



*New Immaterial Materialism*  
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### *New Immaterial Materialism*

Decades before celebrity cookbooks and the differentiation of microwavable breakfasts, Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer wrote *The Cultural Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*. Concerned with modernist production, the essay aims to locate new technical differentiations in art and media. There was something suspicious about certain projects' affect on the identity of both culture and the individual. Film and radio were in the crosshairs, as a means of production, though each did not always come to disorient identity. However certain projects did construct a false cultural reality of representation and image, content that dispersed a "false idea of the universal and particular".<sup>1</sup> Post-modern media sought to dismantle this idea of the universal, making the particular universally participatory. And yet, what birthed from the initial attempt at cultural unification became further dispersed: movie stars became microwave chefs, pop singers became activists, and the demarcation between object and media collapsed.



Developments within modernism – film, radio, the museum, the university, etc. – attempted to unify art and mass culture. Striated by the consumer economy, this unification created a paradox, an attempt transforming the audience into the individual, which exists only impossibly, modeled after a formulated role or object. Or perhaps the formulation of cultural roles led to the release of new cultural objects. These are objects though, retaining some precariousness as they attempt to navigate an audience through aestheticization and commodity. People feel comfortable when they can share something with one another – to be “in” with representation. And despite this shift in/to objecthood, a precarious divergence still exists under capitalist

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore W. Adorno, and Max Horkheimer. “Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London: Verso, 1972. Pp. 95

production, which in finding success in a creative projection molds it into an object through further monopolization. Say it “began with an idea” that shed itself onto object form, which then in turn reappropriates this idea into body of the consumer.



What appears today in response to this mass dispersion of culture is a new reterritorialization of knowledge and creativity. As some people will wincingly state, “It’s cool be artsy these days”. There has been a breach in “the mentality of the public” which once favored “the system of culture industry as part of a system, not an excuse for it”.<sup>2</sup> In the consumer body there is some oppositional participation, those who propose the industry again to be an excuse in the larger economic system. However much the reterritorialization of knowledge and creativity oppose a collective identity produced by modernism, it fails in escaping the position as a tenet of capitalism. The modernist production of media, keenly related to entertainment – or perhaps more disconcertingly, the canonization of those who entertain – has changed the status of an object entirely.

Whether it is an object for the mass market or of exclusive esotericism, it exists as a form of immaterial labor. The consumer is first absorbed by representation, and then goes on to consume. Jean Baudrillard’s *The Ecstasy of Communication* partly examines the object’s new specialized infiltration into reality. Baudrillard seems most unsettled by the ability of the screen to change to the status of the object beyond usage and exchange.<sup>3</sup> Consumption now reflects less a desire for ownership, rather an escape from the ubiquity of the object within reality. We now appear in a universe of scenes, where what is on screen becomes “crystalized into certain operation terminals”<sup>4</sup> for the purpose of reappearing in the experiential. The consumer economy, aestheticized, or a “buy-in” to aesthetic representation. This participation in

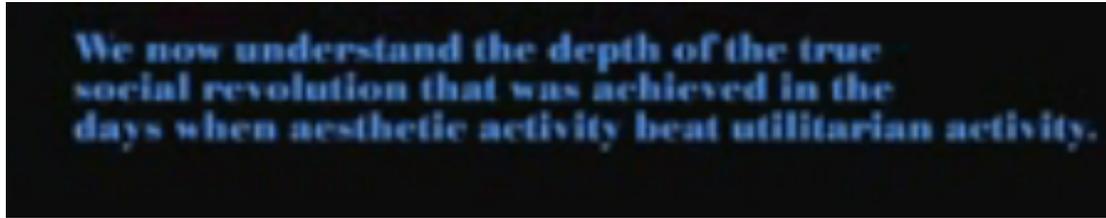
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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pp. 96

<sup>3</sup> Jean Baudrillard. *The Ecstasy of Communication*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. pp. 24

consuming, which itself escapes certain media projects, remains inescapable in the dialectic form: the intellectualized commodity, the individualization of the consumer and object, the displaced relief in avoiding the mass market.



*Underground: Trailer for a Book – Luke Gillick (2004)*

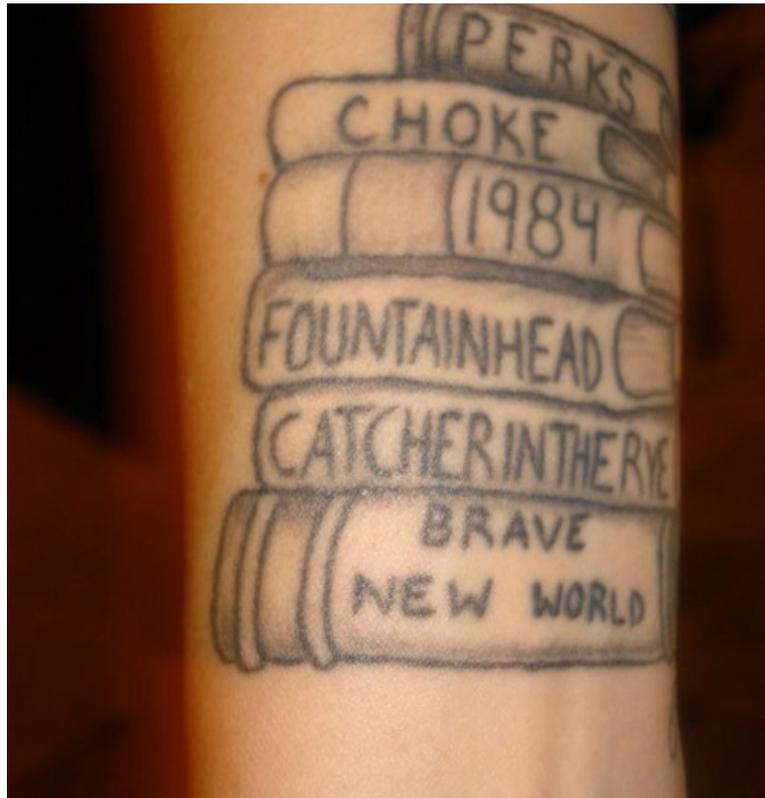
The concern for individuation of the consumer remains at large. A return to local provisions becomes desired, and afforded by those of a certain class (more often than not, those hyper-educated) in Europe and the United States. While this exodus from the celebrated commodity good may appear as a dialectic form of consumption, it proposes concerns in a different ballpark. Seemingly, as an escape from this participation, these outlets rely on “autonomy as sense of entrepreneurial freedom”.<sup>5</sup> Returning to class structure posits questions around freedom, or more distinctly, opportunity – where does it now lie? It may exist ambivalently in space, once affording the entrepreneur relationships with inhabitants as a neighborhood, but has developed into sheer economic opportunity – low rents and no competition. Or perhaps space has now expanded with time?



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<sup>5</sup> Gerald Raunig. *Factories of Knowledge / Industries of Creativity*. Los Angeles, CA.: Semiotext(e), 2013. pp. 34

Gerald Raunig's recent work *Factories of Knowledge Industries of Creativity* examines the striating effect of cognitive capitalism. Raunig writes around knowledge and creativity, appearing in the university where each retains exclusivity through abstracted measurements and ranking systems. Contrarily, once this initial "classroom" exclusivity collapses, knowledge and creativity retain a new currency – maintaining some exclusivity, though, through a different form of aestheticization. Raunig details, "the system of space shortage results in a new quality of subservient deterritorialization."<sup>6</sup> Like those cultural projections in modernism, the university, short in positions, seeks to maximize its effect through expansive space. The immaterial labor one once exerted in tuning into a program, then buying it into reality, has further diverged in form. No longer is the buyer also the viewer, but the thinker, the protagonist of a story which reality itself fails to describe.



Knowledge has become a social mechanic exchange. The student, while in the university, at one time sat in a space between school and work, may now be faced with little opportunity for either. If the reproduction and sharing of knowledge exists for communication or to instruct, it can hardly be said that this activity reterritorializes anything; granted, the modernist period's intellectual unification and then monopolization within university has been taken into account and accepted. However now, the University seeks, alike to the nature of the factory which Deleuze remarks in *Postscript*, "to concentrate, to distribute in space, to order in time, to compose a productive force within the dimension of spacetime whose effect will be greater

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. pp. 38

than the sum of its component forces.”<sup>7</sup> The reterritorialization has created a new creative economy. It pushes the student into public, utilizing a new campus space. If student participation is immaterial labor, then this post-academia campus reterritorializes the immateriality into a relationship between an entrepreneur and the participant, mediated by an all too material projection.



Adam Sandler as Longfellow Deeds delivering his restaurant’s pizzas in the film *Mr. Deeds* (2002)

The local business once appeared comfortably local, aiming to serve its community rather than a group of outside participants – the customer group which frequents disitric, often only to support the retail body. It took into account its place and purpose. Topographic functionality allowed neighbors friendly run-ins and frequent support of each other’s practice. The business knew the patrons and their pricerange. Ironically enough, now this romantic buyer-seller relationship seems to appear more in popular film than it does in reality. Perhaps this image of a local business has become out-moded, a form of warm kitsch put out by the same cultural producers who supply the larger economy. Instead of an impossible return to the mom n’ pop, this new local economy relies what is gained in the university. Creativity and knowledge have become transparently rebellious in this form, precarizing objects which attempt to bridge the gap between buyer and seller with some esotericism. However these new entrepenaurs attempt at creating clientle, the esotericism in market relationship reduces and confines. It confines those participants to an academic privelege, but reduces the status of knowledge and creativity by each’s aestheticization into a new material economy.

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<sup>7</sup> Gilles Deleuze “Postscript and the Societies of Control” in *October*, Vol 59. Winter 1992 pp. 3-7. Cambridge: MIT Press pp. 5

Further, as a departure from the redundant market, those new immaterial entrepreneurs maintain, what Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction*, would call “an ethos of collective distance”.<sup>8</sup> This entails a producer/participant population who can look past necessity, functionality, and their place in a larger district and onto the aestheticized, whatever it may be. For the consumer within the new cognitive market, “Aesthetic perception is necessarily historical. It is demanded by the products of a highly autonomous field of production, inseparable from a specific cultural competence.”<sup>9</sup> In the commodification of the art object, the literary, the historical, the new market provides evidence for the dismissal of the aestheticism entirely, which Bourdieu claims is a veiling of certain privileges and affordances. Not only does intellectual representation embrace the class difference, which it often seeks to dismantle, but it becomes reduced itself, now no longer autonomous. The author and artist become marketing strategists, and the relevance of their work collapses, existing now in a new material space that seeks to project no further past shared representation.



Responses to a mass-produced, media-endorsed commodity have created new immaterial materialism. This new market relies on the sharpness of the participatory body, their ability to recognize representation that borrows from a number of different intellectual constituencies and objects. However, the intellectual object, like the that of the celebrityized commodity is also demarcated. The boundary collapses, departing from both sheer functionality and an aesthetic representation that filiates its existence. This filiation may appear as an unofficial authorial or artistic endorsement. Though in this project, the intention of the work or position of the artist is entirely separate from the from the object of consumption itself. Any artistic connection only appears in the most fraudulent and sometimes contradictory manner, exhibiting esotericism

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<sup>8</sup> Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1984. pp. 6

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 8

and rewarding those who are “in on it” now with option to buy in on it, further propelling the fetishization to represent. The most puzzling relationship in this economy is not the seller’s concern for their audience, but rather the seller’s relation to the creative object. Perhaps this makes these new immaterial producers seem like less iconoclastic, because their understanding of the work concerns not a system of images or ideas? The connection between a gift shop and a short story is surely not bridged by authorial convention, especially with something as grim as Mansfield’s *The Garden Party* – where a bourgeois young girl encounters the death of working class man just outside her afternoon get together.<sup>10</sup> Even more puzzling are those producers who, like film makers, attempt to navigate the consuming body by pastiche alone. This aesthetic remains nameless in regards to artistic specificity. However the entrepreneur borrows from an amalgamation of work, constructing some sort of private language which does not manifest itself as a purely entertaining projection of cultural aesthetic, but rather one that requires audience participation. The ooo-ing and ahing of the buyer seems to become shaped by the object, viewed as a piece of the set or role, they choose to purchase.

The dimension for the exertion of immaterial labor is limitless, Arriving with the opportunity to learn is now a different opportunity to exploit knowledge. Returning to a socio-economic lense, an alternative to the continuation of these immaterial commodity networks regards the use of the space, not in the classroom or university, but the spaces inhabited by populants who cannot afford participation in this new market. Space has collapsed, especially for the small business that drive up the cost of rent and draws a population which travels into the district for the means of participation. As the buyer-seller relationship becomes increasingly mediated by the online market place, perhaps a turn to this sort of automation poses less of a threat because the net retains some all-inclusive activity. Sadly what remains unresolved is the physical exertation of labor as a means of production of these goods, and what this essay remains most concerned with, the displacement of the artform. Whether bought online or in person, to consume these new immaterial commodities still questions whether the creative object is of any value past social currency, the immediacy of useless representation, and the ego of the buyer.

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<sup>10</sup> Katherine Mansfield. *The Garden Party*. 1922. Reprint, Champaign, Ill.: Project Gutenberg, 1998.

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