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The Culture Industry Enlightenment as Mass Deception- Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer

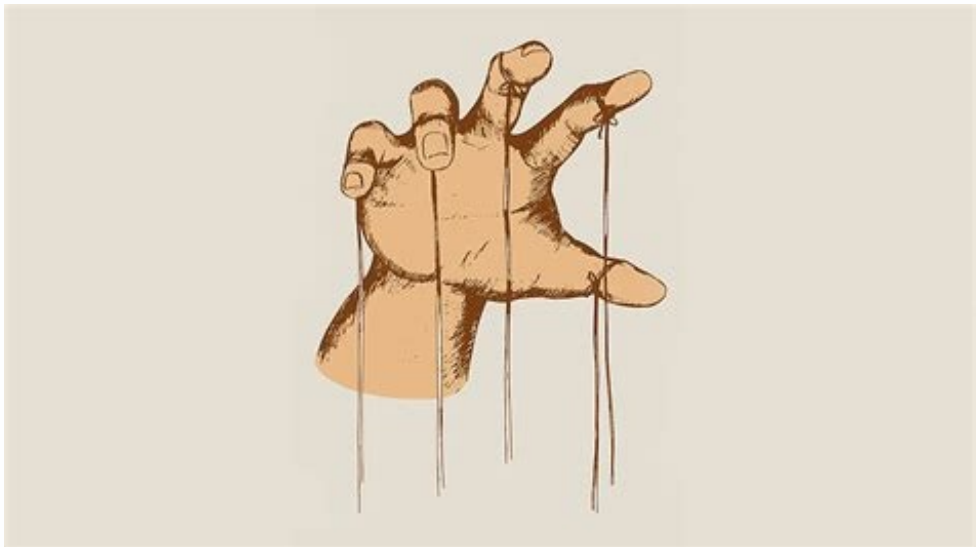
the following write up on The Culture Industry Enlightenment as Mass Deception is by Jaimon Antony

The Culture Industry Enlightenment as Mass Deception is an excerpt from the final chapter of critical theorists Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) and Theodor Adorno (1903–1969) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The book is the cornerstone of critical theory and essentially claims that science is irrational and that the Enlightenment is a trick and nothing happened during that time period. Adorno claims that enlightenment was supposed to bring pluralism and demystification but instead society is said to have suffered a major fall as it is corrupted by capitalist industry with exploitative motives. Both Adorno and Horkheimer belong to the Frankfurt school which tried to theorize ‘cultural Industry’ as being controlled by the Capitalist Economy.

Elements

This essay remains a classical denunciation of ‘cultural Industry’. This is a socialist approach to the industrialization of cultural commodities. Adorno and Horkheimer are of the opinion that the transition of the cultural production from the artisanal stage to the industrial stage has made the society lose its capacity to nourish true freedom and Individuality – as well as the ability to represent the real conditions of existence. According to them the modern cultural industry produces standardized goods to satisfy the larger need of the capitalist economy.

Adorno and Horkheimer begin by defining the “culture industry” as an economic union of microcosm and macrocosm in a society of producers and consumers united by work and pleasure whose technology does not extend beyond standardization and mass production. They move through all aspects of popular culture (from their time period)-radio, movies and music- applying the Marxist idea of alienation of labor to the condition of consumers in a post-Enlightenment capitalist society. Horkheimer and Adorno argue that since the Enlightenment popular culture has become a sort of factory, producing standardized cultural goods to manipulate the masses into passivity, which they term the “culture industry”. Horkheimer and Adorno viewed the



The X Factor is going to help you understand...

- Adorno and Horkheimer’s ‘Culture Industry’
- Standardization
- Pseudo-individuality
- Capitalism
- Do you know what any of these are?



Summary

Adorno and Horkheimer, in this piece, emphasize upon the monotony and uniformity of present culture-radio, films, magazines etc. - and how it operates as an industry. Under monopoly, all mass culture is identical. As capitalism strengthens its hold on the individual, the people in power become less interested in concealing monopoly and its violence becomes more open. Art no longer pretends to be any more than business made into an ideology that justifies the same. The apologists for the standardization of the culture industry claim that it is based on consumers' needs. But the entire system depends upon whose economic hold is the strongest. The attitude of the public is part of the system, not an excuse for it.

The television turns all into passive recipients of broadcasted programmes that are all the same. Clichés abound in mass deception. The so-called dominant idea ensures order but not coherence. There is no scope for imagination. The culture industry as a whole has moulded men as a type unfailingly reproduced in every product. Everything is stereotypically appropriated for the purposes of mechanical reproduction. The individual has no voice. But the system makes the individual deviant a stranger to the system, rendering him powerless. Even marked differences between films or stories in magazines, depend not on subject matter but on classifying and labelling consumers. The technique is that used for any type of propaganda. Invested capital becomes the absolute master.

Bourgeois art has always claimed to create a world of freedom. But from the beginning, it has depended upon the exclusion of the lower classes. The deceived masses are today captivated by the myth of success of capitalism even more than the successful are. Amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work, with mechanization of the work place finding its parallel in the mechanisation of the culture industry. The pleasure apparatus adds no dignity to men's lives. They rush in lest they miss something though exactly what, it is not clear. By repeatedly exposing the objects of desire, which are unachievable, it only stimulates those who are habitually deprived. Even when the public does rebel against the pleasure industry, all it can muster is feeble resistance which that very industry has inculcated in it. Mass culture does not avoid showing the sufferings of sections of society: instead it creates a spectacle out of it, without admitting that it is itself instrumental in the continuation of this suffering.

Adorno and Horkheimer: The Culture Industry PDF

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