

Book Notes

COOK DEBORAH A. *The Culture Industry Revisited: Theodor W. Adorno on Mass Culture*

COOK, DEBORAH A. *The Culture Industry Revisited: Theodor W. Adorno on Mass Culture*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996, xiv + 190 pp., \$22.95 paper.

This intriguing, though curious, short book presents Adorno's scattered assertions regarding mass culture and the culture industry (a term coined by Horkheimer and Adorno) as if they constituted a unitary and cohesive position central, however, not to Adorno's thinking about art and aesthetic experience, but instead to his philosophy *überhaupt*. Deborah Cook's ambitious project is only partially successful. The strength of her book lies in its suggestive meditations on the importance of Adorno's critique of the culture industry for a good deal of his seemingly unrelated philosophical work. Cook succeeds in connecting that critique with, for example, the epistemological project of *Negative Dialectics*. So too—and in her opening chapter—does she attempt to connect the critique of the culture industry to its supposed origins in Marx and Freud. The obvious, general character of this connection seems innocuous enough until the reader proceeds to chapter two and finds Adorno there being taken to task because, it is asserted, a more thoroughly Marxian-influenced critique of the culture industry would have proceeded to provide a more substantive critique of that industry. A more truly Marxist critique would have offered, Cook claims, a political economy of the culture industry. ("This means that the critique of *political economy* remains in principle as essential a feature in Adorno's analysis as it was in Marx's. Unfortunately, it was this very critique which remained underdeveloped in Adorno's own work" [p 11].) Though Cook faults Adorno for not producing just such a political economy, she is optimistic that Adorno's failure can be rectified by the appropriate sociological and cultural studies (not to mention communication studies) research programs.

It is here in chapter two that one realizes what has been left out of chapter one's account of the origin of the critique of the culture industry in Marx and Freud. What is missing is any suggestion that Adorno employed both aesthetic experience and aesthetic theory to construct his critique. This missing component is the most serious drawback of Cook's book—though it helps to explain some of the curious claims she makes. For example, though it is easy to endorse Cook's claim that "Adorno attempted to account for the standardization and homogenization of contemporary culture" (p. x), it is nonetheless quite difficult to see how Cook understands Adorno's account because she excludes from it the nature of the experience of contemporary culture, and more importantly, how the culture industry transfigures it. Cook's point of view is instead that of the social scientist who wants to examine a phenomenon according to the function it is perceived to serve. (The functionalist nature of Cook's account is most apparent in large but rather empty expressions like the following: "The culture industry plays a powerful role in the daily life of the vast majority of individuals in the Western world" [p. x].) This is profoundly not Adorno's point of view. He is less interested in the function of the culture industry in the overall schema of advanced capitalism, and more interested in the form of experience produced within, and upon, individuals by that industry. Again, he is less interested in how that industry produces its products, and more interested in how it produces us as artifacts of it. Adorno's is a critique of the artifact of experience and not the artifacts of the culture industry. Cook writes: "It is unfortunate, however, that Adorno barely touched on the processes involved in cultural production" (p. 48). This sentence cannot mean what it

says; indeed it seems more likely that the opposite is true, that Adorno "touched" *only* on the processes involved in cultural production.

Though Cook explicitly complains that "too much secondary literature on Adorno has overemphasized aesthetic emancipation—the cracks in modern art which let in the light of critique—at the expense of the speculative emancipation provided by immanent ideology critique" (p. 83). she indicates neither how—such an "immanent" critique—via the research projects she proposes—would provide "speculative" emancipation, nor why she deems inappropriate the category of the aesthetic as the locus of just such an immanent ideology critique. (TH)

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