

## FRANKFURT SCHOOL – IN A NUTSHELL

- Theodore Adorno
- Walter Benjamin (worth looking at separately. Diverted from the group later)
- Max Horkheimer
- the culture industry
- false hopes and needs
- neo-Marxist
- 1930's- 50's
- mass vs elite culture
- mass production = mass culture

Two of its key theorists Max Horkheimer and T.W. Adorno developed an account of the "culture industry" to call attention to the **industrialization and commercialization** of culture under capitalist systems of production. This situation was most marked in the United States that had little state support of film or television industries, and where a highly commercial mass culture emerged that came to be a distinctive feature of capitalist societies

the commodities of the culture industries exhibited the same features as other products of mass production: (**mass-production, standardization, duplication, dissemination**). It pointed out that culture was **commodified**. (turned into a commodity) . The culture industries had the specific function, however, of justifying the existing capitalist societies and of integrating individuals into its way of life.

**integration of the working class into capitalist societies.** The Frankfurt school theorists were among the first **neo-Marxist** groups to examine the effects of mass culture and the rise of the consumer society on the working classes which were supposed to be the instrument of revolution in the classic Marxist scenario.

There was a focus on technology and culture, indicating how technology was becoming both a major force of production and mode of **social organization and control**. In a 1941 article, "Some Social Implications of Modern Technology," Herbert Marcuse argued that technology in the contemporary era constitutes an entire "mode of organizing and perpetuating (or changing) social relationships, a manifestation of prevalent thought and behavior patterns, an instrument for control and domination"

technology produced **mass culture that trained individuals to conform to the dominant patterns of thought and behavior, and thus provided powerful instruments of social control and domination. This links to Gramsci's earlier view of hegemony and consensus of the masses.**

While in exile in the United States, the members of the Frankfurt school came to believe that American "**popular culture**" was, like the Nazi regime they had fled from, also **highly ideological and worked to promote the interests of American capitalism**. Controlled by giant corporations, the culture industries were organized according to the rules of mass production, **churning out mass-produced products that generated a highly commercial system of culture which in turn sold the values, life-styles, and institutions of "the American way of life."**

Walter Benjamin noted how new mass media were supplanting older forms of culture whereby the mass reproduction of photography, film, recordings, and publications **replaced the emphasis on the originality and "aura" of the work of art in an earlier era.**

Max Horkheimer and T.W. Adorno in their book Dialectic of Enlightenment, which first appeared in 1948 argued that the system of cultural production dominated by film, radio broadcasting, newspapers, and magazines, was controlled by advertising and commercial imperatives, and served to create subservience to the system of consumer capitalism.

they criticized mass culture as **being politically motivated**, leading to **passivity and acceptance of hegemonic norms. Perpetuates the status quo of the ruling establishment (which Marx called the Bourgeoisie)**

Mass culture for the Frankfurt School produced **desires, dreams, hopes, fears, and longings, as well as unending desire for consumer products**. The culture industry **produced cultural consumers who would consume its products and conform to the dictates and the behaviors of the existing society**.

The school is firmly rooted in an era of organized capitalism in which the state and giant corporations managed the economy and in which individuals submitted to state and corporate control. This period is often described as "**Fordism**" to designate the system of mass production and the homogenizing regime of capital which wanted to produce mass desires, tastes, and behavior. It was thus an era of mass production and consumption characterized by uniformity and homogeneity of needs, thought, and behavior producing a mass society and what the Frankfurt school described as "the end of the individual." No longer was individual thought and action the motor of social and cultural progress; instead giant organizations and institutions overpowered individuals. The era corresponds to the staid, conformist, and conservative world of corporate capitalism that was dominant in the 1950s with its organization, its mass consumption, and its mass culture.

the original Frankfurt school model of the culture industry did articulate the important social roles of media culture during a specific regime of capital and provided a **model, still of use, of a highly commercial and technologically advanced culture that serves the needs of dominant corporate interests, plays a major role in ideological reproduction, and in forcing individuals into the dominant system of needs, thought, and behavior**.

strengths	weaknesses
<p><b>power of media industries</b>  <b>financial = ideological control. Marx – the dominant ideas are at every point the ideas of the ruling classes</b>  <b>manipulation of consumer- audiences</b></p>	<p>later critics pronounced their approach too manipulative and elitist,- says that audiences are massive, gullible and unthinking masses.</p> <p>Walter Benjamin pointed out (1969), the culture industry also produces rational and critical consumers able to dissect and discriminate among cultural texts and performances, much as sports fans analyze and criticize sports events.</p>

Frankfurt school's ideas are **firmly rooted in the historical cultural and economic context**. During this period, mass culture and communication were instrumental in generating modes of thought and behavior appropriate to a highly organized and collectivized social order. It was an era in which mass consumption and culture was indispensable to producing a consumer society based on homogeneous needs and desires for mass-produced products and a mass society based on social organization and homogeneity. It is culturally **the era of highly controlled network radio and television, insipid top forty pop music, glossy Hollywood films, national magazines, and other mass-produced cultural artifacts**