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Approaching culture industry: recommended equipment

Tools 1   The text: Horkheimer and Adorno's 'Culture Industry' of 1944/1947

This book is based upon the seemingly ludicrous suggestion that we should approach 'culture industry' using a text that is now over fifty years old.[1] In studying this text, we will also tackle one of the themes of Critical Theory and thus get to grips with Critical Theory itself – an area of study that is generally considered to be 'difficult' and even a little outdated. Adorno's article on culture industry is almost always mentioned in the various anthologies and text-books on 'mass communication' and 'cultural studies', but it is usually dismissed as an 'elitist' work. Adorno's rigour makes him seem something of a spoilsport. His unpopularity is only increased by the fact that he knew nothing of the internet and very little about TV. (By way of compensation, he wrote on Schoenberg, Berg and Webern, but these are 'difficult' composers whose music continues to challenge us today.) These days, it seems as if culture industry as described by Adorno is a thing of the past – now everything is much bigger, brighter and diverse, while we ourselves have become far more sophisticated in our dealings with the excess of cultural goods available. How could we possibly learn anything from such an ancient text?

The fact that we will be approaching culture industry by way of the very first text ever to deal with that topic means that we will be working within a very sophisticated theoretical structure.[2] By using Adorno and Horkheimer's historic text, we will be studying culture industry within the context of social history. This means that we will consider each text about culture industry (including Adorno's own) as

the result of a writer's experience of cultural phenomena. In so do-
ing, we shall dispense with the delusion that such theories offer any
'eternal truths'. While analysing such texts, we should also remember
that every writer's experience is determined by their position within
society. Thus we should acknowledge that Adorno's experience was
determined by his status as a highly educated and cultured man.
Taking an early text on culture industry as our starting point has the
inbuilt advantage that its historical status will help us to see that
'culture industry' is a relational concept: the term describes the diffi-
cult relationship between educated individuals and the vast field of
commodified culture. The relational nature of culture industry is more
difficult to spot in contemporary texts, for this would mean confronting
our own hang-ups and fixations. We find ourselves much less involved
in texts written in historical and social contexts that are easy for us
to categorize. Such texts can help us to learn how to exercise reflexiv-
ity, a reflexivity that should also and primarily be applied to our own
position.

In any case, Critical Theory has always been the most reflexive of all
sociological theories.[3] It is for this reason that Critical Theory provides
us with a far more productive way of thinking than the strategies
offered by many of the more recent sociological texts. Critical Theory
should be read on its own terms – as an intellectual's reflection on his
or her experience of society. If successful, this reflection reveals to us
the structure of the relationship between the intellectual and society, as
well as the structure of social relationships in general.

My analysis of the 'Culture Industry' text is conducted in different
ways within the different sections of this book. In some sections, I work
systematically through an excerpt from Adorno's text, analysing it in
great detail. In others, I group together passages from different places
in the text that are thematically linked, and describe the new constel-
lations and interpretations that then arise. There are also sections in
which I resolve the text's apparent contradictions and illogicalities, and
others where I refer back to the experiences and models of thought that
underlie it. I did not feel obliged to provide an exhaustive interpreta-
tion of Adorno's text. Instead, I chose to analyse those sections that are
relevant to the text's central themes, leaving much unchartered terri-
tory for the reader to navigate alone. (Thus there is, for example, only
scant reference to sport – a topic that Adorno discusses toward the end
of his text – despite the fact that this activity has become quite central
to culture industry today.) In each instance, the analysis of Adorno's
text is complemented by excursions into contemporary phenomena,
by references to contemporary sociological theories and by allusion to
related themes and issues that remain to be explored.

The primary aim of analysing a theoretical and philosophical text in these ways is to explore and understand the meaning of the concepts that it draws on. However, the task of reconstructing these concepts is not made easier if the words that are used have multiple meanings. This problem can be aggravated if the process of translation blurs distinctions that are apparent in the original language. Both of these difficulties occur in the case of the term 'culture industry'.

Horkheimer and Adorno use the term in two different senses:

- In the first instance, 'culture industry' refers to commodity production as the principle of a specific form of cultural production. 'Commodity-form culture' stands in contrast to the bourgeois idea of art as something that is exempt from all practical interest; that is self-contained; that is 'useless' for any instrumental purpose; that forms a universe for itself; and that represents 'l'art pour l'art', as some writers and artists in the nineteenth century proclaimed.
- Secondly, '*the* culture industry' denotes a specific branch of production, comprising film studios, recording facilities, CD factories, giant printing machines disgorging daily papers at an unbelievable rate (an image that crops up in countless movies), radio and TV stations with global coverage, and even the Times Square conglomerate of theatres, clubs and stage shows. '*The* culture industry' makes us think of factories for cultural goods.

The two senses of the term are certainly connected, but not as closely as we might think. The artist or scholar working alone in an isolated studio can think and produce in terms of what will enhance sales and improve relations with the critics and the powers that be. On the other hand (although this is something that Adorno would not have accepted), the jazz musician in a commercial dance-band and the pianist playing in a bar for the patron are right in the middle of culture industry, yet they can play solo passages in which all that counts is the logic of the music and the expressivity of the person playing, no matter what the audience does and regardless of any external considerations.

It is also important to remember that 'culture industry' is not in any way identical with 'the media'. The principle of 'commodity-form culture' also extends beyond the media into architecture, design, art exhibitions, journalistic 'muck-raking' and 'scandal-mongering', the conventions governing dating, affairs and marriages, corporate culture, the composition of 'serious' music, our notions of the 'ideal' body (and our attempts to combat any discrepancies), religious and national

rituals, self-help literature, philosophical and sociological thinking, and so forth. The study of 'culture industry', therefore, is not a subspeciality of economic or industrial sociology, or of management studies. Instead, it involves analysing the subsumption of diverse kinds of intellectual production under commodity principles.

Clearly, it is necessary to distinguish between the two different meanings of the term 'culture industry'. In the original German text, this is done by the definite article: 'the culture industry' refers to the media and their factories, while 'culture industry' stands for the principle of commodity-form cultural activity.[4] In English, the term has been unified into the usage of 'the culture industry', probably because this sounds more familiar, but also because the distinction between the two meanings was not recognized. (The use of the term without the definite article may sound slightly unfamiliar. Philosophical terms can, and sometimes must have this effect.)

In this book, a conscious attempt is made to re-establish the primary meaning of the term 'culture industry' as indicating 'commodity-form culture' (as distinct from 'the media'). Thus, where appropriate, the unfamiliar form without the definite article is used. Readers should be aware, however, that this distinction is not made in the only translation of the 'Culture Industry' chapter that exists in English. A simple test that can help with this problem is to try replacing the term 'culture industry' by 'factories' and then by 'commodity-form culture', and to see which version makes more sense.

Tools II   Cultural experience: Analysing the products of culture industry

In order to understand culture industry, we must also be familiar with its products. This requires us to go out and experience the whole range of goods that culture industry has to offer. At the same time, however, we must refrain from making our habitual aesthetic and/or moral judgements about the quality, usefulness, interest value, wholesomeness, suitability and so forth of these goods. We must move away from our everyday attitude towards culture and abandon our quest for cultural 'highs', in which we simply ignore anything that does not seem to fit those requirements.

There are valid practical reasons for taking a selective stance towards culture. For one thing, while the range of cultural products on offer is almost unlimited, our lifespan is certainly not. In any case, we are accustomed to selecting different cultural events for different purposes. We use big sporting events or pop concerts to provide us with safe thrills; we seek civilized, cultured entertainment by visiting a

museum with a new partner or friend; we use the cinema to warm up for a big night on the town with our mates; a good book serves to provoke our thoughts, while the TV helps us to relax or fall asleep. It is for this reason that we are keen to discover which cultural event is best suited to each purpose. We are anxious to avoid nasty surprises, not wishing to condemn ourselves to hours of boredom, nor to become responsible for any nasty social gaffes.[5] We often use the media to combat our loneliness, but the media also play an important role in our social lives. Either way, we select a media event in order to create for ourselves the attitudes and relationships which that particular event offers and at the same time presupposes. This is why we like to know in advance what form these will take. It is on this basis that we select the event. We are helped in our decision by our backgrounds, which shape our preferences for certain genres of cultural products. In individual instances, we are aided by the numerous discussions that take place about current cultural events. Finally, the selection process is further facilitated by professional critics and advertising agencies – two groups of people whose activities often appear strangely similar.

For those with an academic interest in culture industry, this selective and evaluative approach to culture provides us with a first substantive finding. However, social scientists are not concerned about establishing whether any of these aesthetic or moral preferences can be justified. They are not interested in trying to 'rationalize' (I use this term in all its possible meanings) why it is that some products might be better than others, nor are they intent on explaining why all such products might be worthless. Such matters are frequently examined within the field of media studies. Indeed, there is a marked fascination with the effect of the media on society (Is it television that makes children restless and easily distracted? / Does filmed violence make (male) youths aggressive? / Can pornography lead to rape? / In short, does exposure to the media result in people losing their sense of reality?).

Such questions are part of a noble tradition that also has its roots in the arts. (See, for example, Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605), Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857) and Woody Allen's *Play it Again*, *Sam* (1972).) These are also questions for which there is no real answer. It is extremely difficult to examine in isolation any one of the many factors that contribute to the make-up of our lives within society. There is, however, still less chance of successfully separating out one causal link from the other factors that affect events that are in any case interconnected. The link between violent young men and their consumption of violent films is, for example, complicated by further factors such as the lower-class origins of these men and their class-bound notion of

masculinity – a notion that privileges physical strength. Moreover, this understanding of masculinity is also linked to the type of work that these men are able – and are required – to engage in. Given the complexity of this web of factors (whose threads we have only just begun to number), how could we possibly establish a direct connection between any one violent act and the viewing of violent films? Even if this were possible, what purpose would it actually serve? Above all, of course, it would provide us with a justification for censorship. However, if we then examine who it is that would support censorship, we will find that studies of violence and the media are often initiated by the media in situations of intense competition between different types of media. Thus the censorship of sex, violence and explicit language has become a point of conflict in the ratings struggle between state and private television. Indeed, censorship would deprive the private channels of the opportunity to win over viewers by using sensational and taboo material that the state channels are unable to use. Of course, it is not always so easy to identify the relevant political factors, but in some cases they are clearly apparent.

In any case, in the spirit of intellectual inquiry we shall distance ourselves from the factors that influence our evaluation and selection of cultural material. If we fail to distance ourselves, we will necessarily become enmeshed in the struggles between those vying to impose on us their own criteria for evaluating and selecting cultural products. Instead, it is our task to treat the struggle of interests (including its effect on us) reflexively, and to withdraw from it for the time being. In order to understand culture industry, we must take an active interest in all its products: from Barbie to basketball, from John Cage to the comic-book, from Goethe to the garden gnome, from home appliances to Hundertwasser, from classical music festivals to the cinema, from *Macbeth* to mass marathons, from sports stadiums to strip clubs, from tourism to talk-shows and from Westerns to Wagner.

We will not allow our curiosity to be limited by our personal preferences (which form an important part of our own self-image), nor by the good taste which all of us, of course, possess. It is possible that we will even come across a few things that were previously unknown to us. Quite apart from that, our drive for comprehensive cultural knowledge provides us with a marvellous excuse to examine those politically incorrect, tasteless, smutty and generally dubious cultural products that we do not usually allow ourselves to approach. Admittedly, we will also have to come face to face with some cultural products from which we would rather keep our distance. We will be forced to encounter products that disgust us (this is often the case with horror and porno films – worse still, such films can limit our nocturnal

activities and impair our love life), and products that frighten us (as may be the case with the more or less fascist subcultures of machismo). It will not always be easy to find the right way of approaching some cultural objects. In any case, we will have to overcome our fear of confronting the unknown. This is not to say that we must brace our-selves to act as heroes – it is possible to observe certain things from afar. Nevertheless, it is a basic characteristic of the social scientist to exhibit as much curiosity as possible, even with regard to the most diverse of cultural phenomena.

We will be in particular need of this kind of uninhibited curiosity in order to explore the different avenues of high culture. I mention high culture because I do not wish to give the impression that our task consists solely in seeking exotic experiences and questionable plea-sures. At this point, we should remember that it is reflexivity that con-stitutes our most vital concern. Such reflexivity will be particularly difficult to achieve when dealing with cultural products that we have come to admire. We will have to work hard if we wish to deal reflex-ively with those cultural products over which we have gained mastery and in whose glory we have learnt to bask. Of course, a certain degree of expertise is necessary when dealing with any cultural activity. As our cultural knowledge increases, so we learn to perceive the subtle differences that exist. (An obvious example of this would be the way in which many football fans learn to observe their game with the utmost precision, acquiring a vast knowledge of its history and players.)

Nevertheless, there is one area of culture that seems to require us to be particularly learned – traditional high culture. If we wish to discuss high culture, we must at least appear knowledgeable, if not witty. If we want to seem 'cultured', we must always have a trenchant opinion to hand. Most readers of this book will consider themselves to be 'cul-tured' and will therefore be subject to the pressures that this entails. Our status as 'educated people' is the result of a considerable invest-ment that we have made. (Bourdieu calls this 'cultural capital'.) It is, therefore, only natural that we should wish to see this investment hon-oured. However, we frequently have to face situations in which our status is questioned, or in which we are forced to face the competition of others. In such instances, we must put on a suitable 'performance', in order to prove our credentials. (Thus it is that every time we are asked to give our views on an art show or concert, we are being invited to perform. This is a test situation, even if all we are required to do is to fill out a sociologist's questionnaire.) Of course, having to per-form in this manner is not always enjoyable. Sometimes we prefer to avoid exposing ourselves to such pressure. Sometimes we would prefer

simply to 'let ourselves go' or to 'let it all hang out'. (In the past, this had to be done in private, but now this is not necessarily the case.)

Nowadays, if we want to appear 'cultured' (or, in today's terminology, 'culturally sophisticated'), familiarity with high culture, its tradition and its highbrow avant-garde is not enough. (This area of culture is now relatively difficult to define. What is more, its practitioners are now frequently subject to the suspicion of charlatanism.) These days, we must also know all about popular culture. We have not yet entirely escaped the influence of the established canon of art (as composed by the dictates of good taste and cultural elitism). Nevertheless, in contrast to the nineteenth century (when the notion of the cultured citizen was in its heyday), it is now much easier to deal with it reflexively. This capacity to view the canon reflexively is to some extent also the result of sociological research, and in particular Bourdieu's analysis of the 'distinctions'. We now have a more tolerant attitude towards cultures which privilege particular cultural products – we simply see them as being different from our own, regarding the cultivation of exclusive tastes as a way of attempting to secure group identity. We no longer believe in a fixed hierarchy of cultural values. In contemporary society, cultured people have particular respect for those who possess a great range of cultural knowledge and who are able to deal reflexively with a multitude of cultural products. For us, knowledge of Schoenberg's music is no longer enough: if we want to appear educated, we must also be able to discuss cultural phenomena such as motor racing. This requires more than simply being able to embark on a critique of the sport. Mere critique would make us appear rather old-fashioned and provincial. In any case, motor-racing is a very easy target – after all, even the fans are well aware of the sport's threat to the environment, as well as of its promotion of macho ideals. These days, the 'culturally sophisticated' are able to criticize all forms of culture, but are also able and willing to enjoy the whole range of cultural products on offer. Cultural studies offer an excellent opportunity for guilt-free indulgence in such intellectual 'slumming'.

It has often been said that Cultural Studies (in particular the American variety) consists solely of intellectual slumming. If this were the case, then our endeavour would not seem especially worthwhile. At this point, we must encourage ourselves to take traditional high culture just as seriously as the cultural products offered by MTV or the net. We can aim to gain at least as much expertise in the field of high culture as we exhibit when we are able to distinguish between the different brands of pop music from yesterday and today. The best way of dealing with the intimidating amount of learning required by high culture is to compare it to the knowledge required for the understand-

ing of popular culture, and to resolve to acquire both. In our dealings
with both high and popular culture, we will encounter the problem of
'pseudo-culture'. This is described by Adorno in 'Theory of Pseudo-
Culture' (1959) as the inability to experience the phenomenon in
question properly and deeply, due to the surplus and unnecessary
knowledge of labels and genres with which we surround it. However,
the ideology of immediacy (a theory of cultural pedagogy that is
directly opposed to the knowledge of labels) does not provide us with
any solutions either. Experiencing art is not simply a question of
'opening ourselves up', so that art may speak to us – such naïve
approaches to art are of little use. In fact, in order for us to understand
high or popular culture, we must work hard and learn to mobilize all
our social knowledge and insight. This will be necessary whether the
product in question appears transparent or encoded, and regardless of
whether it seems to demand us to be 'learned'. Those who believe that
cultural knowledge and reflexivity can be acquired without effort have
fallen for culture industry's ideology of 'fun'. Yet those who do not
know how much pleasure can be derived from such effort have also
been duped.

Tools III   Reflexivity: Writing field notes

Keeping a notebook will help us to consolidate our cultural knowledge.
It is advisable that we jot down notes about our own reactions – as well
as those of others – to particular (cultural) events. We should keep a
record of our insights and our discussions, and then experiment with
different ways of interpreting the various phenomena. Indeed, we
should take every opportunity to write about and comment on culture
industry. There is a big difference between thinking something to your-
self, discussing your thoughts with others, and giving your ideas the
definitive status of writing. In any case, our memories are in fact much
shorter than we usually like to assume. If we preserve our experiences
in writing, then we will be able to continue to work with them, looking
for comparisons, trying to get different responses and interpretations,
and seeking other events that we would like to add to our collection.
If we then go back and read our earlier attempts to interpret events,
we will often find fascinating evidence of the way we have developed
in intellectual and other terms. (It is for this reason that we should think
about dating our notes.) Moreover, if we ever need to work on and
elaborate a particular theme as part of a wider study, we will certainly
profit from being able to reread and reorganize our original notes.

   To sum up: in addition to the analysis of the Adorno/Horkheimer
text, our study of culture industry will require us to come up with

detailed interpretations of cultural products and events. Theoretical study and practical interpretation are activities that run parallel to, and complement each other, as exemplified in the structure of this book. My analysis of cultural phenomena (which appears in this book within the twelve sets of field notes) shows how we may attain a degree of reflexivity towards events approximating that achieved by Critical Theory.[6] It is my hope that the case studies will inspire and encourage readers to engage in their own interpretations – in any case, there is an almost inexhaustible supply of material left to analyse.

Field notes I   Why are you smiling, Leonardo?

On the first day of the Winter Olympics in 1994, Munch's *The Scream* was mysteriously removed from the National Gallery in Oslo. The painting has since been recovered, but in the view of one commentator, Munch's iconic image could not truly be stolen. According to Peter Schjeldahl (then art critic for the New York *Village Voice,* now writing for the *New Yorker*), *The Scream* had long since dispensed with its vulnerable physical form, and now existed only in the insubstantial and trivial mode of kitsch. Schjeldahl takes issue with those for whom the painting had become an object of cynicism and satire, and describes how the sight of the original had changed his life. In Schjeldahl's opinion, the original would still have the power to silence its witty critics: 'As long as *The Scream* hangs somewhere on a wall accessible to the public, humanity will lack one alibi for being stupid about life, art and the human cost of modernity . . .'[7]

The return of the painting means that it would now be possible to try to verify Schjeldahl's claim, and some people may make the effort to visit the painting in Oslo. Of course, we could just as easily try the experiment on a painting housed in a rather more accessible location – the *Mona Lisa* in Paris would seem an obvious choice. Nonetheless, it seems most unlikely that Schjeldahl's assertion would hold. Indeed, if we were to succeed in pushing our way through the rush hour hordes at the Louvre and into the tightly packed cluster of people gathered in front of the *Mona Lisa*'s glass case, we would still have to fight for a view, our brief glimpses of the painting disturbed by snatches of conversation, smells, jostling from the crowd and other such distractions. Quite apart from all that, we have already seen the image a thousand times, and we would not find anything new or different in the original. In fact, reproductions of the painting have already shown us even the tiniest cracks in its surface. What is more, our view of the original would also be troubled by Duchamp's and Dali's satirical versions of the painting. Flamboyant moustaches would superimpose themselves mercilessly upon the *Mona Lisa*, a painting which, by comparison, appears strangely without meaning. So much for the original – indeed, unbeknown to us, it could long since have been replaced by a copy!

If we were to compare the original to a reproduction, the original would not provide us with any greater or better reason to change our lives. We

would find nothing in the original to suggest that it has any kind of special 'aura'. The renovation work in the Sistine Chapel has taught us all how the venerable appearance of original old masters is often linked to the age of their varnish and to the dust and dirt that cover them. (Of course, it is always possible that a thorough cleaning of the *Mona Lisa* would also help to clarify a few points.) The fact that it is possible to reproduce a work of art will not necessarily detract from its aura (that is, from the quality that makes us experience it in a more intense way than we experience the rest of our world). Indeed, part of an icon's aura may be dependent on our frequent encounters with that icon. This is something that Walter Benjamin failed to realize in his writings on the subject.

It is important to remember that an object's aura does not emanate from its existence as a physical artefact. Instead, the aura is a function of the relationship between subject and object; it is a function of the 'working alliance' that exists between the two parties. In order to examine this, we can turn again to the *Mona Lisa*.

Over time, the reactions to the *Mona Lisa* have been many and varied. Nevertheless, there is one aspect of the painting that people have constantly referred to – its ambiguity or indeterminacy. The smile it portrays has always been considered enigmatic, and there have always been doubts as to the identity of the lady. To some, she appears 'virtuous', but to others she is a 'courtesan'. Equally, the idea that the lady might in fact be a young man cannot be dismissed. In an essay of 1869, Walter Pater went a long way towards shaping our current attitudes towards the *Mona Lisa*. Pater describes the *Mona Lisa* as the archetypal woman; a woman who unites Greek and Roman antiquity, the Middle Ages and the sins of the Borgias; a woman who is at one and the same time Leda, the mother of Helen, and Saint Anne, the mother of Mary.

Such efforts to analyse the *Mona Lisa*'s ambiguity take its suggestiveness too literally and do violence to the painting. What the painting actually shows us is this: a young woman who escapes our every effort to define her. As we look at the painting, we are confronted with a riddle that we are not supposed to be able to solve; a riddle that we could not solve even if we tried. This is all linked to what we know, or rather, what we know that we do not know, about the painting. The painting itself provides us with some clues to this. Quite apart from the *Mona Lisa*'s faint, but renowned smile, there is also and more importantly the way that she looks out of the picture. The *Mona Lisa* does not – to put it in contemporary terms – look straight 'at the camera'. Her look does not follow us and give us the illusion of contact. On the contrary, we have the feeling that the *Mona Lisa* has just looked at us, and that at any moment she might look again. Her smile is what remains from that brief moment of understanding in which her eyes met our own.

This pattern of behaviour is familiar to us. It is the pattern of flirtation. We might be at a tedious talk, or even just walking down a street, when our eyes suddenly meet those of someone else. It occurs to us both that we might find each other interesting, and that we could get to know each

other. We know, however, that we will not do so, for it would only end in the tired old routine of mistrust and instrumentalization, of illusory companionship and short-lived happiness (and so on and so forth). All this occurs to us in the brief second in which our eyes meet, and we experience it from its exhilarating beginning to its sorry end. A hint of a smile is all that remains.

A similar play of eyes can also take place between people who are linked in an actual, yet secret relationship. The young lover who finds in his mistress's eyes the *Mona Lisa*'s gaze will be reminded of that dawn moment in which contentment, sleepiness and renewed desire mingle in the first light of day. Their love is secret, and must remain so; yet among a group of unsuspecting others, the woman's eyes seek his. Thus an exclusive bond is forged between the couple, which goes unnoticed by the rest. Such a bond is one of the most intimate forms of relationships, for it is not acknowledged by society and could be broken off at any time. It is this scenario that leads us to believe that the seemingly chaste *Mona Lisa* might in fact be a courtesan.

For us, this bond of exclusivity is fascinating. However, in the case of the painting and of the courtesan (as in the case of every human), the promised exclusivity of the bond is at once ironic: we know that another could easily fill our role and that the promised exclusivity will never be realized.[8] What is true of every human being is particularly true in the case of the courtesan and her painted smile: despite the exclusive relationship that they seem to offer, they do not require a specific partner but could settle for any one of us. This is the absurdity and the charm of their 'deindividualized exclusivity'.

Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* seductively offers us a paradoxical and sham exclusivity. However, this exclusivity has always been one of the key elements of the working alliance in bourgeois art. Thus the individual observer encounters an individual work of art, created by a heroic individual artist. During this encounter, something extraordinary occurs. It is a unique moment, during which we are party to an individual act of creation that permits us to transcend the social order and the structures of domination. Nevertheless, all this occurs in the framework of public institutions – in exhibitions and museums, and at concerts or in the theatre. Furthermore, our behaviour during the encounter is regulated by set rules of conduct, and we are often forced to comply with a dress code. In fact, the encounter is usually a result of our planning, and it does not necessarily arise from any spontaneous desire. It has to be fitted into our social life, and is therefore subject to all the usual aggravations that this entails (time pressures, stress, a shortage of parking-spaces, etc.). Often we have to work hard to secure a ticket or a seat. Sometimes, we only succeed at great financial expense. The individuality of such an encounter is, therefore, of a rather displaced and highly theoretical kind. It is an individuality shored up by money and other such privileges; an individuality that we can only fabricate by these means. In short, it is entirely commensurate with the bourgeois notion of individuality based on competition.

All this explains why the post-bourgeois drive to ironize sham individuality within art took as its target the *Mona Lisa*, that former icon of exclusivity. During the Romantic era, much was made of the *Mona Lisa,* and it eventually became known as the very model of bourgeois art. However, after its theft in August 1911, the *Mona Lisa* became embroiled in the nationalistic disputes that were symptomatic of the decline of bourgeois society. Both the French and the Germans suspected each other of using the burglary to announce – or even to divert attention from – analogous bounty trips in colonial Africa. Even the thief, an Italian artisan, attributed a nationalist motive to his crime, claiming as his goal the return of the Italian painting to its homeland. (Incidentally, this approach to the matter was not without its benefits, for in the end he was only nominally punished by the Italian courts.) As a result of all this, the *Mona Lisa* became the most famous of all paintings. To top it all off, 1919 brought with it the four-hundredth anniversary of Leonardo's death.[9] After earlier attempts by Marinetti and Malevich, it was only logical that Marcel Duchamp should turn to disparaging the *Mona Lisa* in his *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919) – in the case of the *Mona Lisa*, the paradoxical exclusivity of bourgeois art had developed ad absurdum, to the point at which an artistic response to the situation was inevitable.[10] As reports from the time suggest, a moustache on a 'classic' still had the power to shock. This shows that at that stage the bourgeois working alliance was still relatively intact, for the violation of the alliance was not yet perceived as an artistic act in its own right within a new and reflexive working alliance.

The Dadaists' attempts to provoke their audience led to the emergence and availability of a new working alliance for art (which was represented in a particularly reflexive manner in the person of Marcel Duchamp). According to this working alliance, it was the task of the artists and of their public to develop their own ideas about the institution of art, the roles that each party plays in this institution, and the peculiar norms by which the whole business is governed. The artist and the public would be free to (dis)agree. The crucial factor was that this working alliance would be reflexive in structure. Regardless of its specific form, it would be based on the fundamental belief that the object of art is art itself. Thus this working alliance is directly opposed to that which Dadaism and Surrealism are usually supposed to represent. The reflexive working alliance does not encourage the reintegration of art and life, but leads to an increased autonomy of art.[11] Of course, in a society that is already overflowing with the products of culture industry, this increased autonomy can only be realized in a reflexive manner – by presenting the necessarily unsuccessful attempt to preserve art's autonomous status in the face of the inexorable functionalization of society. There are three main ways of dealing with culture industry's main mechanism, short-lived scandal: (1) by insulting the public; (2) by creating an esoteric distance; and (3) by employing irony. These three methods are not mutually exclusive, and they typically appear in combination. They all incorporate the mechanism of scandal, but they counteract its effect and enable a reflexive attitude towards it.

Many years after *L.H.O.O.Q.*, Marcel Duchamp provided a clear demonstration of the procedures in question: he reversed his original parody of the painting, thereby taking the satire to its limits. In 1965, he acquired for himself a normal and entirely unadulterated reproduction of the *Mona Lisa*, and bestowed upon it the title *raseé L.H.O.O.Q.* This new work was dependent on the fame attained by its predecessor, and it provided a comment on this. The actual subject-matter of the painting was entirely irrelevant – at most, the way in which our notion of 'subject-matter' is satirized could be read as an allusion to our fetishism of fame.

This is a cumulative process. The first satirical work presupposes knowledge of the original painting and is dependent on the effect of its fame. Later works play on our knowledge of a whole series of paintings, each new work revealing its novelty and difference from the rest, or, as was the case with Duchamp's painting, commentating on the fact that the others are so well known. To those of us who do not know about Duchamp's work, and who are familiar only with Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, *rasée L.H.O.O.Q.* would not mean a thing.

The reflexive and ironic working alliance is closely linked to history, yet it has no respect for it. Ironic and reflexive art depends on its audience's knowledge of history and its uses, particularly those that are currently in operation. Leonardo was much more than an ordinary artisan. (Although, he too, like the medieval artisans before him, was bound by contract to the specific amounts of blue and gold colour that his paintings were to include.) Indeed, Leonardo was not only an artisan, but was also a highly reflexive and ironic individual. As we continue to struggle with the mystery of the *Mona Lisa*, Leonardo continues to smile, waiting for us to realize that his painting is the depiction of a mystery that cannot be solved: the contradiction inherent in bourgeois art.

Autonomy and mass deception – a case of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

The term 'culture industry' first entered the specialist vocabulary of the social sciences through the title of one of the chapters from Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which originally appeared as a mimeograph in 1944. There is no denying the provocative nature of that title: 'Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception'. However, it is not only this chapter, but in fact the entire book, that takes a rather desperate tone. The book is the work of two academics who were firmly rooted in the European and more specifically, the German cultural tradition, but who had been driven from their German homeland as Marxists and Jews. It was written while they were in exile, their quite convenient, befitting and financially secure Californian

lifestyles accompanied by the news of the destruction of humanity through war and by political, administrative and industrial means. The extreme nature of Horkheimer and Adorno's book matches that of their circumstances. Their book describes the reduction of human beings to the state of amphibians and refers to the activity of the ruling class as 'organized criminality' (as the struggle for loot between two 'rackets' that fulfil no reasonable organizational function in relation to the working population). It tells of how humankind is becoming redundant, the latent death threat forming the backdrop to a conformity born of panic. It describes our great Western reason that, due to the structures of domination, now consigns some men to the status of machine operators and others to that of consumers incapable of action.[12] It talks of how Western reason has become a rationality of domination (over the workers, over itself and over nature), revealing how instrumental reason is incapable of objecting to the foundation of societies based on the law of force, or even on murder. It refers to culture industry and explains how anti-Semitism is based on a false projection (whereby the anti-Semite blames the Jews for the evils of capitalist society, hating them for the way in which their image reminds us of the better life that we were promised, yet never granted).

All in all, this book is a radical, angry, deeply pessimistic and thereby realistic text. It is not, however, 'well balanced'. Instead, it thrashes out on all sides, turning the knife in the wound of two intellectuals, for whom reason and enlightenment had been the focus of their work and the elixir of their lives. In social terms, the carpet had now been pulled from under their feet. (In 1944, fascism was the principal, but not the only reason for this.) The book maintains its poise only through its framework of academic style and poetic image, and through the elegance of its complicated shifts in thought, aided by its lofty distance from the subject-matter. Adorno is often considered to be a snob and a cultural elitist. Leaving aside the question of what Adorno actually made of his cultural knowledge, this assessment is accurate in so far as men of culture like him no longer exist today. Nevertheless, this is no reason to dismiss him, or his ideas, or the exemplary elements in his work. As I explain below, snobbism can be understood as a 'working alliance of public aloofness'. In any case, for a man who had seen the world as he knew it fall apart and the talents that he had nurtured within it become redundant, the attitude of snobbism was one of the few ways of retaining composure. This attitude is no longer at our disposal – if we try to adopt it, it turns into a caricature, as for example in the case of today's 'Adornoites'. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that it would permit us to view the emergent (and 'brave') new world clearly and without illusion.

At this juncture, I should like to make it quite clear that we will not be able to learn from Adorno by copying his methods (that is, by imitating his attitudes or his ways of thinking); nor will we learn from him by trawling his work for 'conclusions' that are relevant to our lives today. What we can do, however, is to learn from his texts by 'composing' them anew (Adorno saw this as the most intense way of appreciating music) and by contextualizing them (that is, by reconstructing the social conditions in which the texts were written, as well as the situation of the person who experienced these conditions and who theorized them). From our position of hindsight, it will be easier for us to consider the texts in a distanced and reflexive manner than it was for Adorno. Thus, from time to time, we will have the pleasure of knowing that our attitude towards the texts is more reflexive than that of their author. As our work progresses, we will be in urgent need of this new-found confidence, for we will have to turn our reflexive attitudes towards our own situation, being sure to mark out the differences between our own circumstances and those of Adorno. This is the moment in which we can 'learn from Adorno'. For now, of course, this is an abstract proposition, but in the following chapters I will demonstrate how it can be done.

Let us return to the 'discovery of culture industry'. Adorno was forty years old when he wrote the 'Culture Industry' chapter for *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Before writing this text, he had studied not only philosophy (Adorno wrote his Ph.D. on Husserl and his Habilitationsschrift on Kierkegaard), but also composition.[13] (Adorno began his studies in Frankfurt under Bernhard Sekles, but in 1925 he moved to Vienna. There he studied under Alban Berg – an experience that was to greatly influence his work.) He also published articles on music criticism and on the philosophy of music. Adorno had set himself the task of writing a philosophical analysis of the achievements of the Vienna School (consisting of Schoenberg and his most famous pupils, Webern and Berg, plus a wider circle of members with varying degrees of involvement). He hoped thereby to explain – and if you like promote – their significance for the history of musical composition, as well as their importance in the history of humanity's struggle for liberation. Alongside his study of musical composition, Adorno perfected his mastery of the piano. (In Vienna, he studied under Eduard Steuermann. Throughout his life, Adorno remained an admirer and devotee of both Steuermann and Berg.) Even during those busy years in the 1960s in Frankfurt, Professor Adorno managed to reserve one hour each day for his piano practice. Adorno identified the phenomenon of culture industry in the 1920s (although he did not use this term to describe it until later on), and he analysed it in terms of 'use-music', 'light music' and 'jazz' (or

what was meant by 'jazz' in Europe at that time).[14] He then assimilated this analysis to his understanding of the history of music.

A summary of Adorno's early ideas about culture industry can be found in 'On the Social Situation of Music' (1932), an essay that he wrote for the first edition of the Institute for Social Research's journal. At that time, Adorno was only loosely associated with the Institute through personal connections, not least through his proximity to Max Horkheimer, the Institute's director. In 'On the Social Situation of Music', Adorno writes:

> From a social perspective, present-day musical activity, production and consumption can be divided drastically into that which unconditionally recognizes its commodity character and – refusing any dialectic intervention – orients itself according to the demands of the market and that which in principle does not accept the demands of the market. (p. 131)

It is important to note the clear distinction that Adorno makes here between commodified use-music and light music on the one hand, and art – serious music that demands to be taken seriously – on the other. (For Adorno, this category includes even those pieces of serious music that he feels are of an inferior quality, for instance the music of Hindemith.)[15] There is no mention of 'culture industry' in this essay, but there are several references to the 'industrialization of production' (p. 160). This term is first applied in connection with the Viennese operetta, and then later to describe 'the totally rationalized factories of sound film hits with their capitalistic division of labour' (p. 161) and the 'ready-made jazz industry' (p. 162).

Later on, in the 'Culture Industry' chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno was to generalize and extend his discussion of culture industry's products to include radio, film, TV, music-hall, fairgrounds, newspaper astrology columns and so on. In that text, the commodification of culture remains the main criterion used for the analysis.

Before he came to write that text, Adorno composed two other important studies that also deal extensively with culture industry, albeit without mention of that exact term: his essay 'On Jazz' (1936) and central sections of *In Search of Wagner* (which were written at the same time and first published in 1939). He also corresponded with Walter Benjamin about the latter's theory of 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. All of these pieces were written in Europe, before Adorno had become familiar with the cultural situation of the US. After 1938, Adorno's experience of American culture merely served to reinforce his convictions with regard to culture industry. Adorno's first encounter with American culture was very intense. Upon arrival

in the US, he immediately started work on a programme of sociological research into radio listeners. The director of this programme was Paul Lazarsfeld – a Viennese mathematician and psychologist, and the author of the classic study on *Die Arbeitslosen von Marienthal* [The unemployed in Marienthal]. Lazarsfeld had left Austria for New York in 1933. There he conducted empirical social research within a specially designed institute, taking on projects that were financed by industry or through grants. Initially, Lazarsfeld and Adorno enjoyed a good working relationship in their 'Radio Research Project', but finally they became embroiled in serious academic disputes and never succeeded in publishing their report.[16] Adorno's essay 'On Popular Music' (1941) was obviously greatly influenced by these experiences.

Adorno's next project was *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, written in California in collaboration with Max Horkheimer. Adorno used this book to develop and summarize the theory that he had been working on over so many years. He now placed culture industry in a broader context, presenting it as an important example of the 'dialectic of enlightenment', according to which the rational disenchantment of the world reverts to myth: despite, and indeed precisely because of man's liberation from his irrational fear of imposed domination, a new form of domination has emerged. The workings of this complex theory are encapsulated in the subtitle of Adorno's essay: 'Enlightenment as Mass Deception'.

It is important to mention at this stage that Adorno's reference to enlightenment is by no means a reference to the provision of political information. Adorno's focus is not on how we might gain insight into the machinations of political leaders. This form of enlightenment, arrived at with the help of society's fearless intellectuals (or through their modern professional equivalent, the investigative freelance journalist), was at one time liberating, but has now been reduced to the level of inconsequential entertainment.

For Adorno and Horkheimer, enlightenment is something much greater than this: it is our ability to experience the world through working in direct contact with its material and thereby changing it. To get such immediate experience we need to refuse to rely upon pieces of 'information' or 'communication' (whose possible link to domination should in any case arouse our distrust). In Adorno and Horkheimer's view, capitalist domination is characterized by the fact that the structures of domination inhere even within our work (for example, as our labour is governed by machinery, or organized according to a set routine of procedures). As a result, we never experience the material itself, but only the instruction manual for the machinery. Thus, for Adorno, the key to liberation does not lie in citizens having the

'right information' (nor in the existence of some kind of 'undistorted communication'), but in our ability to experience the world through our work within it. Adorno believed that such experience could be attained even in capitalism through the activities of producing and appreciating art, yet he feared for its continuing survival.

Considered in this light, a social institution with the function of distributing information, for example journalism, appears to represent the exclusion of the people from political activity. Thus journalism figures as one of the methods of control that the ruling class deploys to regulate itself, drawing upon the threat that the 'people' could be mobilized against it. The contrasting alternative to such indirect domination – the possibility of freedom – is seen in universal autonomy, that is, in direct participation in public affairs, which would render 'specialist' information redundant.

Adorno/Horkheimer's reference to '*mass* deception' can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, it indicates deception on a large scale – every single one of us is being deceived. On the other hand, it refers to the deception practised by those who claim that it is possible to 'popularize' art: Adorno and Horkheimer are denouncing the claim that the masses can have instant access to culture simply by circumventing the demands that elitist art makes on our cultural knowledge and experience. We can only engage in the serious enterprise of experiencing the world and society if we are able to recognize and criticize the distortions effected by social domination. It is not possible to gain such experience by immersing ourselves in light-hearted or brash entertainment. If we want to experience the world, it is no good working with cultural products that have been 'dumbed down' to fit someone else's preconceptions about our intelligence. Such attempts to 'dumb down' culture are in fact the very source of the deception: we are treated with a mixture of condescension and flattery, and are allowed to consume only those cultural products that have been stripped of their challenge. However, art must be challenging if it is to merit the efforts of those who participate in it. If a cultural product does not challenge us, it despises us: apparently desperate to comply with our wishes, it secretly scorns us. When culture is commodified – when it promises to instantly gratify our desires – it relies on deceiving its customers.

The use of the term 'mass' also relates to a sociological model. Adorno could have chosen to refer to the 'deception of the people' (although this would have been rather uncharacteristic) or to the 'deception of the working class' (a notion more in keeping with his thought). The counterpoint of the masses is the elite, and the elite dominates, manipulates and keeps the masses happy. The masses are

neither structured nor organized, and as such they offer no resistance to their organization from above. (A friend of Adorno's, Siegfried Kracauer, described and analysed this in terms of the 'mass orna-ment'.)[17] Adorno's and Horkheimer's experience of how the fascists had shaped the Germans into a 'Volk' led them to accept this particu-lar sociological model – a model that also features in other sections of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and which, for quite different reasons, was also familiar to American sociologists of that time.

According to Horkheimer's analysis, the phase of capitalism that made fascism possible, if not probable, also saw the ruling class degen-erate into 'rackets' – into groups of predatory gangsters whose only interest lay in making a quick financial killing. Thus Horkheimer shows how the ruling class renounced its role of safeguarding the necessary conditions for the reproduction of capital and labour power against the specific interests of particular individuals and classes. (This is another way of saying that the capitalist state failed to fulfil its function.) Horkheimer describes how the ruling class turned instead to organiz-ing the masses into a regimented force, on the one hand tempting them with the promise of bread and circuses, and on the other menacing them with the threat of social exclusion. In order to escape this dread-ful fate, individuals were forced to participate in the exclusion of others, thereby allowing themselves to be manipulated into obedience. The events of recent history led Horkheimer to the retrospective insight that the bourgeois struggle for liberation had been marked from the very beginning by the deception of the masses. The bourgeoisie had used the masses as an ally in their struggle against the aristocracy, deploying them as a kind of battering ram. The means for their ma-nipulation had remained constant, consisting of demagogy, fanaticism, and the skilful deployment of the mass media – whether through sermons and other such speeches, through mass parades celebrating the anniversary of revolutions (or parliamentary openings, Olympic festivals, etc.), or through virtual mass assemblies convened by way of radio or film. Thus the workings for a political theory of culture indus-try can already be found in Horkheimer's earlier essay 'Egoism and Freedom Movements' (1936).

This theory was developed further by Adorno, who approached it from a rather different angle. Adorno's approach is grounded in the sphere of art, and in particular of musical composition. The severity of the term 'mass deception' reflects his high opinion of art. The word 'deception' implies that a promise has been made and then broken. This might seem a little strange to us: these days we actually expect the tabloid newspapers and commercial TV channels to provide us with cheap entertainment, and so we are not disappointed when they do so.

In fact, we are usually pleasantly surprised when we do come across a report that is both interesting and informative – a phenomenon that may from time to time occur! Adorno saw all this in a very different light: he believed that art makes a binding promise, which, if broken, constitutes deception. In his view, art promises to provide us with valuable new and authentic experiences that will further the development of our sensibilities and that will permit us to maintain our awareness of alternative possibilities. Culture industry, by contrast, deceives the masses by manipulating and negating their 'sense of the possible'.

The theory of culture industry was further developed in a whole range of other texts written by Adorno. Indeed, at about the same time as he was working on *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno wrote the section on Schoenberg in his *Philosophy of Modern Music* (1940/1949), which he himself described as a 'an extended appendix' to *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [*Philosophy of Modern Music*, p. xiii]. Moreover, a detailed record of Adorno's views about television can be found in two essays from the first half of the 1950s, 'Prolog zum Fernsehen' (1953) [Prologue to television] and 'How to Look at Television' (1954). Roughly contemporaneous with these essays was 'Perennial Fashion – Jazz' (1953), a text by Adorno that kindled the discussion about his understanding of jazz music in Germany. *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* (1962) contains a chapter on 'Popular Music', and in 1963 Adorno wrote 'Culture Industry Reconsidered'. In his article 'Free Time' of 1969, Adorno used an empirical study conducted by the Frankfurt Institute, to reveal that people do not generally consider the marriage of a princess to be of any importance, although they will eagerly follow the ceremony on TV. Adorno terms this attitude 'split consciousness' (p. 160), regarding it as a chance for consumers to escape from tutelage. This is not so much a revelation as a rediscovery, for even in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* the consumers of culture do not appear entirely constrained by tutelage. (We shall return to this point later on in our study.) Finally, Adorno wrote *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), a text that deals only fleetingly with culture industry, but which provides a definitive analysis of its counterpart, (bourgeois) art.

Field notes II   **The President as the bad guy – Clint Eastwood's *Absolute Power***

Films that feature heads of state as bad guys or weaklings are usually Shakespeare adaptations or stories set in faraway places or distant times. We must look to the US for thrillers or comedies that deal with democratically elected presidents from the recent past or from a fictional, yet credible, present.

The reason for this is clear: nowhere but in the US has the distinction between political news and televised entertainment been so entirely eroded. As a consequence, there is a general belief that the real political decisions take place behind the protective screen of entertainment, unbeknown and unbeknowable to the public. This perfect fusion between politics and culture industry creates a fundamentally paranoid atmosphere – an atmosphere well suited to the genre of the political thriller. (Just as the atmosphere of the Cold War was ideally suited to the spy film.) Reagan – the President who had once played the roles of cowboy and gangster – provides us with a striking symbol of this fusion. However, there is no reason to suppose that Reagan was any better at acting than the presidents whose term he preceded or succeeded. (In fact, Reagan was an entirely mediocre actor.)

Another reason for the unusual popularity of President films in the US lies in the fact that certain parts of the American press are obsessed with the sex life of its public figures. Needless to say, this is not due to any frivolous curiosity, but is instead the result of petit-bourgeois prudishness. Mitterrand's erotic double life probably increased his popularity with the French electorate. The German population proved more willing to forgive Willy Brandt his affairs than to condone his remarriage. Even in the case of Austria, President Klestil's ridiculous petit-bourgeois dalliance (which became public when his wife threw him out) had the effect, if anything, of improving his credibility. In the US, however, the discovery that a politician once started – or finished – an ill-fated affair is enough to topple him from power. Nevertheless, ever since Kennedy (if not before), every American President – and in varying degrees, all American politicians – have come under the suspicion of using their power for their own dissipation. Hollywood has lost no time in exploiting this situation.

In the comic variety of the President film, the protagonist dies from a stroke while in bed with his mistress. A doppelgänger then assumes his role, and goes from being a puppet of the men with the real power to becoming a politician with his own (New-Deal-esque) ideas. (See *Dave*, dir. Ivan Reitman, 1992.) In a more serious version of this film, the comedy is replaced by cynicism. In the President film as enacted by Clint Eastwood, the President (Gene Hackman) is engaged in a sadistic sex game when things get out of hand. His bedmate threatens to kill him, and is in turn shot by a Secret Service agent. Clint Eastwood plays the master thief who was forced to hide when the couple entered the room. Unbeknown to them (and on behalf of the voyeuristic audience), Eastwood witnesses the entire scene. His facial expression in this sequence is inimitable. The Secret Service agents arrange the scene to make it look as if the woman had been murdered by a burglar whose activities she had disturbed, but the traces left by the real burglar undermine this story and puzzle the police. Moreover, the real burglar's masterful thefts have gained him such a reputation that the police always interrogate him as a matter of course after a spectacular heist. As the detective and the burglar talk together, it becomes clear that there is a spiritual link between these two 'real men', who other-

wise stand on opposite sides of the law. (This is a feature of many detective films, as it is, for example, of the 1990s film *Heat*.) Finally, one of the President's Secret Service agents tries to shoot him and then kill his daughter. The latter is a successful county prosecutor, estranged from her father through his long absence, but in reality most dear to him. Eastwood had originally intended to flee, but now the ageing criminal feels compelled to do battle with the world's most powerful political system. Thus the confrontation begins, and – after a few twists of plot, a number of digressions on the nature of Washington's political machine, some picturesque attempts at murder and a couple of actual murders – the film shows how the little man cleverly exploits the power relations in order to bring about a happy ending. In the cinema on the corner of 11th Street and 3rd Avenue, there was applause for several of Eastwood's scenes, while the audience shared in various outbreaks of collective merriment, finally clapping in satisfaction at the film's conclusion.

Even in his old age, Clint Eastwood still inhabits the corrupt world of well-meaning police officers, cold-blooded Secret Service agents and hyper-conscientious bodyguards. However, he has now stopped trying to tidy up and to impose order. In fact, his sole concern is to avoid being crushed by the political machine. This film is not about political goals, for these are barely mentioned. Instead it focuses on how those in charge retain their power and how they protect it from the potential threat posed on the one hand by their political 'godfathers' and on the other by public scandal. In their attempt to bring both risks under control, they are prepared to embark on all kinds of deception and they do not shrink from permitting 'opportune' deaths among the ordinary – and in their view, expendable – people. Now that Eastwood has all but abandoned the task of imposing order, it becomes unclear as to why our ageing hero should choose to become involved. (As I mentioned above, the film gets round this problem by having him act out of self-defence.) Furthermore, it is equally difficult to determine exactly who these apparent enemies of the ordinary people might be. During the film, it becomes noticeable that the politically powerful are all people who have worked their way up to the top. They are men – plus one woman, the villainous 'Chief of Staff' – who started out with almost nothing, and who are now determined to retain the power they gained. There is no sign of the plutocracy of old and rich families that dominate America's political class. The corrupt and unscrupulous characters are always people who are new to power and to money. The simple moral scheme that makes Westerns and cop films so appealing is no longer available. In Westerns, the bad guys are capitalists, monopolists and their henchmen. In cop films, they are usually police chiefs whose determination to present the 'right' public image makes them inadequate superiors, who insist on preventing our man from doing his job. Now this is no longer the case. The enemies of the ordinary people are the people in power, who – due to their dependency on the political 'godfathers' who 'made them', and as a result of the political vulnerability brought on by their greed and their irregular private lives – are not, in

fact, powerful enough. They have just enough power to unleash their henchmen (that is, state power) on to the ordinary people.

Clint Eastwood is still capable of providing us with an effective portrayal of ordinary, hard-working people's discontents. However, he is no longer so keen on the simple solution of violence that otherwise characterizes this genre. (In his earlier films, Eastwood always presented this solution in a kind of fairy-tale manner. Now he gives up on it altogether.) In his old age, our hero has become representative of a very different kind of masculinity. He is still a silent loner, yet he is no longer quite so reticent about his emotions: he visits museums in order to sketch there, and although he is estranged from his daughter, he privately collects photos of her, secretly stocks her fridge, and otherwise protects her as best he can. He no longer relies on his speedy Colt to solve his problems, but uses his cunning and his ability to psychologically manipulate the insecurities and conflicts within the political machine. The relationship between the sexes in Eastwood's films has always been one of distance. Affection, it seems, is only possible between people who have no need for one another. As soon as one person becomes dependent on another, the relationship is swiftly over. In *Absolute Power*, the patriarchal reasoning behind this becomes clear: if in doubt, Eastwood protects women. At least, he would like to be able to do so, and it is an added attraction of this particular film that he succeeds. (As he does in *A Fistful of Dollars* and in *Pale Rider*. In *Bridges of Madison County*, however, he fails.) The ageing lone rider has come to rest and would like his private life to provide him with some moments of happiness. The powerful men of this world should grant him that much by organizing their ridiculous affairs in such a way as to avoid corpses, and especially the corpses of Eastwood's loved ones. In this film, Eastwood exchanges the task of imposing order for the role of the rogue: he becomes an elderly Robin Hood.

P.S. The genre of the President film, of which there are ever more examples, should have warned the American Republicans that although a President's sexual adventures may scandalize the public, they will not necessarily leave a negative impression.

The structure of the 'Culture Industry' essay

Depending on the way the text is laid out, the published version of the 'Culture Industry' chapter comes to a length of around about fifty pages. In addition to this, there are a further thirty-five pages or so of material not published at the time. Traditionally, academics have attributed the 'Culture Industry' chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to Adorno, and, for the most part, this is indeed entirely fair.[18] However, even if Adorno was the text's main author, we should not underesti-

mate the influence of Horkheimer. The published version of the text began life as a manuscript written by Adorno, which was later subjected to two major sets of revisions by both authors. To the best of our knowledge, the unpublished block of material was never revised. However, both of these texts were in any case written during a period of close collaboration between the two thinkers. Indeed, at that time, Adorno and Horkheimer were working together to develop the common elements of their thought, and to establish them as a basic model of Critical Theory.

If this sort of collaboration is at all possible (as it seems to have been in this case), there is no way that we will ever be able to establish exactly who thought what – and there is, in fact, no call for us to do so. The products of successful intellectual collaboration make a mockery of intellectual property, a concept that otherwise assumes great importance within the academic business. It is not merely a question of deciding whether a title should be entered into both authors' 'list of publications' (a matter that plays no small role in any academic's professional advancement). In fact, it is primarily a case of establishing where a particular piece of work is situated in relation to each thinker's theoretical framework and intellectual development. Even a very lengthy and intensive period of collaboration remains essentially an encounter between two individual thinkers. The resulting product is always the meeting point between two separate intellectual strands: it will not necessarily mean the same thing to each thinker, and it may not be of equal import to the development of their work.

As far as this last point is concerned, it would be fair to say that the 'Culture Industry' essay was of greater significance to Adorno's thought than it was to that of Horkheimer. It had longer lasting and more intensive links to Adorno's preceding and succeeding experiences and essays. Thus, regardless of who contributed the most to the work, it is not unreasonable to associate the text with the thought and intellectual development of Adorno, rather than that of Horkheimer.[19] However, this traditional classification prevents us from pursuing a rather different – but by no means uninteresting – line of interpretation, namely that of the political import of the text. The 'Culture Industry' chapter can be interpreted not only in terms of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* and his work on Schoenberg, jazz and Wagner, but also in relation to a trend in Horkheimer's thought. This trend is first evident in 'Egoism and Freedom Movements' and 'The Authoritarian State' (1942), but unfortunately it is not really developed in the texts written after *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Viewing the 'Culture Industry' essay as the point at which Horkeimer's political theory meets with Adorno's predominately aesthetic theories, we come to notice that the text

makes relatively little attempt to deal with the political role of culture industry, while studies of the text devote even less space to this issue.

These days, there is a tendency to discuss culture industry as a problem relating to feel-good art and entertainment, rather than to the destruction of a political public sphere. In one of his important early works, Habermas picked up on the political elements of the 'dialectic of enlightenment', devoting himself to an investigation of the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.[20] However, even Habermas has now turned his attention towards analysing the moral-philosophical foundations of an intellectual's involvement with politics, rather than examining how culture industry undermines these foundations, however well they may be theoretically justified. Nonetheless, aesthetics and politics belong together. They are different intellectual activities, yet they are both exposed to the same threat of commodification. (This holds true despite the fact that in politics, money is not the only form of currency. Financial income is important, but – fortunately for us – political currency is also calculated in terms of the number of votes that each candidate can be expected to win.) Television has not only transformed the nature of art and entertainment, but – more importantly – it has also turned politics into a form of entertainment. This change has benefited neither politics nor entertainment. The problem posed by culture industry is not limited to opera, film and football. It does not merely affect these activities (whose importance we perhaps tend to exaggerate), for it also influences the way in which states are governed and communities organized. In the chapter 'Culture Industry Politics', I try to go some way towards compensating for the one-sidedness of those interpretations of culture industry that are centred around Adorno's aesthetic theories.

Let us return to the text and to its structure. In the published version of the text, a series of blank lines subdivide the chapter into seven different sections. These sections are untitled, and there is no strict thematic division between them. On the contrary, each new section quite clearly picks up from where the previous section left off. (Incidentally, examining the way in which a text uses its introductions and conclusions can be a useful exercise in interpretation, and it is one that is particularly rewarding where Adorno's work is concerned. Now is not the time to embark on any kind of systematic analysis, but it is possible to summarize the situation by saying that Adorno's introductions do not serve to announce his subsequent arguments, but work instead to provide the text with new starting-points and fresh openings. Furthermore, Adorno's conclusions do not present the reader with any 'result', but tend rather to invert the thrust of his preceding arguments, to open

up further questions and to stress the possibilities (of liberation) that nonetheless remain.)

In the light of all this, it would seem reasonable for us to consider the gaps between the sections as a kind of 'breathing space'. The gaps interrupt our reading, allowing us just enough time to absorb what we have read, before we begin again, picking up from where the text had left off. The fact that these gaps do not feature in the unpublished manuscript seems to suggest that they were added in later, in order to mark out the main motifs in this suite of thematic material. It is not difficult to identify the main themes of each section in the published text. However, each theme then appears in a number of variations, as it is approached from different angles and linked to other themes from earlier or later sections. Indeed, throughout the text, the themes are recast in different guises and developed in different directions. With one exception, the sections are of a similar length, each numbering five or six pages. However, the third section is almost twice as long as the others, and has two distinct main themes. The fact that these themes were not treated separately gives us further cause to believe that the sections were not designed as distinct blocks of text to be read as a systematic sequence of subsidiary themes. Rather than viewing the sections as subdivisions of a general theme, it seems that we should consider them as the various facets belonging to an object. Depending on the angle and the light, each facet presents us with a different view. However, if taken together, the facets reveal to us an image of the object as a whole. The essay does not attempt to provide us with an exhaustive account of the object, as analysed in its constituent parts. It does not show the object through the sum of its different perspectives, but offers us an entirely fragmented view, each perspective presenting us with an individual picture of the whole.

The following list is a preliminary overview of the sections' main themes:

Section 1 (pp. 120–4): the industry, and the production of cultural goods.

Section 2 (pp. 124–31): the 'person with leisure' in the grip of culture industry's style.

Section 3 (pp. 131–44): the historic origins of culture industry in liberalism, culture as a means of discipline, and amusement as a form of discipline (p. 135 onwards).

Section 4 (pp. 144–9): the current situation of consumers' forced integration – life (and mere survival) as a matter of blind chance, and the promise of belonging.

Section 5 (pp. 149–54): authoritarian welfare and the abolition of
   tragedy.
Section 6 (pp. 154–61): the forced integration of the individual,
   propaganda.
Section 7 (pp. 161–7): culture as advertising.

In the continuation to the manuscript (published as 'The Schema of
Mass Culture' (1944/1981)), there is more of a focus on the topic of
'advertising'. This is discussed alongside culture industry's reflexivity
(which emerges as a result of the process of self-promotion inherent in
advertising) and in relation to the fate of curiosity under these condi-
tions. The topic of 'blind chance' that is dealt with in the fourth section
is complemented in the continuation to the manuscript by an analysis
of 'sport and gambling' as forms of competition and of the way in
which competition is represented. The conclusion of 'The Schema of
Mass Culture' focuses on the idea that culture industry is subject to –
and itself precipitates – regression.

It is possible to apply to these themes the categories commonly used
in modern theories of mass communication. Thus the first section deals
with *production*, while *distribution* is discussed in those sections con-
cerning advertising and appropriation (the fourth, sixth and seventh
sections, plus the first part of the extension to the manuscript). The
question of *reception* is dealt with in the second, third and fifth sections,
as well as in the analysis of 'curiosity', 'sport' and 'regression', which
appears in the second part of the extension. However, this schematic
division of the chapter's themes would have meant nothing to Adorno,
who certainly did not think or write in this way. He did not conceive
of culture industry in terms of 'communication', involving a sender,
a medium of communication and a receiver; nor did he have in mind
a stream of production, in which the various stages would appear in a
clear and distinct order. Instead, Adorno saw culture industry as a basic
characteristic of the modern mode of social integration. Nevertheless,
the translation of Adorno's themes into contemporary terminology is
useful for two reasons: firstly, in order to emphasize the differences
between these two ways of approaching the subject-matter; and sec-
ondly to anticipate and dismiss the usual claim that Adorno did not
have anything interesting to say about what we today call 'reception',
'reader response' or 'audience' studies. In actual fact, Adorno did not
use the term 'reception' because he had arrived at a far more complex
model of how each member of society is integrated into culture
industry. (This is not to say that he did not rather underestimate the
consumers' resistance to culture industry. These days, we are all too
familiar with the phenomenon of consumer resistance, but Adorno was

writing at a time of hysteria, when listeners were being stirred up into a panic by radio programmes such as 'Invasion from Mars', and, in a different part of the world, incited to hate their neighbours by the propaganda speeches of Hitler and Goebbels. Adorno also underestimated the way in which the media would eventually swamp and satiate the public. This is a point that we will return to later.)

Field notes III   Heartburn and telephone sex

Advertisements are as international as the products they feature. It is for this reason that the European viewer soon comes to feel at home with North American TV. Indeed, even when the adverts are not identical, there remains a very strong resemblance between commercials in America and in Europe. American adverts stand out only by dint of their quantity. In all other respects, there is little about them that the European would find new or different. However, there were two exceptions that struck the uninitiated viewer when flicking through the standard New York cable channels late one evening in 1997. These exceptions were the advertisements for hearburn pills and telephone sex.

'Heartburn' might sound rather romantic to the non-native speaker, yet it is only another name for indigestion. And indigestion went out of fashion in Europe in the 1950s, together with stomach ulcers and athlete's foot. In our age of heart attacks and breast cancer, the simple stomach disorder has been divested of public entertainment value.

Of course, these days, the threat of the heart attack successfully inspires the collective imagination on both sides of the Atlantic. All those who jog or walk their regular laps of the park or town are motivated by the hope that their body's circulation might keep going forever, if only they keep running round in circles. (This hope is also shared by a good proportion of those who belabour themselves in machine-ridden gyms. How apt that we should refer to such self-inflicted torture as 'working out'!) The ever-present promise of 'cholestrol-free' and 'fat-free' products in the supermarket feeds into the same preoccupation. Even fruit is advertised as being 'naturally fat-free'.

Nonetheless, even the ready availability of healthy goods and activities does not seem to protect against the very ordinary complaint of heartburn. The reasons for this become immediately apparent in the course of the adverts. The adverts show us that we need only take the incredibly fast-working and long-lasting heartburn pill, in order to be able to guzzle hamburgers, crisps and chillies with impunity. Without these pills, such a diet would lead to indigestion, a condition that might undermine our success in business negotiations. The adverts attempt to present indigestion as a problem experienced by high-powered managers. However, the incongruous link between business lunches and fast food indicates that this is unlikely to be the case. Instead, the upset tummy is a problem suffered by the overworked small-time entrepreneur who has two different jobs and

a mountain of debts, but who has nonetheless remained (or been forced to remain) constant to the American dream of the fast buck and the patriarchal dream of supporting the family. (In the case of the female, the dream is to be a 'superwoman' – a career woman, model mother and desirable lover, all in one.)

The adverts demonstrate that this is what you must expect from life: you have to sweat away to make your living, and you cannot allow yourself a single second of weakness. The wolves are out there to catch you off guard, and those who burp have already been defeated. You have to be able to pack everything in, but also to excrete it out. The pharmaceuticals industry does its best to help you: you only need one pill each day – providing, of course, that it is strong enough and that it represents the latest in medical research. The old pills offered by traditional brands are no longer up-to-date and must therefore be discarded – in our world, there is no place for losers.

Alongside heartburn pills, the second surprising feature of American advertising came in the form of TV commercials for telephone sex. TV ads for telephone sex have only recently reached European cable channels, and so their appearance on the New York cable channels was apt to take the unsuspecting channel hopper by surprise. The novelty and difference of these commercials lies not only in their mere existence, but also in the way that they attempt to sell their product.

Adverts for telephone sex highlight the paradox that lies at the heart of all mass media, namely the mass attempt to address the individual. Indeed, the paradox of the announcer's greeting of 'Good evening ladies and gentlemen' pales in comparison to that of the TV invitation to participate in telephone sex: 'I'm hot for you, call *now*!' In another version of this paradox, the adverts never cease to repeat the promise that everything is 'live', even though the truth of this promise is instantly negated by the medium in which it appears. The promise is also undermined by the regularity with which the same advert is broadcast. (Showing the same advert over and over again is intended to imprint the brand-name on the viewer's mind. This technique may work for washing-powder and cars, but it is unlikely to apply to the telephone number upon which these adverts depend.) As a result of this, the adverts present us with endless repetitions of the same short porn film, showing the same grotesque bodily features and the same supposedly sensuous movement of tongues. They show us the same movement of the arms, as a woman caresses her own body and throws back her hair, along with the same orgasmic invitation for you to pick up the phone and finally call. With each repetition, the whole thing seems to bear ever more resemblance to absurd theatre. Although at times comical, the very form of presentation betrays the alienation and absolute self-instrumentalization inherent in such performances.

The adverts' form of presentation also shows the alienation and self-instrumentalization that we, the viewers, are supposed to engage in. In most of these short porn films, the camera assumes the position of the voyeur, who watches while others do it to themselves, or to each other:

the camera makes of us voyeurs. In some cases, there is the option of adding an acoustic extra – for just two dollars a minute, you can listen to two women having telephone sex with each other. 'You can hear them, but they can't hear you' (although you must, of course, have reached the age of eighteen). A more extreme variety of these adverts places the camera in the position that the viewer is supposed to fantasize about adopting. The camera may thus locate the viewer as the man in a sex act who is looking down at the rhythmic movements of an increasingly aroused woman. The voyeur is transported into the middle of the sexual act.

Another extreme variety of the adverts presents the action with increased reflexivity. We are given instructions as to how we should react to the visual or acoustic pornographic performance. The adverts reassure us that 'It's all right for you to masturbate', or encourage us to 'Snuggle up on the couch with your partner and have a great time watching us'. These are, of course, the two traditional roles of the porn film – the first as an aid to masturbation, and the second as a means for revitalizing relationships. In each instance, the product is presented along with its instruction manual, that is, along with the guidelines for our own self-manipulation.

Another noticeable feature of these adverts is that the protagonists are all white. Asian women are presented as a special variety among the female actors (although 'you don't have to be Asian to call'), but there is never any evidence of any male or female Afro- or Latin Americans. (Perhaps these are available only to those who are really in the know.) The standard cable channels only offer us models in shades of white and yellow, while all dark skin colours – not to mention mixed couples – are excluded.

It could be 'political correctness' that prevents advertising agencies from publicly exposing minorities to the sexual fantasies, to which they are in any case subject. However, even if this were the case, it would only make the ingrained racism of the situation all the more obvious and embarrassing. There is, of course, no right way of dealing with this situation, except by avoiding it. Sexual fantasies directed at persons of a particular skin colour cannot be anything but racist. This is all the more evident in the case of the fantasies of humiliation and domination that are particularly frequent in commercial sex (although they are by no means restricted to this area). On the other hand, this sort of racism might eventually lead to a kind of fraternization. The increased familiarity of the foreign body might lead the voyeur to realize that everyone is more or less the same; that the differences between people are even smaller during sexual encounters; and that if you love somebody, they will always be different and special.

Unfortunately, it is most unlikely that telephone sex would ever permit the customer any such experience of intimacy. Indeed, as with all forms of sex at a distance, the main point of telephone sex is to avoid having to deal with experience at all. Quite apart from this, the adverts' treatment of Asian women is openly racist. The above assumption that the adverts

are guided by 'political correctness' is simply too generous. We are dealing here with straightforward racism – with a racist refusal to portray or witness mixed couples. This refusal represents the kind of racism that causes people to invest all their energy into distinguishing themselves from other groups, and that leads them to engage in the fanatical persecution of all those who fail to follow suit. This sort of racism is much more dangerous than the other variant that – for whatever reason – leads people to seek contact with 'the other'. In the case of TV adverts for telephone sex, exclusionist racism is represented by absence.

In heartburn pills and telephone sex we see how double standards of morality are being commercially exploited. You can eat healthily and have conjugal sex or no sex at all. However, if you do want to indulge yourself, both the incentives to do so, and the means to combat the consequences of doing so, are available in commodity form, – in heartburn medicine and in the visual or auditory support for masturbation.