THE CULTURE INDUSTRY: ENLIGHTEMENT AS MASS DECEPTION
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The sociological theory that the loss of the support of objectively established religion, the
dissolution of the last remnants of precapitalism, together with technological and social
differentiation or specialization, have led to cultural chaos is disproved
every day; for culture now impresses the same stamp on everything.
Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is
uniform as a whole and in every part. Even the aesthetic activities of
political opposites are one in their enthusiastic obedience to the
rhythm of the iron system...The striking unity of microcosm and macrocosm
presents men with a model of their culture: the false identity of
the general and the particular. Under monopoly all mass culture
is identical, and the lines of its artificial framework begin to
show through. The people at the top are no longer so interested
in concealing monopoly: as its violence becomes more open, so
its power grows. Movies and radio need no longer pretend to be
art. The truth that they are just business is made into an ideology in
order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce. They call
themselves industries; and when their directors' incomes are published, any doubt about the social utility of the finished products is removed.

Interested parties explain the culture industry in technological terms. It is alleged that because millions participate in it, certain reproduction processes are necessary that inevitably require identical needs in innumerable places to be satisfied with identical goods. The technical contrast between the few production centers and the large number of widely dispersed consumption points is said to demand organization and planning by management. Furthermore, it is claimed that standards were based in the first place on consumers' needs, and for that reason were accepted with so little resistance. The result is the circle of manipulation and retroactive need in which the unity of the system grows ever stronger. No mention is made of the fact that the basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is greatest. A technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself. It is the coercive nature of society alienated from itself. Automobiles, bombs, and movies keep the whole thing together until their leveling element shows its strength in the very wrong which it furthered.

It has made the technology of the culture industry no more than the achievement of standardization and mass production, sacrificing whatever involved a distinction between the logic of the
work and that of the social system. This is the result not of a
law of movement in technology as such but of its function in
today's economy. The need which might resist central control
has already been suppressed by the control of the individual
consciousness. The step from the telephone to the radio has
clearly distinguished the roles. The former still allowed the subscriber
to play the role of subject, and was liberal. The latter is
democratic: it turns all participants into listeners and authoritatively
subjects them to broadcast programs which are all exactly the same. No
machinery of rejoinder has been devised, and private broadcasters are
denied any freedom. They are confined to the apocryphal field of the
"amateur," and also have to accept organization from above. But any trace
of spontaneity from the public in official broadcasting is controlled and
absorbed by talent scouts, studio competitions and official programs of
every kind selected by professionals. Talented performers belong to the
industry long before it displays them; otherwise they would not be so
eager to fit in. The attitude of the public, which ostensibly and
actually favors the system of the culture industry, is a part of the
system and not an excuse for it. If one branch of art follows the same
formula as one with a very different medium and content...
then the claim that this is done to satisfy the spontaneous wishes of the
public is no more than hot air…

Marked differentiations such as those of A and B films, or of stories in magazines in Different price ranges, depend not so much on subject matter as on classifying, organizing, and labeling consumers. Something is provided for all so that none may escape; the distinctions are emphasized and extended. The public is catered for with a hierarchical range of mass-produced products of varying quality, thus advancing the rule of complete quantification…

The man with leisure has to accept what the culture manufacturers offer him. Kant's formalism still expected a contribution from the individual, who was thought to relate the varied experiences of the senses to fundamental concepts; but industry robs the individual of his function. Its prime service to the customer is to do his schematizing for him… Not only are the hit songs, stars, and soap operas cyclically recurrent and rigidly invariable types, but the specific content of the entertainment itself is derived from them and only appears to change. The details are interchangeable. The short interval sequence which was effective in a hit song, the hero's momentary fall from grace (which he accepts as good sport), the rough treatment which the beloved gets from the male star, the latter's rugged defiance of the spoilt heiress, are, like all the other details, ready-made cliches to be slotted in anywhere; they never do anything more than fulfill the purpose
allotted them in the overall plan. Their whole raison d'être is to confirm it by being its constituent parts. As soon as the film begins, it is quite clear how it will end, and who will be rewarded, punished, or forgotten. In light music, once the trained ear has heard the first notes of the hit song, it can guess what is coming and feel flattered when it does come. The average length of the short story has to be rigidly adhered to. Even gags, effects, and jokes are calculated like the setting in which they are placed. They are the responsibility of special experts and their narrow range makes it easy for them to be apportioned in the office. The development of the culture industry has led to the predominance of the effect, the obvious touch, and the technical detail over the work itself, which once expressed an idea, but was liquidated together with the idea. When the detail won its freedom, it became rebellious and, in the period from Romanticism to Expressionism, asserted itself as free expression, as a vehicle of protest against the organization. In music the single harmonic effect obliterated the awareness of form as a whole; in painting the individual color was stressed at the expense of pictorial composition; and in the novel psychology became more important than structure. The totality of the culture industry has put an end to this. Though concerned exclusively with effects, it crushes their insubordination and makes them subserve the
formula, which replaces the work. The same fate is inflicted on whole and parts alike… The whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry…

The belief that the barbarity of the culture industry is a result of "cultural lag," of the fact that the American consciousness did not keep up with the growth of technology, is quite wrong. It was pre-Fascist Europe which did not keep up with the trend toward the culture monopoly. But it was this very lag which left intellect and creativity some degree of independence and enabled its last representatives to exist, however dismally. In Germany the failure of democratic control to permeate life had led to a paradoxical situation. Many things were exempt from the market mechanism which had invaded the Western countries. The German educational system, universities, theaters with artistic standards, great orchestras, and museums enjoyed protection. The political powers, state and municipalities, which had inherited such institutions from absolutism, had left them with a measure of the freedom from the forces of power which dominates the market, just as princes and feudal lords had done up to the nineteenth century. This strengthened art in this late phase against the verdict of supply and demand, and increased its resistance far beyond the actual degree of protection. In the market itself the tribute of a quality for
which no use had been found was turned into purchasing power; in this way, respectable literary and music publishers could help authors who yielded little more in the way of profit than the respect of the connoisseur. But what completely fettered the artist was the pressure (and the accompanying drastic threats), always to fit into business life as an aesthetic expert. Formerly, like Kant and Hume, they signed their letters "Your most humble and obedient servant," and underlined the foundations of throne and altar. Today they address heads of government by their first names, yet in every artistic activity they are subject to their illiterate masters. The analysis Tocqueville offered a century ago has in the meantime proved wholly accurate. Under the private culture monopoly it is a fact that "tyranny leaves the body free and directs its attack at the soul. The ruler no longer says: You must think as I do or die. He says: You are free not to think as I do; your life, your property, everything shall remain yours, but from this day on you are a stranger among us. Not to conform means to be rendered powerless, economically and therefore spiritually, to be "self-employed." …The consumers are the workers and employees, the fammers and lower middle class. Capitalist production so confines them, body and soul, that they fall helpless victims to what is offered them.
As naturally as the ruled always took the morality imposed upon them more seriously than did the rulers themselves, the deceived masses are today captivated by the myth of success even more than the successful are. Immovably, they insist on the very ideology which enslaves them…

Amusement and all the elements of the culture industry existed long before the latter came into existence. Now they are taken over from above and brought up to date. The culture industry can pride itself on having energetically executed the previously clumsy transposition of art into the sphere of consumption, on making this a principle, on divesting amusement of its obtrusive naivetes and improving the type of commodities. The more absolute it became, the more ruthless it was in forcing every outsider either into bankruptcy or into a syndicate, and became more refined and elevated, until it ended up as a synthesis of Beethoven and the Casino de Paris. It enjoys a double victory: the truth it extinguishes without it can reproduce at will as a lie within…But what is new is that the irreconcilable elements of culture, art and distraction, are subordinated to one end and subsumed under one false formula: the totality of the culture industry. It consists of repetition. That its characteristic innovations are never anything more than improvements of mass reproduction is not external to the system…Nevertheless the culture industry remains the entertainment
business. Its influence over the consumers is established by
entertainment; that will ultimately be broken not by an outright
decree, but by the hostility inherent in the principle of entertainment
to what is greater than itself. Since all the trends of the
culture industry are profoundly embedded in the public by the
whole social process, they are encouraged by the survival of
the market in this area. Demand has not yet been replaced by
simple obedience…Amusement under
late capitalism is the prolongation of work. It is sought after as
an escape from the mechanized work process, and to recruit
strength in order to be able to cope with it again. But at the
same time mechanization has such power over a man's leisure
and happiness, and so profoundly determines the manufacture
of amusement goods, that his experiences are inevitably after-
images of the work process itself. The ostensible content is
merely a faded foreground; what sinks in is the automatic succession of
standardized operations. What happens at work, in
the factory, or in the office can only be escaped from by approximation
to it in one's leisure time. All amusement suffers
from this incurable malady. Pleasure hardens into boredom because, if it
is to remain pleasure, it must not demand any effort
and therefore moves rigorously in the wom grooves of association. No
independent thinking must be expected from the audience: the product
prescribes every reaction: not by its natural structure (which collapses
under reflection), but by signals. Any logical connection calling for
mental effort is painstakingly avoided. As far as possible, developments
must follow from the immediately preceding situation and never from the
idea of the whole. For the attentive movie-goer any individual scene
will give him the whole thing.

The culture industry is corrupt; not because it is a sinful Babylon but
because it is a cathedral dedicated to elevated pleasure…

The culture industry does retain a trace of some-
thing better in those features which bring it close to the circus,
in the self-justifying and nonsensical skill of riders, acrobats
and clowns, in the "defense and justification of physical as
against intellectual art." 3 But the refuges of a mindless artistry
which represents what is human as opposed to the social mechanism are
being relentlessly hunted down by a schematic reason
which compels everything to prove its significance and effect.

The consequence is that the nonsensical at the bottom disappears as
utterly as the sense in works of art at the top.

The fusion of culture and entertainment that is taking place
today leads not only to a depravation of culture, but inevitably
to an intellectualization of amusement. This is evident from the fact that only the copy appears: in the movie theater, the photograph; on the radio, the recording. In the age of liberal expansion, amusement lived on the unshaken belief in the future: things would remain as they were and even improve. Today this belief is once more intellectualized; it becomes so faint that it loses sight of any goal and is little more than a magic-lantern show for those with their backs to reality.

The stronger the positions of the culture industry become, the more summarily it can deal with consumers' needs, producing them, controlling them, disciplining them, and even withdrawing amusement: no limits are set to cultural progress of this kind…

In the culture industry the individual is an illusion not merely because of the standardization of the means of production. He is tolerated only so long as his complete identification with the generality is unquestioned. Pseudo individuality is rife: from the standardized jazz improvisation to the exceptional film star whose hair curls over her eye to demonstrate her originality. What is individual is no more than the generality's power to stamp the accidental detail so firmly that it is accepted as such…

What might be called use value in the reception of cultural commodities is replaced by exchange value; in place of
enjoyment there are gallery-visiting and factual knowledge: the prestige seeker replaces the connoisseur. The consumer becomes the ideology of the pleasure industry, whose institutions he cannot escape. One simply "has to" have seen Mrs. Miniver, just as one "has to" subscribe to Life and Time. Everything is looked at from only one aspect: that it can be used for something else, however vague the notion of this use may be. No object has an inherent value; it is valuable only to the extent that it can be exchanged. The use value of art, its mode of being, is treated as a fetish; and the fetish, the work's social rating (misinterpreted as its artistic status) becomes its use value, the only quality which is enjoyed. The commodity function of art disappears only to be wholly realized when art becomes a species of commodity instead, marketable and inter-changeable like an industrial product. But art as a type of product which existed to be sold and yet to be unsaleable is wholly and hypocritically converted into "unsaleability" as soon as the transaction ceases to be the mere intention and becomes its sole principle. No tickets could be bought when Toscanini conducted over the radio; he was heard without charge, and every sound of the symphony was accompanied, as it were, by the sublime puff that the symphony was not interrupted by any
advertising: "This concert is brought to you as a public service." The illusion was made possible by the profits of the united automobile and soap manufacturers, whose payments keep the radio stations going— and, of course, by the increased sales of the electrical industry, which manufactures the radio sets. Radio, the progressive latecomer of mass culture, draws all the consequences at present denied the film by its pseudomarket. The technical structure of the commercial radio system makes it immune from liberal deviations such as those the movie industrialists can still permit themselves in their own sphere. It is a private enterprise which really does represent the sovereign whole and is therefore some distance ahead of the other individual combines. Chesterfield is merely the nation's cigarette, but the radio is the voice of the nation. In bringing cultural products wholly into the sphere of commodities, radio does not try to dispose of its culture goods themselves as commodities straight to the consumer. In America it collects no fees from the public, and so has acquired the illusory form of disinterested, unbiased authority which suits Fascism admirably. The radio becomes the universal mouthpiece of the Fuhrer; his voice rises from street loud-speakers to resemble the howling of sirens announcing panic, from which modern propaganda can scarcely be distinguished anyway. The National Socialists knew that the wireless gave shape to their cause just as the printing
press did to the Reformation...The inherent tendency of radio is to make the speaker's word, the false commandment, absolute. A recommendation becomes an order.

Even today the culture industry dresses works of art like political slogans and forces them upon a resistant public at reduced prices; they are as accessible for public enjoyment as a park. But the disappearance of their genuine commodity character does not mean that they have been abolished in the life of a free society, but that the last defense against their reduction to culture goods has fallen...

Culture is a paradoxical commodity. So completely is it subject to the law of exchange that it is no longer exchanged; it is so blindly consumed in use that it can no longer be used. Therefore it amalgamates with advertising. The more meaningless the latter seems to be under a monopoly, the more omnipotent it becomes. The motives are markedly economic. One could certainly live without the culture industry, therefore it necessarily creates too much satiation and apathy.

In itself, it has few resources itself to correct this...

Advertising today is a negative principle, a blocking device: everything that does not bear its stamp is economically suspect...Advertising and the culture industry merge technically as well as economically. In both cases the same thing can be seen in innumerable places, and the mechanical
repetition of the same culture product has come to be the
same as that of the propaganda slogan. In both cases the insistent
demand for effectiveness makes technology into psycho-
technology, into a procedure for manipulating men. In both
cases the standards are the striking yet familiar, the easy yet
catchy, the skillful yet simple; the object is to overpower the
customer, who is conceived as absent-minded or resistant…
The most intimate reactions of human beings have been so thoroughly reified
that the idea of anything specific to themselves now persists only as an
utterly abstract notion: personality scarcely signifies anything more
than shining white teeth and freedom from body odor and emotions. The
triumph of advertising in the culture industry is that consumers feel
compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them.


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