

ADORNO'S CULTURE INDUSTRY

"The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception", Chapter 4 of the Dialectic of Enlightenment

- Max Horkheimer's and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is a work that critically examines the values and effects of The Enlightenment. Throughout the text, Adorno keeps with the theme that the Enlightenment, mainly its emphasis on the positivism component, is a self-destructive force that tends to revert into barbarism. Developing along side this theme is the idea of the universal versus the particular, more specifically in Adorno's work as the individual versus the collective.
- After the Enlightenment, which helped to dilute the individualism of things, culture has begun "infecting everything with sameness." (Adorno 94) The beginnings of mass production.
- Everything in culture is now cohesive and aimed at the universal and those in power in the culture industry now aim to make a standardized product and eliminate any actual creativity by tailoring culture and art to meet calculable measurements of public need ie. consider demographics and screening groups. If a sitcom doesn't screen well it will not be produced.
- This tailoring is due to the agencies of business that have taken it upon themselves to tailor culture to all of their consumers. Likewise, culture has become an **extension of labor**. Culture and leisure are now a standardized, a universally known set of plots, ideas, and forms which itself is a commodity. In the evening, a worker goes from labor to an extension of labor that doesn't provide a reprieve, but a shallow preparation for more labor.
- In television shows, we are cued when to laugh, cry, and rejoice. This predictability staves off fear and the realization of one's situation, just as enlightenment and myth were supposed to do. It is important to note that this culture and the pseudo-leisure it supplies are needed to integrate the individual into the new societal system. Consider the consumerism of post-WWII America, ie. I Love Lucy



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- Instead of delivering genuine happiness or desires of the individual, it continually delivers distraction and the mundane disappointments of reality, as generated and approved by the culture industry's system.

- Tragedy serves a purpose for the culture industry. Adorno states, "The posture of steadfast endurance justifies the world which that

posture makes necessary." (Adorno 122) Tragedy and struggle are made to appear healthy and natural by the system, and the greater it is, the more it reminds us of the fate.

- This tragic aspect of culture reminds us that this is the way existence is and creates a mentality of hopelessness, as well as a regressed artistic sensibility. (See Adorno's "Regression of Listening...")
- Individuality itself is only tolerated in so far as it doesn't disrupt the system. Therefore, the pseudo-individuality in the culture industry serves the consumer as a vicarious means to experience individuality. This culture industry is cut and systematically tailored to everyone as a commodity, and its availability has led to its consumption.

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“The Elements of Anti-Semitism: The Limits of Enlightenment” and closing comments

- This prevailing universal societal (instrumental reason, positivism) and economic system (industrial capitalism, bridging fascism) of The Enlightenment has led to the prominent Anti-Semitism of Adorno's day.
- Adorno states, “As bearers of capitalist modes of existence from country to country they earned the hatred of those who suffered under the system.” (Adorno 143)
- They are seen as reaping benefits without participating fully in the system and possibly disrupting the flow of production, and thus invoking hatred and aversion.
- They are despised because they represent the undermining of the proletariat by capitalism. Likewise, the Jew is seen as being dependent on a central authority, much like modern capitalists are dependent on the system. They've evoked the self-hatred of the capitalists who must appear to be producers.
- This idea of self-hatred reflected toward another party is also clearly seen in Adorno's predecessor, Nietzsche, as he states, “all instincts that do not charge themselves outwardly, turn inward.” (Nietzsche 57)
- So, Anti-Semitism is essentially a false projection due to a lack of inward reflection. This is the result of stereotyping, as seen in the culture industry through archetypes. Adorno states that Jews seem to have “happiness without power, reward without work, a homeland without frontiers...” (Adorno 165)
- Misplaced envy. These traits and their relationship come to a head in negative reconciliation, in which the desired must become the hated and must be destroyed and dominated. But, it is not actually the Jew that they hate, he has simply become the object to represent what the actual digressive element in enlightenment is, those in power within the system itself.
- This delusion that perpetuates Anti-Semitism cannot be maintained and eventually the true object of hatred will be revealed when enlightenment masters itself, though assumedly only after it has run out of scapegoats to hide behind.
- Our escape from this Anti-Semitic society is to liberate our thought from power, abolition of violence, and returning the long lost reflection to our reasoning. He ends the chapter by stating, “Enlightenment itself, having mastered itself and assumed its own power, could break through the limits of enlightenment.” (Adorno 172)

