

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONSUMPTION AND THE CULTURE INDUSTRY IN LIGHT OF MARX'S *GRUNDRISSE*

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“Even the commodity fetishist who has succumbed to conspicuous consumption to the point of obsession participates in the truth content of happiness.”¹ Theodor Adorno penned this statement in an essay written against Thorstein Veblen’s theory of consumption. Adorno expressed disagreement with the latter’s characterization of luxury consumption as an unequivocal manifestation of bad faith, because the consumer does, in fact, derive real satisfaction from the object consumed. “[T]he happiness that man actually finds cannot be separated from conspicuous consumption.”² Adorno’s negative judgement of Veblen has, at its core, the insight that Veblen’s critique of conspicuous consumption is, at best, one-sided, understanding it only as consumption of a product that benefits the needs of the system, but not of people. According to Adorno, luxury consumption must also be seen as “the use of parts of the social product which serve not the reproduction of expended labour, directly or indirectly, but of man in so far as he is not entirely under the sway of the utility principle.”³ The extent to which Adorno’s *Kulturkritik* itself maintains this double vision vis-à-vis the sphere of consumption, particularly in regard to cultural or aesthetic consumption, is not immediately clear, especially when one considers that Adorno’s theory of the Culture Industry is a relentless attempt to show that the “utility principle” has, in fact, extended its influence into the domain of the useless. The Culture Industry is the expression of the incongruous notion that Culture, although it emerged in opposition, not to Nature, but to its mundane, quotidian

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, translated by Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1983), p. 87.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

appropriation, has now become an analogue of Industry, or of the capitalist mode of appropriation of nature.

The problematic character of this view has been noted by many, but the most adequate critique of the Frankfurt School in general – with important implications for Adorno’s critical philosophy – comes via the re-interpretation of Marx undertaken by intellectual historian Moishe Postone, whose assessment of the Frankfurt School I will now attempt to summarize. Critical Theory proper, that is, the philosophical and sociological work of theorists associated with Frankfurt am Main’s Institute for Social Research and its *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, was an attempt to account for the systemic transformations in capitalism that were taking place during the 1930s. These theorists, most notably Friedrich Pollock and Max Horkheimer, viewed the transition from liberal capitalism to more bureaucratic and centralized forms of state capitalism as a negative development. “In postliberal capitalism, the state displaces the market as the central determinant of social life. A command hierarchy operating on the basis of a one-sided technical rationality replaces market relations and the rule of law.”⁴ Postone explains that, for Pollock in particular, economic laws, as well as categories such as the “commodity” and “value,” emerge solely from the market. “Pollock, in other words, understood the economic sphere and, implicitly, Marxian categories of the relations of production in terms of the mode of *distribution* alone.”⁵ Likewise, says Postone, the fundamental contradiction of capitalism was understood by Pollock as the opposition “between industrial production and the bourgeois mode of distribution.”⁶ Pollock, whose views became generally accepted by his fellow Critical Theorists, saw state control of the sphere of distribution as the effective supersession of this contradiction. “[A]n understanding of the contradiction between the forces and relations of production in terms of the growing inadequacy of the market and private property to conditions of developed industrial production implies that a mode of distribution based on planning and the effective abolition of private property *is* adequate to those conditions.”⁷ This results in the effective cancellation of the emancipatory drive supposedly embodied in the proletariat, whose

⁴ Moishe Postone, “Critique, State, Economy,” in Fred Rush, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 165-93.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

claims to universality in traditional Marxism⁸ are based fundamentally on the argument that the irrational market is the root cause of inequality because it prevents conscious control of distribution, which goes on “behind the backs of the producers.”

In his major work, *Time, Labour, and Social Domination*, Postone notes the Frankfurt School's “critical pessimism,” which he explains as having arisen precisely from Pollock's supposition that bureaucratic forms of state capitalism had succeeded in eliminating capitalism's fundamental contradiction. Pollock's view leads, ultimately, to a theory of state capitalism as a system of static power relations that preserves class antagonisms and inequality, yet does not itself contain contradictions that propel an inner and potentially revolutionary dynamic. Postone, likewise, calls attention to “the primacy of the political” in Pollock's thought, in which the economic spheres of production and circulation are subordinated to rationalized, bureaucratic planning in a “totally administered society.” This “pessimistic turn” by Pollock and the Frankfurt School grasps capitalism's transformation from a liberal to a more centralized phase and, at the same time, intuits the concomitant reduction of the proletariat's revolutionary potential, but does so in a way that precludes the existence, in society, of an immanent and potentially emancipatory dynamic and, “ultimately [...] does not move beyond the horizons of the traditional Marxist critique of capitalism.”⁹

Although Postone underlines the Frankfurt School's pessimistic turn as a “necessary” response to political and historical developments and to the underlying fallacy of transhistorical “labour” as a social ontology, in light of subsequent developments in world capital (e.g. the demise of Fordism and its supersession by a newer, seemingly more liberal form of capitalism, and the apparent ongoing demise of the latter), the idea of a monolithic, non-contradictory form of capitalism must be judged a theoretical impoverishment and, even from the standpoint of traditional Marxism, to be undialectical. As Neil Larsen explains, this is why Adornian formulations like “the whole is the untrue” must “be judged fatal

⁸ Traditional Marxism is defined broadly by Postone as any approach that views the basic contradiction of capitalism as the tension between the forces of production and what are assumed to be capitalism's fundamental social relations: “value,” “commodity,” “capital,” etc. *qua* market categories. “Labour,” understood as a transhistorical condition of human society, remains an external standpoint whence to critique these relations.

⁹ Moishe Postone, *Time, Labour, and Social Domination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 104.

to any aspiration to dialectical thought.”¹⁰ I contend that Adorno, despite his philosophical acumen and deep understanding of Hegel, allowed this undialectical assumption to pervade his thinking. Larsen and *Wertkritik* theorist Norbert Trenkle have described how, despite being, in many respects, a critique of traditional Marxism, Adornian philosophy and aesthetic theory remain attached to the assumption that “labour” must be the revolutionary agent of emancipation.¹¹ I will attempt to build on this approach to Adorno in order to show that the Culture Industry, as defined by Adorno, rests on both his adoption of the traditional Marxian notion of labour signalled by Trenkle and Larsen and an understanding of consumption (aesthetic or otherwise) that differs from that of Marx. I will begin by explicating Marx’s theory of consumption as outlined in the *Grundrisse*, an important text whose reading has furnished both Postone and the German *Wertkritik* theorists with many fundamental insights regarding the centrality of “value” to Marx’s critique of capital.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx takes pains to establish that the relationship between production and consumption is not simply a unity of opposites, a direct identity of production and consumption which he says economists call “productive consumption,”¹² but one in which they mediate one another reciprocally. “Each is immediately its opposite. But at the same time a mediating movement takes place between the two.”¹³ Consumption realizes, or “finishes” the product as such, just as production “not only supplies a material for the need, but [...] also supplies a need for the material.”¹⁴ Production produces the object, manner, and motive of consumption; conversely, consumption produces the producer’s own inclination to fulfil a need via his or her production.¹⁵ Marx differentiates between a certain kind of consumption, productive consumption *stricto sensu*, which can be thought of as part of the production process because it feeds back directly into this process as either the means of reproduction of the worker or as the means of production (e.g. consumption of raw materials, wear of fixed capital, etc.) and “consumption proper,” “the

¹⁰ Neil Larsen, “The Idiom of Crisis,” *Krisis: Beiträge zur Kritik der Warengesellschaft* (2006), Retrieved 4 January 2010 from <http://www.krisis.org/>.

¹¹ See Larsen’s “Idiom” and Trenkle’s “Gebrochene Negativität: Anmerkungen zu Adornos und Horkheimers Aufklärungskritik,” *Krisis: Beiträge zur Kritik der Warengesellschaft* 25 (2002), pp. 39-65.

¹² Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, translated by Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 90.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

destructive antithesis to production.”¹⁶ Consumption proper, which I will now refer to simply as consumption, stands outside of production as both its antithesis and presupposition. It is likewise presupposed by circulation although here, too, it is exteriorized. In terms of capital, then, consumption actually exists outside the valorization process in both its productive and circulating moments. Yet consumption remains the presupposition of the valorization process because, although marginal with respect to the latter, it is a requisite for social reproduction in general, even if it is not, in a direct sense, a constitutive element of the self-valorization of value. From the standpoint of the total society, consumption forms the necessary process by which it reconstitutes itself. From the standpoint of the total valorization process, consumption is presupposed as the necessary impulse for the sale and, therefore, of the realization of surplus value, but it is only the sale of the commodity that is the process' self-positing end (M-C-M'). That is, whether, and how, the commodity is actually consumed is of no moment from the standpoint of capital within the valorization process. “[O]nce [the sale] is assumed to have happened, it is immaterial, for the movement of the individual capital, what later becomes of this commodity.”¹⁷ From the standpoint of the individual, consumption is simply the fulfilment of a need or a desire (unless this need is the worker's need for self-reproduction, in which case the consumption that fulfils this need remains, in a strict sense, part of the production process). Needs beyond those necessary for the reproduction of labour-power result in consumption that, from the standpoint of total capital, or the valorization thereof, is superfluous. According to its own concept, value would like to abstract away from all qualitative social content¹⁸ yet cannot, for doing so would entail its own annihilation.

Adorno's writings are very aphoristic and anti-systemic, but it should be possible to sketch the basic outlines of his view of aesthetic or cultural consumption by considering some key statements from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Horkheimer's coauthorship notwithstanding) and other texts on the Culture Industry. “Culture is a paradoxical commodity. It is so completely subject to the law of exchange that it is no longer exchanged; it is so blindly equated with use that it is no longer used.”¹⁹ Rather than attempting to explicate such a seemingly contradictory formulation, it may

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹⁷ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 2, translated by David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 468-69.

¹⁸ See Larsen, “Idiom.”

¹⁹ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 131.

be more fruitful to simply restate it so that the predicates of culture are more clear: culture is a commodity subject to the law of exchange and whose original function is now obliterated by mindless utilitarianism. Culture arose, according to Adorno, “as negation of the social utility [...] establish[ed] through the market.”²⁰ The “use” of art, then, consists in “confirming the very existence of the useless.”²¹ Art, so defined, negatively embodies opposition to market logic, if only potentially. The stark irony of the Culture Industry is that even the separate, negative sphere of aesthetics has adapted itself to the demands of the market, allowing itself to become instrumentalized in compliance with needs defined according to the logic of exchange. In consuming these “cultural assets,” the consumer effectively materializes market rationale in his or her person. The notion that the consumer, by exhibiting preferences determined by commodity exchange, effectively embodies market ideology indicates that, for Adorno, even this area of human praxis has been completely rationalized by capital. This is consonant with Postone’s assessment of the Frankfurt School’s pessimism, which mistook liberal capitalism’s transformation into state capitalism for the elimination of capitalism’s essential contradiction, understood as the opposition between “labour,” understood as the transhistorical essence of human society, and more obviously capitalist institutions like the market and private property. Faced with either the abolition of these forms or their effective collectivization under the aegis of the state, the Frankfurt School resorted to a dubious conceptual innovation: noncontradictory capitalism. This theoretical basilisk froze capitalist relations of domination into place and was unable to account for subsequent historical transformations.

Adorno, too, falls victim to this theoretical regression and, despite its richness in other respects, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* contains such anomalies as a “use value fetish” originating in the positing of a transhistorical “labour” as domination over nature. With regard to consumption, there is a fundamental problem with Adorno’s premise that the market has been able to rationalize even the sphere of consumption. Adorno understands value as a category of the market. Consequently, the increasing responsiveness of consumers to marketing, to needs posited by the logic of the market, rather than by consumers themselves, is interpreted as a diminishment of the autonomy of culture and an intrusion of exchange value into the realm of pure use value. “In adapting itself entirely to need, the work of art defrauds human beings in advance from

²⁰ Ibid., p. 127.

²¹ Ibid., p. 128.

the liberation from the principle of utility which it is supposed to bring about. What might be called use value in the reception of cultural assets is being replaced by exchange value."²² It is clear that Adorno thinks that the sphere of consumption has been colonized by exchange value. The mechanism by which this colonization occurs is perhaps most plainly expressed in "On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening." There, Adorno explains that the listener's response to music is conditioned not by the act of listening or any pleasure derived thereof, but by the "cumulative success" of the star or the work itself.²³ The work's commercial "effectiveness" or market-defined relational value thus stands in for whatever use value the work once had for the consumer. "Musical fetishism takes possession of the public valuation of singing voices."²⁴ The "value" of the work, according to this view, derives from market success, rather than from consumer-defined need. Hence exchange value comes to replace the use value of the artwork, now defined as a "cultural asset," whose use value thus becomes a pure fetish. Only art that refuses to be enjoyed, in which "the mask has been torn from the countenance of false happiness,"²⁵ stills resists public valuation and fetishization. Adorno believes that no quantum of enjoyment, posited by public, market-mediated "taste" can be attributed to Schönberg's atonal compositions²⁶ and, therefore, their use value remains their uselessness, or lack of marketability. There is, clearly, something insightful in the concept of the Cultural Industry, something that resonates strongly with the sympathetic reader who senses the reality of commodity fetishism. Anyone who has seen footage of hordes of shoppers trampling each other in their haste to purchase the latest iteration of the Playstation or, for that matter, noted the apparently irrational (and media-driven) obsession with celebrities, will attest to the power of the Culture Industry over the behaviour of the consumer and the seeming universal subsumption of once artistic forms under entertainment. Likewise, the sensitive reader will note the intractable negativity of Adorno's philosophy in general, and his theory of the Culture Industry in particular, vis-à-vis capital, the automatic subject. But, retrospectively, one reads Adorno's censure of jazz and wonders, if

²² Ibid.

²³ Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening," in J.M. Bernstein (ed.), *The Culture Industry* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 35-6.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁶ One wonders whether Adorno would have rejected, tout court, atonal "free jazz" along with "jazz" in general.

jazz was the height of instrumentalized culture, what is one to make of *American Idol*, YouTube, and “augmented reality”?

It is helpful to compare Adorno’s notion of value as an effect of the market, or “public valuation,” with Marx’s theory of value as created by abstract human labour and realized in circulation. Slavoj Žižek, in his essay “The Parallax View,” explains that “even the most sophisticated theory of reification – that of commodity fetishism – falls into th[e] trap [of elevating production as the site of truth], from the young Lukács through Adorno up to Jameson.”²⁷ Žižek can be understood to say that value must be grasped as a duality of production and exchange, not simply as an illusion imposed on use values by exchange relations alone. Žižek speaks approvingly of Kojin Karatani’s focus on the revolutionary potential of workers *qua* buyers, quoting the Japanese critic as follows: “If workers can become subjects at all, it is only as consumers.”²⁸ This idea deserves consideration, but it is important to keep in view the many constraints imposed on consumption by capital, and to recall Marx’s cautionary words about “free individuality in the sphere of consumption and exchange.”²⁹ “This kind of individual freedom is [...] at the same time the most complete suspension of all individual freedom, and the most complete subjugation of individuality under social conditions which assume the form of objective powers.”³⁰ In his pessimism, Adorno is perhaps closer to Marx on this point than is Karatani. Despite Adorno’s considerable insights, though, insofar as the Culture Industry is concerned, he treats value as a category of the market. From a strictly Marxian perspective, this view is decidedly one-sided. Value, as Postone reminds us, does not simply veil real social relations, it *is* a real social relation.³¹ According to Marx, value moves through both production *and* circulation, but not through consumption, except insofar as this consumption can be identified as directly productive consumption, hence still production. Above, consumption proper was described as part of revenue, that “part of the surplus value destined for immediate consumption.”³² Consumption proper is the negative ground of the valorization (reproduction) of capital; consumption is absolutely necessary to valorization as its presupposition, but is the latter’s antithesis inasmuch as it removes commodities from the

²⁷ Slavoj Žižek, “The Parallax View,” *New Left Review* 25 (Jan.-Feb. 2004), p. 122.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

²⁹ *Grundrisse*, p. 649.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 652.

³¹ *Time, Labour*, p. 62.

³² *Grundrisse*, p. 733.

reproductive circuit. Strictly speaking, consumption is a moment that lies outside the valorization process, even if it occurs under conditions imposed by the latter and, in many ways, reflects market logic. "The commodity expelled from the circulation of capital is no longer the commodity as a moment of self-perpetuating value, as the presence of value. It is, thus, its presence as use value, its being for consumption."³³ Given this, one is obligated to ask whether capital actually rationalizes consumption in the way that Adorno claims, by imbuing the use value of a cultural commodity (defined either as pleasure or, paradoxically, as uselessness) with an exchange value that proceeds from "public valuation," i.e. from a kind of marginal utility based on the commodity's synchronization with a generalized, official "taste." It seems evident that the Culture Industry, whatever its merits as a concept, differs considerably from Marx's view of consumption. It assumes value in two places where, according to Marx, it cannot exist: in consumption proper and in the person of the consumer. In strictly Marxian terms, value cannot be personified, or embodied in a human like it can in a use value; a person is not a commodity, even when her labour is commodified. The value of the means of the worker's own reproduction can be determined (and in fact is the principal determinant of the "value of labour power"), but not the value of living labour's use value, because here there is no possible equivalency. Marx indicates that labour relates to capital not as *value to value* as in any other exchange, but as *use value to value*.³⁴ The exchange of wages for living labour power is in reality a not-exchange.³⁵ Outside of special conditions like slavery (which are not generalizable in capitalism), value cannot be transmitted directly through a person; even if it were possible for the consumer to consume and thus embody exchange value, the "worth" of the person would not be in play in the production process. Only living labour, *the* use value of capital, can valorize capital.

Before moving to a more speculative discussion of consumption, it may be appropriate to condense what we have determined thus far. Adorno, despite his recognition that certain aspects of consumption – those that do not directly serve the "utility principle"³⁶ – actually form part of humankind's self-reproduction independently of the valorization process, understands value as being essentially determined by the market and, moreover, tends to identify capital with the "utility principle," something that seems closer to Max Weber's culturalist account of

³³ Ibid., p. 730.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 288-97 passim.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 322.

³⁶ *Prisms*, p. 86.

capitalism than to Marx. Only by denying the, strictly speaking, non-capitalist aspects of consumption does it become possible to view it (hence aesthetic consumption as well) as part of a totally rationalized system. Capital, *qua* system, is imagined here as purely rational and utilitarian. But value, as the essential principle of this system, is a pure abstraction (although “real”), and is antithetical to utility in its objective form, use value. Likewise, there is the matter (brought up by Larsen, Postone, and Trenkle) of whether total bureaucratic control of both production and consumption, of labour and the market, leaves in place the dialectical antinomies of capital and its immanent transformative possibilities. Adorno, despite adhering to the traditional Marxist concept of value,³⁷ departs from that perspective in that he no longer sees “labour,” embodied in the proletariat, as an emancipatory agent, in either its productive or consumptive activity. But the more problematic assumptions outlined above cause Adorno, in the absence of “labour” as a revolutionary agent, to oppose the “useless” work of art to capital, understood as a pure principle of utility. This is not to say that something about “art” does not resist the commodity fetish. Rather, its oppositional nature must instead reside in an antagonistic relationship to *value as system* (i.e. to the valorization of value).

Returning to the subject of consumption, it may be worthwhile to take up Karatani’s point about workers as the *subject* of consumption. While this represents, on one level, yet another attempt to reinstate the proletariat as universal subject, there is a certain truth-value to the association of subjectivity with consumption. In productive consumption, i.e. consumption that belongs to the production process (and hence to the valorization process), the subjective activity of consumption (e.g. of materials by living labour) is directly subordinated to objectified labour, or fixed capital, which itself acquires a kind of subjectivity vis-à-vis living labour.

The whole process therefore appears as *productive consumption*, i.e. as consumption which terminates neither in a *void*, nor in the mere subjectification of the objective, but which is, rather, again posited as an *object*. This consumption is not simply a consumption of the material, but rather consumption [*Verzehren*] of consumption [*Konsumption*] itself; in the suspension of the material it is the suspension of this suspension and hence the positing of the same.³⁸

³⁷ See footnote no. 8 for the sense in which “traditional Marxist” is used here.

³⁸ *Grundrisse*, pp. 300-1.

Clearly, in productive consumption, the objective moment predominates, meaning that the subject's activity of consumption is itself consumed, or instrumentalized as a moment of the valorization of value, whose "given form [is consumed] only in order to posit it in a new objective form."³⁹ Consumption proper, however, remains an ineradicable remainder, the "subjectification of the objective," in which subjective activity, the reproduction of both the individual and society, still prevails, albeit within the narrow limits imposed by capital. The valorization process, which treats consumption as a barrier, or constantly expanding limit, is at the same time a barrier to consumption. The barrier imposed on consumption by the valorization of value is not only a qualitative one, to be understood in terms of choices determined by the market, but also a quantitative one based on the need for fiscal discipline (this applies to capitalist and worker alike). Theories about the emancipatory potential of consumption, as well as criticisms of conspicuous consumption or over-consumption that fail to understand the valorization process as both consumption's driving force (valorization generates new and more varied needs and also posits consumption logically as its negative ground, its necessary other) and its limiting factor are destined to prescribe only palliative countermeasures to the ecological impacts of consumption. Indeed, they run the risk of misidentifying consumption as both the primary source of ecological destruction and the site of resistance to capital. Many current efforts to confront "overconsumption" focus, for instance, on limiting household consumption while ignoring the relatively greater environmental impact and energy expenditure of the construction of the house itself. Likewise, the approach to consumption seen in postmodern cultural studies tends to overemphasize the subjective moment of consumption, forgetting that the kind and quantity of consumption is largely prescribed by one's access to money or credit, and that many consumer needs are posited by production itself, rather than by the consumer. If nothing else, we should retain the Culture Industry's insistence that the consumer's choices are largely determined in advance, even if Adorno's account of the mechanism by which this occurs is technically inadequate.

The countertendency of increasing consumption in the face of the crisis of value is illuminated by the following passage by Moishe Postone:

[T]he increasing importance of consumption to self-identity [...] should not be understood only in terms of the growing dependence of capitalism on mass consumption (a position that frequently regards such consumption merely as generated and manipulated by advertising, for example); *nor*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

*should such a study reify consumption in a culturalist manner as the site of identity and resistance, analogous to the traditional Marxist reification of production. Rather, it should also analyze the increasing subjective importance of consumption in terms of the decline of work as a source of identity.*⁴⁰

Upon examining the economic trajectory of the last forty years, one sees that the height of so-called consumer culture has coincided with post-Fordism and postmodernism. The reality behind the financialization of the economy is that capital that cannot be reintroduced into the production process must be offset by credit bubbles, consumed by manic commodity fetishists, or simply destroyed like the millions of automobiles that cannot be sold. The vast expansion of credit has enabled an explosion in consumption. While overconsumption may not compensate for lack of valorization opportunities, it accompanies the expansion of consumer credit that forms part of what has come to be known as financialization, in which the increased importance of so-called fictitious capital responds to what the *Wertkritik* theorists have described as capital's internal limit to valorization.⁴¹ Likewise, and in part, overconsumption enabled by credit could be considered a reaction against the kind of fiscal discipline imposed by capital on the monetary subject, who can normally accrue wealth only by abstinence from consumption, "through *self-denial*, saving, cutting corners in his consumption so as to withdraw less from circulation than he puts *goods* into it."⁴² Overconsumption could respond to an unconscious recognition that real wealth is material, and to a weakening of the discipline imposed by capital. Without the constraints imposed by abstract labour and the valorization of value, humanity could regain its lost subjectivity, wresting it away from the objective means of production where it was misplaced. Only then would consumption take on its full subjective importance as a means of self-reproduction for both individuals and society.

Despite what I believe to be an inconsistency between the concept of the Culture Industry and Marx's exposition of consumption in his *Grundrisse*, Adorno's work continues to be extremely relevant. Even if

⁴⁰ *Time, Labour*, p. 370; my italics.

⁴¹ For the theory of how capital, in the wake of the unprecedented increase in productive forces ushered in by the so-called Third Industrial Revolution, faces a terminal crisis in its ability to incorporate labour and therefore create surplus-value, see Robert Kurz, *Der Kollaps der Modernisierung: Vom Zusammenbruch des Kasernsozialismus zur Krise der Weltökonomie* (Frankfurt am Main Eichborn Verlag, 1991).

⁴² *Grundrisse*, p. 284.

Adorno's account of how exchange value penetrates the realm of use value (consumption proper) is technically incorrect, one senses that he is right on at least two counts. First, as long as production remains production-for-exchange and not production-for-consumption, consumers will remain objectified insofar as they are posited as consumers by the blind, systemic necessity to actualize value in sale. That is, consumers themselves do not operate as such under conditions of freedom, under which what they produced would be determined by how they chose to recreate themselves subjectively via consumption. Production and consumption have been sundered; no longer two moments of the same, socially reproductive activity, production serves the self-expansion of value, while consumption becomes marginalized. The activity of consumption is itself rendered hollow by value's need to reproduce itself. Adorno is only incorrect in assuming that this is wholly the case, because even consumption driven by the imperative for commodities to be sold satisfies real human needs, regardless of whether these needs have been created by marketing. To attempt to separate "authentic" needs from those induced by the market is to risk the kind of moralizing demand for austerity that finds its analogue, if not its source, in the wage-labourer's battle, nearly always futile, to accumulate wealth through self-denial. Second, we should insist, with Adorno, that art maintains a kind of antagonism to society. "Art is the social antithesis of society, not directly deducible from it."⁴³ As mentioned above, where Adorno might be contested is in regards to the artwork as a kind of anti-commodity that refuses to constitute itself as a use value, so as not to be a porter of exchange value. It is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a work of art that, even if not produced by wage-labour or with the intent to be sold, can elude the potential for commodification. Even certain unaesthetic Neo-Avant-Garde works still find a market niche among academics and professional critics devoted to their interpretation. If art is antagonistic to society it is not because it is not a commodity or cannot become one. Rather, art contains an intrinsic otherness vis-à-vis valorization. Art can take the form of a commodity but cannot be *only* a commodity. Inasmuch as art retains something of the ability to produce enjoyment (or other emotions, regardless of how "debased" these might be), it already points beyond the logic of valorization, which lacks any subjective human qualities, indeed, which lacks any *quality* at all. Value is, quite simply, *quantity*.

⁴³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 8.

Art, in order to be considered art at all, must conserve a subjectively-mediated content, wherein the artist transforms and reproduces his or her objective social life. Simply by possessing a qualitative social content posited by the artist, even if this content is sedimented in its form⁴⁴ and not readily apparent, art opposes itself to the kind of automatic social reproduction seen in capital's self-valorization, whose only attribute is quantity. Art "criticizes society by merely existing."⁴⁵ We must insist on viewing consumption, whether of traditional commodities or of works of art, as retaining the real social content that even its subordination to capital cannot eliminate. In short, it must be viewed as it might exist in a different kind of social formation, as it would "present [itself] from the standpoint of redemption."⁴⁶ Otherwise, one must speak of the end of art, agency and, finally, also of hope.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 226.

⁴⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, translated by Edmund Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), p. 247.