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Theodor W. Adorno , Samuel Weber (Translator) , Shierry Weber NicholSEN (Translator)

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Prisms, essays in cultural criticism and society, is the work of a critic and scholar who has had a marked influence on contemporary American and German thought. It displays the unusual combination of intellectual depth, scope, and philosophical rigor that Adorno was able to bring to his subjects, whether he was writing about astrology columns in Los Angeles newspapers, the special problems of German academics immigrating to the United States during the Nazi years, or Hegel's influence on Marx. In these essays, Adorno explores a variety of topics, ranging from Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and Kafka's *The Castle* to Jazz, Bach, Schoenberg, Proust, Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption, museums, Spengler, and more. His writing throughout is knowledgeable, witty, and at times archly opinionated, but revealing a sensitivity to the political, cultural, economic, and aesthetic connections that lie beneath the surfaces of everyday life.

Prisms is included in the series, *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought*, edited by Thomas McCarthy.

Prisms Details

Date : Published March 29th 1983 by Mit Press (first published 1969)

ISBN : 9780262510257

Author : Theodor W. Adorno , Samuel Weber (Translator) , Shierry Weber NicholSEN (Translator)

Format : Paperback 272 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Theory, Nonfiction, Writing, Essays

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Elizabeth says

Say what you will about his opinions on jazz, but the Benjamin and Schoenberg essays are undeniably brilliant.

Nikki Skinner says

Adorno's Greatest Hits Vol 1

Jason Jang says

Fantastic Book

Not having read anything by Adorno before, I was surprised at the clear yet meticulous writing style given by Adorno in this collection of essays. Here are just some of my favorite essays in the collection.

Cultural Criticism and Society

Capitalist modernity has ruined the structure of culture and in its place replaced its core with two options. One is the totalitarian solution which attempts to bring back culture by canonizing it within the nation and shutting down its criticism which Adorno says merely alienates culture to the masses either forcing an ideal of a particular staticity of the arts which breeds uncritical fetishization or resentment. The other being the movement towards free speech however such solutions while sounding worthwhile merely feign the ideological trends of profit and its various degeneracies.

Spengler after the Decline

A surprising homage to Spengler, Adorno credits the critique of liberalism as progress as solidifying the pre-modernist idea of Machiavelli's notion of the revival of Republican Party politics in The Discourses as being utopian modernism because party politics based on freedom and autonomy attempt to build pluralistic notions of society based on existential notions of autonomy which only give the illusion of freedom due to the neoliberal structure of state and market who commodify values of the party into oppression. He then makes the jump to say Spengler's critique is not just some naive historicism but a pragmatic answer to the issues of modernist liberalism comparing his works to a form of positivism which merely trades particularized history in the future as an empirical framework of progress to a framework of empirical analysis which sees decline in the universals of cyclical civilization. Finally Adorno critiques Spengler's naive critique of political economy and his appeal to totalitarianism due to his focus on civilization.

Perennial Fashion – Jazz

While seemingly out of date to today's study of Jazz, Adorno constructs an interesting critique of Jazz as commodity culture in where inconsistent and accidental eccentricity has been normalized as a mad notion of individuality due to its reproducibility and inauthentic connection to its own roots. Adorno views Jazz as the ideological posterboy of the culture industry fetishizing commodities of industrial proportion.

A Portrait of Walter Benjamin

A nice little essay on Adorno's teacher Walter Benjamin and his collection of essays on various writers and artists who embodied lively images against the pictures of humanism and unoriginality. Noting Benjamin's neoplatonist jewish mysticism, Adorno argues that his own themes of post-enlightenment alternatives to the long beaten path of romanticism lied in the creative thoughts one could spin by reinvigorating a different spirit of enlightenment from the Paris Arcades.

Michael says

This is an incredible book. I would have used many of the essays here to put together my dissertation.

Jesse says

Haven't read it all, but selected essays. But what I have is brilliant and dense and... often makes me feel really, really inadequate.

Josh Brown says

I liked the essays better which were directed at specific targets. Even the ones about authors I haven't read evoked something of the essence of what Adorno wanted to say about broader therms. My only real criticism is that some of this stuff is so unbearably dense and abstract that it's tough to make out exactly what's being said. The more he tethers his ideas to those of others, the more I can understand them.
