

THE MYSTIFICATION OF ADORNO'S "ENLIGHTENMENT" IN MUSIC INDUSTRIES

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SUMMARY. Forty years ago we were at the beginning of a time when "music industries" were becoming the object of academic and political preoccupation. A fundamental piece of work for the field of philosophy, written by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, presents the intransigent analysis of ideological cultural trends produced during the Enlightenment and used to educate and control the "mass" social layer. The study is important for the history of cultural management due to the identification of the first acknowledgements of the cultural consumption markets and the commercial connotation associated to music by an aesthetic category named "artistic commodity value". Although the debate seems pejorative, if we relate it to the contemporary theories and to the applicability that this field enjoys nowadays, it will remain in the exegetes' conscience as a moment of historical reference. Adorno is the one who introduced the term cultural "industry" into the practice of management.

Keywords: music management, economic culture, cultural policies, music sales markets.

1. Introduction

18th century France brought to the front the theories of reason and the possibility of a social "Enlightenment" by means of art and education. The idea of peoples' emancipation by culture was immediately adopted by the rest of Europe and developed on a "mass" level in all more or less conventional spaces, schools, factories, open spaces, etc., thus giving birth to the process of "wise social reconstruction", that is, to the renaissance of a people that had to believe in progress and in its own forces [1]. As an effect of this movement, after more than a century, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer published the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in Amsterdam [2].

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The purpose of the book, as the authors themselves state, was too ambitious and placed too much trust in contemporary consciousness; for this reason, the two philosophers decided to write a revised edition 20 years later. In its updated variant, published in 1969, they declared:

“The book was written at a time when the end of the National Socialist terror was in sight. In not a few places, however, the formulation is no longer adequate to the reality of today. (...)What we had set out to do was nothing less than to explain why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism. We underestimated the difficulty of dealing with the subject because we still placed too much trust in contemporary consciousness. While we had noted for many years that, in the operations of modern science, the major discoveries are paid for with an increasing decline of theoretical education, we nevertheless believed that we could follow those operations to the extent of limiting our work primarily to a critique or a continuation of specialist theories.”[10]

The entire critique authored by Adorno and Horkheimer revolves around a few questions addressing the Enlightenment directly, namely the instruments of fascist ideology which use modern science and artistic industry in order to convince people to give in to political manipulations. According to these, the methods of the cultural “Enlightenment” practiced in the 19th and 20th centuries had arrived at an irrational point [3]; the essays in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* continuously stressed the irresponsibility used for the so called social education, which was accomplished by means of elitism and politics that lacked interest for the real situation of the population.

2. The Structure of the *Dialectic*

The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* comprises five fragments presenting the instrumental reason that underlay the failure of *Enlightenment*. In the authors’ opinion, mid-twentieth century found society in a process of technological manoeuvring, being forced to subject itself to the despotism of totalitarian ideologies – a moment catalogued as a “collapse of bourgeois civilization”.

In general, the concept of Enlightenment in the study we are referring to is dedicated to the analysis of progress, to detailing the signs by which humans freed themselves throughout history, by reasoning, from under the domination of nature: “Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings. He knows them to the extent that he can manipulate them”. The essays also criticize the present from the perspective of “nominalism”, a doctrine in the medieval scholastic philosophy that asserted that only individual things have a real existence, while general notions are mere words or names of these things.

In the authors' vision the "manipulation" in question was very visible at the beginning of the 20th century. The critics' revolt was generated by the absence of social individualization caused by a *system of influence* that had already become hyper-mature and capable of functioning only due to the immaturity of its subjects.

For contemporary society this act, which had started to turn nature into a mere material for scientific taxonomies and was not producing individuals with creative personalities, as it motivated, but rather a herd that served the authorities economically, politically and militarily, was a hardly acceptable phenomenon. It was a reality subordinated to a dictatorship of organization and administration by means of standardized procedures: "Mathematical procedure became a kind of ritual of thought (...)".[10] The elimination of any reflection and problematization led to "intellectual narrow-mindedness" and hindered the social functioning of life.

3. The Musical Industry and the "Mystification" of the Masses

One of the *Dialectic's* chapters amply analyses the social mechanisms that alienated and influenced the masses by means of art in the time from 1940 to 1970. For over two decades this subject was debated solely in small cultural circles, without being paid much attention by international critique.

Towards the end of the 20th century the essay authored by the two philosophers became a point of reference for the science of artistic entrepreneurship [4] which, generalizing the attitude exposed in the study, had undertaken to transform the mentalities of scientists and determine them to accept the age of "economic art" and the introduction of the "commodity value" as a normality of progress and not as a "dirty word" which compromises creative value, as the psychoanalyst Gerald Raunig [5] calls it.

The major objection highlighted by Adorno and Horkheimer in their essay is the ever growing influence of entertainment industries over cultural value, the way in which they transform artistic acts into sales products. The involvement of culture in a system of cultural globalization and the reticent attitude in relationship to the new media spread by radio and films determined the two authors to justify the negative nuance that art had gained in the last years: "The conspicuous unity of macrocosm and microcosm confronts human beings with a model of their culture: the false identity of universal and particular. All mass culture under monopoly is identical, and the contours of its skeleton, the conceptual armature fabricated by the monopoly, are beginning to stand out (...) Its millions of participants, they argue, demand reproduction processes which inevitably lead to the use of standard products to meet the same needs at countless locations."

The study defines “cultural industry” from the perspective of film and radio producers, frequently referring to private Hollywood-type American institutions. The attitude of the two is evidently bothered by the phenomenon of systematic manipulation that aimed to uniform the entire culture and to build audiences: “Something is provided for everyone so that no one can escape; differences are hammered home and propagated (...) Everyone is supposed to behave spontaneously according to a ‘level’ determined by indices and to select the category of mass product manufactured for their type. On the charts of research organizations, indistinguishable from those of political propaganda, consumers are divided up as statistical material into red, green, and blue areas according to income group.”[10]

We notice the presence of a quasi leitmotif of “rapid consumption under the sign of entertainment” in which the viewer is reduced to the state of customer in order to be easily identified with this common art style.

Facile art has always existed, but rather as a guilty social conscience of serious art. On becoming aware of the existence of an audience, the non-value of entertainment acts compressed creation processes and replaced them with a kind of entertainment that became legitimate and efficient for production. As a result of this phenomenon, a series of compromises appeared that Horkheimer and Adorno regard as very damaging.

The essay also highlights the fact that they try to fuse culture and entertainment by means of the *forced spirituality of amusement*, by the fact that the access to culture is mediated by various reproduction techniques, by facsimiles, photographs, and radio recordings.

All industrial-cultural short-circuits of the hierarchy of genres are severely condemned by the authors, particularly the fact that the style of individualized creators is encouraged to disappear, leaving space for the “style of cultural industry” which wants nothing but a “lack of style and taste”.

In the last instance, the two authors perpetuate the cultural ideal of the classical bourgeois society, in which art is cultivated for itself and contributes to the emancipation of the receiver, even if they acknowledge the profound ambivalence of Enlightenment.

Therefore, in the conception of Adorno and Horkheimer creators are defined, just like the audience, as a category subject to a passive function of the system. The subjectivity of the approach relies on the same social context in which the artists’ liberty is limited with the purpose of fulfilling their role in the general business: “No one has to answer officially for what he or she thinks. However, all find themselves enclosed from early on within a system of churches, clubs, professional associations, and other relationships which amount to the most sensitive instrument of social control (...). The gradations in the standard of living correspond very precisely to the degree by which classes and individuals inwardly adhere to the system.”[10]

Therefore, the culture represented by Adorno and Horkheimer's industries is defined as a paradoxical piece of goods, coordinated by the law of trade, a law which it confronts so much that it often ends up wasting itself (such as in advertisements) and it can not even be consumed anymore.

The individualisation of art as part of the cultural industry, as it appears in the said essay, is an illusory phenomenon. It is an art of serial products in which the creative "I" becomes a breveted product determined by society, a pseudo-individuality necessary in order to be able to attract and defuse the tragedy: "The best orchestras in the world (...) are delivered free of charge to the home. All this mockingly resembles the land of milk and honey as the national community apes the human one (...)." [10] Works of art are, nowadays, like political slogans, already properly packed, passed out, at low prices, to a reticent public, and as accessible to popular delight as public gardens.

The essay intensely debates the decisive role that the mass media has in the formation of cultural needs, stressing the particular importance of radio and television as auditory and visual partners. We would nevertheless like to highlight the fact that the mass media as such has not led to a diminished interest in cultural values (for example, the opera audience have remained faithful to opera even after they started listening to radio programmes), but it truly made non-audiences become an audience of pop art, often of false values, of artistic refuse and of the kitsch they attracted. However, if, for instance, television were to film and broadcast all symphonic concerts, we might realize that musical education would not increase among the masses, but that abundance would determine a reduction of the viewers' number.

The role of today's cultural management, that Adorno and Horkheimer had so harshly criticized, must not only act towards the development of cultural necessities, but also create conditions for their satisfaction. This is why it was necessary for us to know the obstacles presented in this essay, so that all the impediments that we assessed as an attack to the value of culture might be seen as positions of a psychological nature, influenced or not by a flawed concept or system, which may constitute a starting point towards a re-capitalization of present day art.

4. Creative Nations

The "creative industries" concept began developing in Australia after 1994, following a government initiative to introduce the notion of "creative nation" as a generic term which was going to support the integration of technological opportunities and the "mass culture" current through the digital media.

Starting with 1997 Great Britain used the syntagm “creative industries” in parallel with others destined for the new technologies in the context of social information policies, progressively transforming the power they had gained through ideology into innovating directions such as attracting ICT-specific currents and generating new jobs.

The fusion of creative industries and the digital media remains an essential source for world economy, encouraging, in the course of time, the emergence of entrepreneurship as a quasi-indispensable part of professional art.

Nicolas Garnham [6] highlights the fact that Adorno uses the term “industry” not in order to define the process of cultural production but rather in order reveal the “standardization” that art had been brought to and which had ended up harming its authentic value by too much reasoning.

Explaining the surrogate “cultural production” in the context of capitalist society brought into question the delicate connection which emerges, even today, between art and industry, and the conditions in which music must reinvent itself in order to be capable of integration among the semi-educated “mass” population.

The transformation of esthetical values into commercial values brings with it a jamming of the “cultural offer” which must produce for immediate pleasure, for rapidly changing and exhausting tastes. Artistic stimulation nowadays is accomplished by simple, accessible principles, with preponderantly intellectual and less affective codes, addressing a medium consumer with limited aspirations.

We find ourselves in a delicate period, produced by the excess of information, which leads the audience into apathy and easily going “from an active participation to a state of passive knowledge (...), to the so-called *narcotic dysfunction*” [7]. Everything is “ready made” and does not compel the receiver to interpret and issue personal judgments.

Today’s audiences have new artistic necessities. They consume products that offer immediate comfort and build their beliefs on a universe disturbed by the media system which renders the primary universe of life in images, in real time.

Forming an independent world, by technical means (discs, video tapes, and internet recordings) has impaired the direct contact with the work of art. The transformation of aesthetic experience into action mediated by receivers has forced music itself to exit its privileged frame and enter the practical field of the community. Nowadays we encounter such syntagms as “specialized music/culture” and “mass music/culture” or even “techno-music/culture” and so on. All these must be seen as a natural development resulting from scientific revolutions, the change of philosophical paradigms, the status of modern society and the supra-symbolistic knowledge-based economy [8].

During the passage from modernity to post-modernity culture has changed its structure, codes, and visions. In the paradigm of contemporaneity the mass-media plays a very important role in defining artistic value. The mass culture audience is now a non-specialized one requesting accessible and attractive works and messages, creations capable of broadcasting an industrial-type production on a large scale, changing the relationship between *creators* – *receivers* into a gross one of *producers-consumers*: “Unlike the works of specialized culture, where the criterion of value predominated, in mass culture the commercial criterion is the one that predominates. The products of this culture must be sold, and their industrial production must be profitable.”[9]

Consumer music has a uniforming effect on the public, without requesting them to formulate a critical attitude and distinguish value from non-value. Mass culture does no longer compel individuals to devise durable artistic motivations and skills which can improve their personalities. It is mainly based on the manipulation of desires “producing a state of cultural noctambulism, guided by certain representations, opinions, social behaviours.”

What the representatives of the Frankfurt School stressed through that form of “human dressage” of consumer culture is indeed a dangerous stereotype of the future which can be counterbalanced solely by the appearance of another type of art, a strong one with a very large extension, requiring a particular kind of education.

No society can exist without culture, as it builds its national identity. Regardless of the direction from which we analyse it, culture must have clearly delimited values and norms. Finding a method of “actively keeping” valuable art, with its uniqueness, is a stringent priority of contemporaneity and an ever more visible preoccupation in terms of inclusion, society, economy, community, and integration.

5. Conclusions

We have examined the role held by music in the development of world economy in the past years. We have highlighted the fact that music industries have been used as an instrument of communication for political and social contexts.

The industries are permanently influenced by the oscillations of consumption markets, by producers, retailers, digital technologies, etc. Beside this aspect, a number of factors have had and will continue to have a defining effect in the development of *mass culture*:

- The socio-demographic factor, depending on the education of the ones who gather the cultural capital and which emerges in two ways, according to Bourdieu's theory, by facilitating the accumulation of knowledge in a field and by learning decoding skills of various cultural forms.
- The access to digital media by owning devices that facilitate participation in the on-line cultural environment.
- Leisure time activities and entertainment practices (consuming radio and television shows, attending entertainment, opera, philharmonic performances, etc.)

The development of creative industries brought up the issue of performance criteria, the influence that they can have in the economic flow and other issues connected to the hazards of placing artistic products on the cultural consume market. These are surprising notions which, until 50 years ago, had received no attention, and which are now forcing the system of culture to reconfigure its contents.

The current of European globalization in the field of arts requires the exploitation of music industries' maximum potential in order to consolidate local economies, thus continuing to amplify their political side. Among the principles of socio-economic cohesion principles of the European Union we find such goals as: promotion of young artists' professionalization and provision of working spaces, supporting the establishment of cultural societies and networking of experts in the field of artistic entrepreneurship that would work based mainly on economic mechanisms: "the shortcomings and obstacles that hinder the development of cultural and creative industries should be identified and addressed at the appropriate political level (...) by codes and indicators in order to measure the effects of cultural and creative industries on the market and employment (...) in the post-crisis economy, culture can play a role in achieving social policy objectives in a creative way by fostering innovation in order to obtain social outcomes."

The art of the future relies on an intrepid, multidisciplinary and multicultural approach. In a delicate context, where "commercial" competes with "professionalism", the salutary attitudes are the "open-minded" ones which consider social flows, technological speeds, and remain open to changes imposed by the needs of consumers.

Translated by Alina Pop

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