

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno were members of the Frankfurt School. In 1944, they introduced the expression 'culture industry' in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as a key concept of their Critical Theory. As Brantlinger notes, the primary goal of Critical Theory is liberation from all forms of domination (p.228). Accordingly, Horkheimer and Adorno's study of the culture industry aimed to uncover the politics of domination disseminated by mass media and mass culture. Adorno argued that culture today is not the product of genuine demands, but rather, the product of demands which are "evoked and manipulated" by the processes of standardization and pseudo-individualization (Held, p.91-85). Although almost 70 years have passed since Horkheimer and Adorno first presented their radical view, their analysis remains highly relevant to the post-Fordist transformation of the culture industry. In this paper I will defend this relevance in arguing that standardization and pseudo-individualization persist in contemporary society as a means to insidiously advance the imperatives of the culture industry. I will also discuss positive changes that have empowered a counter force of individuals to critically observe and challenge the culture industry – as opposed to being passively subordinate to its manipulations, which aim to the construction of false and reified consciousness.

Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of mass media was premised on the claim that the expansion of capitalist modes of production allowed major sectors of artistic culture to be commodified. Culture ceased to be an autonomous domain which inspired critical thought and was transformed into an industry. Therein, more "and more artistic products are turned into a 'species of commodity'... marketable and interchangeable like an industrial product" (Held, p.90). However, as Adorno points out, the cultural industry is not to be taken literally as it is fundamentally different from other industries in terms of its production patterns. That is, the culture industry involves "'standardization', the 'pseudo-individualization' of cultural entities

themselves and the rationalization of promotion and distribution techniques” (Held, p.91-86).

Therefore, Horkheimer and Adorno state that its inherent and definitive characteristics of “standardization” and “pseudo-individualization” enable the culture industry or mass culture to undermine the autonomous art.

Standardization is the cultural or social consequence of the integration of capitalist production into the cultural domain. The economics of capitalist production emphasizes the profits to be made from the sale of consumable goods, which functions to turn artistic products into a “‘species of commodity’ ... marketable and exchangeable like an industrial production” (Held, p.90-78). As cultural forms or arts stop operating within an autonomous and independent realm of expression, they lose their capacity to provoke critical thought about human existence. For example, Benjamin affirms Horkheimer and Adorno’s view of mass media, and criticizes the destructive effect that industrial techniques have had on the arts: “such techniques of reproduction as lithography disrupt the concept of authenticity, the ‘aura’ of the work of art, which is dependent on its uniqueness, the fact of its nonreproducibility” (P.238, 1936). The diminishment of art as an autonomous form of expression invariably involves a loss of authenticity as popular culture products are increasingly standardized by mass scale techniques of mechanical reproduction. Such standardization has been evident in the cultural mediums of radio, television, music or movies, which often employ similar production logics of imitation. That is, these mediums may incorporate or be based on works of original art, but will decontextualize the original messages. For example, Marcuse notes that the ‘the jumping and playing of black music’ now takes place “in artificial, organized space” (p.91-88). The culture industry’s manufacture of entertainment styles essentially destroys or negates genuine artistic style. Just as Horkheimer and Adorno note, the consequence of this is that the culture

industry's "products fail to come to terms with reality's essence; they have no genuine content; they are essentially mimetic" (p.94-98). Furthermore, cultural or artistic products can be deceptive in that they may appear to be designed and expressed by an individual artist, while in reality mass production has endowed them with "the halo of free choice and open market on the basis of standardization" (p.95-100). This gives art the superficial individual appearance which Horkheimer and Adorno call 'pseudo-individualization'. There is very little real difference among cultural products and the culture industry utilizes manipulative market-oriented business rationales to persuade consumers that these products are original or novel. As Adorno summarizes, the result of standardization and pseudo-individualization is essentially a mixture techniques such as streamlining, photographic combined with the individualistic residues and sentimentality to make the product suitable for the market. (p.95-102).

In addition, Horkheimer and Adorno also claim that the culture industry strives to produce particular responses in its audience by generating a "system of response mechanism" through the distribution and delivery of products such as radio or television programs (Adorno, p.96-103). For example, television programs deploy stereotypes which represent a certain cultural viewpoint in order to reinforce patterns of audience reaction.

Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of the culture industry is still considered to be very radical . This is because the critique is strongly based on an analysis of the politics of domination and strives to promote "a radical philosophical consciousness" which resists and opposes various forms of domination (p.228). In Horkheimer and Adorno's view, mass media or the culture industry indicates the logic of domination and in promoting the "reified and false consciousness of industrialized mass culture", which essentially colonizes the critical consciousness of autonomous art (p.226, Held).

