Revisiting the Frankfurt School

Essays on Culture, Media and Theory

Edited by David Berry

REVISITING THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL

For Professor John Theobald, wherever you may be

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Edited by

DAVID BERRY
Southampton Solent University, UK

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Notes on Contributors

Robert E. Babe is Professor of Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario London, Canada. He is former holder of the Jean Monty/BCE Chair in Media Studies. He is author or co-author of nine books, including *Cultural Studies and Political Economy: Toward a New Integration*. University of Toronto Press has recently published *Media, Structures, and Power: The Robert E. Babe Collection*, edited by Edward Comor. Robert Babe loves riding his motorcycle.

David Berry gained his PhD in Media Communication at the University of Glamorgan and currently works at Southampton Solent University, England. His most recent publication is *Journalism, Ethics and Society* published by Ashgate Publications and currently being translated into Arabic by the King Saud Center, King Saud University, Saudi Arabia. He is currently healthy and of a sane mind.

Philip Bounds holds a PhD in Politics from the University of Wales. His books include *British Communism and Literary Theory* (2011), *Orwell and Marxism* (2009), *Cultural Studies* (1999) and *Recharting Media Studies* (edited with Mala Jagmohan, 2008).

Hanno Hardt is John F. Murray Professor Emeritus of Journalism and Mass Communication and Communication Studies at the University of Iowa, USA and currently serves as a professor of Communication and Media Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. He is the author of numerous scholarly articles and several books, most recently, *The American Journalism Reader*, 2011, edited with Bonnie Brennen.

Caroline Kamau obtained her PhD in Social Psychology and BSc (hons) in Psychology with Clinical Psychology from the University of Kent in England. She is currently a senior lecturer in Psychology at Southampton Solent University. She conducts experimental and applied psychology research, with recent publications including an article on intergroup guilt and shame, an article on task group performance, and a chapter on cross-cultural impression management. She has interests in the history of psychology, and she teaches a unit on historical and conceptual issues in Psychology.

Sanda Miller started her academic career with a BA (hons) in History and Art and Philosophy completed at Birkbeck College, London University after which she went to the Courtauld Institute of Art where she completed an MA (Venetian Quattrocento), followed by a PhD (Constantin Brancusi). Her specialist subject is

French avant-garde movements although her interests, research and writing have become increasingly interdisciplinary ranging from Philosophy to Visual Culture, the History of Dress and Critical Theory. Her latest book: *Constantin Brancusi* was published in 2010 by Reaktion Books and at present she is working on a book on the history of dress. She is a regular contributor to *Apollo* magazine but writes for many other British, European and American specialized publications. She is also invited to deliver papers at international conferences, most recently in Canberra, Australia (December 2010) and Istanbul, Turkey (May 2011).

Alan O'Connor is Director of the PhD Programme in Cultural Studies at Trent University, in Canada. He has written and edited books on Raymond Williams and on community radio in Latin America. His most recent book is *Punk Record Labels and the Struggle for Autonomy* (Lexington Books 2008).

Julian Petley is Professor of Screen Media and Journalism in the School of Arts at Brunel University, Chair of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, and a member of the board of Index on Censorship. His most recent books are *Pointing the Finger: Islam and Muslims in the British Media* (Oneworld 2011, co-edited with Robin Richardson) and *Film and Video Censorship in Modern Britain* (Edinburgh University Press 2011). He is currently writing a book on David Cronenberg's *Crash* for Palgrave, and a book on obscenity for Reaktion.

Mike Wayne is a Professor in Screen Media at Brunel University and the author of *Marxism and Media Studies: Key Concepts and Contemporary Trends* (2003). He has recently written *Marx's Das Kapital For Beginners* (2011) and is currently researching on the relations between Kant and Marxist cultural theory.

Introduction

David Berry

In the introduction to David Held's accomplished 1980 book, *Introduction to Critical Theory, Horkheimer to Habermas* he begins thus: 'The writings of what may loosely refer to as a "school" of Western Marxism – critical theory – caught the imagination of students and intellectuals in the 1960s and early 1970s'. In the initial parts of the introduction Held continues to refer to the 'school' and then the 'Frankfurt School' in inverted commas before further stating:

> The membership is often referred to as the Frankfurt School. But the label is a misleading one; for the work of the Institute's members did not always form a series of tightly woven, complementary projects. To the extent that one can legitimately talk of a school, it is only with reference to Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Lowenthal and Pollock – and it is for these five men that I have reserved the term 'Frankfurt School'. When referring to the Institute of Social Research, however, I include all those affiliated to the Institute.

The title of this present collection of essays *Revisiting the Frankfurt School* attempts to capture a part of that reality and the complexity concerning the thinkers either directly involved or associated (loosely or otherwise) with the 'school'. Writers featured in this edition are also those detailed above by Held as central figures to the school such as Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Leo Lowenthal and includes others closely associated with the school such as Jürgen Habermas and Erich Fromm, others in the 'outer-circle' as Held argues, such as Walter Benjamin and one who perhaps is on the far reaches of the school, Siegfried Kracauer. One other important writer introduced in this edition is Hans Magnus Enzensberger, not normally directly associated with the school or in the outer-circle or far reaches but nevertheless considered by some to be a part of the generation of thinkers associated with the school. There is one further additional writer introduced in this edition which is Dallas Smythe as way of comparison of ideas with Theodor Adorno.

One particular reason for revisiting the school in the context of culture and media is to provide an opportunity for readers to view the field in a wider rather than a narrowly defined context. It's not unusual to think in terms of a small rather than wider number of writers when the Frankfurt School is mentioned and here I am thinking of Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse and Benjamin. The concept commonly associated with school is the 'culture industry' detailed in the chapter titled 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' in the *Dialectic*

of Enlightenment published in 1947 by Adorno and Horkheimer, although as Habermas wrote in 'Remarks on the Development of Horkheimer's Work' the chapter on the culture industry was the product of Adorno, although Horkheimer referred to the culture industries in 1941 and his writings on culture and reason in the *Eclipse of Reason* and other texts hardly get a mention in many works related to media communication studies.

It's also interesting to note that for many students I have taught at university level that they invariably associate the school with the 'culture industry' but even more distressing and worrying is the problematic 'hypodermic needle theory'. The latter has perhaps been the most destructive and effective for both limiting and undermining the ideas associated with the school and its writers. This book has been written in part to offer a broader viewpoint of ideas, whilst at this point of the discussion it's also worth pointing out to those who associate the hypodermic needle theory with the school that in fact it isn't or it should not be. To seasoned scholars this will come as no surprise, but the fact remains that this falsehood is passed on to secondary school pupils in their preparation for university life. Some discussions concerning essay projects by school pupils on the Internet confirm this. Furthermore, the Internet is also a perfect vehicle for further advancing such nonsense because it is, as we know, the ultimate shortcut to academic pursuits as demonstrated in this quote linked to a web address including the words 'media' and 'students':

> The Frankfurt school, set up in 1923, were concerned about the possible effects of mass media. They proposed the 'Effects' model, which considered society to be composed of isolated individuals who were susceptible to media messages. The Frankfurt school envisioned the media as a hypodermic syringe, and the contents of the media were injected into the thoughts of the audience, who accepted the attitudes, opinions and beliefs expressed by the medium without question.[1]

To make matters worse, if that's possible, the author produces a connection with the above to 'video nasties' such as *Child's Play 3* and whether it 'influenced the child killers of Jamie Bulger'. It is perhaps easy for scholars to scoff at such assertions, although not for this one, but the issue for the school in the homogenized form it is presented above, is that at the very least it is guilty by association. Suffice to say, an exploration of the index of this site reveals no direct references to anyone associated with the school. And here is a blog from a student studying Media Studies AS level conveniently titled 'The Hypodermic Syringe Model' and posted January 2011:

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1   http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Students/pph9701.html – See also the student room http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/showthread.php?t=465072 where confusion reigns, despite a few students believing they have identified the real source, which they had.

> The hypodermic syringe theory suggests that the media is like a magic bullet and when an audience is targeted it will immediately be knocked down when they are hit. The hypodermic-syringe theory also suggests that society is passive and the media 'inject' their media influence into society and manipulates it.[2]

An American journalist, Vance Packard, wrote *The Hidden Persuaders* in 1957 and Packard spoke of the hypodermic needle theory. Packard receives a brief, complimentary mention in the introduction to Marcuse's book *One-Dimensional Man*, whom Marcuse defends against those who perceived Packard's analysis as too simplistic. Nevertheless, the simplicity and over-determined essence of the hypodermic model does not comply with Marcuse's more complex arguments in his book. *One Dimensional Man* is about conforming and containment of radical resistance (Stuart Hall also spoke of containment of popular cultural forces), but as Douglas Kellner informs us in his introduction to the 1981 edition that Marcuse fully understood and accepted social change and the transformation of capitalism was still possible. Kellner further states that: '*One-Dimensional Man* should be read in relation to *Eros and Civilization*' and Marcuse's *An Essay on Liberation and Counterrevolution and Revolt* because 'It is precisely the vision of "what could be" articulated in these texts that highlights the bleakness of "what is" in *One-Dimensional Man*' (Kellner's introduction in Marcuse xxxiii: 1981).

A cursory glance at the title of Marcuse's introduction of *One-Dimensional Man* may lead us to believe that hopelessness pervades, titled 'The Paralysis of Criticism: Society Without Opposition' and only confirm the hypotheses of the hypodermic needle theory. But on further reading this is far from the truth, already detailed by Kellner but confirmed by Marcuse where he details contradictory tensions and dialectical struggles rather than one-way domination which forces subjects to become victims of their own submissions. Marcuse speaks of 'ambiguities':

> *One-Dimensional Man* will vacillate throughout between two contradictory hypotheses: (1) that advanced industrial society is capable of containing qualitative change for the foreseeable future; (2) that forces and tendencies exist that may break this containment and explode the society. I do not think that a clear answer can be given. Both tendencies are there, side by side – and even the one in the other (Marcuse xlvii: 1981).

I've used Marcuse here as an example of the argument against the one-dimensional latitudes of the superfluous hypodermic needle theory. To the extent that humans could escape the authoritarian character of capitalism, of which Fromm originally spoke of, was very much a matter of degrees concerning the analysis of writers within and associated with the Frankfurt School. Marcuse was hopeful and unsure, Adorno less optimistic as was Horkheimer: Benjamin and for that

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2   http://serenabarnes.blogspot.com/2011/01/hypodermic-syringe-theory.html.

matter the lesser-known Kracauer saw democratic moments and possibilities of emancipation in elements of cultural production. It's also arguable, as well as open to interpretation, that Lowenthal would have perceived new media as offering at the very least the opportunity of rebellion. My only desire in this present collection is to open the window a little more than previous on the works of the Frankfurt School and associates.

Chapter 1 begins with a philosophical account of the cultural observations by that lesser-known writer Siegfried Kracauer written by Sanda Miller. The chapter opens with a wonderful quotation by Friedrich Engels on the alienating character of the city and Engels observation of the city as a microcosm of the larger capitalist industrial system. Kracauer in many ways an outsider to the school wrote a collection of essays in his *Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* which the chapter focuses on. A number of relevant writers are introduced by way of comparison and reflection to highlight Kracauer's writings such as Charles Baudelaire and more emphatically Walter Benjamin, the subject of the following chapter, whom Sanda Miller draws comparisons with concerning observations of the 'everyday'.

The second chapter concerns the comparative figure detailed by Sanda Miller in Chapter 1 and one considered to be on the outer-circle of the Frankfurt School, Walter Benjamin. Alan O'Connor's chapter is a focused and detailed account of Benjamin in relation to cultural processes, particularly Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and the intellectual field. In his fine analysis Alan O'Connor asks the following question: 'Is it possible to expand Bourdieu's notion of class habitus and to develop a picture of Benjamin's *intellectual* habitus?' Alan O'Connor identifies ambiguities in Benjamin's writings which he further argues reflect inherent contradictions in Benjamin's class habitus and his political position.

One of the central figures of Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse, is the subject of analysis and assessment in Chapter 3 written by Philip Bounds. The emphasis of the chapter is the philosophical and political process of *negationism* in a cultural context. Whimsically pre-titled, so-to-speak, as 'Just Say No', Philip Bounds sets out to explain Marcuse's writings on negation as an anti-establishment basis for radical action. Marcuse's position as a leading figure of the new left in the 1960s is well-known but Philip Bounds argues that *negationism* remains a viable form of critique and opposition to industrial capitalism on a global scale pointing to the rise of the 'anti-globalization' movement in the latter half of the 1990s amongst other movements, which reflect the struggle against 'containment' detailed above. As Philip Bounds states consumer societies 'defuse' or to reflect the above attempt to contain 'political resistance'. Negationism in this respect stands in opposition to affirmative culture; the point is to realize it.

In Chapter 4, I attempt to show Max Horkheimer in a new light by discussing his insights on human development and social justice in relation to liberalism (and neo-liberalism) and culture. Whilst Horkheimer was a central figure to the school becoming Director of Social Research Institute in Frankfurt in 1930, he nevertheless published less than his colleagues (including associates) and has to a large extent been neglected on issues concerning culture, which Adorno

and Lowenthal were prominent. This chapter therefore attempts to correct that intellectual deficit because Horkheimer produced some very interesting solo intellectual insights into the meaning of culture, and I provide documents to show this not least from the much neglected *Eclipse of Reason*. The chapter discusses how Max Horkheimer combined Arthur Schopenhauer's 'pessimism' and 'suffering' with the 'materialism' of Marx which formed the basis of his ideas on critical theory and in this context provides a discussion of the relationship between culture and liberalism further arguing that Max Horkheimer produced often contradictory statements on control and liberation.

In Chapter 5, Robert E. Babe compares one of the leading figures of the Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno with the Canadian born writer Dallas Smythe. The chapter assesses two conceptual frameworks central to both writers. With respect to Adorno the chapter focuses on perhaps one of the most important areas of concern in media communication studies, which is the culture industry, a concept pursued in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, co-authored with Horkheimer. With respect to Smythe, Robert E. Babe discusses work concerning the consciousness industry. In both cases the author proceeds to compare their respective insights in relation to the political economy of media and communication. Robert E. Babe reminds us that Smythe acknowledged that the idea of the consciousness industry originated with Hans Magnus Enzensberger's who as the author states 'is generally considered to be a second-generation member of the Frankfurt School'. Hans Magnus Enzensberger is the subject of the following chapter.

Mike Wayne's chapter introduces readers to the works of Hans Magnus Enzensberger, the originator of the term 'consciousness industry', and proceeds to discuss Enzensberger's works in relation to new media technology. Mike Wayne sets out to show how Enzensberger's writings allow for a new narrative and assessment of the relationship between 'technological forces and social relationships'. The aim here is to show that by applying Enzensberger to social phenomena in this way can effectively avoid the technological determinism that is so 'prevalent amongst liberal media scholars' as the author argues. Enzensberger isn't usually included in any detailed discussions in the English speaking world in relation to the Frankfurt School and Mike Wayne reminds readers that generally speaking Enzensberger's work in relation and comparison to other writers has been largely ignored and marginalized from debate. Mike Wayne shows that Enzensberger's work on the consciousness industry reveals some of the contradictions in capitalism particularly in relation to control and cultural production.

In Chapter 7, Julian Petley discusses the works of Jürgen Habermas in relation to media and the public sphere. The chapter begins by explaining many of the theoretical problems associated with the idea of public sphere originally forwarded by Habermas but as the chapter proceeds the author highlights how the reformulated public sphere by Habermas can effectively be applied to critically assess the 'social and political role of the media'. This is important because all too often in academia it is common for writers/models of assessment to fall out

of favour, but Julian Petley effectively reminds readers that the public sphere idea (early or later reformulated one) can contribute to theoretical assessments of 'public service media, public/civic journalism, the media and the public interest, spin and opinion management'. Moreover, there is an assessment of new media and the Internet which has impacted greatly on Habermas's idea of the public sphere and whether it offers democratic possibilities.

Chapter 8 is an updated version of the work by Hanno Hardt originally titled 'The Conscience of Society: Leo Lowenthal and Communication Research' published in 1991 in the *Journal of Communication*. Here it is extended to reflect both recent historical and contemporary conditions and re-titled 'The Legacy of Leo Lowenthal: Culture and Communication'. One of the overall reasons for working on this current book is to bring in the associates and outsiders of the Frankfurt School, such as Kracauer, Fromm, Benjamin and Enzensberger and discuss their works and contributions (many neglected) in relation to what has become known as the Frankfurt School. However, it is ironic, to say the very least, that Lowenthal's work has been largely ignored in media communication studies because he was not a peripheral figure at all, in fact as David Held reminded us above Lowenthal was a central figure to the school. But it is also ironic, that despite the neglect that Hanno Hardt first wrote his work on Lowenthal in 1991 and yet still, people may ask 'who is he'? This chapter serves as a prod and a reminder.

The final chapter in this book is written by Caroline Kamau and is a welcome assessment of the work of Erich Fromm, the social psychologist and psychoanalyst whom, as the author reminds at the very beginning of the chapter, was introduced to Max Horkheimer by the subject of the previous chapter, Leo Lowenthal. Fromm joined the Institute in 1928 but occupied a space somewhere between the school's central figures and periphery. Caroline Kamau discusses the tensions between Fromm and other Frankfurt members, in particular Horkheimer and Adorno, over Freudian psychoanalysis of which Fromm was critical. This chapter is a welcome reminder of Fromm's work concerning the 'authoritarian personality' and his influence over the school in this area. As Caroline Kamau reminds us 'many agree that Fromm was responsible for pioneering work on the authoritarian personality', but yet in media communication studies it is Adorno who is largely credited with this conceptual idea. This chapter offers fresh insights to Fromm's works in relation to culture, consumerism and media.

Chapter 1

Siegfried Kracauer: Critical Observations on the Discreet Charm of the Metropolis

Sanda Miller

The very turmoil of the streets has something repulsive, something against which human nature rebels … The hundreds of thousands of all classes and ranks crowding past each other, are they not all human beings with the same qualities and powers, and with the same interest in being happy? And have they not, in the end, to seek happiness in the same way, by the same means? And still they crowd by one another as though they had nothing in common, nothing to do with one another, and their only agreement is the tacit one, that each keep to his own side of the pavement, so as not to delay the opposite streams of the crowd, while it occurs to no man to honour another with so much as a glance. The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest becomes even more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together, within a limited space. And, however much one may be aware that this isolation of the individual, this narrow self-seeking is the fundamental principle of our society everywhere, it is nowhere so shamelessly barefaced, so self-conscious as just here in the crowding of the great city (Friedrich Engels in Harrison, Wood and Gainger (eds) 1998: 295).

Siegfried Kracauer (1889–1966) is best known for his writings on the cinema. And the moot question asked about the 'arts of the camera' initially comprising photography and the moving image, invented during the nineteenth century was in which category were they to be included? Were they 'mechanical device' or were they 'art'? The argument in favour of the latter found a formidable supporter in André Malraux, who described the cinema as 'the furthermost evolution to-date of plastic realism, the beginnings of which were first manifest at the Renaissance and which found its completest experience in baroque painting' (Bazin in Alperson 1992: 277).

Kracauer's reputation continues to rest on his contribution to the philosophy and aesthetics of film. In his seminal book *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, first published in 1960, he argued in favour of a realist theory of film, whose roots he located in philosophy, exemplified by the documentary approach to filmmaking pioneered by the Lumière Brothers, which constituted one of the two main directions cinema followed, the other being George Méliès's phantasmagoric productions, firmly rooted in the theatrical tradition.

The reason why Kracauer regarded the realist approach exemplified by the Lumiére brothers by now iconic first reels, such as *Sortie des usines Lumière* (Lunch hour at the Lumière Factory) or *L'Arrivée d'un train* (Arrival of the Train), where they captured everyday folk going about their business, unaware of being observed and recorded by the lens of the camera, was their 'cinematic' quality. Thus Kracauer contributed a new aesthetic category to film studies, by which he meant the distinct characteristic which separated cinema from other forms of art or mechanical reproduction: 'In strict analogy to the term "photographic approach", the filmmaker's approach is called "cinematic", it acknowledges the basic aesthetic principle' (Kracauer in Alperson 1992: 311). This particular aesthetic category is not compatible with the concept of art Kracauer argues, which 'cannot cover truly "cinematic" films – films that is, which incorporate aspects of physical reality with a view to making us experience them' (Kracauer in Alperson 1992: 312).

What is less well known is that Siegfried Kracauer was a prolific writer, long before he turned his attention to the cinema with his psychological study: *German Cinema: From Caligari to Hitler* first published by Princeton in 1947 which brought him for the first time recognition in the English speaking academic world and it may well be that one of the reasons has something to do with his biography which split his life and therefore his literary, journalistic and academic input into two halves, in two languages, published in two continents.

Siegfried Kracauer was born to a Jewish family in Frankfurt-am-Main in 1889 and after studying architecture and obtaining a doctorate in engineering in 1914 he began to practice as an architect, first in Munich and then Berlin. Between 1922–1933 he worked as a film and literature editor for *Frankfurter Zeitung* where he met – among others – Walter Benjamin and Ernest Bloch.

His interest in the everyday; mass media, popular culture; advertising – everything that came to be associated with capitalist consumerism emerged at this point in his career with the publication of an analysis of the detective novel *Der Detektiv Roman* (The Detective Novel) written between 1923–1925. But the two works which comprise his seminal contribution to the, everyday, are *Ornament der Masse* (The Mass Ornament) and *Die Angestellten* (The Salaried Masses) published in 1927 and 1930 respectively.

With the rise of the National Socialist Party to power, which culminated with Adolf Hitler's election in 1933 to the chancellorship of Germany, its intelligentsia were forced to rethink their future and many decided to flee Nazi Germany. The situation was even more acute in the case of the Jews, because it was not only their ideological position but their very lives they had to protect and thus a veritable exodus began which including – among others – the entire *School of Frankfurt* which relocated lock, stock and barrel to the US. Neither Siegfried Kracauer nor Walter Benjamin were considered members; rather they were regarded as associates, both decided to head for Paris, the latter also attracted by his research interests focusing on his hero Charles Baudelaire. Their French *sejour* however was short lived, because in June 1940 the Nazis occupied Paris. In August 1940 'two German Jewish cultural critics: Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer gathered

in Marseilles in the hope to cross to the US by boat. Their friends Theodor Adorno, Meyer Schapiro, Max Horkheimer, Richard Krautheimer had arranged for them visas and employment in the US'. At this point however, their paths separated with tragic consequences for Walter Benjamin who fearing for his life committed suicide. Less well known, also fortunately less tragic, was the story of Kracauer and his wife Lili, who managed in the end to cross Spain and reach Lisbon from where they embarked on a boat for the US (Levin 1995: 1–32).

Walter Benjamin in fact left us a perceptive if rather misanthropic portrait of his fellow traveller:

> A loner. A discontent, not a leader … A rag-picker early in the dawn, who with his stick spikes the snatches of speeches and scraps of conversation in order to throw them into his cart, sullenly and obstinately, a little tipsy, but not without now and then scornfully letting one or other of these discarded cotton rags – 'humanity', 'inwardness', 'depth' – flutter in the morning breeze. A rag-picker, early in the dawn of the day of the revolution (Quoted in Frisby 1988: 109).

The 'rag-picker' and the 'flâneur': both Kracauer and Benjamin wrote about the big city, emphasizing the solitary existence of the life of the modern city dweller but they were both preceded by Friedrich Engels, who was quick to notice this situation as early as the 1840s and whose pessimistic comments perceptively underlined the painful isolation of the city dweller. Baudelaire's flâneur is melancholic and solitary wrote Benjamin:

> Baudelaire's genius, which is nourished on melancholy, is an allegorical genius. For the first time, with Baudelaire, Paris becomes the subject of lyric poetry. This poetry is no hymn to the homeland; rather the gaze of our allegorist, as it falls on the city, the gaze of the alienated man. It is the gaze of the flâneur, whose way of life still conceals behind a mitigating nimbus the coming desolation of the big-city dweller (Benjamin 1999: 10).

Baudelaire himself talks about this observer of human life from whom 'the crowd is his domain' and for whom 'his passion and his profession is to merge with the crowd'. This observer depicted in the seminal essay entitled *The Painter of Modern Life*, happened to be Constantin Guys, whom Baudelaire transforms into the paradigm of the flâneur 'this solitary mortal endowed with an active imagination, always roaming the great desert of man' but his seemingly aimless wanderings in fact have a *telos*; a final cause which is 'that indefinable something we may be allowed to call "modernity" for want of a better term to express the idea in question' (Baudelaire 1972: 390–431).

Thus Baudelaire invented 'modernity', which he goes on to define as 'the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half art, the other being the eternal and the immovable' (Baudelaire 1972: 403). The true impact of Baudelaire's definition of 'modernity' will only become apparent during the twentieth century

when it will be placed centre stage both by Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer in their own writings.

Kracauer's early journalistic and essayistic career started in 1921 when he was employed by *Frankfurter Zeitung* as a journalist and where he worked until 1929 when he moved to Berlin but continued to work for them as their cultural correspondent. This was however a short lived period and by 1931, as a consequence of a law-suit to do with severance pay, he lost his job and this event marked 'the beginning of his life-long exile' (Levin 1995: 1–32).

Kracauer's prolific journalistic career started with reportage but after being appointed as editor, he was able to choose his own topics, mostly informed by his personal interests in philosophy and sociology. Between 1921–1931 he wrote the majority of the articles and essays later published in two volumes: *Das Ornament der Masse: Weimar Essays* (The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays), already referred to and a second: *Strassen in Berlin und anderswo* (Streets in Berlin and Elsewhere), already referred to, both edited by Kracauer himself and first published in 1963.

The subject of this essay will be to provide a critical analysis of these writings, concentrating on the ones incorporated in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, which today remains less well known, a fact which has not passed unnoticed and to that effect we find comments in almost everyone of the few existing contribution to the sparse existing Kracauer bibliographical list. This is less than helpful to the readers who wish to acquaint themselves with Kracauer's Frankfurt and Berlin years, before he embarked on the second half of his writing career when he switched to the English language and proceeded to write about the cinema. Thus David Frisby (1988) comments: 'If Simmel's contribution to a theory of modernity has until recently, largely been neglected, then that of Kracauer has along with his other contributions to social theory been almost totally ignored' (Frisby 1988: 5). More recently, Paul A. Taylor and Jan Ll. Harris comment:

> Although less well known than Benjamin in media and cultural studies, Kracauer
> played a formative role (he had been Adorno's tutor and regularly corresponded
> with Benjamin) in the analysis of culture and media carried out by various
> members of the *Frankfurt School* to the extent that Benjamin and Adorno's
> accounts of the mass media can be seen as direct response to Kracauer's path
> (Taylor and Harris 2008: 39).

If we accept Baudelaire's definition of modernity as the major premise in the subsequent debate, Kracauer's contribution has been aptly summed up as concentrating: 'Upon the media of popular culture: the cinema, streets, advertisements and the circus. The unifying feature from the early to the late works is the intention of deciphering social tendencies immediately out of ephemeral cultural phenomena' (Karl Witte in Frisby 1985: 110).

Growing interest in the everyday and the understanding of how it continues to inform our understanding of the twin contributions of the nineteenth century, of inventing the concept of 'modernity' and creating 'urbanity' are at the

forefront of what came to be defined as 'the post-modern condition', and this is confirmed by a recent addition to an already impressive bibliographical list such as Michael Sheringham's book entitled *Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (2006). Focus is specifically on four French writers: Henri Lefevre, Roland Barthes, Michel de Certeau and Georges Perec and the period between 1960 and 1980 characterized – the author argues – by 'an explosion of interest in the everyday' whose origins however are traced back to the Surrealist movement (Sheringham 2006: 14). Moreover, he argues that Lefevre's book *Critique de la vie quotidienne,* written in 1945 draws on wider sources about 'the everyday at large' such as 'Marx, Freud, Lukács, Heidegger, Surrealism, Bataille, Leiris, Queneau and Benjamin' (Sheringham 2006: 4). A cursory glance through Kracauer's own writings reveals not only his formidable erudition but, more importantly, a commonality of inspiration, although he seems to display, not surprisingly, a noticeable preference for German, rather than French bibliographical sources.

Kracauer amassed 24 of his articles and essays contributed for *Frankfurter Zeitung* in the volume entitled: *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*. Hitherto focus has been on the sociological, and to a lesser extent philosophical aspects of his writings, exemplified in the scholarly contributions of Thomas Y. Levin, David Frisby and more recently Paul A. Taylor and Jan Ll. Harris, and for that reason I would attempt a different angle of approach that will link him to modern art, more specifically to the European artistic avant-garde which emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, as well as to popular culture, whilst exploring the recent new interest about its contribution to the development of 'high' art.

As already mentioned, both Kracauer and Benjamin were affiliated but never belonged to the elite Frankfurt School, although they both had close links with its members, and in the case of the former, especially with Theodor Adorno to whom he dedicated the volume under discussion.

An interesting question to be asked however is regarding the nature of Kracauer's relationship with some of the finest art historians and theoreticians of art such as Meyer Schapiro and Richard Krautheimer, who are listed as being among the friends who had arranged visas and work for him and Benjamin, and were awaiting their arrival in New York in 1940.

Richard Krautheimer (1897–1994) the distinguished Byzantine scholar was born and educated in Germany, but like Kracauer being Jewish had to flee Germany during the Nazi period and in 1935 he left for the US where he lived until 1971 when he settled in Rome, which became his adopted home until his death in 1994. In 1940, he was working as a lecturer at New York University where he taught until 1971 and during this time his seminal work in two volumes on Lorenzo Ghiberti, published in 1956 and 1971 respectively by Princeton University Press was published.

Meyer Schapiro (1904–1996) arrived in the US through a different route and at a different time. He was born in Lithuania and in 1907 his family emigrated to the US where he studied art history and completed a PhD at Columbia University where he began his academic teaching career. By 1952 he became a full professor

and well-known writer on modern art. His most enduring contribution however was art theory; specifically he was the first to introduce Marxism as a methodology in art history.

Thomas Crow in a study of the relationship between European avant-garde and consumer culture analyses what he calls 'this extraordinary theoretical moment of the later 1930s' (Crow 1998: 16) and he singled out as its main contributors the formidable trio of intellectuals: Meyer Schapiro, Clement Greenberg and Walter Benjamin. But there is a fourth contributor to the debate regarding avant-garde movements and mass culture, he regards the most important among them: Theodor Adorno, whom he regards as 'the only one able to preserve its original range of reference and intent' and for that reason Benjamin, Greenberg and Schapiro were used to 'lend historical and sociological substance to Adorno's stance as it pertains to the visual arts' (Crow 1998: 28).

The avant-garde movement was not only informed but directly influenced by consumer society Schapiro himself traced back to the Impressionists and this constitutes the main tenet of the argument put forward by Crow's 'trio of intellectuals', Schapiro, Benjamin and Greenberg. It was however Clement Greenberg's much quoted essay 'Avant-garde' and Kitsch, first published in 1939 in the *Partisan Review* in which he famously introduced the concept of *kitsch* (borrowing the word from German) as a new aesthetic category which has since been predicated of all that is bad taste, trash and vulgar. Greenberg's, somewhat dialectical approach postulates the necessity of a *rearguard* obviously an analogy with the Hegelian *anti-thesis*:

> Where there is an avant-garde generally we also find a rearguard. True enough – simultaneously with the entrance of the avant-garde, a second new cultural phenomenon appeared in the industrial West: that thing to which the Germans give the wonderful name of *kitsch*: popular, commercial art and literature with their chromotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics, Tim Pan Alley music, tap dancing, Hollywood movies, etc., etc. For some reason this gigantic apparition has always been taken for granted. It is time we looked into its whys and wherefores. *Kitsch* is the product of the industrial revolution which urbanised the masses of Western Europe and America and established what is called universal literacy (Clement Greenberg in Francina 1985: 21–33).

Greenberg's criticism of this new form of 'low' culture he labelled with the pejorative term of *kitsch* has been interpreted to reflect his preoccupation with a 'material and social crisis which threatened the traditional form of nineteenth century culture with extinction', whose cause was 'the economic pressure of an industry devoted to the simulation of art in the form of reproducible cultural commodities, that is to say, the industry of mass culture' (Crow 1998: 9).

The third contributor of the 'intellectual trio' Walter Benjamin and he introduced this link in his study of Charles Baudelaire in which he discusses the

privileged bourgeoisie, to which Baudelaire himself belonged, and their mode of finding enjoyment whereby the enjoyment on offer could only be enhanced by empathizing with commodities: 'The enjoyment promised to be less limited if this class found enjoyment of this society possible. If it wanted to achieve virtuosity in this kind of enjoyment it could not spurn empathizing with commodities' (Benjamin in Crow 1998: 16). The famous aesthetic category of 'l'art pour l'art' championed by Théophile Gautier (1811–1872) and Baudelaire himself who proclaimed the purity of an art that had to detach itself from any additional narratives, such as morality, pedagogic or propagandistic or any other role encumbered upon it in its history, was applied to literature but, Crow argues, this applies even better to the visual arts:

> the avant-garde left behind the older concerns of official public art not out of any special rebelliousness on the part of its members, but because their political representatives had jettisoned as dangerous and obstructive the institutions and ideals for which official art was metaphorically to stand (Crow 1998: 16).

And so we return to Baudelaire's celebrated definition of *modernité* which for the first time brought together, albeit in a poetic manner, the two sides of the culture: 'high culture' and the 'avant-garde': the former embodying the stable, ideal, universal values of art, the latter, all that is contingent:

> Nineteenth-century high culture was nothing if it did not embody the permanent, Indisputable and idea; the avant-garde appropriated the form of high art in the name of the contingent, unstable, and material …Validated fine art, the art of the museums, is that special preserve where the commodity character of modern cultural production is sealed off from apprehension … Marginal, leisure-time subcultures perform more or less the same denial of the commodity, using the objects at their disposal. Lacking legitimating institutions, their transformation of the commodity must be activist and improvisatory: thus, their continual inventiveness in displacing provided cultural goods into new constellations of meaning. The most powerful moments of modernist negation have occurred when the two aesthetic orders, the high-cultural and sub-cultural, have been forced into scandalous identity, each being continuously dislocated by the other (Crow 1998: 26–7).

It is possible then to construe the entire avant-garde movement as a confirmation of how it continuously intended to incorporate low-brow or mass culture in its morphological vocabulary and Crow provides excellent examples starting with Georges Seurat's famous *Bathers at Asnières*, and the *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of the Grande Jatte* painted in 1886 and 1888 respectively, in which the painter transferred the kind of leisure associated with the bourgeoisie, onto 'an exhausted but uncontrived working-class time off' (Crow 1996: 26–7).