

BEHOLDING A NEW PALE HORSE

THE CULTURE INDUSTRY
AND FOUCAULT AFTER MODERNITY

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Introduction

If there is one enduring feature of modern life, it is that of the spectacle. Authors and visionaries as diverse as Spengler, Jung, Huxley, Gibbons and Toynbee have seen the downfall of a society wholly inundated with its own decadence and cultural investments in illusory freedoms. The prophetic visionaries of civilization's moral and cultural decline have not escaped us in our time. Of course this decline does not rapidly necrotize, as entropy and decay slip in gradually, taking a subtle form of cultural nihilism. In this phase transition, a perpetual apparatus of motion that comes from the fissures in the neat and seamless (or so it is thought) existence of a "perfect" modern democratic order of living. Behind spectacles of all sorts, and the satiation of base desires is the latent reality of domination and passivity, of alienation and detachment from any authentic individuation (if there can be such a thing in the modern world).

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno lay out the most totalizing and domineering force that has been at the forefront of modernity, and a direct by-product of Enlightenment's instrumental reason: the culture industry. Modern culture is wholly captured by market forces and commodification, reified cultural entities and tropes that constantly replicate, reproduce, and mechanically enforce such norms and orders that leads to a sterile and effaced cultural landscape. The age of mechanical reproduction has shaped the normative structures of what types of art and entertainment are considered valuable, or commodified, and the scientific positivism of the Enlightenment has conceived of a culture itself as only another economic output mechanism, pushing it to ever greater heights of efficiency and mass consumption. But now we are in the age after the ground-breaking insights of Michel Foucault, who greatly admired the works of the Frankfurt School. Power is central in the issue of what exactly the culture industry is, and what its implications are if culture itself breeds dominated forms of subjectivity. That is why through a critical exploration of the culture industry, and its relation to the genealogy periods of Foucault, and exploring the contentions between them (with some possible courses of action) we will arrive at the conclusion that the dialectic of Enlightenment and Foucault's insights into power have created a near perfect working model of a cultural critique of postmodernity.

Part I

“What is the Culture Industry in the Modern World?”

There are those who proclaim the modern world to be a place of moral and cultural nihilism, bereft of any valuation in higher pursuits of being, while solely valuing the easily digestible form of streamlined cultural products, and emphasizing crass somatising pleasure-seeking. It is the age of mass mechanical, and now digital, reproduction of all forms of media, wholly giving ones subjective being over to technocratic control, and increasing levels of operationalization. It is in the ways we consume cultural information that has defined the modern world, as Gary Allen put it, the “picture painters” of the mass media in all its forms artfully craft hidden images and background assumptions about modern life that render us totally unaware of the ramifications of having most of our inner intellectual and even emotional life be given over willfully to the matrons of the culture industry.¹ By this we mean our subjectivity itself is being consumed, and now created whole-cloth by the assumptions and forces of the culture industry.

But this is not a conspiratorial or guided phenomenon. To Horkheimer and Adorno, the culture industry is the joining up of Enlightenment instrumental rationality with modern culture and entertainment. Its fundamental process is that of sameness and repetition, which guides the very process of culture itself, with its sole purpose being to “legitimize the trash it produces.”²

The culture industry is no less than the streamlined and technical logic that runs in the background of all cultural considerations. Quote:

Technical rationality today is the rationality of domination. It is the compulsive character of society alienated from itself. Automobiles, bombs, and films hold the totality together until their levelling element demonstrates its power against the very system of injustice it serves.³

The conceptual model, the ethos behind the culture industry in late capitalism I shall call “flattening.” The impetus of all cultural decision making in this modern late stage of capital is what Horkheimer and Adorno in the above quote is instrumental rationality, the only post-Enlightenment rationality in fact, that has total primacy over all modes of economic and cultural production. Hence why the mediums of culture themselves have developed in such a way as to flatten any ounce of diversity or originality. The mediums of entertainment are captured by this Enlightenment rationality, and diffuse this model of cultural output to all forms and creations of culture and entertainment, from the television, to radio broadcasts and movies (and

1 Allen, Gary. *None Dare Call It Conspiracy*. Buccaneer Books, 1976.

2 Adorno, Theodore. Horkheimer, Max. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. California: Stanford University Press. 94-95.

3 *Ibid*, p. 95.

now the internet), hence why there is no actual consideration of the differences between content as Horkheimer and Adorno point out.⁴ They use the example of constant repetition in jazz music,⁵ but picture if you will, why every so called police drama is essentially the same format with repeating sets of interest-capturing plot devices. Why there is an intricate display of images and sound manipulations, on the symbolic and somatic levels, which create a vast array of emotive phantasmagorias, with every scene of a movie or show being meticulously crafted to satiate, keep us in suspense, and even placate inner desires and sentiments. This is due to the inner logic of repetition and mass commodification present in the culture industry.⁶

The culture industry exploits a vast knowledge and semiology of symbols and latent metaphors to enhance the commodifying ability of culture in all its diverse forms. The standard public relations model, taken from the works of psychoanalysis, such as Freud, and social theorists, such as Edward Bernays. Even methods from the propaganda machines of various 20th century totalitarian regimes (most notably Joseph Goebbels and the Nazi Public Enlightenment and Propaganda Ministry) categorize and deploy these inner psychological and sociological techniques to placate the inner misery of Mankind to Stiegler. In the post war period, the libidinal economy needed to alleviate over production and social unrest, so it is the creation of desires and the popular sentiment manipulated in order to despise the old, the traditional, and the conservative lifestyle. New desires and needs came along with the advent of mere “convenience” technology, and culture was its main vehicle to spread the consumerism model to all aspects of life (more on that later) to where one is educated, providing of health care, *etc.* and virtually all human activities, especially those that are considered leisurely.⁷ These psychological methods of strategic consumerism, produces a form of cultural alienation that is supported by a latent grammar which comes from this very logic of flattening in the culture industry. The basic words chanted over and over in slogans and product placements, the very simple soundbites of the centralized news agencies which rely on the same 24 hour news cycle format, all designed with instrumental reason in mind, and the main consideration being efficiency above all. The efficiency of getting the right degrees of product exposure out to the masses, the politically allowable opinions presented in a manner as to suggest, but never really get to, the egalitarian idea of true representation among the political spectrum. Hence the use of simple words and phrases meant to have an unconscious impact, which Horkheimer and Adorno take note of. As it was in chaotic Fascism, the thinker is no longer present at the site and moment of information garnered from the mediums of the culture industry. Like Marx before them, the considerations of how the labour force is organized, how leisure time is to be had, what is the appropriate way of living in a suburban environment, *etc.*, relies on unquestioned assumptions. Such things go unquestioned, and unmentioned to Horkheimer and Adorno, even the way information is distributed. Simple language passes through the evanescent

4 *Ibid*, p. 97.

5 *Ibid*, p. 96.

6 Tsarion, Michael. “Age Of Manipulation – 1/3.” Filmed. Gothenburg, Sweden. March, April, May 2010. YouTube. [<https://www.prometheanreach.com/>] [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvSBn4gdTso>]

7 Stiegler, Bernard. “Suffocated Desire, Or How the Culture Industry Destroys the Individual: Contribution to a Theory of Mass Consumption.” *Parrhesia*. 13, 2011: 55-56.

bodiless subject at a rapid pace, easy labels are applied to whole segments of the population, either for benevolent or malevolent purposes, and consensus reality is had with ease in the flatness and cultural homogeneity of all products from the culture industry.⁸

The culture industry relies fundamentally on the flattening and even banishment of creativity and originality in its quest for an even more total plane of enlightened reason to operate in the cultural sphere. The economic flow of mechanical reproduction (and now digital reproduction) has permeated all manner of art and entertainment. It is the simplest and basest of all the desires, the beholding of a hyper glamourized version of everyday life to be a new sacrilegious rite and romanticized reified entity, and above all mass spectacle: these are the things kept in all considerations of the culture industry.⁹ As we have seen with Horkheimer and Adorno's observations of simple language, so too does Postman see this as a way of normalizing the sterile and free-dried assembly line logic of the culture industry and its repeated attack, and subsequent reconstituting in its own apparatus of all that is truly original and creative; the radio or television news medium itself informs the way in which information is filtered to the input mechanism we call the modern subject. We no longer have true input or dissent, each slogan or headline forms a knowledge unto its own; an insular and closed off knowledge that permeates all mass popular culture, which is cut off from the considerations of history or even personal subjectivity. These slogans and phrases and latent meanings create whole bodies of information and knowledge, tropes which self-replicate, mechanically reproduce, and the mediums themselves facilitate the reproduction of simple knowledge in the culture industry by the way they present visual or audio information to the viewer.¹⁰ The visual medium is the most powerful for it incorporates all elements of sound, vision, and even inner rhythms of feeling and emotive output, such as jump scares, anticipations of a character's line delivery, *etc.*. Even the way in which a pressing news issue is formulated and presented is beholden to the mediums of television or the internet. In fact to Postman, television is the ultimate medium since it consumes every aspect of our lives, and can virtually present anything it wishes, seamlessly replicating reality and pushing it through the filters of mass media and the mass information-entertainment complex¹¹; the internet now operates in much of the same manner as television: Short answers, quick headlines, and even visual body language of the news reporter can create an intricate pattern of dispersing attention and attitudinal content in specifically laid out directions for the viewer to passively consume.

Horkheimer and Adorno also have similar observations, lamenting the death of creativity in mass culture:

Amusement itself becomes an ideal, taking the place of higher

8 Adorno. Horkheimer. p. 167.

9 Ibid, p. 100-101.

10 Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death, Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. New York: Penguin Books, 1985: 69-71.

11 *Ibid*, p. 92-93.

values it eradicates from the masses by repeating them in even more stereotyped form than the advertising slogans paid for by private interests. Inwardness, the subjectivity restricted form of truth, was always more beholden to the outward rulers than it imagined.¹²

In this we find the end result of the culture industry: beyond the logic of instrumental reason and the triumph of sameness and repetition, we also find that the nature of amusement and spectacle are at the heart of the various normalization processes of the culture industry. We now live in an amusement industry, the arrangement of print and typography, which breaks down complex social and political ideas, like those (seemingly absent now) present in an electoral debate, or even the themes of the mass globalized Hollywood movie industry, has led to the universal standard in the culture industry of easily broken-down and flattened information.¹³ The so called “Hollywood” formula of a dramatic rising and falling action, of a specific set of characters along with happy is now a globalized plane of cultural diffusion.¹⁴ It is the underlying grid, the standard by which we receive superfluous entertainment and escapism, it is the ultimate logical mechanism, or output machine of the culture industry.¹⁵ It is in cartoons, it is in (deemed) “light” entertainment, with seemingly no real consequences for the audience. But this is in fact a clever deception, a by-product of the medium itself; Hollywood frames itself in such a way as to promote the idea that it is entertainment and nothing more, yet spreading latent messages, placements, deforming the very essence of discourse and meaning by filtering it through the lens of the Hollywood blockbuster, through the mechanism of spectacle, now replicate on a global scale.¹⁶

Finally I shall say the culture industry is really an anti-culture. Hollywood is often implicated as an anti-culture, a totally autonomous entity, that synthesizes micro-cultures and political/societal phenomenon, meanwhile being sheltered from reality and historicity. Even the mimetic conception of Hollywood is only at the surface: storeys that could be any story, over-used tropes, and archetypes repeated endlessly to the point of having no real connection to the so-called “real life” situations

12 Adorno. Horkheimer. p. 115.

13 Postman. p. 50-51.

14 Note: I would say modern meme culture on the internet is just as a pervasive a force as the culture industry; serving to self-replicate, transform and disperse bodies of minute knowledges across milliseconds on the internet that are in themselves immune from history, for it is a synthetic digitalized cultural expression (that may or may not be reformed into something transgressive). The replacement rate of memes and bits of cultural information in the new globalized techno-information economy is a matter of mere weeks or days, or even hours depending upon the shelf-life of the meme. The creation of memes itself serves as the same function of entertainment, taking complex political and cultural ideas, framing them in a humorous or “light” manner, thus rendering these serious intellectual issues and topics impotent. A discussion of meme culture here is too vast a topic, another paper on its own would be needed. Perhaps the works of Virilio can be a fruitful architecture from which to build a philosophic (rather than psychological or systems theory) analysis of modern meme culture.

15 Adams, Sam. “The Not-So-Secret Formula Behind Every Hollywood Movie.” *Indiewire (Criticalwire)*, July 19, 2013.

16 Adorno. Horkheimer. p. 106-107.

Hollywood is trying to portray, up to and including historical depictions that are still filtered through the lens of the now. Even the offshoots (Bollywood, and now Nollywood in Nigeria) carry the basic visual formula that Hollywood has managed to flatten and globalize diverse cultures, subsuming it under a commodity model ready for consumption by new global middle and under-classes.

Culture is a paradoxical commodity. It is so completely subject to the law of exchange that it is no longer exchanged; it is so blindly equated with use that it can no longer be used. For this reason it merges with advertisement. The more meaningless the latter appears under monopoly, the more omnipotent culture becomes. Advertising is its elixir of life. But because its product ceaselessly reduces the pleasure it promises as a commodity.¹⁷

Thus the globalized character of the culture industry as anti-culture is thoroughly economic, and seeks the totality of Enlightenment rationality as Horkheimer and Adorno summarize. But this idea of a meaningless omnipotent space that is the culture industry is intriguing, and for this I shall use the genealogy period of Michel Foucault.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 131.

Part II

“The Endless Void-Culture Industry as Heterotopia.”

As Marx said, money soon only becomes the “real community.” The endless news cycle, the cult of the celebrity, the globalized information field dispersing a catastrophic effluvia of data through infinite channels of technological infrastructure, all serving to mask the very humanity that it is supposedly desired to “inform.” Some media critics have speculated that mankind has been totally extrapolated outward, that there is no longer an inner dimension to the subject, that we have lost the perennial truths which kept inside of the soul humanity’s inner bliss, to now only be cracked open, reified, bought and sold back to the subject in the form of the culture industry’s pre-approved venues of communication and entertainment, creating a virtual information world of pure outwardness and alienation.¹⁸ But this is speculation that exceeds the projects of Foucault and Horkheimer/Adorno (as we shall see in the subject part).

One thing is certain, the culture industry as outlined by Horkheimer and Adorno is a close ended system; nothing gets in our out, only along pre-approved channels of appropriation, of reconstitution and absorption of the unique and new, to them be commodified and reified in the cultural technocratic operationalizations of Enlightenment reason. As we have established, there is no venue of subversive creativity or expression in the operations of the culture industry, it is not subject to history or a historical dialectical flow, and quote:

The whole world is passed through the filter of the culture industry. The familiar experience of the movie goer, who has perceived the streets outside as the continuation of the film he has just left, because the film seeks strictly to reproduce the world of everyday perception, has become the guiding line of production.¹⁹

The culture industry is the perfected synthetic unity of all things and all types of places, events and epistemic histories which combine to make a tapestry of virtual space. It is totalized, its operations finely tuned into every frequency wave of the human imagination and history in order to deliver a cost-effective, streamlined package. And in this see a pure expression of the Foucauldian heterotopia. heterotopias are non-hegemonic spaces of differences. They express the hidden, secret, dispersed layers or sediments of meaning in a given space; a grid of differential relations. The heterotopia is ubiquitous set of relations and venues where one order is not subsumed under another. Of course Foucault is interested in those that are expressing a totalizing order: a totalized space of relation elements that have curious properties that relate to all other series of orders. heterotopias come from utopias, placeless places where all desires are equally of no spaciality, a literal “no-land,”

¹⁸ Glass, Marty. *Yuga: An Anatomy of Our Fate, a Companion to Spiritual Practice*. Hillsdale New York: Sophia Perennis, 2001: 90-91.

¹⁹ Adorno. Horkheimer. p. 99.

where idealized forms of life are presented. heterotopias operate in much of the same way, but incorporates all elements of life which draws us out of ourselves, but unlike utopias, do have a relation to reality. They are places in which all things meet, for example, Foucault gives that of a mirror. It is a space in which a reflected image is not real, but still has a visual and special place which fixes it to reality. Thus mirror images are not utopian, but heterotopias.²⁰ And also to Foucault, heterotopias are inherently cultural, in fact no culture has existed without the presence of a heterotopia.

They can be the primitive variety of heterotopia, where there are rites of passage, ceremonial spirit journeys, and honeymoon trips that cement relationships *etc.*. There are also those which make society operate differential from previous modes. To this Foucault gives the example of the cemetery, that which combines different social classes in the middle of the city (before 19th century hygiene banished them to the outskirts); everyone gets their little box, but everyone is beholden to that particular evanescent, yet still real, heterotopia.²¹ But Foucault lays out very interesting principles of heterotopias: they are capable of juxtaposing and consuming several real and contradictory spaces. They are linked to epistemes, slices of time in which the symmetry of the heterotopias can operate in those moments of jumping off, when tradition is abandoned for new forms of relations among diverse elements. And furthermore, heterotopias operate like a closed off system, with certain points of opening to involve greater elements; Foucault gives the example of a library. It accumulates the new, it is a history-less space, where the decay and machinations of previous epistemic periods cannot effect it.²² A place in which all things are reconstituted in, but is never really effected by the histories of those elements. They have always presupposed this system of opening and closing, and as such, have a unique totalizing relation to the spaces they cover. They integrate and impose ordering upon diverse spaces, colonize them, wrap a museum image around them, and ultimately dissect and render flat the language and grammar of those spaces. Creating a whole system of elements, from which Foucault sees language and culture operating in the sphere of heterotopia.²³

Given the descriptions of the heterotopia in Foucault, the culture industry is the heterotopia in its perfection, or as I will call it, an “omega-heterotopia.” It is the terminus of all difference, the final ordering system that has the ability to allow in, replicate and synthesize all manners of diverse experiences and social elements. Horkheimer and Adorno made it clear, nothing escapes the culture industry, it has utilized instrumental rationality to such an extent (that being, the quest to find solutions to problems, working with nature in a manipulative/positivist manner, supreme efficiency of production, *etc.*) every bit of cultural expression is reintegrated into the apparatus of the culture industry. In other words, no outside can be envisioned. There is only unity in the omega-heterotopia of the culture industry, its

20 Foucault, Michel. “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias.” In *Architecture/Movement/Continuity*. Trans. Miskowiec, Jay. France: March, 1967: 2-4.

21 *Ibid*, p. 4-6.

22 *Ibid*, p. 6-8.

23 Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things, An Archeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994: xviii, xx.

final goal beings its sameness. Hence the lack of original style in the anti-culture of Hollywood, there is no room for style, and the cultural specialists operate under a logic which allows no room for such individual considerations. Anything from the outside is brought into the machinations of production and efficiency, which is why Horkheimer and Adorno see a destruction of the transformative qualities of art, because there is no competing style of overcome.²⁴ Only what is legitimated in the diverse elements, from the cinema screen to the gallery, by the diverse elements within the heterotopia of the culture industry. Not only does it juxtapose several different spaces, even at the same time on the virtual screen, but the culture industry embodies all of the virtual elements of heterotopias, even what Foucault labels heterotopias of deviation; the places were behaviour outside the norm, such as hospitals and prisons, are regularly displayed in the mediums of the culture industry. The rituals of old in the sacrilegious heterotopias, for instances churches, are being replaced by the social/communal activates of media. The fondest of memories are in movies or television shows, children grown up with the rite of passage of a particular series, passed on from generation to generation, which is now being enhanced with interactive mediums such as video games.

In the close ended nature of, and the subsequent reordering of elements within the cultural omega-heterotopia, we find a line between not just Foucault and Horkheimer/Adorno, but Postman as well; Postman highlights the creation of pseudo-events and pseudo-happenings in modern cultural medium. A creation of events within the close ended entity of the media which has no real effect on our lives, and with no real information or solutions provided, but nevertheless is cloaked in such a way as to appear like a legitimate happening or important event.²⁵ This is not just limited to the manufactured desires of the advertising industry, but even political events as well. Issues and faux-solutions are presented to a passive audience, and as we have established before, the whole of the culture industry is reliant on spectacle. The pseudo-event we can say, is merely the luminous rearranging of information and orders within the cultural heterotopia to present a wholly within-itself happening. No more blatant is this phenomenon then modern celebrity worship. The knowledge, ways of ordering and operation, and discourses in the omega-heterotopia create an environment of directed desire, of events that have no real consequential impact on the lives of the masses, yet is manufactured to the the gravest importance in the culture industry. It is merely the end result, the product of the logic of the culture industry heterotopia in which all social and culture (and most of all political) elements are perfectly synthetized and rearranged in such a way as to create the insular ordering of the pseudo-event.

Since we cannot see an end to the culture industry, as end implies a safe space beyond the horizon, which is not the case; we cannot foresee an end to the culture industry, or its grasp of politics, for it would be an end to the way we see reason itself as merely instrumental, and can only end if the production of the capitalist market can end. Our very vision of the world is caught up in the narratives and happenings within the culture industry. There is only this omega-point, the outside is, even

24 Adorno. Horkheimer. p. 102-103.

25 Postman, p. 76-77.

presented to us by the culture industry to satiate our longing and desire for the illusion of authenticity.²⁶ The art of the culture industry, for example the anti-hero, the post-apocalyptic theme regurgitated endlessly, the glorified serial killer of serial killers, *etc.* all serve as a reconstitution within the heterotopia of culture, anticipating the need for regression, and presenting us with a glamorized and unrealistic picture of “real” acts of heroism and the individual confronting faceless (or even an all too perfect face given) social and political forces. All leading to a well thought out conclusion, while masking our inner desire for completion and recognition, even fuelling our narcissism and illusions of future worth, mental images that are painfully detached from our own misery and alienation, and all of these tropes still caught up in the singularity that is the culture industry.²⁷

26 Adorno. Horkheimer. p. 126-127.

27 Stiegler, p. 58-59.

Part III

“Power, the Subject and the Culture Industry.”

We now turn to the power/knowledge period of Foucault, which shares an intimate connection with the power of the culture industry over the subject (or lack thereof). Throughout this presentation, there have been numerous examples of media and cultural commentators seeing through the culture industry and its capacity to alienate and dehumanize the subject, but this is not exactly the position of Horkheimer, Adorno and Foucault.

There is no escape from the machinations of the culture industry, and no primordial or authentic subject to return to that can liberate us from it. Power to Foucault constitutes the subject, it constantly organizes, reintegrates, absorbs transgressions, it is the source of the regimes of truth that create the modern dominated subject. Truth and knowledge is produced from power, and the subject is individuated in the whole social body. Normalizations of power do not merely repress, but also constitute and grow the subject to utilize its productive capabilities, and which disciplinary training is a major part.²⁸ Again a by-product of instrumental rationality, which is vital to both Foucault and Horkheimer/Adorno. The culture industry operates in much the same manner. As Horkheimer and Adorno state in their concept of Pseudo-individuality: no real individuation or process of self-creation is every present or was ever a reality in the culture industry. It is just the bourgeoisie reality in which mass culture has revealed the true fissures of our lack of individuality or subjectivity. As stated,

The individual, on whom society was supported, itself bore society's taint; in the individual's apparent freedom he was the product of society's economic and social apparatus.²⁹

The universalizing tendencies of the cultural heterotopia means the absolute oblivion of the individual in its order.³⁰

However, according to Ahmed, this not a conspiratorial view, and the cultural industry is not a literal entity that is guided by the hands of a few globalists, but rather the operating logic of post-Enlightenment culture. As we have seen, heterotopia is inherently cultural, power implying knowledge is also cultural. Power produces the domination and captured pseudo-subjectivity that cultural knowledge enforces, since power always implies knowledge, therefore the subjugation of power was always implied in culture itself. But this domination (as Foucault is well aware to point out at every turn) is not simple political domination, it is more complex and evanescent than that. It is really a matter of social and historical context for said domination, the growth of new discourses from the 18th and 19th century has shaped modern culture,

28 Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge*. New York: Vintage Books, November 12, 1980: 116-119.

29 Adorno, Horkheimer. p. 125.

30 “Omega,” in its Greek etymology meant “great” or end point.

which is an outgrowth of the disciplinary action bred from the power/knowledge discourses of the turn of the century. In other words, the prison discourse, the medical and psychiatric discourses also inform culture in subtle ways.³¹ Ahmed also describes the pseudo-individuality of Horkheimer and Adorno as the mass individual; this is similar to power invading the body in Foucault. Horkheimer and Adorno see how we are constituted by the various stimuli of the culture industry, and judge the standards of art, entertainment, and mass media images and ideas by the standards it presents us. Only it is not about the ideas *per sé*, but the normalization and commodification that is the impetus of the culture industry. The culture industry in effect produces a self-fascism, a self-alienation in which our experiences can only be had within its clearly defined spaces and channels of illusory meaning. The internalization of fascism also means the culture industry is inherently political in its creation of the modern subject, for it polices the thought of what opinions are allowable, and which group makes the convenient “other” in which we place all our malice and fears inside.³²

The mass individual created by the culture industry is a slave to routine, and replaces genuine intellectual thinking with stereotyping. The art of the culture industry satiates and deadens inner growth, such as pop music becoming more and more simple, and scientifically formulaic (again a result of instrumental reason) and even music that has stimulated the human mind and heart for centuries has become a relic of the past.³³ Another example brought up by Foucault would be the disciplinary actions of power regulating, creating bodies of knowledge on and creating an environment of self-policing around sexuality. For instance, the sexual control of childhood curiosity by parents, or nightclubs and brothels being designated outside city limits, the various medical discourses around intimacy and sexuality, *etc.*³⁴ Foucault also observed how the libertine at the dawn of the 18th century was the moral debaucher. The one who transgressed the limits of society’s taboos on sexuality, incest, rape, *etc.* The pervert signaled the liens of flight from a budding counter culture of pure desire and sensuality.³⁵ However as sexual morality lowered, as Foucault notes, sexual perversion and degenerate behaviours were given over to new medical and psychoanalytic discourses, and this was deliberate; only the priest and moral enforcing judge can merely restrict and repress sexual deviancy in its multiple forms, but the doctor and psychoanalyst can intimately travel inside one’s own inner self. They are given permission, by treating the discourse around deviancy as an illness, to go inside, collect more and more information and knowledge, and further entrench new discourses around sexuality, thus creating new knowledge out of power.³⁶ The culture industry does much of the same in its constitution of the subject *via media*

31 Ahmed, Saladdin, Said. “Mass Mentality, Culture Industry, Fascism.” *Kritike* 2 Vol. 1, June 2008: 81-82.

32 *Ibid*, p. 83-84.

33 *Ibid*, p. 85.

34 Foucault, Michel. *The Foucault Reader*. Ed. Rabinow, Paul. New York: Vintage Books, January, 2010: 312-313.

35 Note: Even during the early days of the 19th century, mystics, spiritual apocryphals and tantric eccentrics, eager to consume and profess new knowledges from the east, appeared at this transitional period (such as Aleister Crowley), eager to tap into the new sentiment of eroding Victorian morality and religious orthodoxy.

36 Foucault. *Reader*, p. 319-320.

representations of sexuality. Beauty is whatever the camera can depict, and the ideology of the epoch is whatever is only in the now; by this Horkheimer and Adorno mean the insulated state of the culture heterotopia. It gives nothing transcendental, or anything historical, but only within this vague and seemingly endless episteme. The current, the contemporary is held in utmost reverence.³⁷ This applies to current media informed depictions and ideas around our sexuality; our art no longer holds sexuality to be a thing of gravity, but a mass commodity, a mass sameness in which we are sold a very surface-level and transparent form of sexuality that can be exploited, scandalized, and even unconsciously deployed. Art now celebrates the body, the shock of the grotesque, the somatising and the basest elements of erotica.³⁸ This is not only the decline of serious art, but the decline of resistance in higher ideas that can potentially create a fugitive (albeit momentary) transgression to the power of the culture industry.

Now that we have a chance to talk about the mass individual being created in the wake of power in the culture industry, and that sexuality is a primary mode of the creation of such, let us examine the specificity of this claim; as Hedges points out, there is an “illusion” of sexuality in modern mass media. There is a distinct difference in the various mediums of pornography, mostly including direct forms of pornography, and the larger pornographic nature of modern media in general (since it all comes cheap and formulaic), between what is sexuality and what is simply masturbation. There is no real promotion of intimacy and longing for the other in pornography, it is readily available sexual gratification, a “pantomime” of sexuality, even the way pornographic actresses are portrayed as a hyper-desirable pleasure machine, a ready made vessel of gratification, disciplines our view of sexuality, and even distorts our ability to garner real intimacy, replacing it with a consumer model of sexuality.³⁹ To Foucault, many methods of discipline have been enacted upon mankind, gathering information and finding new ways of observing the process of disciplinary behaviour, but the modern culture industry has eliminated the need to even observe behaviour. So long as the economic/cultural model of production is in place, in its basest form being a modern digital pornography culture, the mass individual is docile and compliant, masking inner lack of connection and alienation, and replacing it with wholly external forms of base gratification.

37 Adorno. Horkheimer. p. 118-119.

38 Ahmed, p. 88.

39 Hedges, Chris. *Empire of Illusion, The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle*. New York: Nation Books, 2009: 55-57, 85-86.

Part IV

“Contentions and a Possible Hypothesis for Recapture.”

We have seen how Foucault and the culture industry form a powerful basis from which we can land an effective cultural critique. However, an air of caution should be applied. As we are all within the nexus of power, so too is the culture industry all pervasive, and any attempt to critique it will ultimately still be subsumed and reconstituted under its power. Even the emphasis on Enlightenment instrumental reason alone does not capture the whole scope of power in Foucault, it is too restrictive for his taste as Ransom points out.⁴⁰ Therefore I have attempted to expand and use the theory of the culture industry to rectify this distinction. Another factor that was made explicitly clear is the lack of the primordial or base subject that the power of the culture industry, in this episteme or period epoch, dominates and colonizes. Psychic colonization is had due to the creation of the subject by the culture industry, as Horkheimer and Adorno point out, hence the emphasis on the “dreamless art” within it; “mass worldly art” as they call it, can only be effectively commodified if there subject is wholly captured and created within the body of body known as the culture industry, with no effective metaphysical or ontological outside to escape from it.⁴¹ The culture industry itself has the whole of experience pass through it, disciplines the body and the psyche, and replicates a virtual plane in which we can dispense all of our misery and need of escape onto. Even something as exaggerated as professional wrestling, Hedges points out, gives us a tapestry of larger geopolitical and domestic issues in an easily digestible and satirical form. Stone cold Steve Austin beats up and berates his boss because we all wish to do those things, the Iron Sheik is the evil Iranian during the oil crisis in the 70s, who is heroically defeated by Mr. “Real American” Hulk Hogan. And if that has no effective pull of attention, if the fans grow weary of the repeated formula of “sports entertainment,” then a wrestler is sent to drop a “pipe bomb” or an off the script speech that exposes the politics behind the spectacle, giving us our need to be insiders, placing our need to see behind the performance in that entity who is not a real outsider, for they are still apart of the spectacle itself.⁴² This is the totality of the culture industry, therefore to Horkheimer and Adorno, and Foucault as well, we cannot rely on any notion of the subject which has been clouded by culture, or any return to a primal authenticity that the ancients experienced, we are in a completely different cultural episteme, our experiences cannot regress, even if we were to appropriate the chants and garbs of the tribal. Therefore, as Foucault turns to a speculative aesthetics of existence, in this case any mode of living which his created as a work of art must confide in and rearrange the ordered elements within the heterotopia of the culture industry.

The outsider music and art that laments over the machinations of the mass

40 Ransom, John, S. *Foucault's Discipline, The Politics of Subjectivity*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997: 88-89.

41 Adorno. Horkheimer. p. 98.

42 Hedges, *Empire of Illusion*, p. 5-9.

industrial consumerism model of culture is not enough, for any critique will ultimately be placed right back on the plane and space of the culture industry (even the pieces of outsider art can only be legitimated in the space of the gallery). There can however be a fugitive reconstitution, a momentary subversion using the technologies and techniques of the culture industry. This can garner a potential working method of not wholly escaping, but negating some of the more aggressive disciplinary regimes of the culture industry. Subjectivity must be built a new in art, since no return is possible. Take the advent of the so-called remix culture that sprang from the late 90s and now 2000s. as digital technology rose to prominence, so too did these groups of outsiders hack the system, creating digital fugitive languages, taking clips, rearranging, juxtaposing images of modernity to suit their purposes. One example deep inside internet imageboard culture would be the enigmatic NOBODY™. Running a website of what he calls “edits,” he presents a phantasmagoria of images and footage, his own music, all cut and rearranged and layered like a symphony piece. The images and sounds and colours are free flowing and terrifying, haunting, fantastic, even perennial as he is a fan of ancient wisdom schools of thought, from both the East and the West, and wishes to achieve a new digital form of individualist spirituality (or so his website purports). No one knows his true identity, stating we are all “nobody-trademark” seemingly living in an effaced existence, yet captured by the forces of power and culture. Hence appropriating the label of a content patent, we are captured on all sides by culture, yet nobody trademarks our existence, a double imperceptible meaning of his logo-identity. He claims to use technology to subvert it, often capturing incredible feats of personal narcissism and pop culture footage, and distorting these clips digitally, making them beautified or sinking them into contextual relations with other clips and sounds, producing a new entity that grows out of, but rebels against the commodified content produced by the culture industry.⁴³ Even the transversal nature of art, the blending of mediums the culture industry does so well with television, can be appropriated for the more authentic end of discovering a new process of individuation. The visionary painter Robert Venosa, reflecting on his painting entitled “angelic manifestation” which became the artwork for the Florida progressive metal band Cynic, stated that there is this cross-current blending, this alchemical mix of sounds, words and music.⁴⁴ The creation of a complex audio and visual tapestry which submerges the viewer into a higher state of awareness, a pure experiential plane of emotive qualities that have no particular fixation on a on a specific image, or sensual experience, but lands the experiencer in a meditative state free of the economic reification in the culture industry. Even a revival of the Heroic dandyism of the 19th century, constantly finding new ways of experiencing art and existence may be a type of fugitive release from the reification of the culture industry, at least in momentary states, and not at all a final or egalitarian solution, as it is increasingly difficult for

43 Wallace, Adam. “NOBODY™ and Postmodern Antimodernism.” West Coast Reactionaries. November 6, 2015. [<https://westcoastrxers.com/2015/11/06/nobodytm-and-postmodern-antimodernism/>]

44 44. Garcia, Ramon, Martos. “And Justice For Art: Cynic’s ‘Focus’ – The Cosmic Marriage Between Progressive Metal and Angelic Art.” Excerpt from “And Justice for Art, Stories About Heavy Metal Album Covers” by Garcia, Ramon, Martos. Puregrain Audio, October 11, 2012. [<http://puregrainaudio.com/features/and-justice-for-art-cynics-focus-the-cosmic-marriage-between-progressive-metal-and-angelic-art/>]

anyone to even have experience through art in today's modern epoch.

In conclusion we have examined what the culture industry is, where it came from and how it has changed in the digital globalized modern world, we have seen its relations to Foucault in power/knowledge, disciplinary action, and how it creates the mass individual or pseudo-individuality. The culture industry is also a Foucauldian heterotopia, but the final one, an omega heterotopia from which nothing of life escapes. We have explored the dangers of trying to critique or think outside of the culture industry, to which Horkheimer, Adorno and Foucault are in agreement, especially since power in the culture industry has created and constituted the modern subject. Finally we have seen some contentions between Foucault and the two luminaries of the Frankfurt school, and some rough, fragmented possible momentary ameliorations or reconstituted transgressions through new forms of experiential art we can potentially produce to reconfigure subjectivity in the culture industry, if such a thing is possible well we are wholly produced by it.