

FOREWORD

The first significant analyses on the industrialization of culture are rightly traced back to the book *Dialektik der Aufklärung, Philosophische Fragmente*, (New York: Social Studies Association, Inc., 1944), written by two theorists of the Frankfurt School, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer. This study included a long chapter devoted to the 'cultural industry'. While it is not quite certain whether they coined the expression, which was to have a great – albeit late – success at the end of the 1960s, they unquestionably deserve credit for being the first to place strong emphasis on a major social and cultural phenomenon. While the arguments put forward by the two German theorists have greatly influenced the ideas and cultural practices of artists, cultural militants and mass culture sociologists, they have not contributed to a correct appraisal of a phenomenon that indisputably characterizes the late 20th century.

Horkheimer and Adorno were above all philosophers, and they were deeply attached to the forms, modes and values of artistic creation as they had developed in 'Old Europe' since the 18th century. They had chosen exile in the United States to escape Nazism, and had the opportunity to observe the growth of commercial radio and the development of the film industry. What especially struck them about these new practices was the lack of creativity and the loss of the critical power of art when it became a commodity. Adorno, who was moreover an extremely demanding classical musician, couldn't find words harsh enough to denounce this cultural industry which reduced art to a relation between supply and demand or to audience ratings, and ended up by stripping art from its aura and denying the public any access to a certain form of the imaginary. For him, consumed art is an unnatural art from which all anti-

establishment potential has been removed.

These thoughts on the 'cultural industry' are essentially a reflection on the evolution of culture, and one can understand why its pessimism and radicalism appealed to the students in 1968. Over the years, these concepts have continued to inspire the behavior and ideas of a considerable part of the art world, often unconsciously. Even today, when an ever-growing number of young people and artists are putting their hopes in the rapid expansion of the communication and culture markets, the thoughts developed in the author's *Critical Theory* remain ever-present and available as if to warn against cultural degradation and 'babelization'.

Yet, for those who were following closely the evolution of cultural production in Europe, this thought rapidly showed its limitations. Limitations which may be summarized in the following three points:

1. Adorno's thought tends to remain limited to a rigid idea of artistic creation, which valorizes solely the legitimate artistic expressions as they had established themselves over the previous two centuries. Obsessed with a concern for denouncing the inconsistencies inherent in the commoditization of art, Adorno didn't clearly see how much artistic practice itself had been changed and transformed with major technological innovations. This was already the gist of Walter Benjamin's criticism, for whom photography – despite its borrowing from technology – could claim the status of a major art form. Admittedly, technologies and markets are tightly interwoven. Cinema, art photography, radio and television creation, video art, etc., all appeared and developed in a commercial form, but this is not a sufficient reason for drawing a line between art and technology, and refusing the new conditions of cultural production, such as the collective work involved in cinema or television production. If technologies unquestionably accompany the development of cultural commodities, they also open up new directions in art. The refusal of commoditization mustn't bring in its wake a distrust for technology and artistic innovation.

2. Reference to the 'cultural industry' – in the singular – misleads one into thinking that we are faced with an unified field, where the various elements function within a single process. The phenomena – it is thought – are the same in literature, music, painting or in the radio. The same model is said to be at work, quickly levelling out the different modes of creativity and imposing common standards. There is no need to take the analysis very far to discover that this postulate is false; more than forty years after the publication of *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, we are still faced with a heterogeneous process made of elements that, quite obviously, do not belong to the same field or, at least differ greatly. The differences between the internationalized production of television series or videoclips on the one hand, and contemporary literary creation or painting on the other, prevail over their similarities from the point of view of the artists' working conditions as much as from the way the products are valorized or appropriated by the classes that are to consume them. The cultural industries are complex, and an analysis must bring out the reasons for this diversity.

3. Lastly, the authors of the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* paradoxically took a greater interest in markets and in commodities than in the industry. More precisely, they reduced it to its technical components and to serialization. Their approach to industry is only incidentally concerned with the production process, the extension of the division of labor to the conception of artistic products, and the resulting production relationships. They hardly perceived that this industrialization of art should be analyzed as a process of capital valorization adapting to new fields with specific conditions. If capital is trying to use cultural production as a source of profit – historically first in the U.S., later in Europe, but in any case more intensively today – this process does meet with resistances and limitations. These limitations – and everything points in this direction – are structurally-based and linked as much to the specificities of creativity as to those of the reception and consumption of art. The fact that Adorno and Horkheimer did not take into account this fundamental aspect of the industrialized production of culture prevented them from thinking in terms of its unequal, or even uncertain, development in some sectors. In North America and western Europe, the cultural industries have far from completely taken over art and culture. The attempt, however, has recently gained momentum as western economies, forced to restructure, more and more are considering culture and communication as an important area in which to valorize capital that cannot be made profitable elsewhere. Their venture is meeting with considerable success, to such a point that it is reflected already in consumer statistics: in all developed capitalist countries, in the area of consumption, the highest growth rate since the beginning of the 1980s has generally been that of cultural consumption – a growth rate which may be considered limited compared with overall consumption in the 1960s, but which is nevertheless higher than any other type of expenditure. However, while it is a fact that this process has now begun and that the new communication technologies and the emergent new media – almost all of which are organized according to the commercial model – are elements that contribute to tightening the hold of capitalist production over culture as well as communication, this does not mean that the capitalist industrialization of culture has been fully realized, even in the western economies. Moreover, the extension of commodity consumption doesn't always result from the development of the major industries, as it co-exists with other forms of production: pre-capitalist; those connected to small commercial production; those that can only be explained by the political/ideological role of the State (the cultural goods are than called 'public goods'); and finally, those that depend on sponsorship or patronage by industry and that do not, therefore, concern the direct valorization of capital.

In showing the limitations and inconsistencies of the 'cultural industry' approach put forward by the theorists of the Frankfurt School our purpose is not to focus attention on a critique of its authors, whose merits are undeniable. The reader may even never have read anything written by Adorno, but it is likely that his ideas are familiar as they have widely penetrated artistic and radical circles. Thus the reason for the critical evaluation of Adorno's theories which we have just outlined is simply to let the reader understand from the

beginning that the capitalization of cultural production is a complex, many-sided and even contradictory process. It cannot be analyzed in simple or unilateral terms; it requires a number of different instruments of analysis and a pluriscientific approach.

The studies selected for this book all reflect this research perspective. They were written between 1976 and 1986, and they express our original intention, whose relevance has been confirmed as the economic and socio-economic importance of the audiovisual program industries have gradually increased. The later studies ask new questions and further extend the scope of our analysis.

Our perspective can be expressed in terms of the following epistemological position: the intention is not so much to propose the development of economic and sociological approaches alongside other approaches such as aesthetic, semiotic, ethno-methodological etc., as to introduce into interdisciplinary research the methodologies and problematics originating in the social sciences. This position is set out in the first text in this volume.

From there, an analysis of the capitalization of cultural production was then carried out in the second, third and eighth texts. Cultural products cannot be considered as an undifferentiated whole; distinctions have to be made based on their reproducibility, and on the nature of the contribution of artists and technicians. This affects the conditions of capital valorization which varies greatly from sector to sector. These conditions are at the origin of the specific publishing function through which intellectual and artistic production can *en masse* take the form of commodities (see the second and third texts). However, the commercial media, which in western Europe have recently been gaining strength, is also an area where artistic production is rapidly being industrialized and the 'flow logic', which is at the base of these media, competes more and more with the 'publishing logic'.

In reality, contrary to widespread opinion, the present situation of the cultural industries is not characterized by a sole and unique logic but rather a confrontation between three competitive *logics*:

- The logic of the *publishing* of cultural commodities, that is, of products generally issuing from the materialization and reproduction of artistic work (whose creators are paid by a system of royalties and reproduction rights), and sold direct to consumers;
 - The *flow logic*, governing the operation of the audiovisual media, which is organized quasi-industrially and whose objective with the regular broadcasting of programs is to 'create an audience', because the financing is entirely assured by means of advertising or by public or institutional funds; and
 - The logic of the *written press*, which must be both purchased regularly by the final consumer and 'create and audience' (as advertising income covers an important part of newspaper and magazine publishing costs).
- The confrontation between these three logics conditions all relationships between companies and financial groups, the conception of products, editorial practices and the types of consumption; ie, the entire chain is affected.

Furthermore, the not-very-peaceful co-existence of these three logics does

not only have social-economic ramifications; it directly affects the conditions underlying the production of art and how the consumer-user appropriates it.

The fourth and fifth texts are based on an analysis of the publishing of commodities presented above and extend its scope to three specific fields: the internationalization of children's products; the uneven penetration of the cultural industries depending on the type of artistic expression (literature, music, painting, dance, cinema, etc.); and lastly, the reactions of the Third World countries faced with the increasingly dominating cultural industries and their imposition of transnational cultural models. Each of these fields would require by itself a full analysis to re-appraise or critically assess the many existing studies, but this was not our intention; we simply wanted to apply our model of analysis to specific subjects in order to test its validity and perhaps, gain new insights. It seems that in doing this important new areas of research have indeed opened up.

Finally, as we have already mentioned, the central perspective in this study, which, for the most part, incorporates economic and sociological approaches, cannot by itself explain such decisive 20th-century phenomena as the rise of the cultural industries or the increasing use of communication technologies and practices. The cultural industries and communication technologies are at the heart of the re-structuring of the management of labor in the western capitalist societies, and are very related to the current transformation in the exercise of political power. This fundamental observation led us, in addition to our work on the capitalization of cultural production, to think about the 'social logics' involved in the field of culture and communication. This new area is outlined in the sixth, seventh and, especially, eighth texts.

Thus the cultural and communication industries are not solely a new field for the valorization of capital, they also very directly participate in social reproduction, in ways which are only now taking shape and therefore are barely perceptible. Adorno saw the death of art in these industries; he didn't suspect their participation in the reproduction — and restructuring — of western capitalist societies.