Critique in Critical Theory


“We demand from criticism above all that it should have a critical attitude to itself and not overlook the difficulty of its subject-matter” -- Marx
The Divorce Bill, 1842.
The Context of Cultural Studies

- The end of the Old World and the belief in progress: the “dialectic of Enlightenment”
- Decline of the traditional disciplines and systems of knowledge
- Conflicts of cultural production, identity, representation, & power/knowledge
- The Cold War, the emergence of an “organized” Right & of “wars without end.”
### Cultural Studies in America: Reception and Institutionalization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Americas</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>U.K.</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### Americas, 1980s-2000

Identity, Multiculturalism, Feminism, Critical Theory, Literary Theory & Criticism, Popular Culture and the "Culture Wars", Deconstruction, post-modernism, post-colonial theory, but also institutional acceptance, changes in higher education, creation of departments and programs & a market for studies, graduates, etc.
Genealogy of Cultural Studies I: Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School

The Institute of Social Research

Max Horkheimer: philosophy, social theory, history of ideas
Theodor Adorno: music, sociology, philosophy
Herbert Marcuse: philosophy, politics, psychoanalysis
Wilhem Reich: psychoanalysis
Eric Fromm: psychoanalysis, philosophy
Friedrich Pollock: economic history, economics
Leo Lowenthal: literature, art, media and propaganda

and
Walter Benjamin: philosophy, history, cultural critique/surrealism (He was not an official member of the Institute, but was close to them, especially Adorno. Also a friend of Klee, Breton, Brecht, etc.)
The Frankfurt School and Critical Theory
Themes and Objects of Study

*What is culture? “Life as it is lived,” which is for us profoundly shaped by the Enlightenment, the history of capitalism, and the domination of nature.

*Critique of the family, the state, and Enlightenment Reason

*Power, Authority, and Fascism

*Music, Film, Radio (later TV as well), popular culture and propaganda

*Opposed orthodox Marxism, hence the term Critical Theory
“A Klee painting named ‘Angelus Novus’ shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.”

----Walter Benjamin, Theses on the Philosophy of History, IX (1940)

Laurie Anderson “The Dream Before” (MP3)
Ludwig Feuerbach: Alienation and the Fetish

Karl Marx: The commodity and the fetishism of commodities.

Frankfurt School: The Culture Industry and the production of commodities are at the heart of understanding how authority functions.

Umberto Eco: Casablanca --- the Movie as a cult object (fetish).
Commodities and Art – Horkheimer & Adorno

“For Consumers the use value of art, its essence, is a fetish, and the fetish --- the social valuation which they mistake for the merit of works of art --- becomes its only use use, the only quality they enjoy. In this way the commodity character of art disintegrates just as it is fully realized. Art becomes a species of commodity, worked up and adopted to industrial production, saleable and exchangeable....” ----Horkheimer and Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, 128-129.
Commodities and Politics
Horkheimer & Adorno

The public should rejoice that there is so much to see and hear. And indeed, everything is to be had. The 'screenos' and cinema vaudevilles, the competitions in recognizing musical extracts, the free magazines, rewards, and gift articles handed out to the listeners of certain radio programs are not mere accidents, but continue what is happening to the culture products themselves. The symphony is becoming the prize for listening to the radio at all, and if the technology had its way the film would already be delivered to the apartment on the model of the radio. It is moving towards the commercial system. Television points the way to a development which easily enough could push the Warner brothers into the doubtless unwelcome position of little theater performers and cultural conservatives. However, the pursuit of prizes has already left its imprint on consumer behavior. Because culture presents itself as a bonus, with unquestioned private and public benefits, its reception has become a matter of taking one’s chances. The public crowds forward for fear of missing something. What that might be is unclear, but at any rate, only those who join in have any chance. Fascism, however, hopes to reorganize the gift-receivers trained by the culture industry into its enforced adherents.

---Horkheimer and Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, 130-131.
“...The relentless unity of the culture industry bears witness to the emergent unity of politics.
Sharp distinctions between A and B films, or between short stories published in magazines in different price segments, do not so much reflect real differences as assist in the classification, organization, and identification of consumers. Something is provided for everyone so that no one can escape; differences are hammered home and propagated. The hierarchy of serial qualities purveyed into the public serves only to quantify it more completely. Everyone is supposed to behave spontaneously according to a 'level' determined by indices and to select the category of mass product manufactured for their type. On the charts of research organizations, consumers are divided up as statistical material into red, green, and blue areas according to income groups” (Dialectic of Enlightenment, pgs. 96-97)
The technical media, too, are being engulfed by and insatiable
uniformity. Television aims at a synthesis of radio and film,
delayed only for as long as the interested parties cannot agree.
Such a synthesis, with its unlimited possibilities, promises to
intensify the impoverishment of the aesthetic material so radically
that the identity of all industrial cultural products, still scantily
disguised today, will triumph openly tomorrow in mocking
fulfilment of Wagner's dream of the total art work....the accord
between word, image, and music.... This work process integrates all
the elements of production, from the original concept of the novel,
shaped by its sidelong glance at film, to the last sound effect (98).

The whole world is passed through the filter of the culture
industry. The familiar experience of the movie-goer, who
perceives the street outside as a continuation of the film he has
just left, because the film seeks strictly to reproduce the world
of everyday perception, has become the guideline of
production. The more densely and completely its techniques
duplicate empirical objects, the more easily it creates the
illusion that the world outside is a seamless extension of the one
which has been revealed in the cinema (99).
What parades as progress in the culture industry, as the incessantly new which it offers up, remains the disguise for an eternal sameness; everywhere the changes mask a skeleton which has changed just as little as the profit motive itself since the time it first gained its predominance over culture.

Thus, the expression "industry" is not to be taken too literally. It refers to the standardization of the thing itself — such as that of the Western, familiar to every movie-goer — and to the rationalization of distribution techniques, but not strictly to the production process. Although in film, the central sector of the culture industry, the production process resembles technical modes of operation in the extensive division of labor, the employment of machines and the separation of the laborers from the means of production — expressed in the perennial conflict between artists active in the culture industry and those who control it — individual forms of production are nevertheless maintained. Each product affects an individual air; individuality itself serves to reinforce ideology, in so far as the illusion is conjured up that the completely reified and mediated is a sanctuary from immediacy and life. Now, however, the culture industry exists in the "service" of third persons, maintaining its affinity to the declining circulation process of capital, to the commerce from which it came into being. Its ideology above all makes use of the star system, borrowed from individualistic art and its commercial exploitation. The more dehumanized its methods of operation and content, the more diligently and successfully the culture industry propagates supposedly great personalities and operates with heart-throbs. It is industrial more in a sociological sense, in the incorporation of industrial forms of organization even when nothing is manufactured — as in the rationalization of office work — rather than in the sense of anything really and actually produced by technological rationality. Accordingly, the misinvestments of the culture industry are considerable, throwing those branches rendered obsolete by new techniques into crises, which seldom lead to changes for the better. --Adorno, “The Culture Industry Reconsidered” (1967).
In Our Time --- The Frankfurt School (podcast)
http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/inouertime/inouertime_20100114.shtml

Death of the West 1 of 2: Frankfurt School, Cultural Marxism, Political Correctness
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4v6CvCHUXY

Death of the West 2 of 2: Frankfurt School, Cultural Marxism, Political Correctness
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5gm_u4gOng&feature=related

Cultural Marxism (Featuring Ron Paul, Pat Buchanan and others)
http://www.culturalmarxism.org/single.htm

*Original Intent* ("Pat Buchanan discusses the breakdown of American culture due to rejection of the "melting pot" system of assimilation and active efforts of the Frankfurt School, a Marxist splinter group that seeks to destroy capitalism and the basic building block of the Middle Class, the family unit. Intensely assaulted by the Left as a "bigot," ORIGINAL INTENT places Buchanan's research, and other experts' research, into perspective, and shows why these progressive groups are so desperate to undermine the U.S. Constitution so they can usher in a one-world government.")
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-dWC-vFAwk

Anders Behring Breivik's "Manifesto"
