“Is This S**t For Real?”

Adorno, Benjamin, and Anti-Comedy

Dennis Golin

German cultural theorists Walter Benjamin and Theodore Adorno were outspoken in lamenting the industrially-churned sameness produced by the culture industry, yet both men also saw the power of truly authentic work to deliver moments of introspection (or, as is often the case in modern art, to highlight the absence of them). The visual technologies of the twentieth century have the power to lull us into submission, but also to politically energize mass audiences through propagating absurdity, imperfection, and confrontation. According to Benjamin’s theories, film may even have the power to form a window into the unconscious. The philosophy sustained and elucidated by these two men has had a profound influence on modern American comedy, particularly in the work of comedians Tim Heidecker and Eric Wareheim. Throughout their oeuvre of surreal comedy sketches, Tim and Eric take up the complex themes of alienation, greed, inadequacy, and a Freudian obsession with paternity (and by extension patriarchy), and feed them roughly through the meat grinder of lowbrow comedy. The result embraces the derivative, the faulty, and the profane, creating authenticity by pointing out the hopelessness in trying to achieve it. In the process, their comedy expands our sensibilities and sensory vocabularies, challenges our relationships to reality, and redefines the scope of artistic expression.
L et me remark, by the way, that there is no better starting point for thought than laughter; speaking more precisely, spasms of the diaphragm generally offer better chances for thought than spasms of the soul. (Benjamin [1966] 2003, 101)

On a 1975 episode of the comedy program Saturday Night Live, a strange looking man named Andy Kaufman applied a phonograph needle to a vinyl record and stood in silence. A scratchy recording of an old cartoon theme song began to play as Kaufman continued to stand still with a kind of dazed look about him. The audience chuckled nervously. Then, at the crucial moment of the song – “Here I come to save the day!” – Kaufman broke the tension and boisterously mimed along, returning to his awkward silence at the line’s completion. A few seconds later, he almost jumped in early, missing his cue, but collected his bearings and hit his mark with gusto when it returned (“Mighty Mouse - Andy Kaufman” [1975] 2014). The audience in the studio seemed to enjoy it, but perhaps without knowing quite why. Audiences at home heard the confused but enthusiastic reception and were largely left questioning the reality and the meaning of what had just occurred: “Was this meant to be ‘funny’ or ‘not funny,’ or was it funny precisely because it wasn’t actually all that funny?” (Sconce 2013, 75). Whereas dry traditional humor, according to philosopher Simon Critchley, is “a consequence of city life, maybe even of metropolitan life… what civilized people do, share, have in common” (Dillon & Critchley 2005), anti-comedy elevates the provincial, the unpleasant or disturbing, and the unfamiliar (it is worth remembering that Kaufman’s most successful character was named “Foreign Man”)—to find comedy in the uncommon and to experience humanizing laughter rather than fear when faced with the idea of the Other. In keeping with the iconoclastic spirit of Adorno and Benjamin, it eschews conventional delivery and subject matter by heightening just how vapid those conventions can be. It also speaks to the grouping of the comedic avant-garde of 2018, as the most notable of Kaufman’s heirs are a prolific duo from Philadelphia with a predilection for the grotesque—Tim Heidecker and Eric Wareheim.

Today, Kaufman’s unique performances on stage and in life, which include reading pages of The Great Gatsby in a British accent (“Andy Kaufman Reads The Great Gatsby” [1978] 2016), eating a bowl of ice cream while canned applause comes out of a cassette player (“Andy Kaufman - Eating Ice Cream” 2007), or “forgetting” the rest of his act—his staccato cries of anguish gradually morphing into a bongo-infused scat—fall within a genre often dubbed “metacomedy” or “anti-comedy.” It’s a term that can further be applied to some of Kaufman’s contemporaries like Michael O’Donoghue, progenitors like Ernie Kovacs, and successors like Eric Andre. Cultural theorist Philip Auslander defined it as “a practice focused on the vulnerabilities and potential ‘failures’ of public performance… comedy that is explicitly about the art of comedy itself, a foregrounding of its expectations, conventions, and execution” (Sconce 2013, 75).
Since 2004, Tim and Eric have created a number of shows that have aired on the Cartoon Network’s Adult Swim programming block. The most influential of these, *Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job!* has been described as “like outtakes from a public-access channel that’s broadcast only in hell… full of shoddily produced, sloppily edited talk shows about acne and commercials for utterly unnecessary gadgets, and populated by people who should never stand within 50 feet of a camera lens” (Itzkoff 2008). While slyly skewering the consumerism of late capitalism through their “CINCO” brand’s infomercials (“Every Cinco Product Ever | *Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job!* 2017) and the shadowy “Channel 5” it controls, the very look and feel of their show experiments with perception itself, playing with Walter Benjamin’s convention that “the audience’s identification with the actor is really an identification with the camera” (Benjamin 1969, 230). As comedian Scott Aukerman recalled, “They were using editing and sound effects in a way I had never seen” (Zinoman 2017). These effects usually include a crescendo of gurgles, static, lip smacking, and still frames that always seem to get stuck on the most unflattering pose. Certainly, a casual TV watcher who came across one of their early episodes found himself in the same position as that *SNL* audience 40 years ago, asking, “Are these people for real?” The line between art and reality wasn’t just blurred, it was smeared.

Another duo, the critical theorists Theodore Adorno and Walter Benjamin, were themselves no strangers to the cutting edge. Playwright Bertolt Brecht was a friend to both men, having spent time with Benjamin in Sweden as exiles and in Los Angeles with Adorno. Beginning in the 1920s, Brecht created a theatrical technique he dubbed “epic theatre” which employed unconventional methods to destroy the illusion of straightforward representation: “Actors spoke as if they were reciting someone else’s words; they went in and out of character on stage; scenes formed a discontinuous montage, and were, at times, frozen into a tableau vivant” (Ezcurra 2012). Adorno seemed to dislike it, claiming, “Brecht distrusts aesthetic individuation as an ideology. This is why he wants to turn the gruesomeness of society into a theatrical phenomenon by dragging it out into the open” (1991, 82). Benjamin, on the other hand, was entranced by the possibilities of this form “to alienate the audience in a lasting manner, through thought, from the conditions in which it lives” (2003, 101). The weirdness of modern anti-comedy can trace its history to this principle. Tim and Eric frequently use non-professional actors, degraded video, and abrupt edits to break through the artifice of conventional sketch premises. As Eric Wareheim told the *New York Times*, “It added to the mystery. It makes people think: Is this real? Is this acting or not? That’s exciting to us” (Zinoman 2017). Benjamin was strongly in favor of such trickery, recalling how “Brecht talks about epic theatre, and mentions plays acted by children in which faults of performance, operating as alienation effects, impart epic characteristics to the production. Something similar may occur in third-rate provincial theatre” (2003, 115).

Obviously, a well-funded show on a national cable network is not “third-rate provincial theater” by any means. Just because the aesthetic of the program takes on a provocative quality doesn’t mean it is not in service to what Adorno called “nothing but business as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce” (Horkheimer & Adorno 2006, 42). Indeed, the very editing style that Tim
and Eric (along with their longtime editor Doug Lussenhop) pioneered is a feature in many advertisements, some of which are directed by Tim and Eric themselves (Tim & Eric 2014). Benjamin and Adorno would likely be skeptical that someone ensconced within the capitalist mode of production could effectively critique it. However, Tim and Eric were given complete creative control by Adult Swim, something of a rarity in Adorno and Benjamin’s day of studio systems in the 1930s and 1940s. Tim Heidecker remarked: “When Adult Swim approached us about doing another show, we said, ‘you have to trust us. You know us. You know what we do. It’s just going to be our show’” (Epstein 2007). The arrangement allowed them to reach an audience of millions while maintaining artistic integrity in the face of corporate interests.

There is a certain irony to the fetishization of so-called “high-art” on the part of Adorno and Benjamin. Adorno seems unaware of the classism in his argument when he describes a revolutionary cultural creation like jazz as “routine travestied as nature” and “stylized barbarism.” He seems to insist that any cultural production that fits outside the regimen of standardized production is nonetheless in service to it: “Orson Welles is forgiven all his oﬀences against the usages of the craft because, as calculated rudeness, they confirm the validity of the system all the more zealously”—a deeply ironic statement considering that Welles’ work came to deﬁne the craft of ﬁlmmaking itself (Horkheimer & Adorno 2006, 46). Adorno lovingly speaks of the highly class-stratiﬁed culture of pre-Fascist Europe, calling it “backward in relation to the monopoly of culture… it was precisely to such backwardness that intellectual activity owed a remnant of autonomy” (ibid., 49). He conjectured that it was precisely because the work of art was inaccessible—and perhaps incomprehensible—to the lower classes that art was disconnected from market demands and was thus more “pure.” To put it plainly, “as long as it was expensive, art kept the citizen within some bounds. That is now over” (ibid., 67).

Likewise, Benjamin sees even the most challenging works as having their origins in bourgeois circles: “The extravagances and crudities of art which thus appear, particularly in the so-called decadent epochs, actually arise from the nucleus of its richest historical energies” (1969, 237). The progressive reaction to ﬁlm, according to Benjamin, “is characterized by the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert,” presumably referring to the director (ibid., 234). He speaks favorably of the Dadaists who “attached much less importance to the sales value of their work than to its uselessness for contemplative immersion,” speaking to how their deconstructions of word and image confronted the observer with distraction, an eﬀect perfected with the rise of ﬁlm (ibid., 237). Adorno retorts: “The idea that a reactionary individual can be transformed into a member of the avant-garde through an intimate acquaintance with the ﬁlms of Chaplin strikes me as simple romanticization” (Adorno & Benjamin 1999, 130). The two intellectuals were of a similar mindset to that of French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, who asserted only a proper background and grounding in the arts could stimulate revolutionary thought, where “the legitimate way of appropriating culture and works of art favors those who have had early access to legitimate culture, in a cultured household…” (2004, 432). In fact, Critchley posits that the cultivation of “taste” has a strong relationship with the rise of humor as a respected ﬁeld, claiming “you could
probably plot similar genealogies for both concepts” (Dillon & Critchley 2005).

A sketch by Tim and Eric (themselves graduates of Temple University’s film program) like “Poop Tube” would certainly gain the ire of many “serious” cultural critics. This fake infomercial involves a medium-energy inventor a la Billy Mays hawking a device that supposedly restores dignity and cleanliness to the act of defecation—by rerouting the excrement so it shoots out of a helmet-mounted tube, allowing men to use the urinal instead of sitting on the toilet seat (“The Poop Tube | Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job! | Adult Swim” [2007] 2009). This parody of performative masculinity and the pragmatic shamelessness of late capitalism can hardly be called “in good taste.” Bourdieu remarks how,

The denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile—in a word, natural—enjoyment, which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated… distinguished pleasures forever closed to the profane. (2004, 432)

Recognition from the cultural elite is based mostly in “prohibitions applied to its syntax and vocabulary,” something Adorno believes is true of both the “avant-garde” and the culture industry alike (Horkheimer & Adorno 2006, 46). Of course, much of modern “avant-garde” art and performance will incorporate scatological or grotesque elements—the work of Marina Abramovic and Chris Ofili being some notable examples—blurring the expectations between what constitutes “tasteful” and “tasteless,” “high art” and “low art.” In the age of YouTube and Wikipedia, cultivating what Bourdieu calls an “aesthetic disposition” is simpler than it looks (Bourdieu 2004, 432). As cultural historian Jeffrey Sconce postulates, Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job! suggests, “even television—long-considered the lowest and most debased of the visual and performing arts—has both ‘artists’ and an audience who have now cultivated such a disposition” (2013, 81). Basic cultural literacy may not be required to comprehend anti-comedy, but it certainly helps interpret it.

According to Benjamin, mechanical reproduction led to the steep decline of the “aura” as perceived through face-to-face experience. The aura, or “a quality of our experience of objects…closely tied to the religious or quasi-religious element in art” (Rosen 2004, 10) of a performance or a work of art has been replaced by the “spell of a personality, the phony spell of a commodity” (Benjamin 1969, 231). Or, put more plainly, the ancient ethereal experience of a cultic object has been replaced by the monetized spell of celebrity culture (satirized as a mad dash-for-cash game show in the Tim and Eric sketch “Celebrity Zillions” [“Celebrity Zillions | Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job! | Adult Swim” [2009] 2010]). Somewhat cynically, Benjamin states “[Mankind’s] self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order” (1969, 242). As Situationist Guy Debord phrased it, “The basically tautological character of the spectacle flows from the simple fact that its means are simultaneously its ends” (1977). It is a kind of scripted pointlessness wherein we insist on our autonomy but perform exactly as we are expected. Adorno further clarifies: “For centuries society has prepared for Victor Mature and Mickey Rooney. They come to fulfill the very individuality they destroy” (Horkheimer & Adorno 2006). This is a kind of class-consciousness of an inevitable
consumption towards death, whereby the means of continuing our existence through the fulfillment of our basest desires is also the means by which our lives are propelled toward their ends, in a pastiche of Heidegger’s \textit{Sein-Zum-Tode} ("being-towards-death") (Heidegger 1962, 247).

Here, Benjamin’s fascination with Dadaism once again reveals a desire to prod the audience: “Dadaistic activities actually assured a rather vehement distraction by making most works of art the center of scandal. One requirement was foremost: to outrage the public” (1969, 238). He sees these developments firmly in line with the iconoclasts of the past, squaring his Marxist historical materialism with his religious tradition (Ezcurra 2012). “For the first time in world history,” Benjamin writes, “technological reproducibility emancipates the work of art from its parasitic subservience to ritual” (Ross 2014). Adorno also believed in this merger of mythmaking and historical conditions, claiming, “[the] heart of the autonomous work of art does not in itself belong to the dimension of myth... but it is inherently dialectical, that is, compounds within itself the magical element with the sign of freedom” (Adorno & Benjamin 1999, 128).

The smoothing over of time and place into a homogenous present plays an essential role in Benjamin and Adorno’s belief in the decline of aura. As Benjamin puts it, “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (1969, 220). The cheapness of reproduction cannot help but extend into the lived experience of the consumer, replacing the uniqueness of empirical perception with a copy of a copy of a copy. Technology has created a spectacle which “presents itself simultaneously as all of society, as part of society, and as instrument of unification” (Debord 1977). “The more densely and completely [filmic] techniques duplicate empirical objects,” Adorno wrote, “the more easily it creates the illusion that the world outside is a seamless extension of the one which has been revealed in cinema” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2006). Thus, it falls upon artists to utilize the unique representational features of cinema itself to span generations, link past with present, and shatter the adherence to a unified present. As Benjamin believed, memory “traverses the whole of life like lightning... That is the only way in which [the audience] encounter themselves, and only thus – by fleeing from the present – can they understand life” (2003, 112).

“By means of its technical structure,” wrote Benjamin, “the film has taken the physical shock effect out of the wrappers in which Dadaism had, as it were, kept inside the moral shock effect” (1969, 238). This is the nucleus of Benjamin’s “shock effect”—the audience feels actual physiological sensations through film via its use of montage, jump-cuts, special effects and so on, overwhelming our senses with secondary, emotional stimuli. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan would later take it a step further, postulating how film’s “sheer speeding up [of] the mechanical, carried us from the...
world of sequence and connections into the world of creative configuration and structure. The message of the movie medium is that of transition from lineal connections to configurations” (McLuhan 1973, 27). In a sense, our brains are being rewired to identify with the clustering of subjects and objects as they are related visually, rather than the linear approach that came with thousands of years of written communication. The frenetic pace of many Tim and Eric videos reflects this—what Bob Odenkirk calls “the perfect wrong thing at the right time with a rhythm to it” (Zinoman 2017)—as does the principle of interruption in epic theatre, itself a reinterpretation of film montage for the stage (Benjamin 2003, 99). Indeed, there may be evidence for such a theory. New research shows that people “faced with information overload tend to shift their medium of information from long texts… to condensed information such as video… or short texts (Twitter and the like). In other words, we stopped reading and began watching” (Ahn 2016).

Reading the work of Charles Baudelaire, Benjamin remarked how he “placed the shock experience at the very center of his artistic work” agreeing that “the highly sensitized artist is constantly being shocked, over-stimulated, by the world around him and must enlist his consciousness to aid him in the battle” (Slocombe 2004). In fact, Brecht’s conception of Verfremdung (estrangement or alienation) and Benjamin’s idea of “shock” “are often deemed identical” (Ezcurra 2012). Both men believed the heightened state of mind required to combat audience complacency is progressively weakened through exposure, both from voluntary exposure to things like films and plays and involuntary exposure to urban environments, large crowds and so on (Slocombe 2004). When one harnesses the ability to pay attention, the rote language of the market (“New!” “Improved!” “Guaranteed!”) betrays a kind of intellectual bankruptcy that is only made more perverse through its constant replication, and repetition on television and the internet (a special kind of advertising hell that neither Adorno nor Benjamin ever got to experience).

For Adorno and Benjamin, even if something authentic were to slip by the cultural industry, the industry would quickly commodify it (or, if it failed to do so, produce knock-offs). On a television appearance, Adorno remarked how “when somebody… for whatever reason [accompanies] maudlin music by singing something or other about Vietnam being unbearable… I find, in fact, this song unbearable, in that by taking the horrendous and making it somehow consumable, it ends up wringing something like consumption-qualities out of it” (“Adorno about Popular Music (now with english annotation)” 2007). Anti-comedy purveyors would agree that there is no way to speak authentically to the tragedy of warfare. The more truthful, and indeed shocking approach would be to reflect on the horrendousness of conflicts like Vietnam as an essential, inevitable part of “the spectacle” that is incapable of being expressed without falsely imposed narratives (see the overwrought jingoism and shamelessly applied stock footage of Tim Heidecker’s Trumpian secret agent show Decker, where the bad acting and special effects prove the perfect accompaniment to faux-nationalist bloviating [“Decker: Unclassified Trailer | Adult Swim” 2016]). Anti-comedy embodies a kind of ‘Detournement,’ the Situationist method of using preexisting aesthetic elements to construct propaganda within the old cultural spheres, “a method which reveals the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres” (“Definitions” 1958). Likewise, epic theatre “aims at creating awareness by exposing its own
artifice” (Ezcurra 2012), and relishes in the degradation of form to return the observer to detail-oriented thinking.

“Tim and Eric mock clumsy cable access, for sure,” wrote the New York Times, “but also venerate the possibilities of terrible acting or the kinds of mistakes that reveal an honest moment in the middle of the artifice of show business” (Zinoman 2017). Lowering expectations allows one to be more fearless in their choices, taking expectations and inverting them. Andy Kaufman insisted: “I’m not a comedian. What I am is a song-and-dance man. And if someone wants to really flatter me and be complimentary, they can call me an absurdist and a surrealist. Because I’m not trying to be funny” (Hecht 2001, 63). Perhaps levity is essential to true insight, taking “art” out of the staid galleries and reorienting it to and within reality. Even the skeptical Marxist Adorno could not help but wonder if “absurdity in the manner of Mark Twain, with which the American culture industry flirts from time to time, could be a corrective to art” (Adorno 1999, 55). Could the surrealist ‘rhizome’ in modern comedy be hinting toward a deeper truth about the human regression, a reversion to irrationality in the age of cold mechanized efficiency? As Marshall McLuhan postulated, “In the electric age man seems to the conventional West to become irrational” (1973, 15).

It has become evident that television and film are quite literally making us more emotionally invested and present, while simultaneously making it harder for us to think linearly. As Michael J. Ahn wrote for Brookings Institute,

Assuming there is a unit of information to be conveyed, acquiring that information from reading long texts will prompt people’s rational thinking while watching a video will, in addition to rational analysis, facilitate emotional reaction depending on how the information was presented visually. (2016)

Benjamin had foreseen that the mechanical principles of film could reveal things that simple perception could not (e.g., the Muybridge Experiment’s use of film to prove horses gallop with all four hooves off the ground). As he wrote in Mechanical Representation,

Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye, if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man... the camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses. (Benjamin 1969, 236)

Just as McLuhan saw media as an extension of the human body—making us into pseudo-cyborgs—Benjamin believes film has become a psychic apparatus: “Film is the first art form capable of demonstrating how matter plays tricks on man. Hence, films can be an excellent means of materialistic representation” (ibid., 247).

Could anti-Comedy be a kind of window into the id-saturated unconscious? Kaufman often bordered on the infantile in some of his “acts,” once famously getting into a physical altercation with wrestler Jerry Lawler on an episode of Late Night with David Letterman (the event, like countless other Kaufman happenings, was later revealed to have been staged [“Lawler Kaufman on Letterman 82” [1982] 2014]). Tim and Eric frequently use the convention of fatherhood as a source of ridicule and borderline Oedipal obsession, writing songs like “I Wear My Dad’s Dirty
Socks,” (“I Wear My Dad’s Dirty Socks | Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job! | Adult Swim” [2007] 2012) “Live With My Dad” (“Live With My Dad | Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job! | Adult Swim” [2009] 2012) and “Meditation for Children” (“Meditation for Children | Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job! | Adult Swim” [2007] 2012) where the host attempts to obtain the email addresses of the children’s fathers. Modern comedy has a fixation on discomfort, perhaps reflecting and confronting the uneasy balance between the virtual (i.e., contrived and socially conditioned) and the real (i.e., authentic) in our human relations. As such, it places itself in a realm of tension and reflection that is, as Martin Heidegger says, “on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it. Such a realm is art” (1977, 35). For Benjamin, the duel between consciousness and distraction “is the creative process itself,” and has thus “placed the shock experience at the very center of his artistic work” (Slocombe 2004).

With the proliferation of reproduced images and the decline of real-life interpersonal connections, all the world has truly become a stage, and life itself, an installation, a performance. Adorno believed people who just left a film perceive the street outside as a continuation, because the film “seeks strictly to reproduce the world of everyday perception” (Horkheimer & Adorno 2006, 48). But Benjamin saw the blurring of lines between author and audience as ripe for radical possibility. In the films of Dziga Vertov for instance, Benjamin was thrilled by “the masses themselves become[ing] actors, and the divide between author and public disintegrat[ing]” (Ross 2017). Thanks to technologies like YouTube, engagement with a work’s creator is easier than ever, and can be done in a number of creative and deconstructive ways. For instance, fans of Saturday Night Live often “repeat, reuse, and re-contextualize” the sketches that resonate with them, expanding the show’s influence beyond just those viewers who watch the initial live broadcasts” (Gurney 2013, 255).

It is the fulfillment of a desire harbored by Benjamin ever since he first became aware of epic theatre: That the cultural apparatus “will be better, the more consumers it brings in contact with the production process, in short, the more readers or spectators it turns into collaborators” (2003, 98). As he predicted in The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Representation, “The distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character” (ibid., 98).

Adorno knew that there will always be the ideology of sameness to rally against and watched as the Expressionists and Dadaists “attacked in their polemics, the untruth of style as such, triumphs today in the vocal jargon of the crooner” (Horkheimer & Adorno 2006, 48). The modern media landscape shows that even with an abundance of choice, the mediocre—as the common denominator—triumphs nonetheless. Yet, as long as free access to culture burgeons, niche markets find their consumers more easily. Mutual appreciation between outsiders (and the marginalized) can always be fruitful. Tim Heidecker once suggested fans of his shows “laugh at things that make other people squirm… it’s fun to watch how different people are” (Wilson 2012). Even Andy Kaufman’s mom could see the autonomy and the existential honesty in living through laughter: “Don’t you realize that with Andy it has to be fun? He won’t do it if it’s not fun” (Hecht 2001, 44). Fans of modern anti-comedy are bound together as a group (and subculture) outside the mainstream sensibility. As fans of the show proliferate (and as their own referential sketches take on a second life on the internet), the show’s influence
will increase exponentially, reverberating throughout the comedy world for years to come. Eventually, it will come to dominate mainstream culture by expanding and adjusting cultural sensibilities, just as the rebellious Bunuel, Brecht, or Baudelaire have become canon. But by then, new ways of representing our humanity and challenging the new mainstream will have emerged. What is now considered radical production will have been neutralized and neutered by appropriation, commodification, and the subsequent desensitization of the viewer. The non-conformist inevitably ends up as kitsch, raising the threshold and necessitating a new rebellion. The cycle continues. The show goes on.
Bibliography


