

Commodity Fetishism and Commodity Enchantment

1. 5:1 | © 2001 Jane Bennett

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4.

5. *"A study of commodity culture always turns out to be an exploration of a fantastic realm in which things act, speak, rise, fall, fly, evolve..."T. Richards*[\[1\]](#)

Swinging Khakis

6.

7. Picture a world where wondrous events compete with acts of cruelty and violence, where magical gestures occasionally displace instrumental reason, where molecular activity is both surprising and responsive to scientific investigation, where governments and economies are neither as competent as many hope nor as overwhelming as some fear, and where the social fabric is continually re-assembling rather than progressively fragmenting. There, wonder and fascination cohabit with realism and fear; there, enchantment is a real possibility. Enchantment, as we've seen, is a mood of lively and intense engagement with the world, and I've been trying to think about how it plays into an ethical comportment of generosity toward others. Enchantment consists in a mixed bodily state of joy and disturbance, a transitory sensuous condition dense and intense enough to stop you in your tracks and toss you onto new terrain, to move you from the actual world to its virtual possibilities.[\[2\]](#)

8.

9. For me, the 1998 GAP ad "Khakis Swing" both induces and expresses this state of enchantment. American Swing music from the 1930's and 40's is, as a GAP executive says, "very energetic. Its ebullience calls you in from the next room."[\[3\]](#) The ad is set in a large space where about twenty young people in beige pants are dancing to Louis Prima's "Jump, Jive and Wail." At several points in the video, as the music continues uninterrupted, the camera freezes the image of the foreground dancer in mid-flight.

10.

11. Although everyone's stopped in their tracks, the vitality of the scene continues, for now it's the room that -- thanks to the "stop and pan" camera technique -- spins and swings. Then, after that frozen yet mobile moment, the organic connection between music and dance resumes. The ad first turns the dancers into statues, as if victims of the wrath or whimsy of an Olympian god. As such, they can be panned around, as one would video a sculpture garden. But then, again as in Greek mythology, the frozen beings reanimate. The ad suggests some irony on the part of the

- videographers, as if to issue a challenge: "You say these are mere pants! I'll show you *pants*!"[\[4\]](#)
- 12.
13. I position this GAP ad, wherein the room and the khakis dance along with the human bodies in them, in a tradition of works of art that explore the phenomenon of *animation* -- of dead things coming alive, of objects revealing a secret capacity for self-propulsion. Several of Kafka's stories, for example, depict the crossing from an inert thing to a thing that can exert itself. In "The Bucket Rider" a pail transports a cold man in search of coal: Seated on the bucket, my hands on the handle, the simplest kind of bridle, I propel myself with difficulty down the stairs, but once downstairs, my bucket ascends, superbly, superbly; camels humbly squatting on the ground do not rise with more dignity... Through the hard-frozen streets we go at a regular canter; often I am upraised as high as the first storey of a house; never do I sink as low as the house doors.[\[5\]](#)
- 14.
15. And in "The Cares of a Family Man," Kafka's star-shaped spool for thread reveals an inner capacity for playfulness, not to mention speech: "Of course, you put no difficult questions to him, you treat him -- he is so diminutive that you cannot help it -- rather like a child. 'Well, what's your name?' you ask him. 'Odradek,' he says. 'And where do you live?' 'No fixed abode,' he says and laughs..."[\[6\]](#)
- 16.
17. As Freud points out in "The Uncanny" about Hoffmann's tales, and as Bruno Bettelheim notes in his study of fairy tales, such animations can disturb as well as delight.[\[7\]](#) They disturb perhaps because they explore the possibility of the "animateness" of humans, nonhumans, and nonanimals alike. If the power to self-move, to laugh, or to dance adheres, albeit differentially, in all material things, then humans must reckon with a much larger population of entities worthy of ethical concern, and humanity faces the difficult prospect of moderating its claim to uniqueness. At the same time, animations can delight -- perhaps for the same sensory reasons that a kaleidoscope does: metamorphoses of shape, color, size, and arrangement of form capture the imagination. If things that we had previously considered to be but the passive context for our activity are themselves mobile, vital matter, then the world becomes so much more *interesting*.
- 18.
19. Perhaps you will grant that, under the right circumstances, a fable by Kafka or Hoffmann or Grimm can enchant. And perhaps you will also grant that the plenitude of feeling evoked by the morphings they describe can be cultivated into a disposition of presumptive generosity toward others. But even if you go that far, the question remains whether such laudable effects can also issue from animations designed to make you *buy* something. Can the enchanting potential of animation survive commercialization? Can advertisements qualify as sites of the ethically-useful kind of enchantment I seek? And even if they can, should we not seek our enchantments elsewhere?
- 20.

21. There's no doubt that *some* kind of enchantment is the goal of advertising, and that many people in rich societies are caught up with consuming. Popular and academic critics agree that consumption structures much in everyday life, including identities, aspirations and imaginations. One influential interpretation of this social fact condemns it as "commodity fetishism," the idolatry of consumption goods. Commodity fetishism is a kind of perceptual disorder: humans become blind to the pain and suffering embedded in the commodity by virtue of an unjust and exploitative system of production, even as commodities -- mere things -- appear as active agents capable of commanding attention and determining desire. The explanatory power of this notion of commodity fetishism has endured the many developments in capitalism since 1857, when Marx first elaborated it. But some recent work in cultural studies has argued, against it, that our commerce with bought things has a more politically ambivalent effect: commodity culture both expresses and *exposes* "a social disorder that would otherwise remain hidden"[\[8\]](#); particular repertoires of consumption are said to function as a "language of invention with which radical groups can think about, refine, and ultimately advertise their ideologies."[\[9\]](#) Such perspectives, which emphasize the liberatory possibilities internal to consumption, contest the idea that only revolutionary action can alter the economic terms of justice.
- 22.
23. I too will argue that the theme of "commodity fetishism" is not capacious enough to account for our fascination with commercial goods. This is not to deny the value of "demystifying" the commodification process or the commercial advertisements that support it. If one immediate effect of ads is the urge to possess this or that product, a long-term, cumulative effect might very well be described as normalization. Ads have tended, for example, to inculcate upon the senses -- to write into the body -- an aesthetic image of the slim, beautiful (male or female) body. Demystification is indispensable as a counter to this normalizing power. But it is *also* valuable to appreciate the capacity of ads to work on us in unpredictable ways. For me the issue is not *whether* to live with commodities but *how* to participate in commodity culture. There is no vision of capitalist or non-capitalist economy today that does not depend to some extent upon the commodity form. If so, then the pertinent questions become: how to reform commodity culture to render it more just and more compatible with ecological integrity? how to design individual and collective strategies for exploiting the ethical potential within commodity culture?
- 24.
25. The phenomenology of consumption I pursue focuses on the sense of vitality, the charged-up feeling, that is often generated in human bodies by the presence or promise of commodity consumption; I see similarities between that affective state and the "moral sentiments" that have long been associated with the beauty or sublimity of nature. In short, I am looking to explore the possibility that enchantment, from multiple sources, can be used to feed or fuel an ethical will. I want to think about how commercial items -- more specifically, how their artistic representations (in ads as well as in the potential consumer's imagination), can enchant. I locate the enchantment-effect primarily in the aesthetic or theatrical

dimension of commodities, and in the way commodities function as tangible and public elaborations of, and experimentations with, personal and collective identities. A *New York Times* article about the sequel to the "Khakis Swing" ad ("Khakis a Go-Go") sat under the heading "Style Over Substance"[\[10\]](#); my story instead explores the ethical substance internal to the style of the ads. That style can be described as an aesthetic of vibrant mobility, of the ever-present possibility of bursts of vitality that violate an order that ranks humans incomparably higher than animals, vegetables and minerals.

26.

27. Consistent with Marx's critique of commodification is the environmentalist position that the intensive and excessive consumption typical of middle class Americans is ecologically disastrous ("mass production of economic goods necessitates the mass production of environmental bads"[\[11\]](#)) and, moreover, that we're caught on a "treadmill of production" such that any decrease in consumption has harmful effects upon employment, wages, and poverty. I am an advocate of this environmentalist critique and support political efforts to reconstruct the economic infrastructure that demands continually increasing levels of consumption and waste. I saw how easily this infrastructure overpowers individual efforts toward ecological living while in a Wal-Mart store: the "REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE" banner hung above the check-out aisles could only be a joke inside a warehouse crammed with thousands of low-priced and ultimately disposable "goods."

28.

29. Such consumption practices are indeed part of a system that tolerates a deplorable level of economic inequality; their extravagance causes suffering in other cultures and species; they promote greed and, eventually, military adventurism among administrations; they work to eclipse the project of deliberately considering which ends we want to pursue in common. But I believe that a modified organization of commodification and advertising could respond to structural injustices in existing patterns of consumption and augment the enchanting effects of commodities at the same time. It is the form of commodification, not the fact of it, that is problematic. The existing political economy is built too much around what Michael Best and William Connolly have called exclusionary goods, and it needs to build more inclusive goods into the order. As it is extended to more and more people, an exclusive good (1) decreases the private value of the good to those who already had it, (2) increases the private costs of its use, (3) accentuates the adverse common or social costs of its use, and (4) increases, directly or indirectly, the per-capita costs borne by the state in subsidizing its use and rectifying its adverse effects. Inclusive goods reverse these tendencies. Few goods fit either model perfectly, but the car, private medical care, private education, and private security arrangements move in the first direction while public transport, universal health care, public education, and jobs and education to prevent crime move in the second. The point is that moving toward inclusive goods can reduce inequality and protect the environment. But it need not seek a world without GAP ads, or moralize against the commodity

- form or technologized art, or disqualify minor displays of consumption as a source of pleasure, creativity, self-expression, and enchantment.[\[12\]](#)
- 30.
31. It makes sense to derive sustenance from whatever ethical resource might be derived from commercial culture, and to pursue an ecology that draws positive sustenance from the moods and energies engendered by some modes of advertisement. We ought to work toward what E.F. Schumacher described as a "Buddhist" or sustainable economics[\[13\]](#) and, through micro- and macropolitics, invent ways to delimit the sensory assault of advertisements. But I would hope that creative advertisements and the aesthetic pleasure of minor luxuries would persist in the new order.[\[14\]](#) Even today, the electricity generated by running on the treadmill of consumption is not a closed circuit, and those charges are also powering other, non-commercial phenomena. John Jervis makes a similar point about advertisements: "If ads are about selling things, they are not *only* about selling things; their images can carry symbolic meanings, transmit messages, and create moods, in ways that cannot be reduced to the conscious intentions of their creators, and cannot be wholly controllable and predictable in their effects."[\[15\]](#) Like most social formations, the effects of commodity-fascination include some strange bedfellows, and it may very well be that lodged within it is a kind of exhilarating energy akin to magnanimity. After all, those khakis do *swing*.
- 32.
- 33.
- 34.
35. A story like mine, which highlights the noncommercial effects of commercial commodities, runs the risk of what Wendy Brown described as the "renaturalization of capitalism." I work to avoid that effect. I aim instead to deny capitalism quite the degree of efficacy and totalizing power that its critics (and defenders) sometimes attribute to it, and to exploit the positive ethical potential secreted within some of its elements.[\[16\]](#) What image of power do I invoke in my story? One that shares Deleuze and Guattari's conviction that "there is always something that flows or flees, that escapes ... the overcoding machine," one that affirms the view that though "capitalists may be the master of surplus value and its distribution, ... they do not dominate the flows from which surplus value derives."[\[17\]](#)
- 36.
37. My tale of commodity culture proceeds by critically engaging Marx's notion of "commodity fetishism" and then Horkheimer and Adorno's adaptation of it in their famous essay on "The Culture Industry." I pay particular attention to Marx's claim that when commodification "animates" mere artifacts it also enervates their producers and consumers, and to Horkheimer and Adorno's picture of power as a hyper-competent and impermeable fortress. This image is born of their outrage at a system that seeks to dominate every aspect of life, and they emphasize the pervasive power of the system in the hopes of inflaming a comparably strong degree of opposition to it. But while this image of power may indeed provoke political resistance to commodity culture and promote a more self-conscious relationship to it, I think that there is also a way in which it works against that goal

-- why should one bother to criticize what is inevitable or challenge what is omnipotent? And so, I emphasize the openings, ambiguities, and lines of flight within systems of power, doing so to work positive effects within and upon the system.

38.

39. The phenomenology of consumption I pursue emerges, then, through a dialogue with Marx, Horkheimer and Adorno, and Deleuze and Guattari around these questions: What does it mean for ethics and politics when objects appear as animate or as capable of making claims upon us? Is this best described as "fetishization"? What is the relationship between animated objects and dulled (human) subjects? What are the theatrical techniques by which commodities exert power over human bodies? What is the role of repetition in commodification? What dimensions of the consuming self does such repetition act upon? What is the relationship between the pleasure afforded by mass produced entertainment and ethico-political complacency? How does a zest for commodified art coexist with critical awareness of its manipulative intent?
- The Commodity as Fetish**

40.

41. Inaugurating the distinction between use- and exchange-value, Marx defined a commodity as an article produced from the start for large-scale market exchange rather than "for its own immediate consumption."[\[18\]](#) In commodity form, "the product becomes increasingly one-sided... [I]ts immediate use-value for the gratification of the needs of its producer appears wholly adventitious ... and inessential..."[\[19\]](#) Commodification homogenizes objects: it destroys their "sensuously varied objectivity as articles of utility"[\[20\]](#) by defining them in terms of equivalent units of exchange.

42.

43. In its exchange-value the shoe is qualitatively identical with any other commodity, no matter how much they may differ in terms of their use-value properties -- their physical features, symbolic attributes, and so on. By virtue of this abstraction, which is based on market exchange and the universal equivalence of money, a palace is equal to a certain number of shoes...[\[21\]](#)

44.

45. Marx presents the alchemy of exchange-value, through which unequal things are made equal, as a sinister process.[\[22\]](#) Sinister not because commodification does violence to artifacts (by stripping them of their specificity and reducing them to transactional goods), for such a defense of objects would give too much life to mere things. Instead, Marx makes it clear that the harm of commodification accrues to humans -- they are the ones deprived of the "sensuously varied objectivity" of "articles of utility." As commodities, labor and the laborer are "objectified," an objectification that enables the swindle that is profit, for although a portion of the labor "is exchanged for the equivalent of the worker's wages; another portion is

appropriated by the capitalist without any equivalent being paid."[\[23\]](#) The masking of power relations is the most pernicious effect of commodification.[\[24\]](#) But second to that is its unnatural animation of artifacts. It is this second effect that I want to examine further.

46.

47. Commodity fetishism bestows a "phantom objectivity,"[\[25\]](#) it animates artifacts and then obscures the source of that animation. Marx compares this trickery to the mystification that is religion: The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists ... in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves.... [T]he definite social relation between men ... assumes here... the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities...[\[26\]](#)

48.

49. In capitalism as in theism, things are empowered and persons are deadened. Mere things, the self-expression of living, laboring human beings, come to exercise power over those beings as if they too had "a life of their own." Marx is *too* dismissive of animism. Within his frame, it is reduced to the atavistic practice of "fetishization."

50.

51. Marx describes fetishism as a "religion of sensuous desire" that debases men. "Fantasy arising from desire deceives the fetish-worshipper into believing that an 'inanimate object' will give up its natural character in order to comply with his desires. Hence the crude desire of the fetish-worshipper *smashes* the fetish when it ceases to be its most obedient servant."[\[27\]](#) We might inquire further into Marx's choice of the term fetish by looking at its dictionary definition: Fetish: 1.a. Originally, any of the objects used by the negroes of the Guinea coast and the neighboring regions as amulets or means of enchantment; b. By writers in anthropology ... used in wider sense: An inanimate object worshipped by savages on account of its supposed inherent magical powers, or as being animated by a spirit.[\[28\]](#)

52.

53. If one places this definition alongside Marx's likening of animated artifacts to religious mystifications and his account of the "fetish-worshipper" and his "crude" and childish form of desire, some of the worrisome features of Marx's theory of fetishization come to the fore. The phrase "commodity fetishism" now seems to draw some of its power from an image of the masses in Western Europe as creatures who bear the repulsive trace of the African savage. Its drama aligns the primitive with the negro, the negro with pagan animism, animism with delusion and passivity, passivity with commodity culture. And this line of equivalences is contrasted with another consisting of the modern, the light, the demystified, the debunking critical theorist.[\[29\]](#) This strain in Marx's thinking does, however, coexist with others that run counter to it.[\[30\]](#)

54.

55. More central to my own interest is the tendency of Marx's critique of commodity fetishism to picture a matter whose "natural character" is dead or inert: for him nature is dis-encharmed. That is to say, it is drawn against the background of a superceded pagan world wherein all things were enlivened with divine spirit. In doing so, it supports an onto-story in which agency is concentrated in humans, either in the capitalist mode of apparent individuality and market rationality, or in the socialist mode of true collective agency and mastery.
- 56.
57. I see the GAP ad as expressive of a different ontology: in it, the liveliness of matter itself is once again apparent, this time by the grace of cinematic technology rather than God or the Spirits. You can call those pants "commodified" and you can call fascination with the advertisement a "fetish," but the swinging khakis also emerge from an underground cultural sense of nature as alive, as never having been disenchanted. Out of the commercialized dance erupts a kind of neo-pagan or Epicurean materialism. An enchanted materialism. "Mechanistic" does not describe *this* materialism, for the khakis display a playful and surprising will not unlike the "swerve" of which Epicurus speaks. Perhaps it is true, then, that the "facts of commodity culture always [turn]... out to be ... a fantastic realm in which things act, speak, rise, fall, fly, evolve."[\[31\]](#)**Marx and the Swerve**
- 58.
59. But Marx himself wrote his doctoral dissertation on Epicurus. Could it be that his thinking contains more resources for an enchanted materialism than I have credited? Let us take a look, then, at Marx's treatment of Epicurean philosophy and ask: What is the "matter" of Marx's "materialism"? What picture of nature, what physics, is entangled with the political economy he comes to endorse? In particular, might Marx's interest in Epicurus suggest that he too had a sense of the vitality of matter?
- 60.
61. Marx turned to ancient atomism because he was intrigued by the possibility of a materialism that was not deterministic, that is to say, a philosophy that gave primacy to the sensuous, natural world but did not picture that world as mechanistic or a realm of necessity. After reading Holbach, Condorcet and Diderot, each of whom endorsed a "concept of the *internal* movement of material elements,"[\[32\]](#) Marx was drawn to Epicurus's idea that the atom occasionally swerved from its straight, downward path through the void. In his dissertation, entitled "The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature," Marx argued that Epicurus rejected the deterministic universe of Democritus. For Democritus, chance was an illusion created by humans to explain their own "perplexity" about the order of things. But for Epicurus, "necessity ... does not exist, ... some things are *accidental*, others depend on our *arbitrary will*.... 'It is a misfortune to live in necessity, but to live in necessity is not a necessity. On all sides many short and easy paths to freedom are open.'"[\[33\]](#)
- 62.

63. Epicurus's emphasis on freedom -- exemplified by his notion of the swerve -- was what made Marx rank him above Democritus. The straight line formed by the downward fall of the atoms represented the fateful "materiality" of the atom, while the swerve expressed the atom's "formal determination" or freedom:
- 64.
65. The atoms are purely self-sufficient bodies or rather bodies conceived in absolute self-sufficiency, like the heavenly bodies. Hence, again like the heavenly bodies, they move not in straight but in oblique lines.[\[34\]](#)
- 66.
67. According to C.J. McFadden, the young Marx thought of matter as too recalcitrant or unruly to be part of an order of natural necessity: "all the existing forms of materialism were unacceptable to Marx because they lacked a vitalizing principle. They regarded matter as inert, and Marx did not believe that it was such."[\[35\]](#) Marx's statement that the declination of the atom is "that something in its breast that can fight back and resist"[\[36\]](#) supports this interpretation of him as a kind of vital materialist.
- 68.
69. More often, however, Marx reads the swerve in a more Hegelian manner, as Epicurus's way of expressing the moment of "pure individuality" within self-consciousness's struggle to realize itself in the larger world. Under the sway of Hegel's philosophy of self-consciousness, Marx translates the swerve of the atom into an assertion of self-consciousness; the activity of declination is reduced to "a symbol of the active self"[\[37\]](#); the vitality of matter serves only as an analogy for the intrinsic human quest for freedom. The swerve is thus presented as belonging to human self-consciousness rather than to both nonhuman and human matter. By the time Marx gets done with it, the fighting spirit of matter has settled down into the bodies of men.
- 70.
71. Marx describes the swerve as the atom's "abstracting" of itself from "its relative existence, the straight line."[\[38\]](#) This act of abstraction is the cornerstone, says Marx, not only of Epicurus's physics but of his ethics of *ataraxy* or tranquility. Just as "the atom frees itself from ... the straight line... so... the purpose of [human] action is to be found ... in abstracting, swerving away from pain and confusion..."[\[39\]](#) Marx notes that Epicurus even makes the truth of nature dependent upon the subjective effect it has upon the self, quoting Epicurus's claim that "since eternity of the heavenly bodies would disturb the ataraxy of self-consciousness, it is a necessary, a stringent consequence that they are not eternal."[\[40\]](#)
- 72.
73. For Marx this strange, subjective science was yet another indication of Epicurus's defense of "the absoluteness and freedom of self-consciousness."[\[41\]](#) Unfortunately, however, the dialectically unsophisticated Epicurus could only conceive self-consciousness as something that "arises in *opposition* to the material world, and not *through* it." Epicurus did recognize, says Marx, that in order for the atom to attain concrete "existence," it would have to take on determinate, material attributes --

which would contradict its "essence" as abstract individuality. And Marx credits Epicurus as the first philosopher in history to "incorporate the notion of the contradiction between essence and reality into his thought." [42] This was, says Marx, a profound achievement even if Epicurus failed to resolve the contradiction. [43]

74.

75. Finally, Epicurus's dialectical failure would become Marx's goad: according to a sympathetic interpreter of Marx, Marx would make it his task to "move...from abstract self-consciousness and freedom to concrete self-consciousness in the political economy. In order to overcome the contradictions of existence and essence... implicit in Epicurean physics, the alienation of the objective and physical world must be overcome through social praxis." [44] As Marx himself says in his Notebooks on Epicurean philosophy, he will give "a quite different account of the matter from that of Epicurus." [45]

76.

77. From my point of view, however, it is equally important to note the strange fact that for Marx Epicurus is an anti-naturalist! Though Marx is, I think, justified in criticizing Epicurus's bracketing of those aspects of nature whose metaphysical implications would disturb human tranquility, Marx overplays his hand. He loses touch with the remarkable appreciation of agency *within* nature that Epicurus actively affirms.

78.

79. Marx did celebrate Epicurus's indifference toward the gods, or what George McCarthy calls his "critique of all forms of alien objectivity." [46] But here again, it seems as though Marx was overzealous. So keen to debunk this "alien objectivity" was Marx that he lost touch with his own, original attraction to the quirky and resistant objectivity of micro-matter. This willfulness within the very smallest speck as well as larger assemblages, this something in the breast of matter that "can fight back and resist," becomes merely a symbolic representation of a stage of self-consciousness. And Marx's too-quick translation of atoms into human beings may have had a profound effect upon his future thought. Instead of a reminder of the lively resistance of material bodies, of their capacity to act upon other bodies including ours, the swerve becomes *man's* capacity to resist social forms. The physics of Epicurus transmogrifies into a Marxist philosophical anthropology. The swerve of matter becomes the persistent urge for freedom within *humannature*. The refusal of atoms to tow the line morphs into a revolutionary will to overthrow unjust social forms. These are themselves interesting and ethically laudable transformations, and they reveal a rarely-discussed Epicurean influence upon Marx. What they don't mark sufficiently, however, is the possibility that nonhuman matter also counts. Though he might have, Marx did not allow himself to draw upon Epicurus to develop a more enchantment-friendly materialism. **The Critical Potential of (Commercial) Art**

80.

81. Like Marx, Horkheimer and Adorno find nothing positive about the animation of objects, a liveliness that, given their onto-story of disenchantment, can only be a dangerous illusion. Commodified objects are implicated in an unnatural transference of energy from persons to things; commodification operates as a zero-sum game. To respond to things as if they were alive is to steal animus from the humans who own the monopoly rights to it. Horkheimer and Adorno's essay on "The Culture Industry" can be read as an extended effort to awaken man's critical faculties which have been de-animated in a world saturated by commercialism. In particular, it argues against the possibility of an affective response to commodities able to *challenge* the socio-economic system that generates it. There is no aesthetic sphere independent of, and hence a potential site of resistance to, "the iron system" of capital.[\[47\]](#) And so it would be impossible for a GAP ad -- no matter how technically interesting and aesthetically innovative -- to fuel any sensibility other than consumerism.
- 82.
83. "The culture industry can pride itself on having energetically executed the previously clumsy transposition of art into the sphere of consumption."[\[48\]](#) Every increase in the sharpness of video cuts or the peppiness of hit songs issues in a decrease in the critical faculties of its audience. Mass entertainment is replete with images of novelty and surprise, but the upbeat "tempo and dynamics" are carefully calibrated to preclude the exercise of mental effort and independent thinking. The result is a passive, consumptive audience.[\[49\]](#)
- 84.
85. If for the Romantics art provided a line of flight from banality into creative self-expression, and if for Nietzsche it offered noble souls a theater in which to redeem the world through beauty, for Horkheimer and Adorno (capitalist) art is always ideology. They acknowledge that artists have good intentions: the "promise held out by the work of art that it will create truth by lending new shape to the conventional social forms is as necessary as it is hypocritical," for it is in the very nature of art to *aspire* to transcend the status quo. But this aspiration always fails. Art ends up tracking and recapitulating the social hierarchy, it is "derivative" of "the real forms of life as it is."[\[50\]](#) The history of art does include feeble instances of criticism and protest, but the reign of the culture industry now prevents even these fleeting moments:
- 86.
87. When the [stylistic] detail won its freedom, it became rebellious and, in the period from Romanticism to Expressionism, asserted itself as free expression, as a vehicle of protest against the organization.... The totality of the culture industry has put an end to this. Though concerned exclusively with effects, it crushes their insubordination and makes them subserve the formula, which replaces the work.[\[51\]](#)
- 88.
89. Part of what propels Horkheimer and Adorno to tell their story is their moral outrage at the culture industry's colonization of human creativity.[\[52\]](#) Culture-

products are designed with extraordinary care and expertise, such that "no medieval theologian could have determined the degree of torment to be suffered by the damned ... more meticulously than the producers of shoddy epics calculate ... the exact point to which the leading lady's hemline shall be raised." [53] In lieu of authentic, spontaneous creativity we get a sophisticated science of entertainment in the service of squeezing out more consumption. This science "demands an astounding productive power," but only "absorbs and squanders" it. [54] Creativity, presented as a kind of primary drive whose authentic aim is self-expression, is said to be now fully in the service of system-legitimation. It becomes "entertainment," which diverts us from dehumanizing forms of work even as it mirrors its monotonous structure. [55]

90.

91. This colonization of creativity occurs by means of the technologization of art qua television, radio, film. Pre-capitalist art at least had the potential to challenge injustice; technologized art has no such promise. This is because, for Horkheimer and Adorno, technology does not issue from the drive to create but from another fundamental drive, to dominate: "The basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is greatest. A technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself." [56] And so every rise in the technical sophistication of entertainment is accompanied by a decline in the political will to justice: "The idea of 'fully exploiting' available technical resources and the facilities for aesthetic mass consumption is part of the economic system which refuses to exploit resources to abolish hunger." [57]

92.

93. It is by means of this image of human "drives" that Horkheimer and Adorno are able to transform the truism that technically sophisticated forms of entertainment operate within an unjust economic system into the morally powerful claim that such entertainment *keeps people hungry*, that improvements in the science of entertainment *proceed only at the expense of* advances in human welfare. In particular, their image of technology as inherently oppressive is what allows them to suggest a *causal* link between high-quality commercials and low-quality anti-poverty efforts, between the impressive special effects in the GAP ad and the expanding gap between the rich and the poor. [58]

94.

95. To sum up their critique, then: the culture industry squanders artistic energy, shores up a dehumanizing work-structure, and enervates the will to social justice. But, and this *is* the rub, its consumers fail to object to these connected effects. Instead, they lap up the entertainment slop. That is to say, they fetishize the art-commodity and enter its thrall as if it was alive. Everyone is well aware that art has *become* commodity -- indeed, art "deliberately admits it is one; art renounces its own autonomy and proudly takes its place among consumption goods" [59] -- but no one seems to mind. Horkheimer and Adorno devote considerable energy to explaining the psychological mechanism of this failure to contest the march of commodification, and in doing so they make an original contribution toward a

phenomenology of consumption. And yet, as I shall argue in the next section, they prematurely abort a promising line of inquiry, the line connecting commodity consumption to a somatic energetics. In so doing, they fail to discern a moment of affinity between commodity fascination and wonder at the world. **Affect and Thought**

96.

97. How is it possible that we accept the unholy admixture of art and commodity? How has an enlightened society returned to the fetish? The crux of Horkheimer and Adorno's response is this: by means of repeated exposure to a form of entertainment that activates and stimulates the senses *in order to* dull them. The creature who walks out of the cinema leaves with the pleasant, refreshed feeling that he has just been exercising his creative imagination. And he has indeed been exerting himself. But this self-exertion has been working in exquisite, intimate cooperation with techniques of slumber exercised upon him by the culture industry. He's been put through his paces pleasantly, and rendered stupid and sleepy through the effort. The same can, of course, be said about the experience of advertisement. Advertising and the culture industry are both instances of "psychotechnology," a "procedure for manipulating men." [60] I may feel exhilarated and enchanted by "Khakis Swing," say Horkheimer and Adorno, but this effect is purchased at the price of stupefaction:

98.

99. The stunting of the mass-media consumer's powers of imagination and spontaneity [can be]... traced back to ... the objective nature of the products themselves, especially to the most characteristic of them, the sound film. They are so designed that quickness, powers of observation, and experience are undeniably needed to apprehend them at all; yet sustained thought is out of the question if the spectator is not to miss the relentless rush of facts. Even though the effort required for his response is [only] semi-automatic, no scope is left for the imagination. [61]

100.

101. Horkheimer and Adorno here offer a good account of the subtle relationship often forged today between personal, authentic-feeling experiences and external, manipulative forces. At the movies, one's own mental acuity ("quickness"), one's own sensory perception ("powers of observation"), and one's own bodily affect ("experience") commingle with the calculated design of an industry devoted to exchange-value. As a result, we're enlisted in our own commercialization; we voluntarily exercise our imagination in ways that stunt it while enjoying pleasurable feelings of activeness or vitality. We get what we ask for: culture-commodities are artificially-induced needs, but *felt* needs nonetheless. Our response is only *semi*-automatic. [62]

102.

103. In this analysis, Horkheimer and Adorno begin to explore the *active* side of what they typically depict as consumer passivity; and they draw our attention to what might be called the affective energetics of consumption. But they don't pursue this dimension long or hard enough. Instead, they allow their insight into the way

commodities manipulate / activate our *bodies* to drown in a vocabulary of *mind*. In the end, they reduce the mechanism of commodification to thought-control. Their nuanced reading of the self's pleasurable investment in consumption thus gives way to a cruder picture of a high-tech industry that imposes a series of mind-numbing techniques upon a population already rendered mentally deficient by its work. Perhaps the best example of their slide into intellectualism is the summary statement that follows the quotation cited above about "quickness, powers of observation, and experience": "The might of industrial society," they conclude, "is lodged in men's minds."[\[63\]](#)

104.

105. And yet they've just shown that at least some of this might is lodged not in *minds* (home to self-conscious thought) but also in *bodily* sites of potentially critical (albeit not originally self-conscious) thought: the eyes that widen, the stomach that roils, the skin that galvanizes and registers "the relentless rush of facts." Here one can detect the influence of the model of materialism inherited from Marx: once matter is figured as "naturally" inert, it will be difficult to sustain the idea of the matter of human *bodies* as an active, and potentially disruptive, force in commodity culture.

106.

107.

108.

109. Horkheimer and Adorno do not ignore the role of affect, as is evidenced by their focus on *aesthetic* commodities and by their acknowledgment of the role played by moods like love.[\[64\]](#) But they underestimate, and then lose sight of too quickly, the spunk or swerve of bodies.

110.

111. Another source of this tendency, alongside the disenchanting materialism of Marx, may be their indebtedness to a Kantian model of self organized into "faculties," including the faculty of aesthetic judgment. Horkheimer and Adorno affirm the need to update that model, but at base endorse its idea that only self-conscious thought is thought and only thought can have critical force. This assumption is operative even in their criticism of Kant: whereas Kant saw the *individual* as the one who would "relate the varied experiences of the senses to fundamental concepts," today the culture-industry does the individual's schematizing for him.[\[65\]](#) It seems to me, however, that if Horkheimer and Adorno had allowed their insight into the role of affect in commodification to stand, they might not have had to bestow such omnipotence upon the culture industry or present the consumer as so thoroughly stripped of agency.[\[66\]](#) They might not, in other words, have had to foreclose all lines of flight save that opened up by the self-conscious and relentlessly skeptical demystification of the sort displayed in their essay. For if the industry operates upon us by means of our affective participation in it, this means that its control over us is simultaneously deep and unpredictable. And that is because affect itself is both deep and never entirely predictable in its movements. And this element of unpredictability opens up the possibility that commodities operate not only with mind-dulling (bare) repetition but also with an ethic-enabling (spiral) repetition of

the sort described in Chapter 3. It opens up the possibility that commercial items can enchant and not just mystify. Let me return briefly to the matter of repetition.**Repetition**

112.

113. Consistent with Marx's idea that commodification is homogenization is Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of mass-produced art as monotonously uniform and deadly to the new. Despite its constant invocation of novelty, the culture industry serves up only formulaic amusements.^[67] Moreover, commercial culture not only repeats, *it repeats perfectly*. It is portrayed as having the ability to reproduce things *exactly*. One could even say that Horkheimer and Adorno "fetishize" the culture industry, animating it with a supernatural degree of efficacy.^[68] This power of perfect duplication is predicated upon the prior process of leveling enacted within exchange-value. Use-value, you will recall, is a realm of sensuous variety, whereas exchange value operates on a dull and flat plane.^[69] In this latter space, "all are free to dance and enjoy themselves, just as they have been free, since the historical neutralization of religion, to join any of the innumerable sects. But freedom to choose an ideology -- since ideology always reflects economic coercion -- everywhere proves to be freedom to choose what is always the same."^[70] Or, put in Deleuzian terms, the culture-industry practices bare repetition.

114.

115. Recall that "bare repetition" is what happens to the absolutely unique material specificity of any assemblage (its "haecicity") once it is placed within a Kantian framework -- wherein it becomes "particularity." According to Kant, thought proceeds by means of the subsumption of "particulars" to "universals." And Horkheimer and Adorno still work with that image of thought. But outside of it, difference itself can persist within repetition: each rotation is recognizably close but not identical to the one before. In this spiral repetition, the "same" repeats but with a twist.^[71]

116.

117.

118.

119. From within a Deleuzian imaginary, then, Horkheimer and Adorno overstate their case about the dulling effect of the repetition of the commercial realm. For why assume that even a system of "mechanical reproduction" is able to produce flawlessly identical copies? At the very least, each copy is put to slightly differential use, thus allowing a bit of the new to take hold. Why assume that matter is such that differences can *only* take the form of "particularities"? If there is difference within repetition, then fetishization is not the only way to describe what is going on. And demystification is not the only response to commodification. Moreover, the "animation" of artifacts that Marx, Horkheimer and Adorno lament might not be all bad. It might embody several dissonant possibilities; it might have *all* of the following incompatible effects: pressing people to submit to the call to consume, distracting them from attending to the unjust social relations embodied in the

product, reminding them that they share the world with non-human modes of agency, drawing them to the wonders of material existence, opening them to unlikely ecological connections and political alliances. If so, then the encounter with animated objects would call sometimes for demystification, sometimes for appreciation of the capacity of non-human things to *act upon us*, and sometimes for both at once. That is, it may be part of our job to bring out the positive elements of advertisement that other forces leave in the shadows. This recognition opens the way for a deliberate receptiveness toward, even an active courting of, those "fetishes" among whose effects can be counted surprise, wonder, even enchantment. **Yea-Saying**

120.

121. I am not saying that enchantment is the only effect issuing from encounters with commercial artifacts. Very often it is what Horkheimer and Adorno call "amusement," a state of being without the unsettling, even dangerous, "swing" element of enchantment. Horkheimer and Adorno contrast amusement, which disables systemic thinking,^[72] with the physical humor and "mindless artistry" of the circus, which "represents what is human as opposed to the social mechanism."^[73] Such "nonsense," they say, is good art -- it provokes a free play of imaginative possibilities which stands in stark contrast to the uniform monotony of capitalist culture. But such artistry is "relentlessly hunted down by a schematic reason" and transformed into the "idiotic plots" of amusement. In this way the culture industry colonizes "genuine personal emotion."^[74]

122.

123. Amusement is an affective state that shares a certain pleasurable with enchantment but lacks its disturbing dimension. One of the ways that enchantment works is by slowing down or speeding up the usual tempo of something, as when the dancers' movement is temporarily frozen in "Khakis Swing." The differential in tempo delights *and unsettles*. In contrast, amusement is too smooth a feeling to admit wonder and surprise, too contented for critical thinking to emerge as an after-effect. Horkheimer and Adorno fail to distinguish between amusement and enchantment (and even amusement may contain rebel energies that might be mobilized in support of ethical concern) and so they equate pleasure per se with moral lassitude: The original affinity of business and amusement is shown in the latter's specific significance: to defend society. To be pleased means to say Yes.... Pleasure always means not to think about anything, to forget suffering even where it is shown. Basically it is helplessness. It is flight.... from the last remaining thought of resistance.^[75]

124.

125. "To be pleased means to say Yes." It does seem that pleasure entails some kind of affirmation. But is the subject to which this assent is addressed always the system-hegemon? "Yes to GAP investors and a corporate system of worker exploitation!" "Yes to WWII and swing dancing!" "Yes to the creativity of the film technician!" "Yes to a human body that can fly with birds and fuse with sound!" "Yes to the exuberance of beige cotton molecules!" Which is it?^[76]

126.

127. And what is the ethical import of pleasurable affirmation? For Horkheimer and Adorno, to say Yes to pleasure is to say No to critical thinking. But while pleasure may entail stupidity, passivity, and, eventually, moral indifference, I contend that it can also enliven, energize, and, under the right circumstances, support ethical generosity. Enchantment and critical theory probably do entail different affective constellations: one can't be enchanted and skeptical *at the same time*, and the unrealism of wonder may induce a sense of generosity but reduce insight into the mechanisms of power. On the other hand, part of the energy needed to challenge injustice comes from the reservoir of enchantment -- including that derived from commodities. For without enchantment you may lack the impetus to act against the very injustices you critically discern. **The Limits of Refusal**

128.

129. Horkheimer and Adorno do not distinguish between amusement and enchantment. Neither do they cultivate generosity as a possible counter to the fascist mentality of the culture industry.^[77] For them, the forces of stupor had recently proved so hideous, so easily re-activated in even liberal, democratic contexts, and so deadly to the large-scale transformations they sought, that even an ethically-useful kind of enchantment was not worth the risk. These forces include not only amusement but also the cynicism generated by the culture industry: In this age of universal publicity any invocation of an ideal appears suspect to us. We have learned how to identify abstract concepts as sales propaganda. Language based entirely on truth simply arouses impatience to get on with the business deal it is probably advancing.^[78]

130.

131. We've learned to equate idealism with con jobs by means of repeated exposure to commercials that invoke ideals for precisely this purpose.^[79] Our two master demystifiers lament *this* cynicism, acknowledging that political change requires not only critical suspicion but a hefty dose of idealistic energy -- energy, for example, on behalf of economic justice and Enlightenment freedom. They assert that the cynicism induced by commercial culture wields little political force. To develop this thought further, one can see how cynicism supports not only complacency but active, right-wing agendas: cynicism reduces expectations of the state and thus diminishes the will to respond collectively to injustices; it is easily mobilized on behalf of anti-tax and get-tough policies that disdain liberal ideals about human rights, the power of education, and the legitimacy of a diverse array of social and personal identities.

132.

133. Horkheimer and Adorno end their essay by noting that widespread cynicism about commodification *fails to interfere* with the commercialized consumption that generates it. We see through ads but keep on buying. They interpret this remarkable fact as the crowning glory of a culture industry bent on controlling the entire life-world. But this is not the only reasonable interpretation of the coexistence of commodity culture and cynical self-consciousness. The consumption that continues alongside knowledge of its manipulative intent may indeed be a sign of just how

deeply that manipulation has entered into us. *But it may also betoken the presence of some non-commercial value that the consumer derives from consumption or from its aesthetic representation in advertisements, some pleasure whose force may be susceptible to ethical deployment.*

134.

135. Horkheimer and Adorno offer a phenomenology of consumption that resonates with much contemporary experience. The primary fear motivating their story is that we live in a system where the forces of domination have become resistant to all but the most relentless strains of critical reflection. That is why they are so adverse to any mood, including enchantment, that falls short of a Kantian standard of thinking. They tend to assimilate such moods to one of the following negative forms: mystification, reification, fetishization. In spite of their portrayal of the culture industry as a closed system, Horkheimer and Adorno still harbor hope for a way out by means of radical critique and demystification. Their essay is an enactment of these techniques, designed to help us see through the mist, to expose the connections between commodification, human stupefaction, and economic injustice.

136.

137. Built into Horkheimer and Adorno's project, then, is an Enlightenment faith in the efficacy of debunking, in the idea that clear sight into injustice carries with it its own *impetus* for undoing wrong and enacting right.^[80] This faith sits uneasily with their depiction of a commodity-cynicism that has little practical effect. If they had applied this insight into the limits of critique to their *own* strategy of debunking, they might have understood more profoundly how an ethical politics requires more than rational demystification. They might have pursued further the affective component of the will to social justice and ethical concern. They might have seen that by discrediting so thoroughly the minor pleasures and inspirations currently available to people, they depress the ethical life and deaden the idealism and somatic will required for significant political and economic reform.^[81] At issue is the moral and political efficacy of critical refusal. Are the effects of commodity culture sufficiently confronted and challenged by a Marxist critique? Or can other modes of engagement, which figure the political field as more contingent and imagine the material world as more animate, also make a difference?

Notes

138.

139. ^[1] T. Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914*, (Verso, 1991), p. 11. (Cited in John Jervis, *Exploring the Modern: Patterns of Western Culture and Civilization* (Blackwell, 1998), p. 95.)

140.

141. ^[2] This essay is drawn from my *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming 2001). The essay owes much to a reading course on commodification and culture with Kathryn Trevenen during the fall 1998 and spring 1999, and I am grateful to her for her contributions to this essay, especially regarding the role of speed, movement, and repetition.

142.

143. [3] Michael McCadden, quoted in Stuart Elliott, "The Media Business: Advertising; The latest music form to find resurrection by mainstream marketers is swing, in all its glory," *The New York Times*, January 18, 1999.

144.

145. [4] My thanks to Bill Chaloupka for helping me develop this description of the ad, and for his thoughts about the limits and insights of a Marxian reading of commercial culture.

146.

147. [5] Franz Kafka, "The Bucket Rider," in *The Complete Stories* (Schocken, 1971), pp. 412-13.

148.

149. [6] Franz Kafka, "Cares of a Family Man," *The Complete Stories*, p. 428.

150.

151. [7] See Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (Vintage, 1989), and Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17 (Hogarth, 1954-1974).

152.

153. [8] Ackbar Abbas, "Cultural Studies in a Postculture," in *Disciplinary and Dissent in Cultural Studies*, eds. Cary Nelson and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, Routledge, 1996, pp. 291-92.

154.

155. [9] Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption*, Indiana University Press, 1988, p. xv.

156.

157. [10] Frank DeCaro, "Millennium a Go-Go: Frugging to 2000," *New York Times*, April 18, 1999, Section 9, p. 1.

158.

159. [11] Allan Schnaiberg and Kenneth Alan Gould, *Environment and Society: The Enduring Conflict*, St. Martin's, 1994, p. 25.

160.

161. [12] These themes are developed in Michael Best and William E. Connolly, *The Politicized Economy* (D.C. Heath, 1976); William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minnesota, 1995), ch. 4; Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth* (Harvard, 1976); John Buell, *Democracy by Other Means: The Politics of Work, Leisure and the Environment* (Illinois, 1995).

162.

163. [13] See E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*

164.

165. [14] Might the fear that changing the infrastructure of consumption would entail the end of pleasure in consumption be one source of cultural resistance to the adoption of more eco-friendly ways of life?

166.

167. [15] John Jervis, *Exploring the Modern*, Blackwell, 1998, p. 98.

168.

169. [16] See Wendy Brown, *States of Injury*, Princeton, 1995, especially pp. 59-60. I share Brown's concern to mitigate the role of *ressentiment* in contemporary politics: for me enchantment is an important counter to resentment, as affective states predispose

their bearers for or against a particular existential state as well as political program. I am grateful to Brown for her critical response to this chapter at a 1999 American Political Science Association panel.

170.

171. [17] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Minnesota, 1986, pp. 216 and 226.

172.

173. [18] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. II., p. 952.

174.

175. [19] *Capital*, vol. II, p. 953.

176.

177. [20] *Capital*, vol. I, p. 166.

178.

179. [21] Michael Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, University of North Carolina, 1983, pp. 25-6.

180.

181. [22] Frederick Jameson refers to this as "the mystery of the equivalence of radically different things." (*Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Duke, 1991, p. 233.)

182.

183. [23] *Capital*, vol. I, p. 953.

184.

185. [24] My thanks to Melissa Orlie for pressing me not to lose sight of the question of power in commodification. For a subtle and fascinating reading of commodity-enchantment as expressive of a thwarted or underground desire for democratic politics, and an excellent account of the role of techniques of the self in a democratic ethos, see her " ," 1999 American Political Science Association paper.

186.

187. [25] Taussig, p. 4.

188.

189. [26] *Capital*, vol. I, pp. 163-5.

190.

191. [27] Karl Marx, "The Leading Article in No. 179 of the *Kölnische Zeitung*," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, Karl Marx: 1835-43, Lawrence and Wishart, 1975, p.189.

192.

193. [28] Oxford English Dictionary. Jean Baudrillard, in his Marxist incarnation, puts the point this way: in their "splendour and profusion," we forget that commodities are "the product of a human activity and are dominated not by natural ecological laws, but by the law of exchange-value." (*The Consumer Society*, Sage, 1998, p. 26.)

194.

195. [29] My thanks to John Docker for these points. For Docker, "perhaps what Marx and modernists like Adorno and Horkheimer share is a messianic desire to effect total change in modern society by punishing the people for their reversion to paganism and permitting themselves to be seduced (made passive, as if female?) by the commodity or advertising fetish." (email, June 9, 1999) See also his *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, Cambridge, 1994.

196.

197. [30] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, for example, emphasize the Marx for whom the "multitude" is less a primitive than a protean, vital force: "The multitude is the real productive force of our social world, whereas Empire is a mere apparatus of capture that lives only off the vitality of the multitude -- as Marx would say, a vampire regime of accumulated dead labor that survives only by sucking off the blood of the living." (*Empire*, Harvard, 2000, p. 62) For Hardt and Negri, the "teleology" of the multitude "consists in the possibility of directing technologies and production toward its own joy and its own increase of power." Moreover, (industrial, intellectual, aesthetic, communicative) laborers "cannot be completely subjugated to the laws of capitalist accumulation -- at every moment they overflow and shatter the bounds of measure." (pp. 396-97) Here Hardt and Negri discern in Marx a conception of power closer to that of Deleuze and Guattari than Horkheimer and Adorno.

198.

199. [31] T. Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914*, (Verso, 1991), p. 11. (Cited in John Jervis, *Exploring the Modern: Patterns of Western Culture and Civilization* (Blackwell, 1998), p. 95.)

200.

201. [32] Norman D. Livergood, *Activity in Marx's Philosophy*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1967, p. 3.

202.

203. [33] "Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature," (Marx's doctoral dissertation) in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, Karl Marx: 1835-43, Lawrence and Wishart, 1975, pp. 42-43.

204.

205. [34] "Difference," p. 49.

206.

207. [35] C. J. McFadden, *The Philosophy of Communism* NY: Benziger Bros, 1939, p. 27, quoted in Livergood, p. 3.

208.

209. [36] "Difference," p. 49.

210.

211. [37] Livergood, p. ix.

212.

213. [38] "Difference," p. 50.

214.

215. [39] "Difference," pp. 50-51. *Ataraxy* is the state of the sage who has attained inner freedom through knowledge of nature and deliverance from fear of death. (See Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, Notes, #21, p. 736.)

216.

217. [40] "Difference," p. 70.

218.

219. [41] "Difference," p. 72.

220.

221. [42] George F. McCarthy, *Marx and the Ancients: Classical Ethics, Social Justice and Nineteenth Century Political Economy*, Rowman & Littlefield, 1990, pp. 30-31.

222.

223. [43] McCarthy, pp. 40-41.

224.

225. [44] McCarthy, p. 45.

226.

227. [45] "Notebooks on Epicurean Philosophy," *Collected Works*, vol. 1, Karl Marx: 1835-43, Lawrence and Wishart, 1975, p. 416.

228.

229. [46] McCarthy, p. 25.

230.

231. [47] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, Herder and Herder, 1972, p. 120.

232.

233. [48] Horkheimer and Adorno, pp. 134-35.

234.

235. [49] Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 137.

236.

237. [50] Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 130.

238.

239. [51] Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 126. This sense of the systemic quality of the culture industry is presented in more semiotic terms by Baudrillard. For him, consumption takes the form of a "chain of *signifiers*... [O]bjects are never offered for consumption in absolute disorder. They... are always arranged to ... orientate the purchasing impulse towards *networks* of objects in order to captivate that impulse and bring it... to the limits of its economic potential. Clothing, machines and toiletries thus constitute object *pathways*, which establish inertial constraints in the consumer... He will be caught up in *acalculus* of objects, and this is something quite different from the frenzy of buying and acquisitiveness to which the simple profusion of commodities gives rise." (*The Consuming Society*, p. 27.)

240.

241. [52] What is the standard of art against which Horkheimer and Adorno judge and find wanting the culture industry? It is an art that self-negates, i.e., displays its own *inability* to reconcile its transformative aspirations with its dependence upon the status quo. It is an art cognizant of the fact that what "enables it to transcend reality ... is to be found in those features in which discrepancy appears; in the necessary failure of the passionate striving for identity." (p. 31.) Critchley endorses a similar conception of art (see Chapter IV).

242.

243. This is a theme that Adorno develops more fully in *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*. As Morton Schoolman puts it, art becomes "the only form of thought able to convey the nonrepresentational character of nature, nature's nonidentity, and to expose the illusion of any aesthetic impersonation of being." See Morton Schoolman, "Towards a Politics of Darkness: Individuality and Its Politics in Adorno's Aesthetics," *Political Theory*, Feb 1997, pp. 57-92. I am also indebted to Schoolman for his sensitive reading of this chapter.

244.

245. [53] Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 128.

- 246.
247. [54]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 129.
- 248.
249. [55]"Amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work. It is sought after as an escape from the mechanized work process... but.... mechanization has such power over a man's leisure... that... [leisure] experiences are inevitably after-images of the work process itself." (Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 137.)
- 250.
251. [56]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 121.
- 252.
253. [57]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 139.
- 254.
255. [58]This is not to deny that GAP, Inc. contributes to economic injustice. According to the Wetlands Preserve Environmental and Social Justice Activism Center (<http://www.wetlands-preserve.org>), GAP was one of eighteen U.S. clothing companies named in a lawsuit accusing them of using indentured labor -- predominantly young women from Asia -- to produce clothing on the island of Saipan.
- 256.
257. [59]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 157.
- 258.
259. [60]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 163.
- 260.
261. [61]Horkheimer and Adorno, pp. 126-27.
- 262.
263. [62]"Demand has not yet been replaced by simple obedience." (Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 136.) Baudrillard makes a related point when he writes that "the whole system of values rests on this: there is in the consumer an absolute instinct which inclines him by essence towards his preferential ends -- the *moral* myth of consumption which is the direct heir to the idealist myth of man as naturally inclined towards the Beautiful and the Good..." (*The Consumer Society*, p. 175.)
- 264.
265. [63]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 127.
- 266.
267. [64]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 134.
- 268.
269. [65]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 124.
- 270.
271. [66]"The totality of the culture industry ... crushes ... insubordination and makes [it]...subserve the formula.... The whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry." (Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 126.)
- 272.
273. [67]"The universal triumph of the rhythm of mechanical production and reproduction promises that nothing changes." (Horkheimer and Adorno, pp. 134-5.)
- 274.
275. [68]John Docker makes a similar point when he says that the Culture Industry essay assumes "a smooth fit between aesthetic forms, images, representations and non-aesthetic realms, ... as if the capitalist world was a smoothly functioning totality,

without divergence, disjunction, conflict, contradiction, questioning, challenge, reversal, inversion, messiness, inexplicability, enigma." (*Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, p. 43.)

276.

277. [69] For Horkheimer and Adorno, contemporary culture is merely the highest form, the realization, of a leveling tendency inherent in culture per se: "today aesthetic barbarity completes what has threatened the creations of the spirit since they were gathered together as culture and neutralized.... Culture as a common denominator already contains in embryo that schematization... which bring[s] culture within the sphere of administration." (Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 131.)

278.

279. [70] Horkheimer and Adorno, pp. 166-67.

280.

281. [71] "Re-petition opposes *re*-presentation: the prefix changes its meaning, since in the [latter]... case difference is said only in relation to the identical, ...in the other it is the univocal which is said of the different. [Spiral] repetition is the formless being of all differences, ... which carries every object to that extreme 'form' in which its representation comes undone. The ultimate element of repetition is the disparate [*dispar*], which stands opposed to the identity of representation." See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, Columbia, 1994, p. 57.

282.

283. [72] Amusement "is possible only by insulation from the totality of the social process, by desensitization... [to] the ... claim of every work ... to reflect the whole..." (Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 144.)

284.

285. [73] Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 143.

286.

287. [74] Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 144.

288.

289. [75] Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 144.

290.

291. [76] Daston and Park show how the wondrous and the commodified have had a long history of cohabitation. As far back as the twelfth century, Europeans "craved direct contact with wonders.... In addition to being textual objects -- things to think about and think with -- natural wonders were also things in and of themselves: gems with marvelous properties, exotic plants and animals, and even human beings of unusual or unfamiliar appearance.... [T]he value of such mirabilia sprang in part from their scarcity in the European market. As a result, wonders were also commodities: to be bartered, bought, sold, collected, and sometimes literally consumed." (*Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150-1750*, pp. 66-67.)

292.

293. [77] "In the culture industry the individual is an illusion not merely because of the standardization of the means of production. He is tolerated only so long as his complete identification with the generality is unquestioned. Pseudo individuality is rife: from the standardized jazz improvisation to the exceptional film star whose hair curls over her eye.... The bourgeois whose existence is split into a business and

a private life, whose private life is split into keeping up his public image and intimacy, whose intimacy is split into the surly partnership of marriage and the bitter comfort of being quite alone, at odds with himself and everybody else, is already virtually a Nazi, replete both with enthusiasm and abuse..." (Horkheimer and Adorno, pp. 154-55.)

294.

295. [78] Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 147.

296.

297. [79] "Anyone who doubts the power of monotony is a fool." (Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 148.)

298.

299. [80] As James Schmidt shows, after the completion of (the collection of fragments called) *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, "Horkheimer and Adorno turned their attention to ... the manuscript's sequel: a 'positive theory of dialectics' that would explain how the 'rescue of enlightenment' might be accomplished." (James Schmidt, "Language, Mythology, and Enlightenment: Historical Notes on Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*," *Social Research*, Winter 1998, p. 811.) Schmidt also notes that "none of the material that was said to have been completed has yet been found." (p. 820).

300.

301. [81] Adorno may realize this in other texts, especially *Negative Dialectics*, but even so, he does not apply it to consumption.

302.

303.

Jane Bennett is professor of political science at Goucher College. She is a member of the *Theory & Event* Coordinating Editors board. Her new book is entitled *The Enchantments of Contemporary Life: Crossings, Energetics, and Ethics*. It will be published this spring by Princeton University Press. She can be reached at jbennett@goucher.edu

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