

ZUR 393k: Effects of Mass Media

Assignment #1: Popular Culture Critique

Due: Wednesday, 21 October 2015 at the start of class (6:45 pm).

Length: 1-page summary (15 points) plus 2 - 3-page analytical essay (85 points).

This assignment asks you to analyze a contemporary popular song as a means of engaging with key ideas and arguments stemming from the Frankfurt School (and Theodor Adorno in particular). Your task will be to identify and illustrate points of agreement with Adorno.

To begin the assignment, first choose **one** popular song (from any country) that was **released for the first time within the past year** (e.g. since October 2014).

The writing assignment entails the following:

1. Write a separate **one-page summary/description** of the song you have chosen. Imagine a reader who is not familiar with the song or artist(s) you are discussing. Present details that will offer a clear sense of the musical style, vocal qualities, instrumentation, etc. Your summary should also include information to demonstrate the song's **popularity** (as measured by chart placement, album sales, iTunes downloads, YouTube hits, etc.). Also **identify the record label and its parent corporation**. Finally, **attach a separate copy of song's lyrics**. (Please try to offer an English translation of the lyrics, if possible.) (15 points)
2. Write a **2 - 3-page essay** that carefully **identifies, illustrates, and supports** points of agreement with specific concepts discussed in Adorno's writing. Your analysis should be presented in a single well-organized and well-supported essay with a clear thesis statement. (Your thesis for this assignment should essentially make an argument that despite the many changes in styles of music and the organization of the music industry since the early 1940s, some of Adorno's ideas and criticisms still hold relevance.) (80 points)
3. A complete **bibliography** of all works cited in both your summary and essay. (5 points)
To defend Adorno's critique of popular music, first identify 2 or 3 specific concepts/arguments drawn from (either/both) of the two assigned essays by Theodor Adorno. Clearly define/explain each concept that you use and link each carefully to the song you selected, illustrating your argument with specific features of the song (e.g. melody, instrumental or vocal elements, lyrics, etc.). Cite your sources carefully--both from Adorno and from your song itself (or from popular press discourse about your song).

EXTRA CREDIT: If you wish, you may also submit an additional page in which you present the strongest counter-argument that you can offer to this Frankfurt School critique. **Rather than refuting a point you have already made, a stronger counter-argument is one that focuses on an additional concept drawn from Adorno or which introduces new considerations that Adorno may not have taken into account in his critique of popular culture.** Support your counter-argument with evidence. This may include outside research (perhaps drawn from in-person or on-line investigations of the song or its intended audience). Your counter-argument must still specifically address the song you have selected.

PLEASE REMEMBER TO CITE YOUR SOURCES (including course readings).

See below for further information on proper citation format.

NOTE: The grading rubric used to evaluate your summary and essay is included with this assignment prompt. PLEASE ATTACH A COPY OF THE RUBRIC TO YOUR ESSAY..

NOTE: Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. Any act of plagiarism will be penalized with an F for the essay – AND FOR THE COURSE.

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GUIDELINE FOR CITING SOURCES:

Please use in-text citations (NOT footnotes) in your essay and include a **bibliography** of all works cited (including the essays by Adorno) at the end of your essay. You may use either APA or MLA citations.

Using in-text citations means that if you name the author in your sentence, simply identify the page number where the quotation or idea can be found. If you are using multiple works by the same author, then be sure to indicate the title of the work (in an abbreviated form) in your in-text citation as well. For example:

Adorno argues, that although we may consider contemporary music “ethereal and sublime, . . . it actually functions as a commodity” (“Social Critique,” 211).

If you don’t name the author in your sentence, your citation should include the author’s last name, along with the page number (and title, if necessary). For example:

The argument that music “is largely a social cement” (Adorno, “On Popular,” 39) means that listeners use popular music to help form, express, and share their sense of identity with others.

NOTE: Class discussion and lecture (or lecture slides) do not count as a source!
Cite Adorno (or other relevant scholarship) directly.

To cite Adorno’s essays AND popular press articles (related to chart placement, sales, etc.) in your “Works Cited” page:

MLA Style Citations:

Adorno, T.W. "On Popular Music." *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9 (1941): 17-48.

_____. "A Social Critique of Radio Music." *Kenyon Review* 7 (Spring 1945): 208-217.

“Songs of the Summer.” *Billboard*. 19 September 2015.

<http://www.billboard.com/charts/summer-songs>. Accessed 30 September 2015.

Cantor, Brian. (2015). “Taylor Swift’s ‘Bad Blood’ Crosses 2 million Year-to-Date U.S. Sales Mark.” *Headline Planet*. <http://headlineplanet.com/home/2015/07/31/taylor-swifts-bad-blood-crosses-2-million-year-to-date-sales-mark/>. Accessed 30 September 2015.

APA Style Citations:

Adorno, T.W. (1941). On popular music. *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9, 17–48.

_____. (1945). A social critique of radio music. *Kenyon Review* 7 (2), 208-217.

Songs of the summer. (19 September 2015). *Billboard*.

<http://www.billboard.com/charts/summer-songs>. Accessed 30 September 2015.

Cantor, B. (2015). Taylor Swift’s bad blood crosses 2 million year-to-date U.S. sales mark. *Headline Planet*. <http://headlineplanet.com/home/2015/07/31/taylor-swifts-bad-blood-crosses-2-million-year-to-date-sales-mark/>. Accessed 30 September 2015.

Consult Owl at Purdue for more assistance with source citations and bibliographic form:
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

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GRADING RUBRIC for Essay #1: Popular Culture Critique

YOUR NAME: _____

	<u>POINTS</u>
<u>ESSAY:</u>	
2 or 3 specific concepts drawn from readings	
Concepts clearly defined	/ 25
Concepts effectively illustrated with reference to song	/ 25
Persuasive analysis/argument offered	/ 5
Clear & effective essay organization and writing style (e.g. intro & conclusion, thesis, transitions, etc.)	/ 10
Completed assignment turned in on time	<u>/ 15</u>
	/ 80
<u>Song Transcription & Summary:</u>	
Complete transcription (and English translation) of song	/ 5
Song summary	
describes musical/vocal quality, etc. effectively	/ 5
names record label & parent company	/ 2
provides evidence of "popularity" (chart placement, sales, video views, etc.)	<u>/ 3</u>
	/ 15
<u>Bibliography</u>	
Complete and properly formatted list of all sources cited in summary & essay	<u>/ 5</u>
TOTAL POINTS:	/ 100
LETTER GRADE:	
<u>OPTIONAL EXTRA CREDIT:</u>	
Identify a specific weakness in Adorno's argument	/ 5
Offer evidence to support your argument	<u>/ 10</u>
	/ 15