study of black representation in the graphic arts, the theater, and the cinema. An essay by Geraldyn Dismond, identified as a "well-known American Negro writer," finally, stresses the co-implication of white and black representation, in that "no true picture of American life can be drawn without the negro" (ibid., p. 73). Although blacks entered the cinema through the "servant's entrance," Dismond points out, "the negro [has turned out] some of the best acting on the American screen and stage" (ibid., p. 74). Wide-ranging, the essay addresses issues of "primitivism," the stereotypical casting of blacks as comic menials, and self-representation, in ways that at times anticipate the multicultural film studies of the 1980s and 1990s.

The Frankfurt School

If the Surrealists had expressed both hope for and disappointment in the cinema, others from both left and right lauded and critiqued the cinema for different reasons. The critique often coincided with an intense and anti-democratic form of anti-Americanism. Herbert Jhering warned in 1926 that the American film was more dangerous than Prussian militarism: millions of people were being "co-opted by American taste; they are made equal, made uniform."[1] One prominent leitmotif was the idea that the cinema rendered its audience bovine and passive. For the conservative Frenchman Georges Duhamel, the cinema was the slaughterhouse of culture, and movie theaters were "Gargantuan maws" where hypnotized pilgrims, corraled into long lines, went "like lambs to the slaughter." Reacting to what he saw as the desecration of literature in the form of filmic adaptations, Duhamel wrote:

And no one cried murder! . . . All those works which from our youth we have stammered with our hearts rather than with our lips, all those sublime songs which at the age of passionate enthusiasms were our daily bread, our study, and our glory . . . were dismembered, hacked to pieces, and mutilated. (Duhamel, 1931, p. 30)

The apologists of mass culture were responsible for "having allowed the cinema to become the most powerful instrument of moral, aesthetic and political conformism" (ibid., p. 64). While film theorists like Arnheim were trying to decide exactly what kind of art the cinema was, Duhamel denied that the cinema was an art at all: "The cinema has sometimes diverted me and sometimes moved me; it has never required me to rise superior to myself. It is not an art. It is not art" (ibid., p. 37). From a self-consciously elitist perspective, Duhamel ridiculed cinema as "a pastime for slaves, an amusement for the illiterate, for poor creatures stupefied by work and anxiety . . . a spectacle that demands no effort, that does not imply any sequence of ideas . . . that excites no hope, if not the ridiculous one of someday being a 'star' at Los Angeles" (ibid., p. 34).

Cultural critic Walter Benjamin took a contrary view. At the end of his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (first published in France in 1936) Benjamin argued, against Duhamel, that the new medium had a progressive epistemological impact. For Benjamin, capitalism planted the seeds of its own destruction by creating conditions which would make it possible to abolish capitalism itself. Mass-media forms like photography and the cinema created new artistic paradigms reflective of new historical forces; they could not be judged by the old standards. Anticipating Andy Warhol's "15 minutes of fame," Benjamin argued that in the age of mechanical reproduction every human being had an inalienable right to be filmed. More important, the cinema enriched the field of human perception and deepened critical consciousness of reality. For Benjamin, film's uniqueness derived, paradoxically, from its non-uniqueness, the fact that its productions were multiply available across barriers of time and space, in a situation where easy access made it the most social and collective of the arts. Film's mechanical reproduction triggered a world-historical aesthetic rupture: it destroyed the "aura," the luminous cult-value or presence, of the putatively unique, remote, and inaccessible art object. The modernity of the cinema reveals the artistic aura as the product either of illusory nostalgia or of exploitative domination. Thus critical attention shifts from the venerated object of art to the dialogue

between work and spectator. Just as Dada had turned respectable art into an object of scandal and thus perturbed the passive contemplation of artistic beauty, the cinema had shocked the audience out of its complacency, forcing it to participate actively and critically.

Benjamin turned the much maligned "distraction" of film viewing into a cognitive advantage. Distraction did not entail passivity; rather, it was a liberating expression of collective consciousness, a sign that the spectator was not "spellbound in darkness." Through montage, film administered shock-effects which effectuated a break with the contemplative conditions of bourgeois art consumption. Thanks to mechanical reproduction, film acting, too, lost the literal presence of the performer which characterized the theater, thus diminishing the aura of the individual. (Metz would later argue that the very lack of real presence of the actor would paradoxically induce spectators to invest the "imaginary signifier" with their own projections and thus render the image even more charismatic.) For Benjamin, film exemplified and itself shaped a kind of mutated perception appropriate to a new era of social and technological evolution. Duhamel's critique of film was for Benjamin merely the "same ancient lament that the masses seek distraction whereas art demands concentration of the spectator" (Benjamin, 1968, p. 241). As opposed to the solitary absorption provoked by the reading of a novel, film spectatorship was necessarily gregarious and potentially interactive and critical.[2] The cinema could therefore transform and energize the masses for purposes of revolutionary change. The politicized aesthetics of socially conscious and formally experimental films provided one poss-ible response to fascism as the "aestheticization of politics."

On one level Benjamin's thinking reflected a perennial tendency, evidenced later in McLuhan's utopian claims about the "global village," as well as in the more giddy proclamations of contemporary cyber-theorists, to over-invest in the political and aesthetic possibilities of new media and technologies. And indeed the publication of "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" triggered a lively polemic about the social role of film and the mass media. In a series of epistolary responses to Benjamin's essays, Frank-

furt School critical theorist Theodor Adorno attacked Benjamin for a technological utopianism which fetishized technique while ignoring the alienating social functioning of that technique in reality. Adorno expressed skepticism about Benjamin's claims for the emancipatory possibilities of new media and cultural forms. Benjamin's celebration of film as a vehicle for revolutionary consciousness, for Adorno, naively idealized the working class and its supposedly revolutionary aspirations. Adorno worried over the effects of what Frankfurt theorists called the "culture industry," discerning vast potential for alienation and commodification. Ironically, although a man of the left, Adorno expressed the same scorn for the passive popular audience as was shown by an extreme right-winger like Duhamel, but this time reformulated in a Marxist idiom. In *Minima Moralia* Adorno almost seems to echo Duhamel when he says that "every visit to the cinema leaves me, against all my vigilance, stupider or worse" (Adorno, 1978, p. 75). Representing the more pessimistic wing of the Frankfurt School, Adorno placed his faith not in what he regarded as circus-like popular distractions but in what would later be called the difficult "high modernist" art of an Arnold Schoenberg or a James Joyce, art which staged the dissonances of modern life. At the same time, Adorno knew that even the high art of erudite modernists was caught up in capitalist processes, although at the "higher," more sublimated level of patronage, museum exhibition, state subsidy, and independent wealth. High art could be "difficult" precisely because it did not have to sell itself directly on the open market. Nevertheless, high art did have the capacity to dramatize through form the social reality of alienation. What Adorno missed was the fact that popular art, for example jazz, might also be difficult, discontinuous, complex, challenging.

Artistic modernism reached its zenith in the 1920s. But if the 1920s constituted an orgy of theoretical experimentalism, the 1930s were the hangover after the party, as Nazism, fascism, and Stalinism (and in a very different way the Hollywood Studio system) began to close down the various insurrectionary aesthetics and art movements. Thus the 1930s became a period of intense anxiety about the social effects of mass media. Both Benjamin and Adorno were affiliated

with the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research, which was established in 1923, moved to New York in the 1930s after Hitler came to power, and was reestablished in Germany in the early 1950s. The Frankfurt School, which also included Max Horkheimer, Leo Lowenthal, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, and (on its outskirts) Siegfried Kracauer, became a key center of institutional reflection, inaugurating critical studies on mass communication. The Frankfurt School was shaped by vast historical events such as the defeat of left-wing working-class movements in Western Europe after World War I, the degeneration of the Russian revolution into Stalinism, and the rise of Nazism. One of the School's main concerns was to explain why the revolution envisaged by Marx had not occurred. Departing from Benjamin's *via positiva*, they counterposed their own *via negativa*, a faith in the power of critical negation. The Frankfurt School studied the cinema synecdochically, as a part-for-whole emblem of capitalist mass culture, deploying a multifaceted and dialectical approach that paid simultaneous attention to issues of political economy, aesthetics, and reception. Deploying such Marxist concepts as commodification, reification, and alienation they coined the term "culture industry" to evoke the industrial apparatus which produced and mediated popular culture, as well as the market imperatives underlying it. They chose the term "industry" rather than "mass culture" to avoid the impression that culture arises spontaneously from the masses (see Kellner in Miller and Stam, 1999).

In "Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," published in 1944 as part of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer outlined their critique of mass culture. That critique formed part of a larger critique of the Enlightenment, whose egalitarian promises of liberation had never been fulfilled. If scientific rationality had on the one hand freed the world from traditional forms of authority, it had also facilitated new, oppressive forms of domination of the kind exemplified by the high-tech Holocaust engineered by the Nazis. But Adorno and Horkheimer were equally critical of liberal capitalist societies, whose cinemas produced spectators as consumers. As opposed to those who saw the mass media as "giving the public what it wanted," Adorno and Horkheimer saw

mass consumption as a consequence of the industry which dictated and channelled public desire. The cinema, as the "*mésalliance* of the novel and photography," created a fictive homogeneity reminiscent of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Commercial films were simply mass-produced commodities engineered by assembly-line techniques, products which themselves stamped out their own passive, automatized audience. Adorno's and Horkheimer's overwhelming concern was with the question of ideological legitimation: how does the system integrate individuals into its program and values and what is the role of the media in this process? As they put it, "the deceived masses are today captivated by the myth of success even more than the successful are. Immovably, they insist on the very ideology that enslaves them." The culture industry, caught up as it is in the world of commodification and exchange-value, stupefies, narcotizes, zombifies, and objectifies what is symptomatically called its "target" audience. A difficult, modernist art, in contrast, fosters, for Adorno especially, the development in its audience of the critical capacities necessary for a truly democratic society. Interestingly, Adorno and Horkheimer share with Brecht the critique of "stupefying" art, but unlike Brecht they did not applaud popular forms like boxing, vaudeville, the circus, and slapstick, although they did make an exception for Chaplin. At the same time, their condemnation was not unnuanced. Adorno and Horkheimer did show some sympathy for the undisciplined, anarchic, pre-Taylorized silent cinema, before it became "streamlined." (Adorno's major direct contribution to film theory *per se* was the book – co-written with Hanns Eisler in 1947 – *Composing for the Films* – which discerns progressive possibilities in such techniques as sound–image disjunction, which go against the *Gesamtkunstwerk* tradition.)

For Adorno and Horkheimer, the emergence of the cultural industry signified the death of art as the site of corrosive negativity. The Adorno–Horkheimer denunciations of the culture industry, and indirectly of its audience, were subsequently criticized as simplistic, positing the audience as "cultural dopes" and "couch potatoes." The modernist "difficult" art they praise, meanwhile, has been criticized as elitist. Noël Carroll argues that the idea of "disinterested

art" traces its origins to a misreading of Kant, a hand-me-down aesthetic of "purposeful purposelessness" based on a misunderstanding of "The Analytic of the Beautiful" in Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (Carroll, 1998, pp. 89–109). Film theory and cultural theory are still very much under the influence of these debates. The Adorno–Benjamin debates, and the attendant oscillation between melancholic and euphoric attitudes toward the social role of the mass media, returned in force in the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The Adorno–Horkheimer claim that "real life" has become "indistinguishable from the movies" clearly anticipates Debord's "Society of the Spectacle," Borstin's notion of "pseudo-events," and Baudrillard's proclamations about the "simulacrum." It could also be argued that 1970s proposals for "counter-cinema" and for a cinema of production rather than consumption are indebted to Adorno's call for "difficult" art. Another influential aspect of "Critical Theory," broadly defined, was the attempt by figures such as Wilhelm Reich, Erich Fromm, and Herbert Marcuse to forge a synthesis of Marxism and psychoanalysis. Germany before Hitler, after all, was the country where psychoanalysis was strongest, and Frankfurt was also the home of the Frankfurter Psychoanalytisches Institut. Both Freudianism and Marxism were seen there as two revolutionary forms of liberatory thinking; one aimed at transforming the subject, the other at transforming society through collective struggle. This project would be approached differently, and in a Saussurean–Lacanian vocabulary, by Althusserians and theoretical feminists in the 1960s and 1970s and by Slavoj Žižek in the 1990s.

Later theory also took up again the 1930 debates about "realism" which opposed Bertolt Brecht (and Walter Benjamin) to Marxist theorist Georg Lukács. For Lukács, realist literature portrays the social totality through the use of "typical" characters. While Lukács took the novels of Balzac and Stendhal as his model for a dialectical realism, Brecht favored a theater realist in its intentions – aimed at exposing society's "causal network" – but modernist–reflexive in its forms. To cling to the ossified forms of the nineteenth-century realist novel constituted for Brecht a formalistic nostalgia which failed to take altered historical circumstances into account. That particular

artistic formula, for Brecht, had lost its political potency; changing times called for changing modes of representation. Haunted by the Nazis' fondness for overwhelming spectacle which exploited blinkered, visceral emotion, Brecht called for a fragmented, distantiated "theater of interruptions" which fostered critical distance through the systematic demystification of dominant social relations. Walter Benjamin (1968) took Brecht's epic theater as a model of how the forms and instruments of artistic production could be transformed in a socialist direction. Epic theater, he argued, "derives a lively and productive consciousness from the fact that it is theater" (Benjamin, 1973, p. 4). Through interruptions, quotations, and tableau effects, epic theater supersedes the old illusionistic, antitechnical, auratic art. Benjamin compared epic theater, somewhat speciously, to film:

Epic theater proceeds by fits and starts, in a manner comparable to the images on a film strip. Its basic form is that of the forceful impact on one another of separate sharply distinct situations of the play. The songs, the captions, the gestural conventions, differentiate the scenes. As a result intervals tend to occur which destroy illusion. These intervals paralyze the audience's capacity for empathy. (Ibid., p. 21)

While one might question Benjamin's analogy (since the images on a film strip, unlike the sketches of epic theater, proceed in *apparent* continuity), and while one might wonder if empathy *per se* is *necessarily* reactionary, such ideas were to have immense impact on the practice and theory of film over subsequent decades.

The Frankfurt School had a major impact on subsequent theories of the culture industry, on theories of reception, and on theories of high modernism and the avant-garde. Walter Benjamin was influential not only through "the age of mechanical reproduction" essay, but also through his ideas on the "author as producer" and on the necessity of artistic as well as social subversion, the idea that revolutionary art must first of all be revolutionary in formal terms, *as art*. His readiness to embrace new forms of mass-mediated art provided a foundational insight for what came to be known as "cultural studies."

His rejection of classical ideals of beauty in favor of an aesthetic of fragments and ruins prepared the way for the postmodern "anti-aesthetic." Benjamin's ideas on allegory and the *trauerspiel*, meanwhile, had an impact on theorists of national allegory like Fredric Jameson and Ismail Xavier. The Frankfurt School, more generally, had a long-distance impact – via such thinkers as Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Alexander Kluge, John Berger, Miriam Hansen, Douglas Kellner, Rosewitta Muehler, Roberto Schwarz, Fredric Jameson, Anton Kaes, Gertrud Koch, Thomas Levin, Patrice Petro, Thomas Elsaesser, and many others – who later reworked its theories.

The Phenomenology of Realism

Apart from debates within Marxism (such as that between Brecht and Lukács about "realism" and between Benjamin and Adorno about the progressive potential of the mass media), the decades following the advent of sound were dominated by arguments about the "essence of cinema," and more specifically by the tensions between the "formative" theorists who thought the artistic specificity of cinema consisted in its radical differences from reality, and the "realists" who thought film's artistic specificity (and its social *raison d'être*) was to relay truthful representations of everyday life. As already discussed, one current of film theory was dominated by "formative" theorists like Rudolf Arnheim (*Film as Art*) and Bela Bálázs (*Theory of the Film*), who insisted on film's differences not only from "reality" but also *vis-à-vis* other arts such as theater and the novel. If some theorists, like Arnheim and Bálázs, favored an interventionist cinema which flaunted its differences from the "real," other, later theorists, partially under the impact of Italian neo-realism, favored a mimetic, revelatory, and realist cinema. The realist aesthetic predated the cinema, of course, and could trace its roots to the ethical stories of the Bible, to the Greek fascination with surface detail, to Hamlet's "mirror up to nature," on through the realist novel and Stendhal's "un miroir que se promene lelong la rue."

But in the 1940s, realism takes on a new urgency. In a sense, postwar film realism emerged from the smoke and ruins of European cities; the immediate trigger for the mimetic revival was the calamity of World War II. Surveys of film theory too often forget the essential contribution of Italian theorists, including filmmaker–theorists, to the debates about film realism. In the postwar period, Italy became a major scene not only of filmmaking but also of film-theoretical production, through film journals such as *Bianco e Nero*, *Cinema*, *La Revista del Cinema Italiano*, *Cinema Nouvo*, and *Filmcritica*, and through prestigious publication series like "Biblioteca Cinematografica." In his film *Histoires du Cinema*, Godard suggests that there was a historical logic behind this filmic Renaissance. As a country which was formally part of the Axis powers, but which had also suffered under the Axis, Italy had lost its national identity and therefore had to reconstruct it through the cinema. With *Rome Open City*, Italy regained the right to look at itself in the mirror, hence the extraordinary harvest of Italian film. The war and the liberation, filmmaker–theorist Cesare Zavattini argued, had taught filmmakers to discover the value of the real. Against those like the Formalists, who saw art as inescapably conventional and inherently different from life, Zavattini called for annihilating the distance between art and life. The point was not to invent stories which resembled reality, but rather turn reality into a story. The goal was a cinema without apparent mediation, where facts dictated form, and events seemed to recount themselves. (Metz, basing himself on Benveniste's categories, would later call this form of telling "histoire" [story] as opposed to "discours" [discourse].) Zavattini also called for a democratization of the cinema, both in terms of its human subjects and in terms of what kinds of events were *worth* talking about. For Zavattini, no subject was too banal for the cinema. Indeed, the cinema made it possible for ordinary people to know about each other's lives, not in the name of voyeurism but in the name of solidarity.

Guido Aristarco, meanwhile, in his critical essays as well as in his *Storia delle Teoriche del Film*, argued against Zavattini that realism, in the sense of registering daily life, was never simple or unproblematic. Inspired both by the work of Hungarian Marxist