's work, which argues for the contradictory messages of TV shows. For him these messages are conflicts that express the ideological and

social changes in advanced capitalism and thus revitalize the traditional role of popular culture as on element of protest within the dominant culture. She his "TV, Ideology, and Emancipatory Popular culture," *Socialist Review*, 45 (1979), pp. 24ff.

(30) The failure to supply such a framework underlines those recent studies on mass-produced texts which focus on the complexity of reading strategies but offer no (political) interpretation of these strategies. In her book, Tania Modleski only hints at this problem in her concluding chapter, contending that "while popular feminine texts provide outlets for women's dissatisfaction with male-female relationships, they never question the primacy of these relationships." See *Loving With a Vengeance*, p. 13.

(31) "Television and the Patterns of Mass Culture," p. 487.

(32) See Hansen, "Introduction to Adorno, 'Transparencies on Film' (1966)," *New German Critique*, 25 (1981-2), p. 197.

(33) "On Popular Music," p. 19.

(34) "On Popular Music," p. 21.

(35) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 126.

(36) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 129.

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