



Culture, Class, and Critical Theory: Between Bourdieu and the Frankfurt School (Routledge Studies in Social and Political Thought)

By David Gartman

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Culture, Class, and Critical Theory develops a theory of culture that explains how ideas create and legitimate class inequalities in modern society. This theory is developed through a critique and comparison of the powerful ideas on culture offered by Pierre Bourdieu and the Frankfurt School thinkers, especially Theodor Adorno. These ideas are illuminated and criticized through the development of two empirical cases on which Gartman has published extensively, automobile design and architecture.

Bourdieu and the Frankfurt School postulate opposite theories of the cultural legitimization of class inequalities. Bourdieu argues that the culture of modern society is a class culture, a ranked diversity of beliefs and tastes corresponding to different classes. The cultural beliefs and practices of the dominant class are arbitrarily defined as superior, thus legitimating its greater share of social resources. By contrast, the thinkers of the Frankfurt School conceive of modern culture as a mass culture, a leveled homogeneity in which the ideas and tastes shared by all classes disguise real class inequalities. This creates the illusion of an egalitarian democracy that prevents inequalities from being contested.

Through an empirical assessment of the theories against the cases, Gartman reveals that both are correct, but for different parts of modern culture. These parts combine to provide a strong legitimization of class inequalities.

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Culture, Class, and Critical Theory: Between Bourdieu and the Frankfurt School (Routledge Studies in Social and Political Thought) By David Gartman Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #5932452 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Routledge
- Published on: 2012-10-16
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x 6.25" w x .75" l, .85 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 194 pages



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About the Author

David Gartman is Professor of Sociology at the University of South Alabama.

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