

Marxist Criticism & Frankfurt School Seminar - Annotated Bibliography

Adorno, Theodor. 'The Essay as Form'. *New German Critique* 32 (Spring-Summer 1984), 151-171.

In this essay about the essay, Adorno explores the formal characteristics of the essay as a literary genre and the ways in which it can be employed by the Marxist critic. He builds upon the work of the young George Lukács in *Soul and Form*, and develops them from the framework of his negative dialectics. Adorno sees the capability of the essay of immersing itself in specific cultural products as if they were something given and unmediated as providing the possibility of revealing their mediations from within and of showing that nature is itself something culturally mediated.

Adorno, Theodor, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, Georg Lukacs, and Fredric Jameson. *Aesthetics and Politics*. London; New York: Verso, 2007.

This is a classic introduction to some of the central debates in Marxist theory around realism and expressionism, the autonomy of art, ideology and aesthetics. It was originally collected together by the *New Left Review*, and it is constructed as a series of statements and replies between some of the major figures of the early twentieth century. It also includes an afterword by Fredric Jameson which illuminates some of the directions his own work has taken in response to these debates.

**Benjamin, Walter. 'Convolute N [On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress].'
Arcades Project. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 2002. 456-488.**

In this section of the unfinished *Arcades Project* written between 1927 and 1940, Benjamin endeavoured to establish the epistemological and theoretical groundwork for a study of the covered passages and the city life of Paris. In so doing, he critiqued and refashioned some of the central tenets of the Marxist tradition. He focused on the problems raised by the base/superstructure relation, and developed his original interpretation of the Marxist conception of history. Notwithstanding its unfinished character, in these notes we can find crucial insights and breakthroughs for the understanding of cultural and artistic objects, as well as for the role of the Marxist critic.

**Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (1992).
Translated by Susan Emanuel. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996.**

In *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu synthesises many of more disparate observations on the history, vocation, and practice of literature that can be found in his earlier collection, *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993). Though maintaining an unorthodox relationship to Marxism, Bourdieu seeks to show how art and literature establish autonomy from the economic sphere, and how individuals artists might adopt a variety of positions (avant-garde, committed, popular) within the literary field. This study also develops a serious analysis of the relationships between writers, academics, and literary critics.

Brouillette, Sarah. *Literature and Creative Economy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014.

Brouillette seeks to re-examine the place of literature in the context of recent ideological and material developments in the labour process, such as increases in independent contracting and the concept of the ‘creative class’ coined by urban theorist Richard Florida. This book contributes to a debate on the Marxist concept of ‘alienation’ for a neoliberal era that frequently collapses the distinction between work, creativity, and life.

Chandler, James. *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1998.

Although Chandler does not explicitly define himself a Marxist literary critic, this study of the development of historicism in the Romantic period is indebted to Marxist theory in a number of ways. On one hand, he provides a historical sketch of how the problems of the brand of Romantic historicism that culminated in Marx’s *Eighteenth of Brumaire* re-emerged in the twentieth century in the debate between Sartre and Lévi-Strauss, and were later taken over by literary critics like Jameson and himself. On the other hand, Chandler’s study inhabits this theoretical framework by reading texts in both their ‘documentary’ and ‘worklike’ functions, i.e. as they inform about a state of affairs in the past and as they actively engaged in that state of affairs to transform it or preserve it.

Davis, Ben. *9.5 Theses on Art and Class*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013.

Davis’ book comes from two somewhat divergent experiences: his involvement in the Occupy Movement, and his career as a journalist in the world of contemporary fine art. Drawing frequently from Leon Trotsky’s writings on art and literature, Davis interrogates the failings of the world of elite art while refusing to accept that politically committed art can be merely reduced to more popular art. Davis therefore raises questions for the division of art and labour, accessibility for the public, and art education.

Eagleton, Terry. *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976.

This is one of the most briefly concise introductions to the subject of Marxist literary theory. Eagleton tackles the questions posed, and problems raised, by the major themes of Marxist literary and cultural criticism, such as literature and history, form and content, political commitment, and literary production. In each case, he brings to bear the major contributions of many prominent Marxist thinkers, such as Walter Benjamin, Louis Althusser, Pierre Macherey, Georg Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, and Marx and Engels themselves. This volume is essential for anybody new to the subject.

Horkheimer, Max. 'Traditional and Critical Theory.' *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*. 1972. New York: Continuum, 2002. 188-243.

In this programmatic essay written in the inter-war period, Horkheimer brought forth the distinction between two qualitatively different kinds of theory and theoretical practice. Although not strictly dealing with literary topics, the distinction between 'traditional' and 'critical' theory has been influential in the understanding of the role of Marxist literary criticism. The emphasis on the concretely historical over the abstractly universal, on the production over the givenness of social and cultural phenomena, on contradiction over harmony, on the freedom and negativity of reason over the necessity and efficiency of the *status quo*, are all useful principles in approaching literature from a Marxist perspective.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. 1991. 2nd Ed. London: Routledge, 2002.

This is an excellent starting point to Jameson's work. In the introduction "On Interpretation", he sets out his own methodological approach in opposition to the academical culture of his time, drawing from a range of sources including Greimas, Levi-Strauss, Althusser and Lacan. Countering the poststructuralist questioning of the referent, evident in such texts as Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, Jameson insists on the Real of history as 'absent cause' and proposes a form of historicism that pays attention to the necessary ideological production of the text.

Jameson, Fredric. 'The Politics of Utopia.' *New Left Review* 25 (2004): 35-54.

In this wide-ranging essay, Jameson argues that the waning of the idea of utopia is symptomatic of postmodernity's crisis of the historical imagination. Jameson argues that the utopian imagination has a specific role in times when the political has been suspended; offering the fantasy of an alternative in a moment when no alternative to the present seems possible. Yet, this

imaginary construction arises, by necessity, from a particular ideological position. The essay raises interesting questions about the relationship between utopia and ideology, and the political potentialities of the literary imagination.

Kaufman, Robert. "Legislators of the Post-Everything World: Shelley's 'Defence of Adorno.'" *ELH* 63.3 (1996): 707–733.

In this essay, Kaufman reads Percy Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* (1821) in the light of Theodor Adorno's insights into the relationship between aesthetics and politics. He proposes his reading as an alternative approach to those of cultural materialism, new historicism, and post-structuralism. He claims that the modern 'aesthetics and politics' question was first broached in British culture during Romanticism, where Shelley's literary theory and practice had a central role. He claims that Shelley invented many of the themes and procedures later employed Marxist literary criticism, especially of the negative or critical brand cultivated by Adorno and continued by critics like Marin Jay and Fredric Jameson.

Macherey, Pierre. *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966). Translated by Geoffrey Wall. London: Routledge, 2006.

Macherey focuses on literature as it's situated in competing systems of ideology and production. The gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions demonstrated by literature constitute, for Macherey, what it means for writing to be literary. Analysing a range of critics and authors, such as V. I. Lenin, Jules Verne, Jorge Luis Borges, and Honoré de Balzac, Macherey re-evaluates a series of concepts crucial to Marxist literary theory, including 'reflection' and 'mediation'.

Macherey, Pierre and Etienne Balibar. 'Literature as an Ideological Form: Some Marxist Propositions.' *Marxist Literary Theory*. Eds. Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996. 275-295.

In this controversial essay, Macherey and Balibar argue that literature is the result of the contradiction between 'literary' language and 'common' language. Influenced by Louis Althusser's concept of the Ideological State Apparatus, they locate the source of this contradiction in the educational system, where the dominant ideology derives the notion of 'literary' style and reception from a fundamental class conflict that 'literary' aesthetics then simultaneously obscure. Though this essay has been criticised as essentialist in its definition of literature's character and social role, it raises issues about literature's role in class domination and state power.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on Literature and Art.* (1973) Edited by Lee Baxandall and Stefen Morawski. Nottingham: CCC Press, 2006.

This slim collection provides a good introduction to Marx and Engels' disparate writings on literature, art, and aesthetics. The collection is organized around a series of useful themes such as: the origins of the aesthetic sensibility; art in a class society; art and alienation; realism; art and political tendency; form and style. While less complete than the 1976 Progress Publishers edition of Marx and Engels' writings on the subject, this edition provides a useful entrance into a subject that the philosophers were deeply concerned with, even if they never completed a sustained discussion of it.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics.* Trans. Gabriel Rockhill. London: Continuum, 2004.

This short book is an excellent introduction to Rancière's work on the relationship between politics and aesthetics. It is divided into five chapters grouped around some of the key concepts of his work: including the relationship between art and politics, the relationship between fiction and history, and the notion of disagreement. It also includes a useful introduction by Gabriel Rockhill and an afterword by Slavoj Žižek. These help situate Rancière's work more broadly within the field of aesthetics, and also draw some interesting points of dialogue between Rancière and Žižek.

Toscano, Alberto and Jeff Kinkle. *Cartographies of the Absolute.* Winchester: Zero Books, 2015.

Toscano and Kinkle draw on and develop Fredric Jameson's provocative notion of "cognitive mapping" to look at the way mapping has been used by contemporary artists as a way of representing the networks of capital, including readings of ideas of conspiracy in contemporary cinema, the notion of containerism in David Simon's *The Wire*, and an interesting reassessment of the importance of Guy Debord on the society of the spectacle.

Trotsky, Leon. *Literature and Revolution* (1923). Translated by Rose Strunsky. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960.

This collection of essays by the famous Russian revolutionary is an astute analysis of a wide-range of subjects. Not only does Trotsky critique developments within literature in the early twentieth century, such as Russian Futurism, but also analyses emerging schools of literary theory. His polemic against Russian Formalism has become a classic study in Marxist literary

theory. Furthermore, his studies on the social role of art and literature have serious implications for studies of politically committed art, as well as questions of ‘High Art’ versus ‘Popular Art’

Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Williams’ seminal collection of concise analyses of more than twenty basic essential terms for Marxist literary and cultural studies was intended as both an introduction and theoretical re-orientation in the tradition of the British ‘New Left’. Williams stresses an understanding of culture as a dynamic process that cannot be adequately viewed as a series of discrete artifacts, but only as objective pieces of evidence of the ongoing tensions between ideology and production. Furthermore, Williams’ re-evaluation of the traditional Marxist concept of base-superstructure described the more fluid, and influential concept of ‘structures of feeling’.

Žižek, Slavoj. ‘The Spectre of Ideology.’ *Mapping Ideology*. Ed. Slavoj Žižek. London: Verso, 1994. 1-33.

In this introduction, Žižek crystallizes his original contribution to this field of Marxist criticism, which had been the central focus of his work since *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989). Žižek argues that ideology needs to be separated from notions of truth and illusion; instead, drawing on Lacan and Althusser to argue that ideology can be understood in terms of three interlinked though distinct categories of doctrine, ritual, and belief. The essay raises productive questions about the role of fantasy that can be applied to an understanding of the relationship between literature and ideology, and discusses the task of ideological critique in this context.