Adorno and Greenberg, 1933 to 1939

By Vaughn Whitney Garland

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Modernism & the Dialectic

Dr. Victoria Scott

"'When you spend Saturday night in a illegal dance hall, there is no energy left for Sunday-morning mass.'"[1]

In the debates about aesthetics, culture, music and visual arts in postwar American Modernism, the names Clement Greenberg and Theodor W. Adorno appear frequently. Greenberg and Adorno championed a high modernist aesthetic that connected the avant-garde and the cultured elite. The simultaneous emergence of popular culture and new aesthetic philosophies, in terms of a national, social, and cultural identity, brought Adorno and Greenberg's concepts to life. Despite what is typically thought about the origins of the arguments regarding avant-garde and kitsch argument in the art world and its theoretical reliance on Greenberg as the primary and original source, it was Adorno, not Greenberg, who began the discussion about the roles and responsibilities of the avant-garde. While the ideas put forward by both Greenberg in his essay "Avant-garde and Kitsch" and Adorno's work "On Jazz" are the impetus for many of the arguments made regarding the role of the avant-garde, I will suggest that the modernist discourse concerning popular culture and its relationship to the avant-garde began instead with an article published by Theodor Adorno in 1936.

Since the publication of "Avant-garde and Kitsch," the aesthetic discourse in the United States has frequently focused on Greenberg. However, Adorno's article "On Jazz," which was published earlier, with its critique on the bourgeois and proletariat music jazz, may have actually been the foundation of modernist theory. While I find it important to suggest the comparison for further study. I have not found direct

[1] Harry Cooper. "On 'Über Jazz': Replaying Adorno with the Grain," (*October* 75 Winter, 1996):101

correspondence between Greenberg and Adorno during these first few years. However, I do find worthy of note the similarity between the terms and concepts used by Greenberg to those which Adorno used only a few years prior. While further study would be useful to clarify relationship between the times, dates, and places in which these arguments took place, this paper will only comment on the ways in which one might find comparison within the texts.

The relationship between the avant-garde and kitsch provided the foundations for an ongoing aesthetical and cultural debate throughout the twentieth century, especially during the late 1930's and early 1940. That debate was largely informed by Marxist philosophy, which posited that individuals were products within a larger system of cultural practices that encouraged the exploitation of those individuals. While Marxist philosophy made its way into the cultural critique in the twentieth century. it was critics, philosophers, and theoreticians who grabbed hold of this philosophy in order to comment on the roles of commodity and consumerism in the higher forms of art making. Clement Greenberg has been largely considered the primary figure responsible for revealing the theoretical separations between high culture and low culture within the context of the general art world because of his 1939 article titled "Avant-garde and Kitsch." In this singular article Greenberg's observed that high culture, the avant-garde, is the only real hope for a better type of art. At the same time, Greenberg suggested that art made by and for mass culture, which he calls *kitsch* (art produced specifically for the daily digestion of the masses), was not dialectical enough to push true high art forward. "Because it can be turned out mechanically, kitsch has become an integral part of our productive system in a way in which true culture could never be, except accidentally. It has been capitalized at a

tremendous investment which must show commensurate returns: it is compelled to extend as well as to keep it markets."[2] Greenberg tasked the selected avant-garde with saving art from being placed in a lower category of appreciation. Likewise, Theodor Adorno took the same stand against jazz that Greenberg took against kitsch. Adorno's critique, no matter how flawed its language is, is not only a critique of jazz but a critique of mass culture: "jazz offered a better cipher of society, a clearer locus of truth, than 'autonomous' art."[3] Importantly, Adorno made this critique in two articles prior to the publication of "Avant-garde and Kitsch."

The first Adorno article about the musical style jazz appeared in 1933, followed by a second article appeared in 1936. In 1939, Adorno also published a book about Richard Wagner also alluded to the importance of the avant-garde in its relationship to mass culture. *On Jazz* the article published in 1936 is considered the most significant because it established a dialectical arguments between two seemingly opposites-- high culture and low culture. Both Adorno and Greenberg used the dialectical structure to try and arrive as some sort of statement of truth from the back and forth of thesis/antithesis. This negation of what is and what is not resides at the center of the critique of culture.

The dialectic is nothing new. Many of the modern notions of dialectical understanding come the German Philosopher G.W.F. Hegel. Hegel's dialectical structure considers the identity of an object and the negation of that identity. According to Hegel's logic, the negation of the original leads to a revelation of a new being-- a somewhat more truthful acknowledgement of the original. This truth is revealed through the process of "becoming," which is realized in the master/slave relationship Hegel

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[2] Clement Greenberg. *Art and culture: (Critical Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1965, 1961): 7
[3] Harry Cooper. "On 'Über Jazz': Replaying Adorno with the Grain," (*October* 75 Winter, 1996):105

describes *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel suggests a realization of the lord to his serf and the serf to his lord wherein one sees a becoming of the other. In this case, and on which case Marx bases his ideas, the serf realizes that without his work the lord has nothing. At the same time, Hegel suggests that in that realization the lord then realizes without the serf that he cannot be lord. Here, we have the negation of one another and at the same time a synthesis of the two:

> To begin with, servitude has the lord for it essential reality; hence the truth for it is the independent consciousness that is *for itself*. However, servitude is not yet aware that this truth is implicit in it. But it does in fact contain within itself this truth of pure negativity and being for-self, for its has experienced this its own essential nature. For this consciousness has been fearful, not of this or that particular thing or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread; for it has experienced the fear of death, the absolute Lord. In that experience it has been quite unmanned, has trembled in every fiber of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations.[4]

Here Hegel is suggesting that the realization of the serf to his lord is really a product of the knowledge and identity realization of the serf, that it is in the negation of himself that he find himself. This must be the moment when Marx starting jumping up and down. The realization of the negation, the synthesis, brings about the awareness on not only the individual but the entire system in which the serf and the lord are engaged. The synthesis of this moment is the driving force behind many post-Hegelian philosophers, as it defines the process of "becoming." Andrew Cole understands this Hegelian negation as paramount to Marx, "There is no need to say again, that Hegel had diagnosed feudalism properly; rather, it is important to see that Hegel's view of feudalism displays yet another social fantasy of economic life, fur a fantasy that has become constitutive of a staggering wide body of contemporary theory, beginning with Marx, who among the most important

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[4] G.W.F Hegel. *The Phenomenology of Spirit.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979):117

of post-Hegelians appreciated the critical promise of Hegel's feudalism, a conceptual space in which all condition of exploitation are 'laid bare,' revealed to be 'as they really are."[5] While rather circular, Hegel's negations are viewed much more like a spiral, never circling back to the same position as the original statement and yet the outcome continues to enable more dialectical oppositions.

Greenberg and Adorno both relied on the dialectical structure for their critiques on mass culture, music, and the visual arts. While much of Greenberg's viewpoint changed through the rest of his career, it is widely understood that a fundamental shift occurred in Greenberg's writings in the early 1940s, when he adopted the Marxist dialectic as a platform for his arguments. While he considered himself a socialist until 1947, Greenberg had renounced dialectical materialism by in 1942, gradually moving toward qualified liberal positivism."[6] On the other hand the art, historian and critic Donald Kuspit suggests that Greenberg continued to use the dialectical argument throughout his work, but did so by revealing that as long as there is a positing of characteristics from one side or the other the dialectical argument continues to show the vitality of art and the need for that vitality to continue.

> Greenberg is not unaware of the ironies of self-negation in the realization of art…He is more aware, however, of dialectical conversion as a kind of 'wrench,' in part the sign of '*retroactive* power,' 'by which a long and rich tradition' still asserts itself. It reverses direction to reexplore its possibilities, reviving lost, overlooked, or still latent yet realizable possibilities. Dialectical conversion is an indication of the enduring viability of what seems a finished art, and of its new possibilities in aesthetic experience. This leads to a reexperiencing of it, as in Greenberg's treatment of the later Monet, who is freshly perceived as an abstract painter rather than traditionally as am impressionist. The transcendence of

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[5]Andrew Cole. "What Hegel's Master/Slave Dialectic Really Means." (*Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34/3 Fall 2004): 577-610

[6]Nancy Jachec. "Adorno, Greenberg and Modernist Politics." (*Telos* 110 Winter 1998): 107

> opposites is a sign of the unforeseeable release of an art's energy in the process of working it out to its 'logical' conclusion.[7]

Adorno was much more methodical about his dialectical arguments, even suggesting that his good friend Walter Benjamin's writings were not dialectical enough. Frustration over the fact that one of Benjamin's articles did not do the dialectics enough justice actually led Adorno to write "On Jazz," which was published alongside Benjamin's seminal work *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. It was this article from Benjamin which spurred Adorno's critique of culture. "His [Adorno's] most general criticism was of Benjamin's allegedly un-dialectical use of such categories as the fetishism of commodities…Tied to this criticism was Adorno's dissatisfaction with Benjamin's use of 'dialectical images' (Dialektische Bilder), which were objective crystallization of the historical process." [8] The appearance of the Benjamin article, which commented on a wide range of technological advancements including photography and film, built on the idea that mass culture could serve as a common ground between technology and artists. The article also addresses the artistic use of reproduction and mass copies:

> In the theatre one is well aware of the place from which the play cannot immediately be detected as illusionary. There is no such place for the movie scene that is being shot. Its illusionary nature is that of the second degree the result of cutting. That is to say, in the studio the mechanical equipment has penetrated so deeply into reality that its pure aspect freed from the foreign substance of equipment is the result of a special procedure, namely, the shooting by the specially adjusted camera and the mounting of the shot together with other similar ones. The equipment-free aspect of reality here has become the height of artifice: the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology…with regards to the screen, the critical and the receptive attitudes of the public coincide. The decisive reason for this is that individual reactions are

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[7]Donald Kuspit. *Clement Greenberg, Art Critic*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979): 23-24

[8]Martin Jay. *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 207

> predetermined by the mass audience response they are about to produce, and this is nowhere more pronounced than in the film. The moment these responses become manifest they control each other[9]

While Benjamin and Adorno were close friends, often working on articles at the same time through their own personal correspondence, this particular set of articles quite honestly shows how the correspondence continued between Adorno and Benjamin. Adorno's 1936 article connected directly to the ongoing correspondence with Benjamin and was done so between some times of great pressure— during the rise of the Nazi party and Adorno's flight from Germany to England and finally to America:

> One might well find onself wondering why…he [Adorno] chose to write this essay on jazz in 1936, during a period when all of his writing was done under considerable duress in the face of Hitler's rise to power and his own imminent emigration to America. The essay did not appear 'out of the blue,' as it were, but was written as a response to Walter Benjamin's essay of the same year, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.' Indeed, '*Uber Jazz'* could be read on one level as a long variation on the theme of Benjamin's comment in that essay that human subjectivity was now alienated from itself and its own best interests to such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order,' a formulation Adorno echoes throughout his essay.[10]

Between the years 1927 and 1933, Adorno spent much of his time traveling to Berlin, where he would visit his future wife and friends like Benjamin, Siedfried Kracauer, Ernst Block, Otto Klemperer, Moholy-Nagy, and Bertolt Brecht. In Berlin, Adorno would be introduced to the jazz world of Germany in the 1930 and to the

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[9]Walter Benjamin. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007): 233-234

[10]Jamie Owen Daniel. trans., "Introduction to Adorno's 'Uber Jazz,'" (*Discourse:* 12, 1 Fall/Winter 1998-1990): 42 Daniel uses a quote from a correspondence between Adorno and Benjamin that I feel is important here. In this quote Adorno is writing to Benjamin to comment on his hope to include the 'Uber Jazz' article with Benjamin's article. "I would be very pleased if it [his 'Uber Jazz' article} appeared together with your study. Its subject is a very modest one, but it probably converges with yours in its decisive points, and will attempt to express positively some of the things that I have formulated negatively today. It arrives at a complex verdict on jazz, in particular by revealing its "progressive" elements (semblance of montage, collective work, primacy of reproduction over production) as facades of something that is in truth quite reactionary.

language and lingo of jazz music that he would critique in his 1933 article titled "A Farewell to Jazz." Berlin was at the time a roaring political, artistic, and social hub, especially for the cultural thinkers who were at the time considered to lean toward a leftist philosophy:

> Berlin in the twenties was the new Paris, attracting artist and literary figures like a magnet. Here avant-garde art and leftist political theory converged. Adorno later said that the Zeitgeist appeared to be with his circle there…For Adorno's friends, Berlin was an experimental workshop for a new aesthetics politically committed to the goals of Marxist revolution. But in opposition to the Marxism of the party, the Berlin circle considered art too important to view it as a mere economically determined epiphenomenon. Whereas the communist Party ultimately condemned modern art as a manifestation of bourgeois decadence, Brecht believed that the new aesthetic techniques could be 'refunctioned' (unfunktioniert), dialectically transformed from bourgeois tools into revolutionary ones which could bring about a critical consciousness of the nature of bourgeois society.[11]

Adorno must have been inundated with intellectual stimulation from his conversations with this group of friends, even learning the language of jazz from his friend Matyas Seiber. "If this was his informal jazz training ground, the 'information' in the jazz essay was gained in conversations with Matyas Seiber, a leading Frankfurt jazz teacher and writer from whom Adorno learned enough to turn the lingo to his own ends."[12]

In 1933, the National Socialist German Workers' Party defeated Germany's Weimar Republic. The Weimar Republic, which was formed in 1919, was considered a liberal democracy that called for social participation from its citizens, in the forms of voting and other democratic responsibilities. During the Weimar Republic era, the arts thrived, especially jazz music. In fact the time of the Weimar Republic was called

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[11]Susan Buck-Morss. *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter* Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute. (New York: Free Press, 1977):20

[12]Harry Cooper. "On 'Über Jazz': Replaying Adorno with the Grain," (*October* 75 Winter, 1996):109

"Germany's Age of Jazz."[13] Adorno spent many years traveling to Berlin and engaging with his circle of friends, and listening to the jazz being produced by the commercial entertainers. The exposure to this type of commercial jazz had an impact on his ideas. This is one of the main critiques of Adorno's rejection of jazz-- that he did not know what true jazz was, because he did not hear anything outside of what he heard during this time in Berlin. One of the hardest critics of this Adorno was Bradford Robinson, author of the essay "The Jazz Essays of Theodor Adorno: Some Thoughts on jazz Reception in Weimar Germany." In this essay Robinson suggests that Adorno's critique of jazz must be looked at as a critique of the Weimar Republic style and not the true progressive form of American High Jazz:

> Our first step must to be removed two misconceptions associated with Adorno's use of the term 'jazz': first, that it referred to what we regard today as jazz, and second, that the music it referred to was American. Neither was the case. Because of the peculiar manner in which American popular music was introduced into Weimar Germany, Adorno could not have known that when he took up his pen to polemicize against jazz he was writing about a specifically German brand of music. Adorno's jazz writings, although post-dating the Weimar Republic, must be read within the context of Weimar Germany's commercial music scene as a whole, a context largely forgotten today and, due to the predations of recent history, extremely difficult to reconstruct.[14]

1n 1933, when the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) everything changed for Germany and for those living under the new party's rule. Due to the change in the political structure and a new fear for personal and intellectual safety, revolutionary philosophers, artists, and theorists fled to other countries. Many of these individuals finally settled in America. In many cases, one of the first stages of the immigration to America was through London, England, which was Adorno's own path,

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[13] Bradford Robinson. "The Jazz Essays of Theodor Adorno: Some Thoughts on Jazz Reception in Weimar Germany," (*Popular Music*, 13, 1 Jan., 1994):2

[14] ibid. 1

which would eventually lead him to California. But before he had left Germany, Adorno published his first critique on jazz entitled "Abschied Vom Jazz" (Farewell to Jazz) in 1933. One of the reasons why Adorno spoke against jazz was its perceived identity as commodity. Furthermore, a national ban on jazz by the NSDAP outlawed jazz on any German radio station. While this article in my mind is not a notion of support the NSGWP-- that would be going way too far-- it was the perfect time and setting for Adorno to address his problems with the jazz style. "Adorno insists, [jazz] has already lived out its life span and succumbed to other forms of commercial pressure, the radio ban accomplished nothing that had not already occurred from natural causes."[15] For Adorno, the development and popularity of jazz exemplified how commodity muddied the water of the fine arts. As in a statement similar to one made by the NSDAP, Adorno declared jazz as a symptom of the bourgeois class. To Adorno, jazz was part of the culture of kitsch, geared toward commodity instead of the dialectical devoted high arts. "Adorno's real subject was the reception of jazz. Rather, the subject is the representation in jazz. Adorno's dictum that 'jazz is what it is used for' should be taken literally: jazz is *pure* ideology, *nothing other* than a commodity, a commodity in *the strict sense*."[16]

Between 1933 and 1939, the world changed considerably— illuminating class structures, gaps, and cultural demographics as new technologies made way for large factories, infrastructure building, and the realization of the worldwide economy with the presence of a growing international stock market. The early 1930s was a time of great expansion and prosperity, especially in mass media communication technologies like radio, film, the arts, etc. With these new advancements, fear, apprehension, and even

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[15]Theodor Adorno. "On Jazz," translated by J. Owen Daniel. *(Discourse* 12:1):2

[16]Harry Cooper. "On 'Über Jazz': Replaying Adorno with the Grain," (*October* 75 Winter, 1996):116

disparagement, began rising about where new technologies would lead and how they would impact society. It is this time, the moment of technological innovation, that Adorno and Greenberg watched closely. Both Adorno and Greenberg addressed concerns of modern life through their critiques on painting, jazz, sculpture, and the like, in order to monitor the development of the high arts and the avant-garde. Through critiquing modern mass culture, Greenberg and Adorno hoped to give art new life and a new, better, direction. Throughout their entire careers as critics, not just through these formative years, Greenberg and Adorno argued for the best in art instead of falling victim to the overwhelming increase of mass culture:

> Clearly, says Greenberg, there has been a 'decay of our present society'—the words are his—which corresponds in many ways to all these gloomy precedents. What is new is the course of art in this situation. No doubt bourgeois culture is in crisis, more and more unable since Marx to justify the inevitability of its particular forms'; but it has spawned, half in opposition to itself, half at its service, a peculiar and durable artistic tradition—the one we call modernist and what Greenberg then called, using its own label, avant-garde." [17]

On the one hand, Adorno's theoretical direction moved into a type of cultural damnation, where he warned that the avant-garde needed to take hold in order to save the world from total collapse. The evolution of both Adorno and Greenberg's theories during the years between 1933 and 1939 provided the foundation for early theories of modernism, giving the structure to the discussion concerning the avant-garde and the total role of art. As Adorno lectured on the increasing presence of mass culture, he was creating a negative dialectic, revealing that even in the discussion on the avant-garde and kitsch, there is the Hegelian negation taking place, where one may hope to find truth through the negation of what is present. It is this dialectical argument, even in its nastiest

[17] T.J. Clark "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art," (*Critical Inquiry* 9, 1. Sept., 1982):144

of moments, that we find Adorno's deep need for truth, especially within the context of the incredible swell of technological advancements. The desire to find truth, for Adorno, starts with the negative dialectic. This argumentative encounter, which Adorno uses as the basis of his work and suggests is the foundation of the high artwork comes from the negation of the thesis. As G. W. F Hegel suggests that negation of the thesis, the antithesis, causes a synthesis that is truth, or the presence of such truth. For Adorno, mass culture could not fully interact with this dialectical structure, because in order to negate one must remove oneself from the thesis. For Adorno, mass culture had no ability to fully remove from its location because of its overwhelming ties to identity. Because of the failure of mass culture to be able to step outside, away from such notions like commodity, it could not start the process of negation, which he also calls "non identity thinking:

> According to Adorno, there are three ways of thinking: identity thinking, non-identity thinking and rational identity thinking. The first, *identity thinking*, occurs when we use a concept paradigmatically to pick out those particulars it denotes. It is the relation between universal and particular. Adorno is not concerned primarily with this aspect of identity thinking. He is not proposing a theory of meaning. More importantly this aspect of identifying is the *pragmatic*, nature controlling function of thought. However, concepts also refer to their objects, and by this he means to the condition of their ideal existence. This is the *utopian* aspect of identifying. For the concept to identify its object in this sense the particular object would have to have all the properties of its ideal state. Adorno calls this condition rational identity (*rationale Identität)*. But identity thinking, which is our normal mode of thinking, implies that the concept is rationally identical with its object. However, given the present state of society (the capitalist mode of production), the concept cannot identify its true object. The consciousness which perceives this is *non-identity* thinking or *negative dialectic*. Adorno claims that the possibility of thinking differently from our paradigmatic mode of thinking is inherent in that very mode of thinking. [18]

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[18]Gillian Rose. The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978): 44.

This very principle of identity thinking is the foundation of Adorno's critiques of jazz and music as a whole. "Since the artwork, indeed, cannot be reality, the elimination of its characteristic elements of semblance only throws all the more glaringly into relief the semblance character of its existence. The process is inevitable. The annulment of the artwork's characteristic elements of semblance is demanded by its own consistency." [19] For jazz to be property of the dialectic, it would must have been released from mass culture and from its own identity, and since mass culture is in large part determined by the social capitalists modes of production, the identity cannot disconnect from its true object and thus cannot cooperate with the negation of itself. Primarily Adorno's viewpoint, one that must be remembered when critiquing his understanding of culture, stems from Hegel's process of becoming and Marx's critique of commodity structure.

Through the philosophy learned from Hegel and from Marx, the identity of mass culture develops into the primary subject of debate for Adorno, who felt that the increase in technology and in art of the progressing culture was in large part bringing about less interest in dialectical. Adorno felt that culture, specifically jazz, was in its own definition less Hegelian dialectical, because of its relationship to commodity. Yet, even despite his complaint about jazz and mass culture, Adorno could not stop them, but maybe that was not the point. Maybe, the argument itself caused jazz to be more dialectical, a topic left open for further research. Adorno's arguments against mass culture have even sparked more interest in its own identity, even extending into the 21st century. The jazz articles themselves have become ammunition for a wide range of critique and criticism. Adorno's discussion on the dialectic of music, specifically jazz, have informed our own

[19]Theodor Adorno. *Philosophy of New Music*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006):57

ideas about mass culture and high art even better but why was mass culture really that important for him? While others have tried to figure out Adorno's hatred for jazz or if he really knew what American jazz was, only relying on German Weimar jazz as a reference. I tend to agree with Jamie Owen Daniel when, in his introduction, he suggests that Adorno was not just building an argument against jazz music itself but against the whole of culture. Adorno's jazz articles were a constructive discussion of the whole of mass culture, jazz played the part of the metaphor for something he saw largely happening in film, music, and art. "'Uber Jazz' is not really 'about' its purported subject, it is not about jazz as such, but rather about what its commercial production and consumption in the Europe of the 1930's represents." [20]

One of the reasons why mass culture became so important in early twentieth century was the creation of national identity, propelled in large part at the end of WWI, and through technological advancement. This idea of national identity began to inspire the philosophical discourse that we see in Greenberg's theories of American art as opposed to art from other countries and were being addressed by Adorno in later comparisons of German and American jazz. A national identity became important, especially for the Nazi party, which was in effect trying to build one large cultural identity. This same mentality expanded into the United States as a possible juxtaposition to the German, and even Parisian, identity of aesthetics. What is more important, especially for Adorno, are the conditions of his writings. The fact that Adorno was writing during a time of great displacement of identify, culture, and nation should be of

[20]Jamie Owen Daniel. "Introduction to Adorno's 'Uber Jazz,'" (*Discourse:* 12,1 Fall/Winter 1998-1990): 39-40

great consideration when looking at his own critique of culture. Nico Isreal calls the writings taking place between displacements as "outlandish:"

> To read outlandish writing as rhetorical is to pursue Paul de man's most radical claims about the 'primordially' linguistic nature of tropes ant the necessity of attending to this ineluctable primordiality. But it is also to take p the implicit challenge of de Man's late essays as to demonstrate the persistent value of such rhetorical reading for the criticism of culture and ideology…To ask how representation of displacement are constructed and sustained linguistically is also to encounter the specific discursive filiations with which such writing intersects, that is, with other emerging forms of cross-cultural and transnational knowledge.[21]

Greenberg, among others, felt American aesthetics had progressed so much that the American style was a new leader in the world of art during the 1930 and 1940's. New York, where Greenberg was based, became the cultural center for the world, overtaking elite cities like Paris and Berlin. As we have discussed so far the fleeing of artists and intellectuals from Berlin to London and then to America created several large, quick visible, cultural centers that would lead to an expanding New York and American aesthetic and philosophy just before WWII. New York would then become the leading cultural center after WWII. When Adorno had fled Germany, he arrived at the beginning of an America's golden age of popular culture, which was characterized by the emergence of new types of music, the production of large-budget films, and development of new technologies— all of which brought forth new types of distraction to the betterment of art and the common person. In many ways these technologies distracted from the lessons learned previously because technologies gave people the ability to find easier ways to get to where they were going. New technologies did not allow for people to participate actively, rather it allowed for a growing passive participation. This is the

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[21] Nico Israel. *Outlandish: Writing Between Exile and Diaspora*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) 12

underlining argument of Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and Adorno's critiques of jazz.

Because of the changes in society that came in large part from the growing presence of popular culture from the start of the twentieth century to the late 1940s, both Greenberg and Adorno believed that a defense for high art was necessary in order to save art from becoming corrupted by mass culture. Both Adorno and Greenberg condemmed the relationship between popular culture and avant-garde. Yet, it was this unyielding stance from Adorno and Greenberg that advanced the modernist aesthetic and philosophies, generating some of the most sophisticated work in the arts during the twentieth century. Many of the earlier articles by Greenberg and Adorno commented on popular culture's role in the erosion of the high culture and of society; these comments were then the focus of years of clarification by both authors on what they really meant when these articles first came out. In his articles on music, Adorno-- much more than Greenberg-- warned of a time when a false identity and aesthetic would take hold, if the world would not recognize the need for a group of people to look out for the progression of good art. This same type of warning, which appeared in the first articles on the commodity and commercialization of jazz, layed the groundwork for Adorno's influential final chapter in their co-authored 1944 book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* with the chapter titled "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception."

In 1936, three years after his first article about jazz, Adorno published his hardest critique of jazz music in a German article titled "Uber Jazz" (On Jazz.) One of the most grotesque statements from Adorno was his comment that because of the color of skin of the jazz player, the producers of jazz and those who propelled its commercialism engaged

in nothing more than a commodity exchange, "the skin of the black man functions as much as a coloristic effect as does the silver of the saxophone." This objection, as much racist as it is outlandish, harkens back to the films of the 1920s. In order to understand Adorno's critique on jazz, one must look at his critique on culture in terms of how the black man was being used as a source of successful entertainment. "Adorno chose to 'decode' jazz as commodity form not because he didn't like listening to it, but because he recognized mechanisms at work in it-- just as he did in the emerging cinema that he believed functioned to 'enhance the false identification of the particular with the universal which characterizes all products of the culture industry.'"[22]

After suggesting that it is the skin of the black man who leads to the un-dialectical status and continued commodification of jazz, Adorno continues in his article to speak of the ways dance music would be heard and then worked through the body. For Adorno, every act of the jazz performance reflected the system of its commercialism. "Jazz is 'completely abstractly preformed' by capitalism."[23] In large part Adorno framed his debate not on specific examples, which would lead to condemnation from his critics, but on the visual interaction with the jazz professional and the jazz dance, for which he loosely referred to as *swing*. Adorno suggested that the remnants of the visual interaction of this jazz dance, know as sing, was a sign of pure commodification because of its suggestion to sex but that it had undertones of self loathing and anger. "Adorno describes the dancing that accompanied swing music as mere 'spastic' or 'reflex' actions in which

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[22] Jamie Owen Daniel. "Introduction to Adorno's 'Uber Jazz,'" (*Discourse:* 12,1 Fall/Winter 1998-1990):42

[23] Harry Cooper. "On 'Über Jazz': Replaying Adorno with the Grain," (*October* 75 Winter, 1996):112

he claims to perceive thinly concealed stages of rage and self-hatred."[24] Furthermore, Adorno suggested that the basic rhythm followed by swing dance was a visual documentation of the workers position in the factory system. Looking to later works by Adorno, swing music continues to show up in his discussion, even in the 1944 co-authored publication with his friend Max Horkheimer. Both Adorno and Horkheimer take a hard stand against swing music and what it means as a symbol of society, even becoming a visual document of the workforce. Harry Cooper quotes a passage from Adorno and Max Horkheimer's joint work *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that suggests what Adorno really means by the visual document of this dance being an "'afterimage of the work process.'"[25] Adorno's reliance of the visual imagery with this dance allows him to build a direct link to the overall perception of jazz music itself at the beginning of his article. Adorno felt that what he was seeing in the way people responded to the jazz player one could deduce a possible link to the proletariat's work habits. "I will not finish by accusing swing of being at the root of all our faults…His nervous system was torn asunder by the vibration of the factory…The principal cadence of his life because mechanical. This is the cadence now called 'Swing.'"[26] Even before this statement in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in which Adorno comments on the use of swing music as a reference to the proletariat he, and Horkheimer, takes a more severe step and suggests that it is a image of the downfall of mankind. "I do suggest that swing is one

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[24]Lee Brown. "Adorno's Critique of Popular Culture: The Case of Jazz Music," (*Journal of Aesthetic Education* 26, 1 Spring, 1992):20

[25] Harry Cooper. "On 'Über Jazz': Replaying Adorno with the Grain," (*October* 75 Winter, 1996):100

[26] Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. (New York: Continuum, 1990): 137

manifestation of the decline of our civilization….after ten centuries of culture, we end with the Negro jungle tom-tom."[27]

The opening pages of Greenberg's 1939 article, "Avant-garde and Kitsch" set up an historical account of the creation of the avant-garde, suggesting that the development of this cultural group came about in the nineteenth century when the intellectual revolution took place in Europe. "It was no accident, therefore, that the birth of the avant-garde coincided chronologically – and geographically, to – with the first bold development of scientific revolutionary though in Europe."[28] In part Greenberg believes that the main reason for the appearance of the avant-garde was the appearance of a group of cultural and intellectual radicals referred to across time as bohemians. Bohemians were generally known to be groups of visual artists, writers, performers, philosophers, and political revolutionaries. Greenberg plays down the political part in his introduction to bohemia and the formation of the avant-garde, but he expanded into the political debate in the final part of this article. At the center of bohemian beliefs was a need to be a proponent for the advancement of the arts in any form. It was a hope, and a charge by Greenberg, to find a group of people who took it upon themselves to advance culture, especially in times of great need. According to Greenberg, "the true and most important function of the avant-garde was not to 'experiment,' but to find a path along which it would be possible to keep culture moving in the midst of ideological confusion and violence."[29] Yet, it was not just confusion and violence that Greenberg worried about. In fact, like Adorno, he saw technology as a threat to the avant-garde. Greenberg believed the moment to save culture was his own time, due to the progression of technology and it

[27] Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. (New York: Continuum, 1990): 21
[28] Clement Greenberg. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch."(Partisan Review. 6:5 1939): 35
[29] ibid, 35

is the responsibility of the avant-garde to protect the highest forms of art from the lessoning that comes from the expanse of culture through commodity:

> The masses have always remained more or less indifferent to culture in the process of development. But today such culture is being abandoned by those to whom it actually belongs—our ruling class. For it is to the latter that the avant-garde belongs. No culture can develop without a social basis, without a source of stable income. And in the case of the avant-garde, this was provided by an elite among the ruling class of that society from which it assumed itself to be cut off, but to which it has always remained attached by an umbilical cord of gold. The paradox is real. And now this elite is rapidly shrinking. Since the avant-garde forms the only living culture we now have, the survival in the near future of culture in general is thus threatened.[30]

Greenberg believes that imitation is the sole responsibility of the artist and that this responsibility is shared only with God. Yet, if that imitation is taken to the point of materialism and commodity then that imitation reaches a form of low culture. Greenberg gives the example of Russian art the purpose of which was to serve all culture, and, therefore, inevitably made by mass production. He refers to this art as *Kitsch*. Greenberg describes kitsch art as art that is used for the masses and does not ask anything from them, unlike the works that form the avant-garde. Greenberg comments that kitsch is built out of commercialism and thus remains only a part of that system, built for money. "It is the source of its profits. Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of out times. Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same. Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money – not even their time."[31]

After Adorno deciphered the characteristics of jazz music through the performer and then the audience, he thus turns to the nuts and bolts of his argument. Adorno

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[30] Clement Greenberg. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch."(Partisan Review. 6:5 1939):37
[31] ibid, 38

comments on the overall structure of the jazz music itself. His critique is founded in personal biases and unsupported generalizations without a solid example. For Adorno, the jazz harmonic structure is as detrimental to "serious." Adorno suggests that the rhythmic composition of jazz leads directly to its commodification in the presence of bars and dancehalls. Furthermore, Adorno, in the next passage, suggests that the main reason we see the presence of such music in night clubs is simply because the owners of these establishments cannot afford to pay for the "serious" styles of music:

> Often, the dependent lower classes identify themselves with the upper class through their reception of jazz. To them, jazz is 'urbane,' and, thanks to it, the white-collar employee can feel superior when he sites with his girlfriend in a beer hall. And yet in this only the 'primitive' elements of jazz, the good danceable beat of the basic rhythm, are understood: the highly syncopated 'hot music' is tolerated, without its penetrating more specifically into our consciousness—all the more so because the cheap dance clubs are unable to pay virtuoso orchestras, and the mediated reproduction of the music through the medium of radio is even less impressive in its effects than a live orchestra.[32]

Part of the problem for many critics, including Bradford Robinson, was what type of jazz was under critique. It would seem very out of place if Adorno had not really listened to jazz music to make such a case for its identification as low art. But reading through his description of jazz, even to it structure, one has to question if he even heard jazz. Much of what Adorno talks about is vague generalities that do not make sense to us now when looking on the characteristics of jazz. To look back at this moment and speak of this particular art form does not make sense with our current understanding of jazz music as a progressive, dialectical art form. But, what Adorno stressed, even during his critiques is how every part of the jazz structure was created for the sake of commodity. "The bits that go to make up a piece of popular music, Adorno tells us, are mere cogs "'in a

[32] Jamie Daniel. "Introduction to Adorno's 'Uber Jazz,'" (*Discourse:* Vol. 12 No. 1 Fall/Winter 1998-1990):50

machine.' Their placement, he says, is fortuitous, 'devoid' of a 'logic' of musical progression." [33]

One of the most puzzling moments in this essay concerns his comment on jazz's predictability and generic quality. In this moment Adorno sets up a critique of jazz by focusing on the characteristics that comprise the composition of the jazz structure. By focusing on the particular parts which make up this music, Adorno hopes to isolate what he relates to serious music and what he relates to commodity. But this particular comment alludes to a greater topic of concern for Adorno, and should be addressed in my research:

> Today, in any case, all of the formal elements of jazz have been completely abstractedly pre-formed by the capitalist requirement that they be exchangeable as commodities (tauschbar). Even the much-invoked improvisations, the 'hot' passages and breaks, are merely ornamental in their significance, and never part of the over construction of determinant of the form. Not only is their placement, right down to the number of beats, assigned stereotypically: not only is their duration and harmonic structure as a dominant effect completely predetermined; even its melodic form and its potential for simultaneous combination rely on a minimum of basic forms they can be traced back to the paraphrasing of the cadence, the harmonic figurative counterpoint.[34]

I suggest that Adorno is not really writing about jazz in these articles. If Adorno's topic of scrutiny was jazz as a musical art form, he would have a better grasp on the its influences, complex structure, and even jazz's creation as a singular experience. Yet, if we were to take the above statement and remove the context, remove the word "jazz," and replace that word with any sort of art form welcomed by the lower class and then replace the characteristics that form displayed to its medium we could see that any topic

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[33] Lee Brown. "Adorno's Critique of Popular Culture: The Case of Jazz Music," (*Journal of Aesthetic Education* Vol. 26, No. 1 Spring, 1992):24

[34] Jamie Daniel. "Introduction to Adorno's 'Uber Jazz,'" (*Discourse:* Vol. 12 No. 1 Fall/Winter 1998-1990):52

would work. Is it much of a reach to speak of Greenberg's medium specifically after reading this passage?

Greenberg takes a hard stand to suggest that not even what is learned in school, in training, pushes the boundaries for those moments of making are prescribed and not truly original (my words, not his.) I think Greenberg then links Academism to industrialism and to the factory-- making in order to replicate and to put forth as imitation. "For what is called the academic as such no longer has an independent existence, but has become the stuffed-shirt 'front' for kitsch. The methods of industrialism displace the handicrafts."[35] These new "methods" become a larger worry for Greenberg because of the worldly hold it has on all people and all of culture. Yet, Greenberg is quick to suggest that these advancements reside in the west, the European and the American. "Another mass product of Western Industrialism, it has gone on a triumphal tour of the world, crowding out and defacing native cultures in one colonial county after another, so that it is now by way of becoming a universal culture, the first universal culture ever beheld."[36] In the same breath, Greenbergs suggest that the reason for western kitsch's popularity is that it belongs as a product of the west, and thus sought after by all. This is why, for Greenberg, commercial "national" kitsch has the ability to push out regional and independent folk arts; folk art does not speak to the larger audience as does the general kitsch object that is made for that reason.

To hold Adorno's question of the general object of mass culture up to light we must also look at what he wants from us and what type of music we wishes us to champion. Lee Brown suggests that in order to understand Adorno's critique of jazz we

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[35] Clement Greenberg. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch."(Partisan Review. 6:5 1939):38
[36] ibid, 39

must also understand that Adorno critiqued jazz from the perspective of a European. "Adorno's Eurocentrism inclines him to understand this musical inevitability almost entirely in terms of tonality and harmony, So when he says that jazz does not exhibit a logical progression, he it tacitly complaining that it does not exhibit the harmonic logic of certain categories of European music."[37] Like others, Brown has commented on the Adorno's background: as an educated European intellectual with training in classical music like Schoenberg. Adorno had no training in jazz outside his Berlin group connection, which he visited temporarily over a few years while still in Germany. What Brown suggests is that when Adorno tears apart the tonal structures of jazz he does so from a point of view that would not welcome the African tonal influence. "In short, he [Adorno] *hears* the music as European scales and songs badly played, as full of mistakes."[38]

Adorno believed that the structure of jazz came out of a reliance on reproduction with continued acknowledgement of what it references. I think this is the fatal flaw for Adono. For if one reproduces, as Benjamin suggests, from the technology that produces the effect, then what the artist constructs is an allusion that relies on the original reference. If, in fact, jazz emerges crucially from a long tradition, then jazz can never be "self referential." Furthermore, the artist, for Adorno, who continues to make it a business of continued reflexive and referential creation, is not challenged by the subject of creation.

> He who is reproducing the music is permitted to tug at the chains of his boredom, and even to clatter them, but he cannot break them. Freedom in reproduction is no more present here than in 'artistic' music. Even if the composition were to

[37] Lee Brown. "Adorno's Critique of Popular Culture: The Case of Jazz Music," (*Journal of Aesthetic Education* Vol. 26, No. 1 Spring, 1992):24
[38] ibid, 25

> allow it, the tradition of jazz, which is prepared to fight the slightest subjective nuance, would not tolerate such freedom. If man is incapable of breaking through within a reproduction, which respectfully dresses up its bare walls in order to disguise its inhumanity, but which helps to prolong this inhumanity surreptitiously in doing so.[39]

If Jazz is a direct reference to commodity and its structure causes a general response that is represented by sexual repression, anger, and the overtaking of the individual by the workforce where might jazz lead? One direction for jazz, and for the society that supports jazz as a musical form, leads to a lessoning of artistic seriousness and becomes something common, understood as commercial. But Adorno goes even further and suggests that because jazz music is linked to salon music, then to march music, and finally to fascism, "thus jazz can be easily adapted for use by fascism."[40] Adorno believes this to be the case because of the way in which the commodity in general works, in which one can take marches and make them political. In fact, Adorno's rather large steps into the political display the breadth of his argument against jazz, suggesting that once again we are dealing with a much broader critique on the subject of low culture. Adorno's argument here is quite awkward because he chooses to explain his link to fascism and to march music through the name of a particular instrument. "The effectiveness of the principle of march music is jazz is evident. The basic rhythm of the continuo and the bass drum is completely in sync with march rhythm, and, since the introduction of six-eight time, jazz could be transformed effortlessly into a march. The connection here is historically grounded; one of the horns used in jazz is called the Sousaphone, after the march composer."[41]

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[39] Jamie Daniel."Introduction to Adorno's 'Uber Jazz,'" (*Discourse:* 12, 1 Fall/Winter 1998-1990):56
[40] ibid, 61
[41] ibid, 61

Adorno's argument is filled with overarching generalities about jazz, which has gained him harsh criticism. The main question that continues to appear in these criticisms of Adorno's concepts of jazz asks: where does one should direct their research, scholarship, or understanding when reading his articles against jazz? In fact, the question *"What type of jazz was Adorno talking about?"* continues to be asked. All of this confusion could be unraveled by a few examples. "Adorno himself was faced with repeated criticism, acknowledging at the end of his life that the essay 'provoked the objection that I was not to hear for the last time: Where is the Evidence?'"[42] Yet, what is revealed are short underdeveloped references that keep popping up in the work. In one second he references the jazz dance called "Tiger Rag", in another sentence he mentions the artist "Duke Ellington." Adono chose to never assign much of an example to his critique, if he did that critique would remain specific to jazz and not be able to be appropriated to the larger culture.

Greenberg also ends his article, and his warning about kitsch to the avant-garde with a jump to fascism, socialism, and references to Marx. At the end of Greenberg's article he suggests that the kitsch object, due to the way it is made, may be an object used for propaganda, and for political gain. In that the object may be given power to direct the common people whom have no knowledge of its gravity as a symbol. This is realized by the individuals awareness of what his or her identity is, as if referencing Hegel's master/slave dialectic straightforward. For Greenberg, once the "plebian" finds it in himself that he understand what he is and what he owns then he is given a power of the things in his life. That power, for Greenberg, is a false sensation because it comes from

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[42] Harry Cooper. "On 'Über Jazz': Replaying Adorno with the Grain," (*October* 75 Winter, 1996):105

the kitsch object. Furthermore, once that individual finds power in himself, as compared to his placement in society, he is then faced with the notions of fascism. "The plebian finds courage for the first time to voice his opinions openly…Most often this resentment to culture is to be found where the dissatisfaction with society is a reactionary dissatisfaction which expressed itself in revivalism and puritanism and latest of all, in fascism."[43] Here, Greenberg presents his final argument. Kitsch, when not watched, will become the tool of the government and will be used to hold prey everyone who falls victim to it. While both Greenberg and Adorno warned of the limits of mass culture as a tool for use to bring our worst fears to life they both ended their articles with the threat of government rule and of fascism. The social political worries for Adono and Greenberg were dire, especially for those intellectuals who fled possible persecution from government scrutiny but did it sway their judgment on the larger issues of culture. Both writers would spend the rest of their life trying to decipher what they began, with Greenberg putting aside any connection to Marx, which is easily seen in his earlier articles.

Greenberg continues to be credited as the critic who began the dialectical conversation on high and low culture in the twentieth century, but it is Adorno who established the terminology for Greenberg's argument. While it is not know if Greenberg was directly influenced by Adorno, I find it very probable that he has a certain knowledge of Adorno's 1936 article before he wrote and published "Avant-garde and Kitsch" in 1939. If to say the least, a larger conversation must have been taking place through Adorno and Greenberg's circle of influences, especially through Adorno's connection to

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[43] Clement Greenberg. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch."(Partisan Review. 6:5 1939):46

Horkheimer and to Benjamin, and to Greenberg's connection to the American New York Art and Literary world. What is important to realize is that both writers, whether knowingly or not, started one of the largest dialectical conversation on the roles of culture outside Hegel and Marx, but they did it by turning culture in on itself. The use of the dialectic, as a structure of continued oppositions creates "new." The dialectic creates synthesis, but a synthesis that is conditional. Greenberg and Adorno understood this power. Adorno relied on and preached it in his work and through the correspondence of his friends. Greenberg, on the other hand, was more subtle with his dialectical structure. Within the argument of avant-garde or kitsch what we find is a dialectic of the becoming of art. Here is the key to both writers/critics; what art becomes?

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