Culture Industry:
A Sociological Exploration

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This dissertation entitled, **Culture Industry: A Sociological Exploration** submitted by Sonal Chandra for the **Master of Philosophy Degree** has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University and is my original work.

(Sonal Chandra)

(Sonal Chandra)

We, recommend that the dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

(Amit Kumar Sharma)
Supervisor

(Anand Kumar)
Chairperson

Dedicated to
my Mama
Late.Shri.S.K.Asthana

Acknowledgement

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Cultural Studies

Culture is an all pervasive phenomenon of human life. The social sciences well recognising its place in social life have for long engaged in its comprehension.Theoretical perspectives from evolutionism to functionalism, to structural functionalism, Marxism or interpretative approach have defined themselves by articulating their views on culture. The distinctive standpoints on culture to an extent mark the finer differences in approaches. In fact the vigour to study in detail the cultural dimensions of human life have led to the emergence of cultural studies.

Within the domain of cultural studies, the notion of popular culture is used to applaud the cultural activities and values of those social and cultural groups which are identified as currently dominated and which are therefore understood as the constituent parts of a new and a more democratic construction of hegemony.

But the debate on *culture industry* downplays the notion of popular culture as it upsets such a hegemonic construction of the idea. The debate is a pathbreaking endeavour in cultural studies as it calls for intensive critical reflection.Owing to this fact, the central idea mooted in this work may be partly dealt under cultural studies as *media* and *political economy* are an

equal driving force in the debate. Therefore culture industry dawns as a theme which circumscribes culture and mass media within the location of political economy.

Understanding Culture Industry

The term culture industry signifies the process of the industrialisation of mass produced culture and the commercial imperatives which drive such a system. It calls for an analysis of mass mediated cultural artefacts within the context of industrial production.The theme has various facets to it. In the argument of culture industry one finds multifarious elements enmeshed together.

Culture in culture industry debate has a much different connotation. Precisely to convey this contrast, I have at length explicated the various conventional ways of perceiving this concept. Culture corresponds to an aesthetic realm in the culture industry debate which ought to be divorced from the everyday activities of life. The aesthetic realm connotes a philosophical paradigm which deals with questions of art and beauty. Its principle concern is to define the concept of art or in other words it questions the relationsip of art to the non-art or real world.

Hence culture in culture industry argument is equivalent to the Durkheimian *sacred*. But when it is imbued with the adulterated features of populism thrusted on it by the capitalist industries, the consequence is culture industry.

Consequently culture industries framework incorporates popular cultural forms that are already part of people's lives. It is then a culture which is no longer pristine, rather it has been massified or commercialised. Therefore culture industry which then happens to be a part and parcel of the mundane *profane* world could apply to any number of things. David Chaney has, for example, written about the Departmental Store as a cultural form. In the same vein – cricket industry, *keep fit industry*, beauty industry, tourism industry, leisure industry and many more quotidian activities that fall within the domain of *popular culture* and inherently are commercial ventures would suitably find its place under the broad category of culture industry. From here it is apparent that culture industries are associated with cultural activities that are distributed to a mass audience by technological means, are commercially viable and deal with clearly identifiable cultural commodities, e.g. books, films, videos, records etc.

Hence the character of culture industry, makes it imperative to analyse its cultural text within the ambit of political economy.

Importance of Political Economy

The political economy calls attention to the fact that culture is produced within relationships of state, economy, media and politics. It expands the scope of its location thus rendering important insights into the entire system of production, distribution and consumption of commodities. The political economy seeks to inform that the capitalist societies are organised according to the dominant mode of production that structures institutions and practices according to the logic of commodification and capital accumulation so that

cultural production is profit and market oriented, it entails the fact, that forces of production are deployed according to dominant relations of production which are important in determining what sort of cultural artefacts are produced and how they are consumed.

The first part of this dissertation gives a wide picture of the interconnections between the concepts of *culture* and *industry*, where the concepts of political economy (implicitly) lies at the centrality of all discusssions. Thus political economy in the most appropriate sense links culture to its political and economic context and opens up cultural studies to history and politics. Consequently, it has been the point of focus for critical theorists who resorting to the axioms of political economy, attempted to revamp the Marxian project.

Methodology

The sociological inquiry of this argument entailed a theoretical scrutiny of the debate. Hence there has been a heavy realiance on the secondary sources.

The readings of the translated versions of the authors' works form the main crux of references. These have been supplemented by views and critical commentaries of other noted scholars. Journals, newspaper articles, soap operas on television, films and advertisements in the audio-visual media were other important contributory sources which enabled in updating the analyses.

Objectives

The major objectives of this dissertation are as follows:

> ➢ Firstly to place the entire domain of culture and its artefacts in a critical mould with respect to political economy.

> ➢ Secondly to utilise the culture industry perspective to evolve critical studies of mass media.

> ➢ Finally to make a strong case for the culture industry framework to undertake analysis of the current social situation which is marked with the intersection of media, information technology and globalisation.

Theoretical Framework

The culture industry debate has evolved within the paradigm of critical theorisation. Hence the critical theory is the larger sociological framework within which the discourse is embedded. Therefore an exploration of culture industry entails a comprehension of critical theory.

The term *Critical Theory* was used originally by members of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, after they emigrated to the United States in the late 1930s, following the rise of Hitler. In the hands of these thinkers, critical theory was envisaged as a rigorous critical engagement with social and philosophical issues. Basically, the critical theory emerged as a series of responses to succeeding crisis of capitalism and Marxism.

Right from the beginning, it was a dialectical theory which attempted to sort out the matrix of progressive and regressive, oppressive and emanicipatory forces. The theory aslo provided a useful perspective on modernity because of its comprehensive and totalising approach and went to include analyses of the interrelationships among ecnomics, politics, society and culture. Thus the theory evolved multidisciplinary perspectives in an attempt to traverse and undermine boundaries between competing disciplines and stressed interconnections between the various spheres of academia.

For critical theory every social phenomenon must be interpreted in terms of a theory of capitalism. The theory of the relationship between society and economy brought to light a phenomenon like culture industry, a theme vehemently and exhaustively dealt by the members of the Frankfurt school.

Frankfurt School

The Frankfurt school of critical theory began in 1930 largely due to the efforts of the members of the *Institute for Social Research*. The Institute for Social Research was founded in 1923, as a centre of Marxist studies and was loosely affiliated with the University of Frankfurt, Germany. The very term, 'Frankfurt School' refers to the work of those philosophers, cultural critics and social scientists who belonged to or were associated with, the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. The school launched a systematic, interdisciplinary programme in critical theory that combined methods of scientific research with a marxist theory of society.

The critical projects took up by the school convinced them that the proleteriat had become so much a part of the capitalist system that it had lost its potential for revolutionary social change. By the end of the decade, with the rise of Stalinism and fascism, their confidence that intelltectual reflection could become an effective, progressive susbstitute for proletarian revolution began to rise. It was reflected in their Negative Dialectical thinking which questioned the enlightenment ideal of political change brought about by rational process.

Although the Frankfurt School had many prominent personalities working or associated with the Institute for Social Research, like Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Frederich Pollock, Herbert Marcurse, Leo Lowenthal, Walter Benjamin, Eric Fromm etc. but the Institute's theorists did not form a series of tightly woven complementary project. Therefore number of writers like David Held talk of the first five as the true constituents of Frankfurt School, due to the consistency in their line of thinking and the projects undertaken by them. More specifically for the purpose of this dissertation which deals with culture industry, a concept propounded by Adorno and Horkheimer, the term Frankfurt School has been invariably used in *lieu* of the duo throughout this work.

Horkheimer and Adorno transformed critical theory from a supradisciplinary theory of society into a philosophy of history and a critique of instrumental rationality. Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* published in 1947, a complex text that was largely written during the 1940's, is an important statement of the disillusioned position, especially in its skepticism about the possibility of social change. Under the rubric of

Dialectic of Enlightenment: Marxism, enlightenment rationality, science and technology, the culture industries and the trends of development of both capitalist and socialist societies are remarkably interpreted and theorised into forceful arguments. The master text of the duo is informed by critical distance from prevalent modes of thought and expression as well as from current social developments at a point in history when the world was in their view, falling into barbarism.

The Frankfurt School was also among the first to apply the Marxian method of ideology critique to the products of mass culture. In fact Adorno initiated a strong critique of the artefacts of mass culture and carried forward his crusade throughout his lifetime whereas Horkheimer who joined Adorno in the writing of 'Dialectic of Enlightenment' followed a rather different path of philosophical and socio-historical inquiry.

Adorno's Contribution to the Debate

Adorno in his numerous writings presented a sharp and deeply analytical critique of culture industry. In fact, it is his writings which to a great extent have shaped the entire debate on culture industry. Adorno consistently took this project forward attacking at the very roots of culture industry manipulations. It is largely due to this reason that greater attention has been paid to his writings in this dissertation or put in a more straightforward way – this work is an attempt to peep in Adorno's culture industry, analyse his ideas and even confer a critical treatment wherever needed.

The highly impressive writings of Adorno loaded wtih critical passion inevitably speak volumes about the *genius with gumption*. Born in Frankfut-am-Main, Germany on Septemeber 11, 1903, hailing from a upper middle class family, in 1930, the great German scholar adopted his mother's patronomic Adorno. An economically secure and artistically rich home environment were conducive to the development of his talents in both music and humanities.

Being chiefly interested in philosophy, he took courses in psychology, sociology and music at Frankfurt and wrote a dissertation on Husserl's Phenomenology. Deeply influenced by music, he spent two years in Vienna among a group of innovative composers – Berg and Schoenberg. The knowledge and experience in music went on to sharpen his critical acumen. In the 1920's, he became assoicated with the Institute and started teaching philosophy in his *alma mater*. He could not pursue it for long due to the political turmoil in Germany. The seizure of political power by Hitler disrupted his academic career and eventually forced him into exile. He took refuge first at Oxford, England between 1934-37 and thereafter in United States until his return to Germnay in 1949.

The experience of a totalitarian regime in Germany and manipulative capitalist structures of United States compelled him to take on a threadbare critique of ‚enlightened reason' . It was in the post-exile phase that Adorno's intellectual inquiry reached its peak resulting in some great scholarly works – *Authoritarian Personality, Dialectic of Enlightenment, Minima Moralia, Negative Dialectics, Prisms* and elaborate writings in Aesthetic theory.

His writings which illuminate the darker side of modernity, offers no great promises or happy endings. In the light of this fact, it is quite possible to see an example of intellectual courage of the highest possible order in Adorno. Although comprehension of his writings which break from the standard discursive methods of presentation and argumentation, was a real challenge to me in this work.

At this juncture, it is important to note that the critique of modernity developed by Adorno in collaboration with Horkheimer was in line with the critiques of the German Sociological tradition of Tonnies, Simmel and Weber. The pessimism demonstrated by them on the administered system of domination was resonated by the duo. Specially Weber's disenchantment with the aftermath of modernity and his deep rooted dejection of the bureaucratised and rational society made him identify the industrial society as an, *iron cage* where all freedom and happiness was in shackles.

Addressing these very concerns which were central to both Horkheimer and Adorno, the various sgements of this dissertation have been charted.

Focus of Chapters

The second chapter is a general discussion which calls to explore the various approaches to understand the concept of culture while pivoting on a debate of popular and mass culture. Reflecting on ideas of culture – variants, the discussion weaves in culture and industry in an interesting lattice. Concretising the interconnection are the various arguments of classical thinkers, specially Marx. The Marxian paradigm has been put to elaborate

the idea of political economy which germinates in his theory and provides the prime platform for critical theory to take off. In short, the inaugural section in a very impersonal manner provides a glance of the larger panorama, a feel of the things to come.

The third chapter is an exhaustive analysis of the argument of culture industry. It examines the processes and mechanisms by which the culture industry operates.

The fourth chapter focuses on mass-media in detail. It is an interactive analysis of classical ideas and the current mass-media scene. The whole discussion culminates with critical insights and new openings. This in a nutshell outlines the major concerns of the debate on culture industry. But certainly, there is much more to this discourse which would be witnessed as each chapter unfolds.

While expansive elaboration of this debate constitutes the major content of this work, it is the underlying motive which makes this exercise meaningful. Owing to this reason a mere exploration of concepts and ideas is simply not the aim but to call into question the growing relevance of this debate in the present scenario and in the times to come, is what all this endeavour hints at.

Chapter 2
Bridging the Link: Culture and Industry

Defining Culture

The concept of culture is of central importance to the social sciences on the whole. Although anthropologists and sociologists have differentially reflected their view points when defining the cultural phenomenon. Yet, culture continues to capture the imagination of any serious academic scholarship. Contexual and contestable – culture reamins a domain much enriched by every new academic discourse.

Articulating the complexity of the term, once Raymond Williams said, *culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language*[1]. The wide range of phenomenon and concerns addressed by culture, surely problematises the scope of a precise definition. Owing to this fact the term has carved out a lengthy history for itself. Unravelling some of the important junctures of its development, one can gain a deeper understanding of this concept which would be more worthwhile towards grappling the essence of the term than vying for succint reductionist definition. From classical conception of culture which go on to define it as a descriptive or symbolic category, there are strands of structural conception and systems view which exhaust the definition of this domain.

Classical Conception of Culture

With the emergence of the discipline of anthropology in the late 19th century, the classical conception of culture took its roots in the articulation

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[1] Willaims, Raymond, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, London, Fontana, 1983, p.84.

of the concept by German philosophers and historians. Under the classical conception, culture may be understood as a *process of developing the human faculties, a process facilitated by the assimilation of works of scholarship and art linked to the progressive character of the modern era.*[2] Therefore with emphasis on cultivation of higher values and qualities, it appeals to work of academics and art. It also links with the enlightenment idea of progress. Prominent in this is the descriptive view of culture postulated by Tylor in Primitive Culture. His classic definition reads as following, *Culture, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. The condition of culture among the various societies of mankind, in so far as it is capable of being investigated on general principles, is a subject apt for the study of laws of human thought and action*[3]

Tylor's definition contains the key elements of the descriptive conception of culture. According to this conception, culture may be regarded as the interrelated array of beliefs, customs, forms of knowledge, art etc which are acquired by individuals as members of a particular society and which can be studied scientifically. These beliefs and customs form a *complex whole* which is characteristic of a certain society, distinguishing this society from others that exist at different times and places.

This kind of inclusive use of the term *culture* was continued by anthropologists like Boas and Malinowski. While in Boas, there is a stress on the pluralistic and relativistic conception of culture, Malinowski seems to

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[2] Thompson B.John, Ideology and Modern Culture, 1990, Polity Press, p.126.
[3] Tylor B.e, Primitve Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philsophy, Relgion, Language, Art & Custom, Vol.1, London, John Murray, 1903, p.1.

have picked from Tylcr what John B.Thompson says *Scientisation of the concept of culture.*[4]

Malinowski's writings in 1930s and 1940s espoused a scientific theory of culture and endorsed a qualified evolutionary perspective; but his main concern was to develop a functionalist approach of culture in which cultural phenomenon would be anlaysed in terms of satisfaction of human needs. But Malinowski's functionalist formulation may also be seen as a version of the descriptive view which is explicit from his definition, *culture comprises inherited artefacts, goods, technical processes, ideas, habits and values ---- culture in reality is sui generis and must be studied as such.*[5]. Hence the study of culture must seek to break this social heritage down into its component elements and relate these elements to one another, to the environment and to the needs of human organism. According to Malinowski, examination of functions of cultural phenomenon of the ways in which they satisfy human needs, must precede any attempt to formulate stage of social development and evolutionary schemata.

This functionaist strand is further visible in Parsonian formulation. Although Parsons views fall well in tune with shaping a systems view of culture as he at length talks of the various sub-systems which constitute the social system. He talks of the role of cultural system in the overall integration of society and *integration* and *socialisation* of individuals into society. For Parsons *socialisation* by individuals which results in what anthropologists call *social institutions* involves choices based on values and norms which are specified

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[4] Thompson B.John, Ideology and Modern Culture, Polity Press, 1990, p.120.
[5] Malinowski, Bronislaw, 'Culture in Encylopedia of Social Scicnces', Vol.4, London: Macmillan , 1931, pp.621-623.

within the cultural system. In other words, people behave as they are expected to in a given situation because they have internalised the norms and values – the culture of soceity, what Durkheim would call , *morality*.

Another prominent approach towards the understanding of culture was devised by A.L.Kroeber and Clyde Kluckohn. Their approach had a etic tenor as they tried to construct a *generalised theory of culture pattern*. After attempting some several hundred definitions of culture they arrived at a summary definition of culture which is as following ,

> Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievments of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e histroically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action.[6]

Milton Singer (1968) characterised this *pattern theory* defintion as a consideration of what most American anthropologists in 1940's and 1950's called culture. The pattern theory simply stated that behaviour follows a relatively stable routine, from the simplest levels of custom in dress and diet to more complex levels of organisation in political, economic and religious life. The persistence of specific patterns is variable in different arenas and different societies but larger configurations tend to be more stable,changing incrementally unless redirected by external forces. In addition the theory emphasised that the culture from any given society can be formally described, that is, it can be placed in formal categories representing different

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[6] Kroeber.A & Kluckhohn Clyde, Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions, New York, Vintage Books, 1952, p.181.

spheres of social life to facilitate comparison between societies. As such, universal patterns of culture can be constructed.

Contrary to this view, is the structuralist concept of culture which lays emphasis on the social structure, largely , through the efforts of Radcliffe Brown. A theory emerges which argues that social structure is more appropriately represented by a network or system of social relations than a set of norms. The structuralist argument is intended to clarify how actors in a society actively produce and are socially produced by their cultural context. By distinguishing the actors and interaction in a social system from the behavioural norms, structuralists seek to establish a referent for social structure that is analytically independent of the culture and artefacts produced in that system.

From the culture – social structure debate we may move on to another disparate approach which sees culture as a 'symbolic-meaningful' system. Within the interpretative tradition Clifford Geertz in his masterly work, *Interpretation of Culture* has attributed a symbolic understanding of culture. Taking the system's frame of reference from Parsons, Geertz describes the cultural system, as a *system of symbols and meanings, which is* at a particular *level of abstraction* of social relations. According to Geertz, *the concept of culture .... is essentially a semiotic one. Believing with Max Weber, then man is an animal suspended in webs of significance, he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it .... not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of*

meaning.[7] For Geertz, culture is a *stratified hiearchy of meaningful structures* which have to be disentagled from the multi-layered discourse to make sense of meaning. Another alternative model of culture as a system of symbols and meanings is found in Claude Levi-Strauss whose conceptualisation follows the Saussurian semiotic approach of signifier and signified.

Culture in Industrial Society

The culture in industrial society assumes a specific context which neccessiates to perceive the concept within the constrained parameters. It is no longer a pristine imagination of some tradition, customs and belief systems operating in isolation in the society. Rather it gets enmeshed in the instrumental realm of economy. The cultural meaning is mediated by the economic imperative of capitalist socieites. The insight to this kind of occurence is given by the Marxian paradigm which asserts that capitalist structures produce commodities for exchange value rather than use value.

It is no longer a self-sufficing economy where production is meant to fulfill social needs, rather it is an economy where capitalism unleashes superficial needs to boost the profit making for bourgeoisie. The realisation of such motives lead to the concurrence of the cultural in the economic. This means that when we talk of culture in industrial societies, we are interested in its location in the political economy of the set up. In other words it refers to situate analysis of cultural texts within their system of production and distribution.

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[7] Geertz, Clifford, The Interpretation of Cultures, New York, Basic Books, 1973, p.5.

The references to the terms political and economy call attention to the fact that the production and distribution of culture takes place within a specific economic system, constituted by the relations between the state, the economy, the media, social institutions and practices, culture and everyday life. Political economy thus encompasses economics and politics and the relations between them and other central dimensions of society and culture. The discussion here is intended to throw light on the meanings that culture imbues and imputes in the modern industrial set up. Also emphasis would be given to comprehend the subsequent elitist nostalgia arising out of ramifications of industrialism which lead to a disjunction of high and low culture in the debates.

Raymond Willaims has attempted to show how modern notions of culture in Britain arose out of the 19th century changes and processes. A series of key words like, *industry, democracy, class* and *art* were indicative of the changes. In the 19th century he argues, the concept of culture as an abstraction and as an absolute concept emerged, *as a recognition of the practical separation of certain moral and intellectual activities from which to aim and by which to judge other social and economic activities*[8] But Williams stresses that this new concept of culture was not simply a response to industrialisation but also a search for new kinds of personal and social relationships – a concern shared by Saint.Simon, Comte, Durkheim and Spencer. What delineates the idea of culture in the 19th century is its identification to an institutional sphere into which it is devoted to production, circulation and use of meaning. Thus the cultural sphere when broken down into its sub spheres may comprise – art, magic, theatre,

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[8] Williams Raymond, Culture and Society, Harmondsworth, Penguin, New York, 1968, p.17.

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fashion, literature, religion, media, education etc. This kind of conception of culture has been particularly prominent in the discourses of cultural studies. Its root, as mentioned earlier, may be traced to the 19th century concept of culture as a sphere of high or uplifting artistic and intellectual activity. This evaluative character of culture as talked by Raymond Williams lent it a distinct identity of high culture contrary to mass culture.

In the 1950's and early 1960's, the concept of culture becomes enmeshed in a new debate where anthropological interpretation of culture places both commonplace and elite activities in the same category of culture against the humanities oriented conception of culture which equates the identification of cultural activities with a value statement. This refers to the widely know high- mass culture debate.

High-Mass Culture Debate

In T.S.Eliot, a poet of the 20th century, one finds that his writings on culture lay a lot of emphasis on the importance of the social elite in the preservation and trasnmission of culture. Pessimistic of the aftermath of industrialisation and capitalism i.e. organisation of life by profit motive and exploitation of natural resources, he idealises the true christian way of life.

His ideas become lucid from his statement on what British culture incudes, *all the characteristic activities and interests of a people. Derby Day, Henley Regatta, lowes, 12th of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, coenleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in*

vinegar, 19th century gothic churches and music of Elgar[9] But as Raymond Willaims rightly points out that Eliot's emphasis on culture as a way of life would literally imply a minimal, restricted definition of *popular culture*. In fact Eliot slips into using culture in its meaning of an absolute standard of high culture, that is, culture in its best evaluative form.

Contrary to this runs the concept of mass culture, a term, critic Dwight Macdonald explains is used to identify articles of culture that are produced for mass consumption, *like chewing gum*. Although Macdonald's concern is about the *massification* of consumption patterns which is mainly a critical inquiry in production and consumption of mass goods in capitalist societies.

An exhaustive inquiry in this debate is much desirable at this point as it would serve as a precursor to the understanding of the problematique in culture industry arguments of the Frankfurt school. The debate would inaugurate the problems of mass culture with respect to political economy of capitalist societies. This would enable us in grappling the issues raised in subsequent chapters.

The notion of *mass society* developed out of 19th century sociology. The concept was seen as a aftermath of the emergence of industrial society which is governed by marked, commercial relationships and characterised by atomised; isolated, alienated, disenchanted individuals without roots in community living. Consequently all critics of mass society held an elitist view of society and culture and rejected individual liberalism. Theorists like Mannheim, scholars from Frankfurt school, Macdonald, Greenberg, and

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[9] Eliot T.S, The Idea of a Christian Society, London, Faber & Faber, 1939, p.31.

Berelson took upon themselves as saviours of true or high culture and argued that in order to reintergrate modern society and avoid the excesses of totalitarianism there must be an intellectual, cultural, political elite to ensure transmission of a worthwhile and relatively autonomous culture.

Macdonald's critique of mass culture despite its ultimate conservatism is much influenced by the Frankfurt school theorists. MacDonald emphasises the importance of technological development leading to the creation of a whole new range of mass media. The coming up of televisions and films as well as the mass production of books and records seen to be accelerating the process of massification. Macdonald argues that it is *a parasitic, a cancerous growth on high culture*[10], by which he means that mass culture sucks up the traditions and achievements of high culture. Mass culture intergrates, *the masses into a debased form of high culture ...... It is fabricated by technicians, hired businessman; it's audiences are passive consumers, their participation is limited to the choice between buying and not buying.*[11] The critics argue that the conventions and forms of high art are used directly or as *pastiche* in some advertisements to create a continuity between the tradition of high-mass culture. This is possible due to the techniques of reproduction of mass production which have made widely available good quality reproductions of classical works of art. The cultural needs of the masses, Macdonald argues, are exploited in order to make commerical profits and to maintain the domination of the ruling class.

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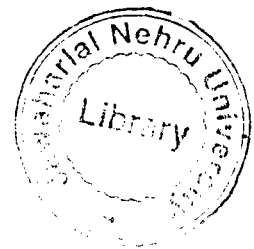
[10] Macdonald D, 'A Theory of Mass Culture', Diogenes 3, p.57, 1953.
[11] Ibid, pp.59-60.

Pointing to the political aspect, he says that it is not just the profit motive but the political obedience of the mases which is achieved by imposition of mass culture. Most striking about Macdonald's discussion is his certainity of the absolute nature of cultural tastes and values defined by high culture. He has well established notions in mind of good and bad art. He asserts, for example, that Charles Dicken's work is popular, it is high culture, whereas that of his contemporary, G.M.Menty is not. He says this is because Menty was an *impersonal manufacturer of an impersonal commodity* meant for the masses. Likewise he dismisses a whole list of painters, writers, architects and others as representing spurious high culture.

He debunks them on grounds that they have produced manufatured items; no different from mass produced cultural items like television, films and other forms of popular media. Implicit in his work is the modus operandi of the production of culture and its relationship to the wider production process of capitalist society. He makes it clear that there is a mass cultural industry catering to superficial needs. He finds the high level of division of labour deeply entrenched in the capitalist structure to be an impediment in the truly spontaneous creation of art. Commenting on this, he says, *unity is essential in art, it cannot be achieved by production line of specialists, however competent.*[12] The formerly localised, highly differentiated and competitive markets become dominated by a single corporate actor who merges different sectors of the consumer landscape and monopolises production resources and distribution outlets.

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[12] *Opcit* p.65.

The concerns citied by Macdonald are to a great extent the reverberation of ideas close to the heart of Frankfurt school. The Frankfurt school too condemns the mass culture and makes it a pivotal point to attack the captains of culture industry while sustaining its defense of the elite/high culture. The devaluation of high culture by technological devices of mass culture, on the basis of tested and oft-repeated formula, into mechanically reproduced forms, is most irksome to this line of theorists. Their pessimism of mass culture articulates it as *a dynamic, revolutionary force, breaking down old barriers of class, tradition, taste, and dissolving all cultural distinctions. It mixes and scrambles everything together... It thus destroys all values, since value judgements imply discrimination.*[13] The above debate on high-mass culture is a general orientation of the things to come. The debate informs us of the disjunctures and dissonance between the two viewpoints. The same debate acquires much significance in the context of the culture industry theory. One finds that the culture industry argument is pitched on this discordant relationship whereas popular culture is looked upon as an eye-soar, the advocates extol at length the potentials of high art.

A unique case in point in the discussion of high-mass culture is the Classical versus Folk culture debate, situated in the Indian context.

Although the classical culture with its attributes of high degree of sophistication, systematisation and norms of ideal behaviour may well be regarded as an elite version of culture or a high tradition. Its parallel current i.e. the folk or desi culture in literal terms may be called a version of mass cutlure but differs in meaning in conceptual terms.

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[13] Macdonald D., A Theory of Mass Culture, p.62.

The folk culture is a mass culture only to the extent that it is practised by a large segment of the population but it is not simply mechanical reproduction of the high classical culture. It is indigenous in its origin, having local flavour, catering to specificities and hence is diverse and heterogeneous. Thus it is not a synthetic, homogenous, superficially reproduced prototype of mass culture. In this respect the folk culture and the *little traditions* are a high culture in their own right.

Resuming back to the debate, as a matter of fact, one finds much of the ideas of the culture industry proponents evolve in the process of their diatribe hurled against mass culture. The popular culture stoops to fall flat in their debates. Hence in a diametrically pitched battle between *High Culture* and Mass Culture, the need for a fair analysis of the two becomes a pre-requisite. More so, when two-thirds of the space in this dissertation is devoted to the central argument of culture industry which mounts a diabolical attack, throughout on mass culture. Henceforth it becomes all the more important to voice the latters view in a plausible fashion. There is no singular advocate of popular culture. In fact popular culture has various shades, which appear in the ongoing discussion as its variants. The effort in delineating these differential concepts would be to ultimately streamline the debate for the advocates of mass culture.

Culture Mosaic: Popular Culture and Its Variants
The term mass culture could be a positive umbrella term for the sub themes of popular culture like consumer culture, commercial culture and culture populism. But considering sentiments of die-hard critics who have frevently

negated the term we may resort to the term popular culture regarding which they too have reservations. Taking advantage of the outward connotation of the term which in commonsensical understanding endows the idea of that which is popular or widely accepted. The problem has been deliberately raised in the opening section of the debate on culture industry. For what is popular and seems uncritically acceptable or gives a fascade of being mass-based or catering to masses may not turn out to be so in the fag end of this work.

A strong proponent of the idea of popular culture one finds in Tony Bennett. He defines the concept broadly in a way that it aptly fits in the popular mould. Bennett gives an all-encompassing definition of culture which he uses as a singular term to refer *to all those activities or practices, which produce sense or meaning*[14] In Bennett's words culture means, *The customs and rituals that govern or regulate our social relationship on a day to day basis as well as those texts – literary, musical, televisual and filmic through which the social and natural world is re-presented or signified – made meaning of in particular ways in accordance with particular conventions.*[15]

Basically Bennett is saying that culture consists in all those things that make our lives and the world make sense for us. Thus much against the'high culture notions, for Bennett books and paintings are much a part of culture like magazines, postcards and photographs. Culture is not something to be found in specific places like art galleries; rather culture is everywhere and it is everything we do.

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[14] Bennett Tony, 'Popular Culture: Themes & Issues (2), Militon Keynes, The Open University Press, 1981, p.82.
[15] Bennett Tony, 'Popular Culture: A Teaching Object, Screen Education 34, 1980, pp.82-83.

Another significant outcome of Bennett's definition is the strong linkage of culture to the political economy. The first implication of his definition is that culture can only be understood by detailed analysis of the relationships of consumption and productions of things like television, literature or films. The second point is that culture concerns daily life hence it has to be analysed in terms of material and real life relationships.

Almost the same tenor in comprehension of the term popular culture is found in works of Ray Browne. In his perspective popular culture is broadly defined as: *it is the everyday culture of a group, large or small, of people .... It is the way of life in which and by which most people in any society live... It is the everyday world around us.... it is what we do while we are awake and how we do it.*[16] Finally he goes on to say, *popular culture studies are scholarly examinations of those everyday culture*[17] The primary goal of this kind of approach has been to legitimise the study of popular culture in all fields of humanities and social sciences. Much like Bennett's approach, the concept here too acquires an 'all-inclusive' usage.

Such an apporach of popular culture hoodwinks the oppositional currents which might be there in the social order. It neatly irons out the dominant subordinate worldviews which may be having conflicting perceptions of culture. At the most if it does acknowledge such aversive currents, it expects them to negotiate to form a compromising amalgam. This is quite evident in Bennett who sees popular culture as, *'an area of negotiation between the two*

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[16] Browne Ray: "Internationalising Popular Clture Studies", Journal of Popular Culture Studies, 30, 1996, p xii.
[17] *Ibid* p.25.

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(dominant and subordinate classes) and within which in different forms of popular culture – dominant, subordinate and oppositional elements are mixed in different combinations [18] Such a view is a stark contrast of the Gramscian concept of hegemony which defines prime culture or popular culture as a culture of the dominant classes.

Since the 1970's, the focus of cultural studies was redefined with Gramsci's work coming in focus of the English audience. Gramsci's concept of hegemony defined as a process by which relations of power are normalised for social members. It generated research trajectory which centered on identifying and analysing systems of power embedded in processes of cultural production and consumption. The field is perhaps most noted for its now widely accepted claim that consumers of cultural texts are not passive but rather active participants in the creation of meaning. The culture industry theory too failed to guage an active audience although a detailed re-interpretation of the writings of its proponents does signal an audience which can see through the superficiality of popular culture.

It is the production of culture, under which the theoretical perspective of culture industry debate can be easily placed. This categorisation largely owes to the fact that this school of thought does not concentrate much on creation of meaning of cultural text at the time of reception or consumption but closely examines culture as a manufactured product. Although the production of culture approach originated in USA much later in the mid 70's but a precursor to this approach can be traced back to works of Adorno and

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[18] Bennett Tony, Popular Culture: Themes and Issues (1), Milton Keynes: the Open University Press, 1981, p.31.

Horkheimer. Without elaborating much in their work, which would be logically elucidated in the subsequent chapters, a sharp observation may be made in context of the ongoing discussion. The duo argued in their classic work *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that cultural objects which are attributed as mass oriented, are produced in much the same way as other industries produce other objects. To them, the assembly-line production of cars is analogous to the production of music or films. Therefore the concept of popular culture is met with aversion in these thinkers.

Continuing with our ordeal of exploring the culture mosaic, we come across the concept of consumer culture, also closely associated with popular culture by a number of theorists. The talks of consumer culture have boomed large in 20th century. The word descends from Marx's observation on commodity fetishism. Early capitalism created a culture of production. But as technology matured, capitalists recognised the need to forge mass markets. They used designing and advertising to create new categories of human needs that only they would satisfy. By the1950's, consumption became the major means by which an average consumer coped with existential anxiety, defined their identities and competed for social status.

The roots of consumer society however can be discerned at least as early as 1900 and it's institutions were in place by the 1920's. Lowenthal (1961) pioneered this analysis in a classic study of Jazz Age shift from industrialists and other heroes of production to celebrities who are heroes of consumption as subjects of popular magazine biographies.

Don Slater while talking of consumer culture pivots it to the framework of modernity. He says, *consumer culture — a culture of consumption.... is unique and specific: It is the dominant mode of cultural production, developed in the West over the course of modernity.*[19] He is of the view that consumer culture is bound with central values, practices and institutions which define western modernity — such as choice, individualism and market relations. To him consumer culture marks a system in which consumption is dominated by consumption of commodities and in which cultural reproduction is largely understood to be carried out through the exercise of free personal choice in private sphere of everyday life.

While Celia Lury's work *Consumer Culture* looks upon it as predominantly a particular form of material culture that emerged in Euro-American societies during the second half of the 20th century. The thesis which she propounds in her work is that, *a process of stylization is what best defines consumer culture*[20] The process of stylization is mediated through the following factors:

> ➢ Circulation of commodities.

> ➢ Changes in interrelationship of different system of production and consumption or regimes of value.

> ➢ Relative independence of practices of consumption from those of production.

> ➢ Special importance given to the consumption or use of cultural objects or goods in contemporary societies.

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[19] Slater Don, Consumer Culture and Modernity, Polity Press, 1997, p.8.
[20] Lury Celia, Consumer Culture, Polity Press, 1996, p.20.

The process conveys a widespread circulation of commodities which may be consumed on its own and more so for the cultural value attributed to the objects, in a strict sense may not conform to the forces of demand and supply. The demand for consumption may linger on. Thus viewed from this angle, circulation of things and culture appear inextricably linked in a society.

Addressing to the question of consumption in the present day global economies, both the authors concede to a heightened consumerist tendency being witnessed around the globe. The economies are infested with a huge variety of goods at competitive prices which have ushered a phase of intensified consumerism, while Slater and Lury from their American and Euro-American perspectives have analysed the consumer tendencies, there could well be other befitting arguments for consumerism. One such important aspect, which occurs to me here, is to guage consumption in terms of the social and symbolic meaning which it encapsulates. The issue has been the central thesis of Veblen's *Theory of Leisure Class*. A society in which the possession and use of an increasing number and variety of goods and services serves as the principle cultural aspiration and surest perceived route to personal happiness. This route to social status could also be a good enough sociological conceptualisation of a consumer society.

In contemporary times many recent writings set in the background of global economy increasingly talk of *commercial society* or *commercial culture*. The scholars view commercial society as an evolutionary progressive development. It is perceived as the third stage directly preceding the science stage which in turn is preceded by the arts stage. The commerce stage of society culminates in the globalisation scenario where issues of deficits,

debts and dependence as well as entrepreneurship and management acquire significance.

To make matters simpler for comprehension, we may turn to the core concept of commercial culture. The commercial culture corresponds to a concept in which almost anything has market value of exchange, in other words, is readily saleable. Therefore in the light of this concept – concerts, theatre, musical evenings, ballads, movies, television and even celebration of festivals could be included as a part of commercial culture. Any day to day activity which is part of the larger socio-cultural milieu of people, out of which money can be minted could be safely dubbed under the tag of commercial culture.

Then the question arises, are commerical culture and consumer culture, one and the same thing. Practically the difference is negligible between the two, but technically – consumer culture looks at the economic powers of commodity exchange or sale from the consumer's end while commerical culture would look at the economic viability of any transaction from the producer's or manufacturer's point of view. Thus whereas consumer culture corresponds to culture of consumption, commercial culture corresponds to culture of production. In both the cases, there is no wonder as to whom the final gains of the transaction would go. It is this very factor which has come under tremendous attack by the Frankfurt school theorists.

A little offbeat from the other concepts, is the term 'cultural populism'. The term is the product of postmodern theory. The concept marks the semblance of the high art and popular culture. Jim McGuigan in his text devoted to *cultural populism* goes on to say, *cultural populism is the intellectual*

assumption, made by some students of popular culture, that the symbolic experiences and practices of everyday people are more important analytically and politically than culture with a capital 'C'.[21] It bridges its way between the two extreme pitched notions of culture. The concept pivots on decentering and emphasises on local pleasures. It goes on to construct hybrid identities from the material of the popular.

The discussion so far has already come a long way where the concept of culture is not only defined by its sole attributes rather the elongated terms with conspicuous prefixes mark the concept's strong interlink in the sphere of political economy. As we have seen in our discussion that the questions of – production, consumption and circulation assume great importance when expressed in the logic of cultural behaviour. This calls for an intensive theoretical exploration which steadfastly establishes the connexion between culture and industry in a more concrete way and hence paves the path for the prime debate to take off.

Culture and Industry: A General Overview of Theoretical Linkages

The argument so far criss-crosses the two realms of culture and industry and makes inroads between the two themes. As we have already witnessed, that the concepts of culture of production and consumption emerge in an industrial society. It is precisely because of the political economy of industrial societies which majorly impact the cultural texts of a society, leading to a situation where culture and industry are drawn close together, than ever before.

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[21] McGuigan Jim, Cultural Populism, London, Routledge,1992, p.4.

In essence the writings of sociolgists during the 18th century enlightenment was somewhere deeply hinged in and around the twin areas. A close examination of the sociological concerns from Saint.Simon to Comte, to Spencer, Durkheim, Marx and Weber is in the backdrop of their response to the heralding of a industrial society. Hence industry, market, factory system, mode of production have been the predominant themes against which the great intellectual minds have mitigated and shaped their perspectives. The aftermath of industrial revolution on the socio-economic cultural realm of man, stimulated each of these scholars to come up with their respective theoretical formulations.

While Comte saw an evolutionary growth of societies from military to industrial but neverthelss he didn't see industrial society without any problems. In fact, Nisbet in *Sociological Tradition* talks of industrial revolution as a *break up of old order*. He says that, *the fundamental ideas of European sociology are best understood as responses to the problem of order created at the beginning of the 19th century by the collapse of the old order regime under the blows of industrialism and revolutionary democracy.*[22] Industrialism collapsed the old order of Europe which rested on kinship, land, social class, religion, local community and monarchy.

Durkheim's entire schema of mechancial and organic solidarity is rooted to the nature of society in terms of its stages of economic activity. He sees an increase in the interdependence among people, rise in the moral density with an augmentation in the division of labour and consequent rise in specialisation in the modern industrial set up. In Marx, the mode of production becomes the central focus of his thesis, drawing from which he

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[22] Nisbet, Robert, Sociological Tradition, London, Heinemann, 1966, p.21.

etches concepts of social relation of production, forces of production, theory of surplus value etc

While another classical stalwart like Weber examined the economic behaviour within the rubric of religious ethic and a literary critic like Raymond Williams, in his classic work, *Culture and Society* maps out the effect of industrial revolution in the cultural ambit of society, particularly in respect of English literature. Therefore it is amply clear by now than an endeavour bridging between the two areas is no novel talk. In fact the 18th century intelligentsia in their philosophic, literary or theoretical works were at some point trying to feel the pulse of the social reality which was moulded by momentous forces unleashed by industrial revolution. On this basis it can be simply stated that this problem of negotiating between the socio-cultural ethos of society and economic logic of industry lies in the heart of sociological debates, since it's very inception.

An interesting concept of *circuit of culture* has been put forth by Du Guy. He talks of an integrated relationship between producers and consumers. i.e. we would know little about singers unless we also study music - buyers, we learn little about television producers unless we also study of television viewers. Du Guy's concept of circuit of culture brings about obscure linkages between the consumptionist trajectory and trajectory of production of culture. The circuit of culture model suggests the 'cultural meaning - making' functions in terms of a transmission flow from producer to consumer which is like a model of dialogue, as an ongoing process. Therefore at one point there is production of cultural meanings, while at other, there is circulation through complex sites of cultural consumption. It

is through this kind of flow pattern approach in cultural studies, that the flow in cultural realm can be seen analogous to the economic flow of goods.

To exposit this more explicitly, I wish to explore the views of thinkers like Simmel, Veblen, Weber and Marx,whose ideas would touch upon each significant process of ecnomic activity and reflect the injunction of the two fields. For purpose of mapping from the simple to complex analysis, we may at first analyse the ideas of Simmel and Veblen who touch upon the culture of circulation and culture of consumption, respectively in their works.

Simmel

Simmel says that interdependence of personality and material relationships, which is typical of barter economy, is dissolved by the money economy. At every moment, it interposes the perfectly objective and inherently qualityless presence of money and monetary value between the person and the particular object. It fosters a distance between personality and property by mediating between the two. This form of long distance ownership, which is taken for granted today has become possible since money has moved between owner and possession both as connecting and separting factor. In this manner, money produces impersonality in all economic ownership and an equally enhanced independence and autonomy of personality. The relationship of personality to associations develops in a similar way of property. For eg. he talks of the medieval guild which he says was not simply an association of individuals who only pursued the mere interest of weaving. In fact, it was a living community in occupational, social, religious, political and many other respects. In contrast to this money

economy has produced innumerable associations which primarily look after member's monetary interest.

Simmel also talks of the dissatisfaction which arises in social life because of culture oriented to money. Since money procures things only in quantitative terms, the qualitative aspect is robbed in the socially significant value exchanges. Simmel also goes on to point out that enormous desire for happiness of the modern man which he sees in attainment of money, thus making money from means to an end in itself.

Simmel was interested in the broader value of money, while money can be seen simply as a specific form of value. Simmel's interest was not in money *per se* but in its impact on the *inner world* of actors and objective culture as a whole. He treated money as a specific pheonomenon linked to a variety of components of life: excahnge, ownership, extravagance, greed, cynicism, individual freedom, style of life, personality, culture etc. Tom Bottomore and Frisby put it, *Simmel sought no less than to extract the totality of the spirit of the age from his analysis of money.*[23] Simmel's ideas have commonality with Marx as much like the latter, Simmel focuses on capitalism and the problems created by a money economy. Simmel saw the economic problem of his time as simply a specific manifestation of a more general cultural problem, the alienation of objective from subjective culture. While to Marx, these problems are specific to capitalism for Simmel they are part of cultural tragedy --- the increasing powerlessness of the individual in the face of the growth of objective culture. Whereas Marx's anlsyses is

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[23] Bottomore Tom & Frisby David (eds), Introduction to the translation of Georg Simmel, The Philosophy of Money, (Orig.1904), London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, p.7.

historically specific, Simmel's analysis seeks to extract timeless truths from the flux of human history.

The differences in their analysis is due to the crucial political differences in Simmel and Marx. Since Marx saw economic problems as time bound, the product of capitalist society which he believed eventually would be solved but Simmel saw the basic problem inherent in human life and heeded no hope for future improvement. In this regard Simmel comes closer to Weber's idea of 'iron cage' which elicits pessimism on the future of modern world.

While Simmel's account focuses on the impact of social relations with the movement of money in market economy, Veblen's approach goes on to examine the consummation of wealth in relation to social status.

Veblen

Thorstein Veblen presents a cynnical view of the world in which the basis of one's good repute in society lies in one's pecuniary strength. He at length talks of two ways of indicating one's pecuniary strength which is *conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption* in his classical work *Theory of Leisure Class* (1899). This is one of the first major contributions to literature on consumption. The inherent idea carried in this text was – that the basis of social honour, prestige and social status is wealth. The miser cuts a poor figure in Veblen because he fails to demonstrate wealth. The *leisure class* located in some feudalistic set up is a class which claims for honour in society by avoiding any kind of productive labour. Hence the class would not learn any employment skill but would prefer to learn dead and rich languages like Latin and Hebrew, because this has nothing to do with

economic pursuits. But in the modern set up, where the size of the society enlarges and impersonlaity creeps in, then according to Veblen conspicuous consumption is the ideal way of attaining honour and social prestige. He says that *even for the lower classes, the feasible way of attaining honour and prestige is by emulating the higher classes in their deed of conspicous consumption.*

The Frankfut theorists especially Adorno caught attention of Veblen's work. After his arrival in US, Adorno observed the extent to which commodity production pervaded culture and how the new culture of consumption was colonising everyday life, while producing a consumer society. For Adorno, Veblen's basic experience may be characterised as that of *pseudo – uniqueness*[24] As long as Veblen is critical of conspicuous consumption which he sees as a remnant of a primitive, *predatory spirit*, Adorno concedes to his stand.

But Adorno is quick to criticise Veblen's idiolisation of production and his failure to see that the mode of production which he criticises is integrally part of the capitalist of mode of production and that the industrial capital whose *instincts*, Veblen praises is interconnected with 'pecuniary capital' and conspicuous consumption, as part of the same capitalist system. Therefore Veblen's theory is not only a sociological enterprise of unearthing consumption in the logic of social status but a step ahead, it provided food for thought to the Frankfurt school to counter the arguments of a consumer society and subsequently evolve a critique of culture industry.

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[24] Adorno.T, Veblen's Attack on Culture' in Prisms, trans S&S Weber, London, Spearman 1964.

Max Weber

Max Weber, who was disillussioned of the promises of modernity and saw no hope in the highly administered set up, was also one of the key figures who influenced the Frankfurt school. Weber worked on a number of issues and problems of economic sociology in his works, *Economy and Society* and his masterly treatise, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

At the core of his work, *Economy and Society* he focusses on the economy itself and explores links between economy and other parts of society. Weber remarked in his work, *the connnections between the economy..... and the social order (such as law, politics and religion) are dealt with more fully than is usually the case. This is done deliberately so that the automony of these spheres vis-a-vis the economy is made manifest.*[25] The statement resounds Weber's polemical stand against the idea that only *material interests* decisively determine human behaviour. In *Economy and Society* he lays down a theoretical groundwork for analysis of economy in terms of categories such as *social action, social relationship* and organisations and association. Weber conceives economic action as social which involves meaning and takes power in account. His concept of market is an arena for *the struggle of man against man*. While money in Weber's eyes is primarily a weapon in this struggle", and prices are " the products of conflicts of interest and of compromises. The essence of such concepts brings out the strong interrelation which Weber draws between economy and society.

Although Weber acknowledges the importance and autonomy of economic sphere but refuses to see it as deterministic sphere. Rather the social,

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[25] Weber, Max, Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology, (ed) Guenther Roth & Clauswittich trans. Ephraim Fischoff et al 2 Vol, Berkeley, University of Californina Press, p.viii, 1978.

religious, political seem to directly negotiate with economy and transcends continually in the other realms.

The *Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism* is yet another remarkable work of Weber which emphatically drives in the point. In this work, Weber elucidates how a certain type of Protestantism helped create a new economic ethic which in turn promoted rational type of capitalism. Weber draws a direct correlation between belief system and economic action. In other words it could be concluded that the culture of people seem to have a direct bearing on their economic behaviour. This strong interrelationship of culture and economic behaviour has much to offer to the present day studies of global entrepreneurship.

The great classical thinker, Karl Marx who envisaged the deterministic role for the economy, was the starting point for critical theory. His entire gamut of ideas which brought the political economy in the limelight compelled the Frankfurt theorists to embark on their critical project, keeping political economy in hindsight.

Karl Marx

Base-Superstructure Debate

This debate assumes importance in this paper for it is the first logical interconnexion that one can easily draw in the Marxist thought when correlating economy and society. For Marx the economy constitutes the base or infrastructure. It is the deterministic sphere which impinges itself on other forms and aspects of social life. Thus it is the material conditions in any society which are decisive of its social, religious, legal, political conditions.

The very argument of social consciousness being determined by one's class position also conforms to this formulation.

The superstructure is the secondary realm which is conditioned by the base. Therefore in Marx's view the social forms and order is not an autonomous or isolated pheonomenon but is formed under direct impact of material conditions. Thus the social relations of production, do not exist on their own. But are extensions of the mode of production in the superstructural realm. Therefore, in Marx, religion, culture, and polity have a secondary existence shaped and coloured in consonance with the political economy of the given period of history.

From Production to Commodification

Marx's ideas centre around the very basic economic activity i.e production. The 'mode of production' in Marx informs the social consciousness in men and translates as relations of production in the social milieu. It is the extensive and exhaustive scrutiny of mode of production in the political economy of capitalist societies which through several debates and arguments lays down the economic sphere as the foundational base on which the other social, political, legal, religious, and cultural sphere vests.

For Marx, capitalism represented a rupture in history, the overthrow of medieval era by a radically secularised modern world organised around proudction, distribution and consumption of commodities. In the capitalist political economy, there is a dissolution of organic social and natural relations in the development of the fragmenting division of labour where commodity production structures social life and maximisation of profit is

society's sole purpose. In the capitalist political economy, Marx sees the triumph of economy over its human producers, the first social organisation in which market relations subsume and dominate the totality of social life.

Marx remarks that while the early phase of political ecnomy is marked with exchange of industrial products, the more advanced stage is that of commodification. He says, *When everything that men had considered inalienable became an object of exchange of traffic and could be alienated (i.e sold). This is the time when ... virtue, love, conviction, knowledge, conscience, etc – when everything finally passed to commerce. It is the time of general corruption of universal venality, or to speak in terms of political economy, the time when everything, moral or physical, to having become a marketable value, is brought to the market to be assessed at its truest value.*[26]

In this short passage Marx anticipates the creation of consumer society, an aftermath of the process of commodification. A stage where the products of political economy come to rule human beings. Since the capitalist mode of production hands over the forces of production in private hands, there is aggrandisement in commodity production. Marx says that forced to sell his or her labour power to survive, *the worker sinks to the level of commodity and becomes indeed the most wretched of the commodities.*[27] But instead of securing and enhancing the existence of subjects, productive activity under capitalism weakens and degrades them. Thus initiating the process of

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[26] Engels and Marx, Collected Works: Vol.4, New York, International Publishers, 1976, pp.113-114.

[27] Marx, Karl, Grundrisse, Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1973, p.70

alienation which Marx sees as a *loss of (human) reality* in which the worker *mortifies his body and ruins the mind*.

The creative, imaginative and transformative activity that defines the genuinely human atrophies and dies. The effects of the alienation of labour carry over into all aspects of social and personal life. This process could also be described as the inversion of exchange value over use value. Capitalism eliminates individual exchange and subordinates use value to exchange value, reversing the hierarchy of value and establishing exchange value as the dominant logic.

An object becomes a commodity when over and above its use value it assumes exchange value that allows its sale. Insertion of subjects and objects into the economic calculus transforms them into abstract entities. The depersonalised human beings themselves become raw material and mere commodities. As analysed by Eric Fromm (1947) people adopt the characteristics of the commodity creating themesleves as *marketable personalities* in order to compete successfully in a market economy. Conforming to this view, the Frankfurt school observes that the commodity forms constitutes an important source of abstraction in its own right, one that permeates social relatlonships in everyday life.

The triumph of commodity installs money as the dominant social power and value and produces an inverted world in which money allows one to simulate various human qualities. Under such conditions of *commodity fetishism' human beings become things and things take on human powers.All the things which you cannot do, your money can do.*[28] But it

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[28] *Opcit* p.96.

would be wrong to interpret the object of Marx's criticism was commodity *per se* but rather it is fetishisation in capitalist conditions of production and exchange, its magnification to the point that it subsumes and mystifies the underlying relations of production, transforming subjects into objects and objects into subjects.

Marx says that once the circulation of capital has been abstracted from sensuous needs and qualities, social life becomes degraded, privitized and fragmented among competing private interests.When the logic of capital extends beyond the factories to penetrate all cultural and interpersonal relations, it has a profound corruptive and distorting effect. The inversion that occurs in the economy affects the whole of social life, is then directly transferred to the cultural and personal realms which become commercialised and saturated with commodity fantasies, eventually producing the self, whose identity and happiness is realised in narcisstic consumption and the worship of celebrities. The Marxian thesis laid out here, in many senses voices the concerns of the Frankfurt school who see the corrosive abstract form of industry as deterministic of the nature of reality itself and going on to build its empire on the simulacra and illusions.

Such a critical explanation of the political economy heralded the first manifestations of an emerging consumer society and self. Taking a cue from the Marxist discourse of commodification, inversion and abstraction, the Frankfurt school theorists have interpreted the intents of the culture industry.

From Political Economy to Critical Theory

The ideas examined so far give an insight of the Marxist paradigm of political economy. The critical theorists with a bigger agenda of extending

and revising the problems which had crept in Marxism, picked up ideas from classic Marxist theme. The major tenets of Marxism to which they conceded and which form the backbone of their theorising may be enumerated below:

- The society is dominated by the capitalist mode of production. It is a society based on exchange, a commodity society where products are manufactured for realisation of profit.

- The commodity character of products is not simply determined by their exchange but by their being abstractly exchanged.

- The particular constellation of social relations which ensures the unity of the capitalist social process also ensures its fetishisation and reification. The terms which became a part of normal vocabulary of the Frankfurt school.

- Capitalism is not a harmonious social whole. In the realm of production of commodities and in the sphere of illusion it is based on contradictions. The dominant relations of production 'fetter' the developed forces of production and produce a series of antagonisms. Antagonisms arise in the cultural sphere as well as in the economic. Contradiction between the socially generated illusions (ideology) and actuality lead to crisis.

- A general tendency exists towards capital intensive industries and increased concentration of capital. The free market is replaced by oligopolistic and monopolistic mass production of standardised goods.

- In order to sustain the progressive rise in the capital, its protagonists utilise all means available – including imperialist expansion and war.

From this starting point, critical theory spelt out its motive – the formation and self-understanding of New Left. The new left or radical protest movements which were in upswing in different parts of the globe had its own set of followers. Hence many of those committed to these radical movements struggles against imperialism, strife against private appopriation of scarce resources and protest aginst constraints on personal initiative – found in the rubrics of this theory an intriguing interpretation of Marxist theory and an emphasis on issues and problems (for instance, mass culture, family, sexuality etc) which had rarely been explored by the conservative approaches to Marxism.

Chapter: 3
Culture Industry: A Theoretical Journey

The culture industry argument, the central theme of this dissertation, has been elaborately expounded in this chapter. The theme has been exposited by first taking into account the prime theory within which the debate is located i.e. critical theory. The Frankfurt school too figures in the discussion as the frontrunner of critical studies.

The trajectory of inquiry of the concept heralds from the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and goes on to outline the various processes by way of which culture industry operates. The understanding of culture in culture industry becomes explicit by bringing in Adorno's concept of authentic art. Finally the chapter culminates with a broadbasing of the issue as Walter Benjamin's counter view gives an alternative perspective of looking at the whole debate.

Critical Theory

Critical theory, the winding note of the preceding chapter is aptly the starting point of the theoretical unfurling of the theme of culture industry. For it is only amidst the backdrop of critical theory that we can holistically grapple the issue. Critical theory has been a major force in the debates about the nature, trajectory and impact of what has become known as modernity. Following the leads of Marx, Nietzche and Weber, critical theory has been deeply concerned with the fate of modernity. In fact, right from the beginning critical theory has been closely connected with Marxism.

During the 30's this movement has followed Marx in seeing modernity primarily as a product of industrial capitalism and interpret the path of modernity in terms of theories of the vicissitudes of capitalist development. Some of the major contributions of critical theory involve a systematic sustained attempt to revise, update and develop the Marxian critique of political economy into a critical social theory that greatly expands the scope, comprehensiveness and the depth of Marxian critique of capitalism. Critical theory articulates the transition from the stage of market, entrepreneurial captialism to the stage of organised or state capitalism.

The critical theorists analyses of the new relationships between the economy and the state in the totalitarian and democratic forms of state capitalism required updating and developing the Marxian theory. Hence the first generation of critical theorists in the 1930's who largely took the classical Marxist ideas of political economy and economic development as the foundation were prompt to notice the new economic political configuration of capitalism which produced new forms of imperialism, science and technology and consumer and mass culture. The culture industry was perceived by them as the outcome of a historical process in which technology and scientific organisation as well as administration came to dominate thought and experience. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the theory of culture industry provided a Neo-Marxian account of the mass-media and mass culture which helps to explain both the ways in which the culture industries reproduce capitalist societies and why socialist revolutions have failed to take place in these societies.

The new technologies were seen as instrument of ideological mystification and class domination. It was argued that the culture industries inhibit the development of class consciousness by providing the ruling political and economic forces with a powerful instrument of social control. Therefore it provided a model of technically advanced capitalist society which mobilised support for its institutions, practices and values from below, making class consciousness more difficult to attain than before.

In Gramsci's terminology, the culture industries reproduce capitalist hegemony over the working class by engineering consent to the existing society, thereby establishing a socio-psychological basis for social integration whereas fascism destroyed civil society through politicising mediating institutions or using force to suppress all homes or the movie theatres, where they produce consumer-spectators of media events and escapist entertaiment. While subtly indoctrinating them with dominant ideologies.

In this sense the theory of culture industry is part of the foundation for the critical theory of society, replacing the critique of political economy which for long had been the basis for social theories in the Marxist tradition.

Theories of consumerism and the development of consumer society, of culture industries, of the incorporation of science and technology into relations of production and new forms of social control.

Frankfurt School: The Frontrunner of Critical Studies

The Frankfurt school flourished in Germany in the 1930's and in US in 1940's. The Frankfurt Institute for Social Research which was established in

1923 was an affiliated body of the Frankfurt University. The Institute developed a distinctive approach to Marxism with initial Lukasian leanings. Its key proponents like Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, Walter Benjamin and Jurgen Habermas (of school's post war 'second generation') inaugurated critical studies of political economy, media, communication and culture.

The Frankfurt school were one of the first neo-Marxian groups to examine the effects of mass culture and the rise of the consumer society on the working classes which were to be the instrument of revolution in the classical Marxian scenario. They analysed the ways by which the culture industries and consumer societies were stabilising contemporary capitalism. Accordingly, they sought new strategies for political change, agencies of political transformation and models for political emanicipation that could serve as norms of social critique and goals for political struggle. This endeavour required rethinking the Marxian project and produced many important contributions – as well as some problematic positions.

Frankfurt school saw culture as a mode of ideological reproduction and hegemony, in which cultural forms help to shape the models of thought and behaviour that induce individuals to adapt to the social conditions of capitalist society. Much like Raymond Williams of British school, the Frankfurt school theorists saw high culture as forces of resistance to capitalist modernity. The whole debate of Frankfurt school's advocacy of authentic art and high culture would become clearer as we explore Adorno's ideas.Also striking is Frankfurt school's engagement with modernism and avant garde art. Metaphorically, since the beginning of the 20th century

avant garde has been taken to refer to the political or cultural leadership by an elite. Implicit in this idea are assumptions of political or cultural progress, which the avant garde pursues. As a key aspect of cultural modernism, the avant garde typically expresses innovative techniques, deliberately resisting easy assimilation into popular or mass culture fold.

Avant garde movements like Expressionism and Surrealism wanted to develop art that would revolutionise society, that would provide alternatives to hegemonic forms of culture. The oppositional and emancipatory potential of avant garde art movements was a primary focus of the Frankfurt school.

The Frankfurt school insists that culture must be studied within the social relations and system through which culture is produced and consumed and thus the study of culture is intimately bound up with the study of society, politics and economics.

Capitalist Development

In the 1930's the Frankfurt school theoriists provided critical accounts of the trajectory of capitalist modernity and the transitions to a new stage of capitalist development. This was an era of state capitalism or as Hilfidering described *organised capitalism*. By the late 1930's most members of the school had abandoned any hope in the revolutionary potential of the working classes in advanced capitalism. The working class was seen to be highly integrated into capitalism as any other class. All the groups within the society were seen to be equally subordinated to the administrative systems of government and industry The proletariat did not any more represent a privileged perspective on capitalism. History, for Frankfurt school, was not a

gradual emanicipation of humanity, but a tightening of the grip of technical and administrative control of all humanity.

Consequently in the 1940's, the school characterised modernity in terms of *dialectic of enlightenment* which explained in new ways the origins of what Adorno and Horkheimer saw as the crisis of Western civilisation or modernity, in the era of World War II and the death camps.

Dialectic of Enlightenment: The Unfolding of Culture Industry

Dialectic of enlightenment is the *magnum opus* of Adorno and Horkheimer's work which triggered their discourse on *culture and industry*. It was in this work that for the first time the debate on *culture industry* received a concrete theoretical treatment of the two scholars. Dialectic of Enlightenment seeks to discover *why humanity instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism.*[29] Adorno and Horkheimer indicate that they were forced to abandon trust in the disciplinary sciences and turn to critical philosophy in part because of the integration of science and scientific thought into the apparatus of the current systems of domination, fascist and capitalist. They stated that *there is no longer any available form of linguistic expression which has not tended toward accomodation to dominant current of thoughts.*[30] This statement reflects their despondency at the promises of positivism.

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[29] Adorno, Theodore and Horkheimer, Max, Dialectic of Enlightenment, Translated by J.Cumming, New York, Herder and Herder, 1972, p.xi.
[30] Ibid, pp.xxi-xii.

Indeed their work charts self destruction of Enlightenment. Adorno and Horkheimer believed that science, scientific reason and technology were part and parcel of existing processes of production and social domination, and thus should be mistrusted.

In fact to do away with the fallacy of thought and writing conformity to systems of domination, the duo attempt to break the standard discursive methods of presentation and modes of argumentation. They employ a new style of writing that juxtaposes material from philosophy, history, cultural studies and contemporary experience in a unique mixture of disciplines and topics which are usually separated in theoretical discourse. Thereby exploding the boundaries of the established academic disciplines.

Douglous Kellner says that Dialectic of Enlightenment can be read as a narrative theorisation of the origins and anticipation of the bourgeoisie subject in Homer's Odyssey, of its heroic stage in the Enlightenment and its decline in fascism and adminstered neo-capitalism. However the authors central claim is that the very same rationality which provides for humankind's emanicipation from the bondage of mythic powers and allows for progressive domination over nature, engenders through its intrinsic character, a return to myth and new, even more absolute forms of domination. In their analysis, enlightenment (with a small 'e') refers to that mode of enlightened thought which emanicipates human beings from the despotism of myth and helps them to control and dominate nature. Thus enlightenment is to be distinguished from the period of *the Enlightenment.* While *Dialectic of Enlightenment* refers to the ways in which supposedly enlightened, *rational* thought contains traces of myth and irrationality. Their

critique of enlightenment encompasses critique of science, technology and instrumental reason.

Horkheimer and Adorno undertake a critique of what they consider the totalitarian nature of values of calculation, quantification, excahnge, equivalence, formalisation, harmony and unity and the like modes of thought are themselves part of social processes of the domination of nature. Englightenment reason serves the interests of domination by virtue of embeddedness in the existing society and by mode of its application to the domination of human beings.

All other modes of thought, ranging from myth and religion to critical and speculative philosophy were deemed by enlightenment rationality as inferior and ineffective in the struggle to dominate nature. Against this position – which would rule out their own preferred modes of thought and inquiry – Horkheimer and Adorno argue that while enlightenment is often posed against myth enlightenment itself becomes myth; and myth is itself permeated with enlightenment rationality.

Their argument is that both myth and enlightenment were motivated by attempts to abstract from nature and also control it. In myths, individuals try to gain power over nature and the spirit world through naming ritual and magic. In science, domination of nature takes place through discovery of scientific laws based on causal connections and regularities in nature. In both cases identity thinking (i.e. the belief that one's concepts are identical with reality, mimesis (meaning the same thing in altered situations) and

calculations are methods of control and domination and both modes of thought are governed by the drive for self-preservation.

The feature of enlightened reason which accounts for this reversal is its identification of rationality and understanding with the subsumption of the particular under the universal. Subsumptive or instrumental rationality disregards the intrinsic properties of things, those properties that give each thing its sensuous, social and historical particularity, for the sake of goals and purposes and finally for self-sustenance. Thus in other words such a rationality treats unlike and unequal things as like and equal and would subsume object under subject. Therefore instrumental rationality occludes the path of enlightened rationality. This leaves no space for judging the particulars and evaluating ends and goals because reason which was to be the means to satisfying human ends becomes its own end, and thereby turns against the true aims of Enlightenment – freedom and happiness.

The economic organisation of modern capitalist society provides for this final realisation of instrumental reaon and self-destruction of Enlightenment. Under capitalism all production is for the market; goods are produced not in order to meet human needs and desires, but for the sake of profit and for the sake of acquiring further capital. Production for exchange rather than use characterises such capitalist economies. This domination of use value by exchange value fufills and duplicates the tendencies of the enlightened reason.

The argument so far not only explicates the concerns of Adorno and Horkheimer but the issues of instrumental rationality, universal and particular and Enlightenment in a big way inform us of the discourse within

which the theme of culture industry is located. It is at this juncture that we can comfortably engage with the central thesis of this disseration, in an elaborate and exhaustive fashion.

Concept of 'Culture' in Discourse of Culture Industry

Unlinke many orthodox Marxists who relegated culture to the superstructure of society and derived an analysis of the form and content of the superstructure from the base, the Frankfurt theorists insisted that cultural phenomena could not be analysed within the simple base – superstructure model. They also insisted on the admissibility of treating culture in the manner of conventional cultural criticism and not in isolation from its position in the social totality.

Any conception of culture which saw it as an independent realm apart from society was to be rejected. Culture could not be understood, as Adorno put it, *in terms of itself.* To suppose *anything like an independent logic of culture,* he added, *is to collaborate in the hypostasis of culture, the ideological proton pseudos.*[31] In fact the notion of culture employed by Horkheimer and the others was much disparate from classical Marxist notions. Adorno in an article entitled *Baby with the bath water* launched his tirade against the Marxist position of culture attacking on the essential working principles of Marxist tradition i.e base and superstructure. To Adorno this distinction and placement of culture at the other realm which is away from base is most problematic. This is most evident when at one point Adorno says, *to see culture as a superstructure* is already to have thrown the

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[31] Adorno, Theodore, 'Cultural Criticism and Society', in Prisms. Translated by S.S.Weber, London: Spearman, 1967, p.29.

baby out with bath water,for it implies that culture must always be grasped as something like a functional lie, creating *the illusion of a society worthy of man which does not exist*[32]. The critical accentuation of culture in Adorno's writing could be guaged from the fact that both Adorno and Horkheimer who fled away from the horrors of Nazi Germany to an exile in USA were in for a massive cultural shock. They found themselves in a world which they readily failed to comprehend - the glamorous world of Hollywood and animations of Mickey Mouse which seemed to hold the entire society in their grip.

It is at this juncture, that the duo got seriously engaged to work out why and how an entire nation could be so seduced by a picture of a mouse with big ears. Both were concerned in trying to understand the basis of the cultural shock they experienced in US. It is this critical engagement which aroused in Adorno a series of assumptions about the meaning and significance of what culture ought to be.

In one of the essays, Adorno wrote that culture was about all of those things that are different from, if not in opposition to the demands and requirements of everyday life. Adorno wrote that, *Culture, in the true sense, did not simply accomodate itself to human beings; but it always simultaneously raised a protest against the petrified relations under which they lived, thereby honouring them.*[33] Adorno also proposed that there is a fundamental difference between culture and what he termed *practical life* and that

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[32] Adorno, Theodore, Minima Moralia (Frankfurt Sukhrkamp, 1986), translated by E.F.N.Jephcott, London, Verso, 1974, p.43.

[33] Adorno, Theodore, Culture Industry Reconsidered in Critical Theory and Society: A Reader, S.Bronner & D.Kellner, Routledge, 1989, p.129.

consequently, culture ought to be, and truly really is, critical of the static relationships of the day to day: *Culture – as that which goes beyond the system of self preservation of the species – involves an irrevocably critical impulse towards the states quo and all institutions there of.*[34]

Basically Adorno's claim is that culture ought to be something distinct from the *petrified relations* of the *status quo* of practical and everyday life. Adorno sees daily life as something that is static and stuck. For Adorno this everyday life is nothing other than a most terrible oppression of all that we can be. It traps us in routines and therefore stops us from doing new things.

In fact, Adorno's ideas reverberate the concerns which Weber had sighted in his classic analysis of *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber says, *When asceticism was carried out of the monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate wordly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order.*[35] But Weber, argues, this movement has tended only to mean that humanity has become trapped in the routines and the requirements of the everyday. For Weber, the domination of the Protestant Ethic means that humanity is a prisoner of the ironcage of what Adorno was later to call petrified relations.

After all, for Adorno there is no doubt that everyday life is oppressive and repressive in such a way that *we are all given to understand that what is most important is understandiing the demands of real life and fitting oneself*

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[34] Adorno, Theodore, The Culture Industry. Selected Essays on Mass Culture (ed), J.M.Berstein, London, Routledge, 1991, p.100.
[35] Weber, Max, The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism, Translated by Talcott Parsons, London, Unwin University Books, 1930, p.181.

properly for the competitive realm.'[36] Speculation has been destroyed and demolished by the tyrannical domination of the dull compunctions of material reality.

Hence one can say that for Adorno,culture ought to be a glimpse of other possibilities. Thus culture ought to possess the ability to show us that there is more to life than things like learning transferable skills and becoming clerks. It ought to be critical and in fact, it is nothing if it is not crucial. Culture ought to inspire us to see how suffocating life is, if we all want to make it our way in the world without ever asking why the world is like it is.

Culture is consequently an enrichment and a challenge to everything that we are and might possibly be,it is a protest against the institutions that try to keep us in our place by giving us trivial rewards. Therefore it is a true and proper honouring of humanity as opposed to all of the paper honours that are so important in daily life. For Adorno, culture involves no financial rewards or pay-back; and so for him, it is yet all the more valuable.

Culture Industry: The Discourse & Analysis

During the stay of Institute's members in United States in mid 1930's and 1940's, members of the Institute witnessed the proliferation of mass communications and culture and the rise of consumer society. Experiencing at first hand the advent to cultural power of the commercial broadcasting systems, President Roosevelt's remarkable use of radio for political persuasion and the ever growing popularity of cinema.

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[36] Adorno.T, The Culture Industry, p.53.

They also experienced the widespread popularity of magazines, comic books, cheap fiction and the other flora and fauna of the new mass produced culture. In short, the emergence of a widespread entertainment industry, growth of the mass media, blatant manipulation of culture by the Nazi's (back home) and other totalitarian regimes, inevitable discovery of the glitz and glitter of the film and record industries: together all this heralded the rise of mass culture to them.

Irrespective of whether they characterised contemporary society as state capitalism or monopoly capitalism, the Institute's members thought that developments had taken place which created the conditions for commodification of major sectors of artistic culture. In their discussion of mass culture, the Frankfurt theorists agreed on basic axioms.

- The protagonist of the present distribution of power and property employs economic, political and cultural means to defend the status quo. As a result most areas of cultural life become co-opted and transformed into modes of controlling individual consciousness.
- The cultural entities have become commodities through and through. The process is exacerbated by increased interlocking between different economic spheres and by the dependence of 'cultural monopolies' on industrial and finance capital.

Thus mass culture had ushered in as a heady mix of profit motive, market, technology in the guise of caterer to masses needs.

Adorno's and Horkheimer's stay in California enabled them to see how business interests dominated mass culture and to observe the fascination which the entertainment industries exerted within the emerging media and consumer society. Marcuse, Lowenthal and others, who worked in Washington during this period for the Office of War Information and US Intelligence Services, were able to observe government use of mass communications as instruments of political propaganda. The theorists thus came to see what they called the culture industry (ies) as a central part of new configuration of capitalist modernity, which used culture, advertising, mass communication and new forms of social control to induce consent to the new forms of capitalist society. The production and tranmission of media spectacles which transmitted ideology and consumerism by means of allegedly popular entertainment and information were, they believed, a central mechanism through which contemporary society came to dominate the individual.

Adorno and Horkheimer adopted the term culture industry, as opposed to concepts like popular culture or mass culture because they wanted to resist notions that products of mass culture emanated from the masses or the people. In their draft of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the authors had employed the term mass culture which they later changed because they felt it was imminent to dispense with the concept of mass or popular culture. As Adorno candidly points out the reason in his essay *The Culture Industry Reconsidered*, "*we replaced the expression with culture industry in order to exclude from the outset the interpretation agreeable to its advocates; that is a matter of something like a culture that arises spontaneously from the masses themselves. Such notions are false. Culture today is not the product*

of genuine demands: rather, it is the result of demands which are evoked and manipulated."[37]

The phrase *culture industry*, Adorno emphasized, *is not to be taken literally as sectors of production of the cultural media do not resemble conventional patters of industrial production. The term, therefore, does not refer to production in itself but to the standardisation*, the pseudo – individualisation of the cultural entities themselves and to the rationalisation of promotion and distribution techniques.

Defining Culture Industry

Adorno in his essay which recalls the origins of the Dialectic of Enlightenment provides a very succinct definition of what the term culture industry actually means. He writes, *'in all its branches products which are tailored for consumption by masses, and which to a great extent determine the nature of that consumption, are manufactured more or less according to plan.'*[38] In other words, the culture industry provides culture as it were from above and in accordance with its definitions of what the audience wants. *This is made possible by contemporary technical capabilities as well as by the economic and administrative concentration.*[39]

The culture industry in the context of enlightenment is interpreted as a devise of mass deception. The authors point out that under monopoly all mass culture is identical and the lines of its artificial framework begin to

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[37] Adorno, Theodore, 'Culture Industry Reconsidered', p.128.
[38] *Ibid*
[39] *Ibid*

show through. They curtly state, 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 director's incomes are published, any doubt about the social utility of the finished products is removed.[40]

The culture industry produces for mass consumption and significantly contributes the determination of that consumption. For people in it are treated as objects, machines, outside as well as inside the workshop. The consumer simply has no sovereignty of his own. As Adorno mentions that the culture industry undeniably speculates on the conscious and unconscious state of the millions towards which it is directed, the masses are not primary, but secondary; they are an object of calculation, an appendage of the machinery. *The customer is not the king as the culture industry would like to have us believe, not its subject but its object.*[41]

The final goal of culture industry is the production of goods which are profitable and consummable. It operates to ensure its own reproduction. The cultural forms its propagates must, therefore, be compatible with this aim. The popular culture it claims to produce masks special interests. The cultural commodities of the industry are governed, by the principle of their realisation as a value, and not by their own specific content and harmonious formation. The entire practice of the culture industry transfers the profit motive into cultural items.

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[40] Adorno, Theodore and Horkheimer, Max, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', Cultural Sociology, Spillman Lyn (ed), Blackwell Publishers, 2002, p.39.
[41] Adorno, Theodore, The Culture Industry Reconsidered, p.129.

The culture industry gears itself almost entirely to the development of cultural forms which are compatible with the preservation of capitalism, creates conditions of dependence on the powerful who can give or withold things greatly wanted. Thus it creates dependency needs. Situations continually arise in which people cannot cope. They are often beset by ego weakness and narcisstic defenses which compel them to compensate their feelings of inadequacy and inferiority by resorting to the products offered by culture industry.

The culture industry also provides the escape routes to its clients who may no longer be able to take in the system's pressure. One can take flight and escape into the world of entertainment. It offers fun, relaxation and relief from demand and effort, at least at the face of it, *fun is a medicinal bath. The pleasure industry never fails to prescribe it. It makes laughter the instrument of the fraud practised on happiness.*[42]

Irrational susceptibilities and neurotic symptoms, ever present within most human beings, are open, as a consequence, to exploitation by the mass media. Something is provided for all so that none may escape, distinctions are emphasised and extended. The public is catered with a hierarchical range of mass produced products of varying quality. Everybody must behave in accordance with his previously determined and indexed level, and choose the type. *Consumers appear as statistics on research organisation charts.*[43]

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[42] Adorno, T.W and Horkheimer, Max, 'Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', p.44.
[43] *Ibid*, p.40.

The man with leisure has to accept what the culture manufacturers offer him. Thus the prime service to the customer of the culture industry is to do his schematising for him. Hence it robs the individual of his intutive function. There is nothing left for the consumer, to classify, the producers of culture industry have done it for him. In fact they have moulded men as a type, which they unfailingly reproduce in every product. Nevertheless the culture industry remains the entertainment business. Its influence over the consumers is established by entertainment which the mass media – radio, films, television constantly reaffirm.

With a pinch of salt, Adorno states, *The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it promises. The promissory note, with, which it plots and staging it draws on pleasure, is endlessly prolonged; the promise which all the spectacle consists of is illusory.*[44] All it does it that it makes sure that the final thing is never delivered and the diner (consumer) is *satisfied with the menu* (the spectacle) itself.

Hence Horkheimer and Adorno convinced with the anti-enlightenment effect of culture industry debunk it as an excercise of mass deception which is turned into a means of fettering conciousness. Its final impact on the consumer, the impediment in development of autonomous and independent individuals whose self conscious judgement capacities are blunted.

Operation of Culture Industry

In the discussion to follow it would be interesting to see how culture industry in its varied forms of media impresses itself on society. Interesting

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[44] Ibid, p.44.

to note would be how certain processes of standardisation, reification, and commodification operate in the garb of culture industries, only to reinforce it in a emphatic way.

The very term mass media specially coined for the culture industry, already shifts its connotations in a harmless terrain. Neither is it a question of primary concern for the masses nor the techniques of communication as such, but of the self-centredness of the bosses of such industries. The culture industry misuses its concerns for the masses in order to duplicate, reinforce and strengthen their mentality to be forever duped by its illusory spectacles.

Adorno observes *modern mass media tend particularly to fortify reaction formations and defenses concomitant with actual social dependence*[45] Its messages appear to offer escape; they suggest pleasure, spontaniety and something metaphysically meaningful. In fact their form duplicates an opaque and reified world. They do not shatter existiing images of reality — they reproduce them. The culture industry stands for adjustment to existing social organisations.

The commercial entertainment offered by the mass media aims at an attentive but passive, relaxed and uncritical reception, which it induces through the production of *patterned and pre-digested cultural entities.* Horkheimer and Adorno analyse these entities in terms of their negation of style; they present little, if any, new shape often represents a spurious reconciliation between society and the individual, identifying the latter with

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[45] Adorno,T, The Stars down to earth: Los Angeles Times Astrology Column, Telos No.19, .1957.,p.35.

the former. The plots, the goodies, the heroes rarely suggests anything other than identification with the existing form of social relations. There is passion in movies, radio broadcasts, popular music and magazines, but it is usually passion for identity. The products of the culture industry can be characterised by standardisation and pseudo-individualisation.

A. Standardisation refers to a process that affects the general features as well the details of work whereby everything is divorced from its specificities and fitted in a *mould that sells*. Structural similarities arise in cultural forms as a result of the technique of the culture industry – distribution and mechanical reproduction. Popular works, or a successful new work, are imitated under the behest of big business agencies anxious to cash in on their appeal. The materials style is plugged (ceaselessly repeated) and frozen (rigidly reinforced). The newly released works of the old style, or new fashions based upon them, must maintain the appearance of novelty and originality; hence *pseudo individualisation* endowing cultural mass production with the halo of free choice or open market work on the basis of standardisation itself.

Each product affects an individual air, although its actual differences from other cultural entities are trivial.

> Not only are hit songs; stars and soap operas cyclically recurrent and rigid invariable types, but the specific content of the entertainment itself..... only appears to change. The details are unchangeable. The short interval sequence which was effective in a hitsong, the hero's momentory 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 alloted to them in the overall plan. Their whole raison d'etre is to confirm it by being its constitutent parts.[46]

Adorno goes on to say that even gags, effects and jokes are calculated like the setting in which they are placed. They are responsibility of some special experts whose basis of appointment is one narrow range of things which they know best. Thus the development of culture industry has led to the predominance of effect, touch and technical detail over work. In other words, it would mean that the totality of culture has been put to an end, what it is exclusively concerned with is a *formula* that has a certain desired impact. Thus the whole inevitably bears no relations to the detail. Hence cultural forms in culture industry are like jigsaw puzzles which have a prearranged harmony. Commenting on this, Adorno says, *Their prearranged harmony is a mockery of what had to be striven after in the great bourgeois works of art.*[47]

The irreconcilable elements of culture, art and distraction are subordinated to one end and subsumed under one false formula. It consists of repetitions in which characteristic innovations are never anything more than improvements of mass reproduction. The result of standardiation and pseudo-individualisation *for the physiognomy of the culture industry is essentially,* as Adorno summarises it, a *mixture of streamlining, the photographic hardness and precision on one hand and individualistic residues, sentimentality and an already disposed and adapted romanticism*

[46] Adorno, T, Horkheimer, The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass, p.41.
[47] *Ibid*, p.42

on the other.[48] As long as a product meets certain minimum requirements, a feature which distinguishes it from others, a little glamour and distinctness, marks of mainstream character, it is suitable material for popular presentation.

But it is just not the industry's produce that is standardised. Dozens of cues are provided to evince correct responses. For example, the pre-recorded laughter in comedy shows leaves no space for any questioning regarding the kind and category of programme and furthermore paves way for desired responses. Similar job is done by the backdrop commentaries of television and radio shows. Hence standardisation aims at standard responses.

Apart from the effects generated by promoters, cultural commodities embody *a system of response mechanisms which tend to automise reactions and weaken the forces of individual resistance.* Frameworks for, or models of, intrepretation are offered which often lead back to familiar experiences: safe grounds for the reception of culture industry.

B. Commodification comes handy in an economy where culture industry has entrenched itself deeply. Commodification refers to a deceptive appearance which conceals within itself the self-seeking and self-aggrandising motives of culture industry. Since a lot depends on the outer spectacle, in an industry which judges the intrinsic with the extrinsic and has no regard for particularities and details, the packaging becomes significant. Everything is saleable in culture industry, with its underlying idea of commodification.Consequently, object transcends as subject and subject

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[48] Adorno, T, Culture Industry Reconsidered, p.133.

transcends as object in other words things are personified and persons objectified.

In fact, the culture industry does not even need to directly pursue everywhere the profit interests from which it originated. Its interests have become objectified in its ideology and have even made themselves independent of the compulsion to sell the cultural commodities, which must be swallowed anyway. The culture industry turns into public relations, the manufacturing of goodwill *per se*, without regard for particular firms or saleable objects. Brought to bear is a general uncritical consensus, advertisements produced for the world so that each product of the culture industry becomes its own advertisement.

The technique of culture industry is right from the beginning, one of distribution and mechanical reproduction, and therefore always remains external to its objects. It lives parastitically from the extra-artistic technique of the material production of goods, without regard for the obligation to the internal artistic whole.

C. Reification is another obscure phenomenon which operates within the processes of culture industry. Literally it implies the transformation of something subjective or human into an inanimate object. This phenomenon occurs when there is an increased tendency to regard abstraction as a material thing. It is a fallacy of misplaced concreteness. In Lukacs terms who originally developed the term, it is a inversion which is manifest in all social relations in a highly rationalised and bureaucratic society. In such a society which is chequered with the ills of culture industry, that which is

qualitative, unique and subjective in human relationships is lost, as they are governed and managed according to the purely quantitative and calculative concerns of the administrators and managers of culture industry.

The reification takes place through the emphatic impressions created by the so called mass media and is passed on to the social lives of people. Adorno says, *The way in which a girl accepts and keeps the obligatory date, the inflection on the telephone or in the most intimate situation, the choice of words in conversation and the whole inner life as classified by the now somewhat devalued depth psychology, bear witness to man's attempt to make himself a proficient apparatus, similar to the mode served up by the culture industry.*[49]

Even the most intimate reactions of human beings are so thoroughly reified that the idea of anything specific to themselves persists only as as utterly abstract notion. *Personality scarcely signifies anything more than shining white teeth and freedom from body odour and emotions,*[50] in such a reified world.

In a painful tone Adorno says, *The more dehumanised its method of operation and content the more deligently and successfully the culture industry propagates (the supposedly great)* personalities *and operates with heart throbs.*[51] A run up to the whole debate so far would reveal somewhere deepdown in Adorno's ascerbic criticism of culture industry lies his penchant for the *authentic art* which flares up every now and then in his

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[49] Adorno, T & Horkheimer, Max, Culture Industry. Enlightenment as Mass Deception, p.41.
[50] *Ibid*, p.45.
[51] Adorno, T, Culture Industry Reconsidered., p.132..

sharp tirade against culture industry. In fact what is very apparent from his universal vs particular and part – whole debate is the distinctiveness which he clearly figures between the spheres of high and low art. To him, the fudging which had been separate for thousand of years, is something most detrimental. Citing the disaster of their coming together he says, *The seriousness of high art is destroyed in speculation about its efficacy; the seriousness of the lower perishes with the civlizational constraints imposed on it.*[52]

Culture Industry & Authentic Art

Central to Adorno is the issue of autonomy of art which he feels is tendentially eliminated by the culture industry. *Works of arts are ascetic and unashamed; the culture industry is pornographic and prudish* where *love is downgraded to romance.* Adorno feels that the culture industry is given whole-heartedly to a mechanical reproduction of beauty – *natural faces of Texas girls are like the successful models by whom Hollywood has typecast them.*[53] Thus he feels that it leaves no room for the unconscious idolatory which was once the quintessence of beauty.

Although the meaning and function of art changes historically but Adorno opines that there is a certain unity that underpins authentic art or autonomous art. The work of art has a structure with a signifying function. It represents the particular in such a way as to illuminate its meaning. Through its form or style or aura, art can create images of beauty and order or contradiction and dissonance – an asethetic relam in which at one point it

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[52] Ibid, p.133.

[53] Adorno,T & Horkheimer, Max, 'Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', p.44.

conforms to reality while at the other it defies it. Art's object world is derived from the established order but it potrays this order in a non conventional manner.

Sensibility, imagination and understanding give new sounds, images and words to the taken for granted. The structure of art forms enacts alternative visions and has cognitive and subversive characters. Besides Adorno even other Institute members believed that the emancipatory effects of art are generated by its rejection of the dominant forms of world order. Thereby meaning that through its very mode of expression it opens the established reality and negates reified consciousness. Art has multiple layers of meaning and the ability to embody and promote truth.

For Horkheimer and Adorno in Dialectic of Enlightenment the elements in an artistic product which enable it to transcend reality are found in those features which ensure non-identity thinking. The truth promoting function of art lies in its capactiy to undermine the doubtful unity of subject and object, idea and material world.

Bourgeoise art strives for identity – an identity between its image of the real and the existent. It presents itself as social reality. For e.g: some of Beethoven's music, according to Adorno, expresses reconciliation between the subjective and the objective, between part and whole. It represents the idea of an integrated community, the promise of the French revolution. The individual part exist as a separate entity, but each part is only fully meaningful in the context of a whole, namely in the structure of the sonata or symphony.

Beethoven's music is faithful to his period; to the awakening consciousness of individualistic society. But the image it presents contradicts bourgeoise reality: *it transfigures the existing conditions, presenting them in the ..... moment of the musical performance as though the community of human beings were already realised.*[54] The promise is both necessary and self-defiant.

It is necessary because in its very commitment to style, art hardens itself agsinst the chaotic expression of the existing order and presents individuals experiences in new, and truly general forms. The promise however is self-defiant to reality as *the claim of art is always ideology too.*[55] Art legitimates prevailing patterns of life by suggesting that *fulfillment lies in their aesthetic derivatives.* Nonetheless, in its very failure to establish identity, art preserves – unlike many forms of conventional expression – a critical perspective.

Art is most critical, in the contemporary epoch, when it is autonomous, that is when it negates the empirical reality from which it originates. In its critical state, autonomous works dismantle appearances. Adorno insists that art must intervene actively in consciousness through its own forms. In this, form refers to the whole organisation of art, to the capactiy of art to restructure conventional patterns of meaning. Therefore the most genuine forms of art are those that resist pressure, created by the *rule of equivalence* to idenity – thinking. The truth content of art derives from its ability to reformulate existent relations between subjectivity and objetivity, and to

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[54] Adorno, T & Horkheimer, Max, Dialectic of Enlightenment, p.130.
[55] *Ibid.*

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maintain non-identity. Therefore, the truth-value of art lies in its capacity to sustain a discrepancy between its projected images of nature and human kind and its objects in actuality.

Authentic art is thus a preserve of both individuality and happiness, as well as a source of critical knowledge. Further an element of resistance is inherent in the most aloof art.

From the arguments above it is quite evident that the bourgeoise art which signifies authentic art corresponds to the high culture in Horkheimer's and Adorno's views. High culture is evoked upon by both, as a potential force of enlightenment and emancipation. However for Adorno, only the most radically avant garde works would provide genuine aesthetic experience against the false harmonies of kitch and affirmative art.

Adorno defended the de-aestheticization of art, its throwing off of false veils of harmony and beauty in favour of ugliness, dissonance, fragmentation and negation which he believed provided a more truthful vision of contemporary stance for socially critical art. In Adorno's view art had become increasingly problematic in a society ruled by culture industries and art markets; and to remain authentic, art must therefore radically resist commodification and integration.

For Adorno authentic art provided insight into existing reality, expressing human suffering and the need for social transformation, as well as providing an aesthetic experience which helped to produce critical consciousness and awareness of the need for individual and social change. Art for Adorno was

thus a privileged vehicle for emanicipation. Aesthetic experience alone, he came to believe provided the refuge for truth and a sphere of individual freedom and resistance.

Benjamin and Adorno:
Divergent Currents of the Culture Industry Discourse

Although most of the Institute's members were in consonance with one other in their basic ideas of art that largely shaped their culture industry perspective, it was the Institute's Walter Benjamin distinctive ideas of art which brought forth a perspective on culture industry much unpalatable and undelectable to the stand of Frankfurt school theorists. His disconsonant ideas are not only a critique to the pessimistic formulations of his fellow theorists but in retrospect render a completely different way of looking at the issue thus enriching the academic discourse with new alternatives . It is precisely this reason which makes a comparative analysis of their ideas indispensible for this work. Monolithic perspective may put us in a comfortable position but it robs us of the critical insight and makes our vision blurred and narrow.

For Adorno culture industry does not seem to offer anything good but Benjamin appears far more inclined to see more good coming out of the culture industry's ability to reproduce and sell things like books, music and paintings. Benjamin expresses his views most clearly in his famous essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.*

From Adorno's point of view if any work of art is reproduced then it is made a part of everyday life and it loses its status of being something different and apart. This quality of unqiueness is what Adorno called the *aura* of the work of art. The aura is somethiing that surrounds the original. But the aura tends to be destroyed by reproduction.

But according to Walter Benjamin, the tendency towards the destruction of aura is actually something good. This is because the works of arts (copies or reproduced) taken out of the galleries and the concert halls and given a wider circulation; they are made more accessible as the fake mystery which has come to surround them tends to be eaten away. For Benjamin the tendency towards the destruction of the aura means that anyone anywhere has access to art on exactly the same basis as anyone else. In other words the interpretation of art is available to all and art is therefore democratised.

For example, photography can reproduce paintings so one can look at Mona Lisa without having to go to Paris and sound recording can reproduce concerts that one has never attended. But to Adorno to pin a postcard of the Mona Lisa to our wall is nothing less than a barbaric act because we are happy to be fooled up with cheap copies and feel absolutely no need to see the original because we think that it has nothing to say to us.

On the other hand, Benjamin is highly appreciative of the technology that has enabled in the proliferation of cultural products to the masses. He gives credit to technology for taking culture to people at large from the self proclaimed, self established elite groups. This he considers a direct attack on the aura of authentic art which has been challenged by the mass media

technology of culture industry. For example, Benjamin says that *from a photograph negative, one can make a number of prints; to ask for the authentic print makes no sense.*[56]

Moving from photography to movies, Benjamin proposes that, *it is inherent in the technique of the film... that everybody who witnessed its accomplishments is somewhat of an expert.*[57] Benjamin goes on to say that instead of sensing ourselves to be prisoners of the world we can instead begin to see ourselves as active participants in a world of our own making. *The newsreel offers everyone the opportunity to rise from passerby to movie extra.*[58]

To Benjamin, the film is also a mode of dispelling the argument of authentic art. Benjamin writes that *The film makes the cult value recede into the background not only by putting the public in the position of critic, but also by the fact that at the movies this position requires no attention.*[59]

Furthermore, Benjamin stressed that film provided new forms of collective experience. *Mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art. The reactionary attitude toward a Picasso painting changes into the progressive reaction toward a Chaplin movie. The progressive reaction is characterised by the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert.......*[60]

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[56] Benjamin,Walter, The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,Illuminations. London, Fontanna, 1973, p.218.
[57] Ibid,p.232.
[58] Ibid, p.225.
[59] Ibid, pp.233-4.
[60] Opcit,p.234.

The new mode of perception offered by film and similar media can turn art toward the interest of the masses and contribute to their mobilisation. Quite obvious that other members of the Institute were not as optimistic as Benjamin about the effects of new techniques of cultural media. Most of all Adorno was greatly tormented with such optimism which in his view did not hold water. Countering such ideas, he stated, *A technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself. It is the coercive nature of society alienated from itself. Automobiles, bombs and movies....... has made the technology of culture industry no more than the achievement of standardisation and mass production, sacrificing distinction between the logic of work and that of the social system.*[61]

Regarding films Adorno argued that collective experiences in the cinema were anything but good and revolutionary. The laughter of audience reminded him of some of the *worst aspects of bourgeoise sadism.* Noteworthy is Adorno's article *On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening* which is a critical response to Benjamin's optimistic appraisal of the socially critical potential of popular art. Adorno analysed in detail the various ways in which performers of music, conductors, instruments, technical performance and arrangment of works were fetishized. There is much more to Adorno's postulation on cinema and music which shall be elaborately explored in the subsequent chapter where media would be the central focus. But for the moment it would be sufficient

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[61] Adorno T & Horkheimer, Max, 'Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', p.39.

to state that Adorno sternly resisted Benjamin's mechanical reproduction of art which he saw as *anarchistic romanticism of blind confidence.*[62]

The comparative excercise between the two contrasting currents of culture industry, of advocacy and negation, true to the dialectic spirit of critical school, has been a thought provoking endeavour. The discussion in one stroke has done two things.

A. It has unruffled the smooth unidimensional debate of culture industry.

B. It has stimulated a sense of criticality, suddenly problematised the issues and has raised a new kind of awareness to look at the whole theme.

But at this juncture my endeavour would not be to resolve all the complexities and doubts arising out of this debate. But to lay bare its problems, loopholes and glitches for much is still remaining to be explored. And whatever has been elucidated till now also necessiates us to put on our critical caps.

The whole argument of culture industry has negative shades. The project right from the beginning, with anti-enlightenment claims about the modernity which has unfolded in the capitalist society, paints a dull, grim picture of the world order. What constructivism such a pessimistic analysis has to offer to our times? In fact if a theory is placed in such a disheartening context, can it be looked upon for any guidance to future theoretical projects.

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[62] Adorno.T, to Benjamin W, Translated by Zoha Harry, New Left Revision, No.81, 1975, p.66.

Adorno's strong advocacy of the high art and avant garde movement makes his formulations elitist in nature. His strong conviction in the potential of high art to act as a means of tranforming society and developing a critical consciousness in people with a stern dismissal of the popular forms of media as low art render analysis to be loaded with elitism. Then does all this mean that Adorno is an elitist who is defending esoteric artistic modernism against a culture available to all. If culture elitism is what this school of thought favours then does this mean an overall debunking of the idea of cultural democracy. Or as the liberal American theorists would have us believe that the mass society is the product of pluralism and democracy therefore unruly notions of mass society in reality are an obstacle to the process of democratisation of mass media which paves way for political and social pluralism.

The theory gives a monolithic view of culture industries. The culture industries appear highly integrated and unified in its form and content. There is almost an overemphasis of homogeneity in culture industries. But the question which arises is that in reality are these industries not more dynamic, diverse and conflictual than the theory allows.

Another important observation is regarding the role of media. Media along with its technology has been looked down upon as source of robbing art of its authenticity and feigning society through its technology tricks to mass deception. Is this curtness towards the role of media justifed? Even if one agrees to maintain a critical stand vis-a-vis media then does it only mean to scuttle its very rationale of existence. Can a critical media studies not be an enabling factor to look at its role in a positive mould.

At the other end, the consumers, are taken to be passive spectacle takers of media. The myriad arguments of deception of masses by the mass media gives the message of the audience being in a powerless static relationship with media. The active audience which has been the focus of many recent cultural studies which talk of the genesis of meaning at the production and also at the consumption level. At the latter level it is the active engagement of the audience which leads to the production of meaning. This aspect is completely evasive in the culture industry.

Finally in the age of *differences, disjunctures, multiplicity, eclecticism, populism* and intensified consumerism of the information society located in the post modern framework, where does the culture industry argument stand with its uncompromising critique of mass culture. In fact, the post modern discourse of culture condemns the high modernist art and bases itself on the cultural populism. Therefore the very genesis of postmodern cultural studies marks the negation of culture industry argument. It not only negates but endeavours to deconstruct the whole theory. But do the postmodern analysis of culture does away with the ills of culture industry theory. Is it right in its claims and is it really an improvement over the shortcomings of the culture industry theory.

These are just a few pertinent questions or problematic observations which are like open ended axioms, free to critical mitigation, the final answer to which is not etched out. These are like stimulant to thinking process which aid us to keep our critical caps on so that we can meticulously examine the operation of culture industry in variant forms of media, in the subsequent

chapter. But till the critics of culture industry are justified in their rebukes and Adorno's defense can be mustered in the epilogue of this work, our preoccupation with the media dimension, would only do good to entrench our understanding of the discourse in its entirety.

Chapter: 4
The Media in Culture Industry

The media lies in the core of the culture industry debate. The entire gamut of criticism which forms the discourse of critical social theory takes off from the systematic analysis and critique of mass-mediated culture and communication. Media is embedded within the very conceptualisation of the term, culture industry and is omnipresent in Adorno's and Horkheimer's crusade against the 'barbaric' culture industries throughout the discourse.

Uptil now, what has been most evident to us are the basic precepts on which the culture – industry operates. This in an implicit way does underline the functioning of mass media in disseminating various cultural forms to the audiences.

We have witnessed that mass media has come under vehement criticism of the Frankfurt school in terms of a technology that rationalises domination. What this chapter attempts, keeping in mind the cumulative stock of knowledge, is to investigate the various media forms within themselves and in a broader sense locate their functioning within this discourse. The whole endeavour would be to present a critical account of mass media. While music and astrology have been exposited as illustrations of the designs of mass manipulating media, the account on television, films and advertising is an initiative to question the current trends in mass-media. The excercise would enable a close scrutiny of Frankfurt school's ideas. But an interesting dimension to the whole analysis would emerge with incorporation of

contemporary media positions and locations which chalk out a futuristic perspective.

Adorno and Horkheimer make an emphatic attempt to discern the implications of media on cultural and moral values. Adorno repeatedly makes this point that it is mainly due to the activities of media and the way it operates that culture is no longer like what it should be. Instead of standing in a critical relationship to everyday life, the media have made culture and especially the arts of music and painting a part of daily life. And so the media have played quite a significant role in the destruction of the value of art. It is in this process that the media have also managed to help transform the possibility of enlightenment into the probability of barbarism. At this point, it would be apt to make this clear that for Adorno, the word 'barbarism' is a way of throwing into relief all the implications of the culture industry and by extension, all of the implications of the thesis of the Dialectic of Enlightenment.

In their book, Adorno and Horkheimer draw on the definition of enlightenment which was given in 1784 by Immanuel Kant. In an essay of that year in which Kant attempted to answer the question, *What is Enlightenment?*', he had written that, *Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity ...... Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another.*[63] In these terms something can be identified as barbaric to the extent that it represents and involves a restriction of the ability of the individual to think for him or

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[63] Kant, Immanuel, 'An Answer to the Question :What is Enlightenment?' in H.Reiss (ed), Kant's Political Writings, Cambridge University Press, 1970, p.54.

herself; barbarism is telling people what to think or do. Barbarism is a return to immaturity. As such, the culture industry is barbaric in a cultural and moral sense because it prevents thought and consigns man to wallow in immaturity thus denying the chance of enlightenment.

In the light of the above argument, I wish to draw attention to two such illustrations which at one level signify the anti-enlightenment tenors as percieved by Adorno and at the other, reflect the ramifications of media.

Illustrations: Astrology and Music

A. Astrology

If enlightenment means making sense of the word for oneself, without a belief in ghosts in the machine, then the operation of the culture industry means that a belief in such ghosts increases. Adorno justified this kind of grim and dark analysis of the impact of culture industry on enlightenment when he carried out an especially brilliant analysis of the astrology coloumn of the Los Angeles Times. The results of a content analysis of the dialy astrological column in Los Angeles times, covering a period of about three months along with a number of observations on astrological journals, were published under the title, 'The Stars down on earth' in 1957.

Conventional astrology, Adorno argued, is institutionalised superstition. It is another product of the culture industry to be passively received. Astrologers offer authoritative advice to individuals whose specific situation they know nothing about. The columns are remarkable for their seriousness and practical attitude towards everyday problems. The emphasis of the Los

Angeles Times column is always on the capacity of the private individual to find the right approach to particular problems.

Although fate is essentially set by the stars; a pragmatic attitude to life is recommended for it can ensure satisfaction and the prospect of high rewards. The astrologer, in this case, places his *magical authority* behind certain strategies and tactics for the day. He has to write as if the constellation of stars had endowed him with certain knowledge. But the *fictitious reasonableness* of the advice masks the the *arbitary and entirely opaque* nature of his authority. The source of his knowledge is depersonalised; it remains remote and is treated as impersonal and thing-like.

Astrology reflects accurately that the fate of individuals is independent of their will; that the order of life appears as natural. But it does not simply register the dependence of individuals on social configurations beyond their immediate control. It further justifies this state of affairs. If you want to survive and be happy, then astrologists recommend coming to terms with your inner and outer life; they suggest you forget frustrated wants and needs and remember/accept all that cannot be changed – the nature of your job, social hierarchies, family life etc. Thus, one can come to terms with life, the main stages of which one cannot control. To be rational in astrological terms means to adjust private interests to given social configuration. If one does not heed the stars, then one incurs a number of risks. As a necessary result of this, communication with the stars also offers the individual increased security, the comfort of being directed and protected by another and a certain relief from responsibility.

At the same time people are continually flattered and made to feel that is their individual efforts that count! *The individual is provided with the narcissistic gratification that he is really all important while at the same time being kept under control.*[64] The coloumnist is a homespun psychologist. His role, however, is the opposite of an analyst or therapist. He plays up to people's defences (for instance narcissim) and seeks to strengthen rather than undermine them. The continuous suggestion of threats, of grounds for anxiety – *Drive carefully!* – ensures that the reader will seek help. Underlying destructive urges are satisfied while aid for a more pleasurable life is promised by a *superhuman agency*. Individuals are reassured: if fate does not solve your problem, effort will.

Adorno argues that newspaper astrology coloumns can be taken to represent an indicator of what has happened to the high hopes of culture in the process of enlightenment. Adorno explores how astrology is one example of a wider tendency whereby we have been rendered immature; we do not think for ourselves and even less do the products of the culture industry help us to think. Instead, they just offer us ridiculous superstitions. What this means is that people tend to, *take astrology for granted, much like psychiatry, symphony concerts or political parties; they accept it because it exists, without much reflection, provided only that their own psychological demands somehow correspond to the offer*[65] After all, and as if to emphasise the culture industry's tendency towards immaturity, *the mechanics of the astrological system are never divulged and the readers are presented only*

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[64] Adorno, T, 'The Stars down to Earth', The Los Angeles Times Astrology Column, Telos, NO.19, 1974, p.34.
[65] *Ibid*, p.15.

with the alleged results of astrological reasoning in which the reader does no actively participate[66].

Astrology stresses and appears to promote individualism. Independent thinking and a concern for play, while, at the same time, it strengthens and reinforces dependencies adjustment to the *status quo* and the work ethic. Adorno argues that astrology represents not just a decline of the independence of social institutions and arrangements themselves. Astrology is a means by which the individual is able to come to terms with a world which she or he feels to be exactly the kind of *iron cage* that Max Weber spoke out.

A few things can be clearly discerned from Adorno's analysis of astrology so far. Firstly, Adorno says that there is no longer any aspect of the life of the individual which remains outside of the institutions and processes of rational societal organisation. Astrology is a reflection of and a response to this situation. *For while people recognise their dependence and often enough venture the opinion that they are pawns, it is extremely difficult for them to face this dependence unmitigated.*[67] Hence astrology is that mitigation; it is a way in which one can excuse one's dependence since it is written in the stars. It is like I can tell myself that it is not my fault; there is nothing I can do because its all got to do with my stars.

Secondly, Adorno lays bare astrology's appeal of the sense that we are caught in a world which is heading towards self-destruction irrespective of

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[66] Ibid, p.17.
[67] Ibid, p.82.

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what we might do. Adorno sees the tendencies towards self-destruction in nuclear weapons, in the present times another threat of global warming could be cited. The implication is that astrology helps us to come to terms with anxieties about self destruction. It *gives some vague and diffused comofrt by making senseless appear as though it had some hidden and grandiose sense.*

Thirdly, astrology is the faith of what Adorno calls a *supposedly sceptical, disillusioned people.* Simply, *The cult of God has been replaced by the cult of facts, just as the fatal entities of astrology, the stars, are themselves viewed as facts, things, ruled by mechanical laws.*[68] What Adorno wrote four decades back, stands as much true in the present times. The *astrology columns* have a fixed , preassigned sacred space in the newspapers and are religiously read by its enamoured readers. With the advancement in technologies, the *Astro-Gurus* are not far behind. With a click of the mouse on the internet and with a flash of SMS (Short Messaging Service) on the cell phone, the most hi-tech of the cilents can also be catered to The.www.astrogyan.com can be cited as the best example for this kind of development.

In fact, there is more on offer in the contemporary times. There are regular features on *Vaastu Shastras* which guide the way to prosperity and happiness by building the right kind of *Vaastu Homes.* The one which has right kind of doors opening in the right directions, right walls facing the right rooms, even the right colour of wall paint may be instructed. Anything from having the right kind of shape of the toilet to the direction in which one

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[68] *Opcit*, p.84.

should sleep in one's bed is carefully expounded in this *Happy-Home Shastra.*

Also interesting are *Feng Shui* revelations of calling upon good luck in life. It is the Chinese version of desi Vaastu Shastra. It's simple solutions picked from the *feel good factor* of everyday life, carefully drafted in its tone of pragmatic conviction hardly evinces to the most rational of people, the underlying loaded superstition to which it unabashedly resorts.

More than ever before the *make-belief syndrome* has become a part of life of the people in a big way. The popularity of such columns as Adorno rightly comprehends is a "symptom" of some tendencies of our society as well as of typical psychological trends of our times. This clearly speaks of the 'anxious', 'insecure', 'uncertain' state of mind of the 21st century generation. Whereas reflecting on why a paper like 'Los Angeles times' should come up with a daily dose of astrology. Adorno is quick to resort to the culture industry framework. Candid enough to point out that articles such as these, appeal to certain kind of individuals who sense their world as prisons. With a sharp precision he promptly notices the economic motive behind such published features. The techni-coloured newspapers of the day, devote a whole page to such articles which are presented with a powerful attracting appeal that one may miss reading the 'Headlines' but not the 'Astro-Predictions'. For some papers this is their biggest USP (Unique Selling Proposition) to stay in the market, no wonder 'Sundays' register high profits for them.

Similar sentiment is expressed when Adorno says, *In view of commercial success, astrology is taken up by more powerful economic agencies which take it away from the crystal-gazer atmosphere... (Just as the big studios took away the movies from the amusements park booths). These power houses of the culture industry take up astrology and make it respectable and thus utilise it commercially on a large scale.*[69]

Therefore astrology comes as a consolation prize for those whom, Weber called the *specialists without spirit* and the *sensualists without heart*. The culture industry coldbloodedly cashes in, on this sensibility. Hence like any mass media product, astrology offers a spurious short cut both to an understanding of social order and its meanig appears as something new, fresh and insightful. In actuality, it is a revamp of an opaque and reified social structure.

B. Music

According to theorists such as Douglas Kellner, the very starting point of Adorno's critique on mass culture was the article, *On the Social Situation of Music*, written in 1932. After this Adorno conducted a series of studies of popular music and wrote striking critical pieces like *On the Fetish character in Music and the Regression to Listening* which was a response to Benjamin's optimistic appraisal of the potential of popular art.

In Dialectic of Enlightenment, Adorno and Horkheimer take a few swipes at Jazz – a popular form of music. But Adorno's ideas on Jazz have been more eloquently expressed and occur in a more developed form in his essay,

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[69] Adorno, T, 'The Stars Down to Earth', p.88.

Perennial Fashion – Jazz. The main claim of the essay is vey clear indeed. Basically Adorno contends that with jazz it is possible to see an especially fine example of all of the terrible tendencies that are associated with the culture industry.

Specifically, Adorno utterly rejects the common-sensical and familiar view that jazz is a highly innovative kind of music which expresses the rebelliousness either of the musicians or of an oppressed social group. *The perennial sameness of jazz consists not in a basic organisation of the material within which the imagination can roam freely and without inhibition as within an articulate language, but rather in the utilisation of certain well defined tricks, formulas and cliches to the exclusion of everything else.*[70]

Adorno argues that jazz is in fact a thoroughly standardised kind of music which is churned out by the culture industry because it is profitable. For Adorno, the much announced rebelliousness and originality of jazz is simply a stylistic trick developed by the culture industry in order to sell its product. Adorno finds, the promises that surround jazz as completely fraudulent. The audience accepts these kinds of claims because they have been thoroughly duped over the years by the publicity machine of the culture industry.

Adorno writes of jazz, *everything unruly in it was from the beginning integrated into a strict scheme that its rebellious gestures are accompanied by the tendency to blind obeisance...*[71] Here Adorno is trying to convey that jazz music can no longer be innovatory, it can offer nothing new, because it

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[70] Adorno, T, 'Perrenial Fashion – Jazz' in S.E.Bronner & D.Kellner, Critical Theory and Society: A Reader, London, Routledge, 1989, p.201.
[71] *Ibid*, p.200

operates according to the regulations of a strict standardisation which is tied up with the demands and the requirements of the culture industry. It is the aspect of obeying to the culture industry which accelerates its propensity of standardisation, commercialisation and rigidification of the medium.

As far as the rebel character of jazz is concerned, then Adorno finds its restrained by the rational requirements of conformity. Consequently, whenever jazz seems to be at its most revolutionary, it is, in fact, at its most obedient. Adorno goes on to compare jazz to the sado-masochistic type (of analytic psychology) meaning that this type chafes against the father figure while secretly admiring him. The following extract explains Adorno's point more lucidly.

> A helpless, powerless subject is presented, one that is ridiculous in his expressive impulses. Now the formula of jazz is this, that precisely by virtue of his weakness and helplessness this subject represented by irregular rhythms adapts himself to the regularity of the total process and because he, so to speak, confesses his own impotence, he is accepted into the collective and rewarded by it. Jazz projects the schema of idenitification in return for the individual erasing himself and acknowledging his own nullity, he can vicariously take part in the power and glory of the collective to which he is bound by this spell.[72]

The conclusion is clear: *while to the naive consciousness jazz, now long standardised, occasionally seems anarchic, the expression of uninhibited erotic impulses, it permits these impulses only in order to cut them off and to reassert the system.*[73] As such, jazz has exactly the same cultural value and exactly the same ability to transform daily life and make us think again

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[72] Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, Aspects of Sociology, Translated by J.Viertel, London, Heinemann Educational Books, 1943, p.113.
[73] *Ibid.*

about everything we do as a coffee cup. As Adorno puts it with a certain degree of disgust and outrage: *What enthusiastically stunted innocence sees as the jungle is actually factory-made through and through, even when, on special occasions, spontaniety is published as a featured attraction*[74]

Adorno believes that jazz is a product of culture industry and that it can therefore have nothing original challenging or truly exciting. Any appearances to the contrary are, in fact, mere deceptions. They are tricks. Indeed, the so called improvisations are actually reduced to the more or less feeble rehashing of basic formulas in which the schema shines through at every moment. His disdain becomes even more apparent when he says, *Any precocous American teenager knows that the routine today scarcely leaves any room for improvisation, and that what appears as spontaneity is in fact carefully planned out in advance with machine like precision.*[75]

Even the improvisations conform largely to norms and recur constantly. Adorno goes on to put the matter succinctly. *The range of the permissible in jazz is as narrowly circumscirbed as in any particular cut of clothes.*[76] In other words, jazz is something that is made and bought off the peg. It has as much to do with revolution, and with the imagination of different ways of life, as the attire of a postman serving the Indian postal services or the dress code followed by medical representatives of a pharma firm. *Jazz is taken for granted as an institutior, house brokern and scrubbed behing the ears.*[77]

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[74] Adorno, T., Perennail Fashion - Jazz, p.202.
[75] Ibid, p.201.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Adorno, T, Perennial Fashion – Jazz, p.206.

It occurs as if Adorno had been able to sense, everything that would happen to pop and rock music. Even if this statement means a long jump, the core point is that ideas in social sciences are not mere exhibits in a museum. The relevance of an idea emanates not from the fact that it gets ossified in the time and space of its genesis but that it flows with changing times and addresses contemporary concerns. Adorno's ideas and arguments are worth exploring precisely because they seem to be able to say so much about the present day. There can be little doubt that everything he says about jazz can be applied to other kinds of music as well. It is hard to think of any example of popular music which has not been subjected to the pressures towards standardisation and conformity that the culture industry evolves.

One of the best examples can be cited from the rock world. The rock bands which came as an anti-thesis to popular music, stood in defiance to the normal trajectory of music. They stressed the wild, loud, discordant notes to convey the spirit of non-conformity to social order or rebellion. What is interesting and noteworthy, in context of this work, is the strating point of their career.

Most of these bands started their life as very angry punk rock bands who were going to free the youth from the tyranny of having to listen to has-been like Elton John, Abba, Beatles etc. Their trend-breaking promises were not only to be gauged from their music which was a semblance of hard and heavy metal instrumentation but also from their disparate lifestlyes. This included an outlandish hairdo – long, unkempt tresses with unshaven faces, giving a flavour of barbarism which in the most optimum way registered their protest of the ills what plagued the society. The punk sub-culture of the

60's and 70's heralded the freedom of youth from the chains of social malaise through use of intoxicants and drugs. It was objectified as a world free from any drudgery, where free will rules and dreams are lived, day in and day out.

Adorno's essay on jazz is most helpful in developing an understanding and appreciation of the aftermath of these bands in the late 1970's and early 80's. His hypothesis simply brings out the real trajectory of this kind of music supplemented with the inward looking analysis which does not miss out, on the underlying economic factor. The rock bands, symptomatic of all rebellion and innovation in a world where art is dominated by the culture industry, did not do anything better than end up looking like all the bands they so despised and against whose defiance they stood in their early days.

The amazing point is, that this transformation happened despite the fact that they had zeroed in on taming tendencies, right at the time of their takeoff. The aggression ceases to be rebellion and instead becomes an advertising slogan. There is much truth when Adorno says, *The more totally the culture industry roots out all deviations, thus cutting off the medium from its intrinsic possibilities of development, the more the whole blaring dynamic business approaches a standstill.*[78] With most of the delineating attributes of the bands lost in thin air as a consequence of getting churned by the culture industry mill, what remained was a standardised orchestrated wildness packaged in the most attractive forms for sale. The impotent nostalgia which made its way in their later numbers was a call to evoke the enamoured masses to lighten their pockets so as to keep the business going.

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[78] *Opcit*, p.202

The culture industry, *the world of slimy deals and swarmy eels* has made sure that finally everything fits like a cog in the wheel which keeps churning profits for it. It suggests that the bands were compelled to produce a totally standardised form of music, if they wanted to be certain of a 1,000 sales or more. Any experimentation could only be allowed if the record company permitted it or if the wool could be pulled over the record company's eyes for long enough.

But rock music has come a long way, like any other form – pop, country, reggae or even for that matter jazz. *The paradoxical immortality of jazz has its root in the economy*[79] which stands true for other forms of popular music too. Thus the story goes as a movement from rebellion to money. Certainly, a band can become much more popular with advertising and multi-media releases taking good care of that. While the straitjacket mould in which music is made to fit into,underplays the risk factors.

This reminds of the trends in contemporary film music scene where *promotion* is the buzzword. It appears that the entire success of the cinematic venture depends on the prerelease publicity of the film sound tracks. The entire manouvering or advertising is skillfully done by massive publicity releases by the 'stars' themselves on radio, televsion and print media alike. The visual excerpts of the soundtrack which are repeatedly showed on the T.V channels aim not only to register their digitalised tunes on the audiences mind who would be drawn to buy OST (Original Sound Track) much before the film actually releases. But the tailoring of visuals also, is done in a

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[79] Adorno ,T, Perennial Fashion – Jazz,p.202.

manner that(whatever the main storyline be) the excerpts promise a world of dreams and fantasy which is cut and pasted by the publicity management.

Another day-to-day example of the predominance of culture industry in the music world of mass media is the trend of *name bands*. These branded bands which are fully backed by a record company and sponsored by big soft drink companies are projected as genuine platform of talent and courage. They are launched with an enormous publicity stunt in the music channels and other media, by the so called masses *heart throbs*, who swear by the genunity of the project and declare massive talent hunt at national level. With every talent hunt ordeal itself being displayed as an advertisement, streamlined in episodes which would finally churn up a fully manipulated success story of the budding talented stars. Of course, the motive is clear: a highly publicised puppetary of music to pump the sales for record which spells out gains for the soft drink companies and MNC's too(the main sponsors of the events). Its a win-win situation for the captains of culture industry who collude their interests to amass maximum profit.

Besides the publicity and packaging done by the barons of mass media in culture industry, the impact of commodification of music on the structure of music also needs attention. As evident from above discussion, it is amply visible that music has been radically altered by capitalist economic processes. The mechanical reproduction in the music industry seems to be at its peak in the current music scene. Packaging old wine in new bottle is the market mantra. The music market is flooded with video remixes which are projected as the new age reincarnations of the old stuff. The recycling devoid of any imagination or innovation, is a garish spectacle driven by

digitalised effects. To Adorno, for whom even the first-hand product of popular music is not an authentic art, then the remix culture of the contemporary music industry would be nothing less than hyper-reproduction.

Mass distribution, modes of mechanical reproduction carried by raido, films, and television has led to the corruption of classical music. Its original structure is often sacrificed to ensure immediate intelligibility. If for Adorno this has been true of Beethoveen's 4th symphony and Schubert's B.Minor Symphony, in the Indian context it stands particularly true for the classical ragas, thumris and ghazals. The mechanical mode of production not only fetishises music's technical structure but also leads to repression of the listener. He says, *'the works which are the basis of the fetishisation.......* *become vulgarised. Irrelevant consumption destroys them. Not merely do the* *few things played again and again wear out, like the Sistine Madonna in the* *bedroom, but reification affects their internal structure. They are tranformed* *into a conglomeration of irruptions which are impressed on the listeners by* *climax and repetition..* [80]

To sum up in a line, for Adorno, jazz like astrology is barbaric or it is highly fetishised and thrives through regressive listening just as astrology survives by catering to the neurotic tendency of the society.

Media as creator of spectacles

The focus on spectacle assumes significance in context of Adorno's writings on media. The spectacle in Adorno is a site of imagery created by the mass-

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[80] Adorno, T, 'On the Fetish Character in Music and Regression to Listening' in J.M.Berstein , The Culture Industry, London, Routledge, 1991, pp.35-36.

media, devoid of any real substance. The spectacle as a concept has been variedly used in sociological debates by various noted thinkers.

Victor Turner makes an ethnographic study of the Ndembu life in terms of ritual process. For Turner, the ritual is the spectacle by which he comes to comprehend the tribal culture.

In Roland Barthes, the use of the term spectacle refers to the interplay of action, representation and alienation in man and society. To him, if myth is a language then spectacle is the conveyor of that myth.

In post-modernist discourses too, spectacle has been increasingly used to demonstrate notions of site, of simulated or hyperreal situations.

Before we set on a detailed task of scrutinising ideas of the exponents of Frankfurt school, it is important to state, that unlike Adorno's ideas on music and astrology which had received specific attention from him, the talk about visual media like television, films accompanied with advertising were nowhere expounded separately. They form a part of Adorno's larger debate of culture industry which highlights the mass media as a major player of the industry which is engaged in delivering of vulgarised cultural forms.

The effort in this work is to pick up from the leads given by Adorno in his articles on culture industry and present an enriched and developed analysis of the visual media which comes handy for a rigorous critical engagement.

Television

The Television as a mode of mass media has considerable importance in the debate of culture industry. While Adorno has been interested in the culture pattern analysis displayed by television, he does not lessen its significance as a creator of spectacles which encapsulates dreams and promises for the masses and in the long run dupes them.

Owing to this double-edged dimensions at one level we may discuss the cultural content and at the other explore the powerful spectacles created by advertising products on the idiot-box's screen .The latter would more suitably be dealt on a discussion on advertising.

Much like the cultural analysis of ethnographic studies which talks of multi-layeered reality and the ethnomethodological approach of deciphering meanings and intentionality of an action, Adorno focusses on the multilayered structure to comprehend a medium such as television.

In his opinion mass media are not simply the sum total of the actions they portray or of the messages that radiate from these actions. Mass media also consists of various layers of meanings superimposed on one another, all of which contribute to the effect. Due to their calculative nature of mass media its rationalised product seem to be more clear-cut in meaning than authentic works of art. Adorno informs that, *the heritage of polymorphic meaning has been taken over by culture industry..... as what it conveys becomes itself*

organised in order to enthral the spectators on various psychological levels simultaneously.[81]

Adorno asserts that as a matter of fact the hidden message may be more important than the overt, since this hidden message will escape the control of consciousness, will not be looked thorugh, will not be warded by sales resistance, but is likely to sink deep into the spectator's mind.The difference between the surface content, the ovet message of televised material, and its hidden meaning is generally marked. But if one is to fully comprehend the overall effect of the televised material on the spectator then this cannot be studied without consideration of the hidden meaning in conjunction with the overt one.

The relation between the overt and covert message could be a little complex. To Adorno's understanding the hidden message frequently aims at reinforcing, conventionally rigid and *pseudo-realistic* attitudes similar to the accepted ideas more rationally propagated by the surface message. Conversely, a number of repressed gratifications which play a large role on the hidden level are some how allowed to manifest themselves on the surface in jests, off-colour remarks, suggestive situations and similar devices.

In an essay, 'Television and the patterns of culture', Adorno discusses the layers of meaning of an American comedy series. The series depicts an entertaining tale about the struggle for survival of an underpaid, young,

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[81] Adorno, T, 'How to Look at Television' in J.M.Berstein (ed), The Culture Industry, London, Routledge, 1991, p.141.

perennial hungry school teacher. The supposedly amusing situations arise as she tries, without success to win a free meal from friends and foes.The very mention of food becomes stimulus for laughter. The series does not seem to push any set of ideas on the surface. Its hidden message emerges as its pseudo realism promotes identification with the charming and funny heroine. The script implies, as Adorno contended:

> if you are as humorous, good naturaed, quick-witted, and charming as she is, do not worry about being paid a starvation wage. You can cope with your frustration in a humourous way; and your superior wit and cleverness put you not only above material privations, but also above the rest of manking.... In other words, the script is a shroud method of promoting adjustment to humilating conditions by presenting them as objectively comical and by giving a picture of a person who experiences even her own inadequate position as an object of fun apparetntly free ofany resentment.[82]

The myriad channels of the Indian television are full of such sitcoms where the portrayal and the underlying message have an averse connection. There are an increasing number of soap operas which are based on the theme of 'familial bonding' and the focus in most series is on the woman to woman relationship in terms of 'Saas-Bahu' (mother-in-law and daughter in law). This particular relationship is portrayed as the basis of all family happiness and prosperity, giving on the 'screen' a notion of women's importance in Indian family and value systems.

Whereas the latent message is imputed by the ever conspiring female characters, plotting against their own family members sometimes as whamps

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[82] Adorno,T, Television and the Patterns of Mass Culture, in B.Rosenberg and D.M.White (eds), Mass Culture: The popular Arts in America, London, Fontanna, 1956, pp.480-481.

and at other times as saviours, conveys the women to be trouble-shooters in the family who are at the core of all family problems. Further it cuts a very shabby figure of women, they appear like passive, foolish individuals who have no better job than to plot and 'conspire'. The ever-so-giving character of daughter-in-law who is unabatedly embroiled in resolving family feuds, is no enhancement to the image of Indian woman. In the covert sense it depicts women in poor light as carriers and reinforcers of staunch patriarchal values. The consequent hidden message which goes to thousands of women spectators and their families is that a good 'Bahu' would necessarily procreate a 'son', sacrifice for the family's happiness and would try to mend the wrongs that are committed by her husband considering it her own onus.

Striking in an analysis of this kind is the Mertonian concept of manifest and latent functions. But the sharp point of difference is, as Adorno would argue that the 'covert' is as much intended impulse as the 'overt' while in Merton the latent is 'unintended'. Such a category of concept would have certainly been countered by the critical insight of Adorno who at no point divorces his critical frame while tracking the terrains of culture industry.

Another remarkable example can be cited from the world of visual advertising on television. The grand and generous ideas put forth in an advertisement of credit card is worth examining. The key idea is contained in the two liner slogan which has an impressive visual at the backdrop, *"there are a few things that money, can't buy.... For everything else there is masstercard.'* The advertisement shows a trail of luxurious items with exorbitant price tags, which can be easily owned if one possesses a credit card. In its last sequence of visuals, supposedly touching upon the human element it says,*"The look on your boyfriends face .... priceless."* The

covert message which this advertisement effortlessly gives is – that everything can be owned and anything can be purchased under the sun be it earthly or ephemeral. Even happiness can be attained by the sheer power of a credit card.

Besides the complex analysis of overt and hidden, Adorno also brings in the picture: the tendency to channelise audience reaction. Certain patterns of reaction are set for the audience by creating an ambience and atmosphere which would bring in the desired effects. The diversification of television content into various categories such as comedy, mystery, detective story, family drama paves the way for presumptuousness to creep in the audiences mind at the initial level. Further, the concretisation of these styles into formulas confirm a pre-established attitudinal pattern of the spectator. Hence before the audience is confronted with any specific content their reactions are already intelligible to the makers of the series.

It is precisely for this reason, after one plot is well received by the spectators there is an assembly-line kind of production of T.V series around the same theme. The media barons true to the spirit of culture industry leave no occasion of cashing on a hit formula. No wonder after a high TRP (Television Rating Points) of family based serials or religion based serials, the Indian television industry is burgeoning with the same prototypes with absolutely no space or scope for anything else.

Thus the programmes on television are tailormade, reproduced realities which have not much to do with creativity and imagination. Much like a factory of shoes or cars that manufactures in abundance those models of their goods which are in vogue. The television also floats stereotypical

products which on the outward may have a different make but are same in content. The various television news channels are no different. The weightage given to the various news in terms of coverage and the editing process resorted to turn an event into a saleable news story casts the myth of it rendering a true expression of events. Thus the news and soap opera, the two contrasting faces of television may use differed codes but signify a 'reproduced reality'.

Films

For Adorno the films form part of a dominating capitalist system along with television, radio and magazines, that make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part. He goes on to state that, even the "aesthetic activities of political opposites are one in their enthusiastic obedience to the rythm of the iron system" [83] This simply indicates the fact that mass culture has no distinguished products to offer under monopoly of culture industry except identical cultural forms. To drive their point in, they (Adorno & Horkheimer) write that the implication and effect of the operation of monolithic and monpolistic culture industry is no more than the achievement of standardisation and mass production.

It is this above stated precept which serves as the paradigm for comprehending their thoughts and ideas on films. To Adorno, the fetishisation of the aesthetic aspect of the film is very disheartening. In an essay on *Transparencies on Film* although he sees cinema as as awkward and unprofessional but inscribes a hope that, *the so-called mass media might*

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[83] Adorno, T & Horkheimer, Max, Dialectic of Enlightenment, p.120

eventually become something qualitatively different.[84] But this statement comes more of as a reflection of the problematic aspects thriving in cinema.

The objectification of the subjective in movies is looked upon as a blow to arts and aesthetics. He says, *the aesthetics of film will do better to base itself on a subjective mode of experience which film resembles and which constitutes its artistic character*[85]. 'Bringing in focus the technology used by the medium like photography, his concern for aesthetics is resonant when he says, *The photographic process of film, primarily representational places a higher intrinsic significance on the object, as foreign to subjectivity, than aesthetically autonomous techniques; this is the retarding aspect of film in the historical process of art.*[86]

In a commercial film production, Adorno finds the aesthetic logic inherent in the material is caught in a stage of crisis even before it is given a chance to really unfold. The demand for a meaningful relationship between technique, material and content does not mix well with the fetishism of means. An example can be cited from Indian film making. If a film is being made on a theme like 'corruption in society' than pompous sound score and photographic focus on the *sleaze* highlighted manifold already objectifies the notion in a way to break through the difference between everyday relaity and screen, that the subjectivity of experience is corroborated and undermined.

Another example could be films which are adapted versions of stroylines from novels. While reading a coherent theme in a work of fiction, one finds that even when dialogue is used in a novel, the spoken word is not directly

[84] Adorno, T, 'Transparencies on Film' in Berstein J.M, The Culture Industry, Routledge, London, 1991, p.154.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid, p.155.

spoken but is rather distanced by the act of narration and thereby abstracted from physical presence of living persons. It is this kind of presentation which ultimately goes on to leave a lasting impact on the mind of readers. In this context, two examples from the cinema world may be cited, which were based on brilliant works of celebrated authors. If one reminsces the final lines of the novel's protagonist Scarlet O'Hara of the novel *Scarlet* in the cinematic version *Gone with the Wind*, the line 'Tomorrow is another day' leaves no reasonating impact on the mind, it subsumes in air as soon it is said. While the same line has tremendous meaning amidst the richness of author's narration. Similarly, a much recent Hindi film 'Pinjar' adopted from Amrita Pritam's novel fails to deliver the profundity of the concluding dialogue, delivered by the novel's protagonist 'Phulo'. The line which marks the crux of the entire subject on vagaries of partition vis-a-vis plight of women falls short of registering itself on the audiences mind, in its cinematic form.

The semiotic framework within which Barthes situates the analysis of cinema is most suited to understand this problem. Barthes makes a distinction between the signs of a spectacle and its signification. He finds it reprehensible and deceitful to confuse the sign with what is signified because it results in total artifice. The judging of the two, which is frequently resorted by film-makers, destroys the impact of the message.

Both Adorno and Horkheimer were upset about the *real to reel* modification which was directed to a sans creativity approach. They opine that, *Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies. The sound film .... leaves no*

room for imagination on reflection on the part of the audience[87] In other words, the cinema stunts and restricts the imaginative abilities which Adorno and Horkheimer say ought to be stimulated by art. And so whatever the cinema touches ceases to be art in the true and fullest meaning of the word.

Instead, all of the dazzling technical effects of the cinema create so much noise and movement that our abilities to think are quite swamped. Indeed, Adorno and Horkheimer imply that they produce so much sound and fury that thought becomes impossible. The movies are valuable in the material terms of daily life since they hinder any speculation on their value as art or culture in themselves. Within moments of most films starting we can predict, quite accurately how they will end, who will win out, lose or be forgotten. The structure of a popular song is well known before the song is actually heard. The first few notes or phrases, of a hit are enough to tell us what the rest will be like. The surrounding framework of events can automatically be supplied to a detail known about a film theme. Even special effects, tricks and jokes are all allocated particular places in the designs of programmes by experts.

This is most evident in the mainstream Bollywood cinema. The film-makers follow a tried and tested formula to come up with spicy potboilers. The 'masala' films have a pre-determined technique to unfold the plot. The hero is an 'ideal' of a kind with all heavenly attributes right from 'compassion' to 'honesty' to 'bravery' to 'brilliance' to 'deligence' and so on and so forth. He is defintely a 'macho man', a mix of 'Rambo' and 'Bruce Lee' who in his crusade against the 'evil', 'bad' and 'ugly' is all powerful to combat a bevy of devilish goons' who look twice as strong as him. His beloved the

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[87] Adorno, T, The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception, p.42.

heroine of the film is the epitome of all beauty and all goodness which is there in the universe. Obviously as concluded in the earlier discussions, there is hardly any substance in the female characters with most of them used for the objectified aesthetic needs of the venture.

A typical Bollywood potboiler, besides having a 'Braveheart' hero, who is the main protagonist around whom the story revolves and the immaculately pretty heroine whose main job is to dance around the trees with the male lead of the film, has its fixed shades of grey either in the 'mafiosi', 'dons', 'corrupt polite officers ' or sometimes in the 'opposing parents'. The underlying theme is *all is well that ends well* after all the troubles and sufferings the eternal union is finally solemnised.

The 'whamps', 'villains' and 'comedians' are line exquisite flavours with which the film is garnished. The pre-destined happy endings fits in all the pieces in the whole, where parts in themselves are divorced from the entire totality. This can be discerned from films which claim to have different or path-breaking storylines.

Ironically even such ventures like *Chinagate* with an all male character team emulating a fervour of heroism has a bollywood diva dancing to the tunes of a belly-swerving number, *Kaante* (a not so good replication of Hollywood's Oceans Eleven) has a sizzling dance number out of the blue. Another very recent venture *Gangajal* devoted to the theme of corruption cleansing and people's mobilisation could not do without men swooning around a seductress on pulsating beats. These are just a few of the many examples that Bollywood films are replete with.

Like in any other conventional film which has a diverse set of ingredients bundled together to deliver to the commerical cause of the film industry, such offbeat ventures too (as they claim themselves to be) pursue the same motive with such item numbers publicised as their USP. The contemporary trend is replete with item numbers which are becoming quite a rage with the Indian film makers who are increasingly using it to magnify the saleability of their product. But to someone like Adorno the item numbers would have meant a lousy patch grafted with instrumental motives on a grey wall, the paint of which is synthetic and the texture, rough with superimposed layers.

Amazing is the fact how one success formula gives way to abundant production of the same kind. Reiterating this aspect Adorno says, *'the whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry. The old experience of the movie-goer, who sees the world outside as an extension of the film he has just left, is now the producer's guideliness. The more intensely and flawlessly his technique duplicates empirical objects, the easier it is today for the illusion to prevail that the outside world is the straightforward continuation of that presented on the screen. This purpose has been furthered by mechanical reproduction.... of sound film.'*[88]

This nullifies the claims made by the film industry barons of their experimental ventures in the name of parallel cinema or art films. The talk of 'novelty' 'innovation' and 'offbeat' script is a mere farce to decieve audiences and stake claims of pure artistic work. The off the beaten path storylines may be a shift from the stereotypical formulations but cannot posit the tag of authentic art because the themes are directly lifted from empirical life and have no element of creativity. While for Adorno, as we have learnt

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[88] *Opcit,* p.42.

earlier, true art is distanced from real life because only in this manner can it be a dialectical expression that weilds critical thinking and action.

But some amount of sympathy may be called for the 'offbeat cinema', as it dares to tread on an untrodden path, which is risky to the economic criterion, a criterion which is the very basis of its existence and perpetuation. Perhaps the tag of low-budget film which comes with such ventures is self-explanatory of the rationale of low budget: a move to guard risk factors. While the big-budget films unabashedly hold the banner of commercial cinema – a term which correctly reflects their nature ad motive. Exposing their intentions is no more a threat to them, because for long it has propagated the idea (which has crystallised in the minds of the audience) that the commercial is the desirable. The inclusion of such films under the category of popular cinema is a reaffirmation of such ventures to be the vanguards of culture industry in spirit and action. For the term popular here signifies their motive of bracketing a wide audience which aids them in balloning their profits at the box office. Locating the films and media in the political economy of culture industry, Douglas Kellner comments, *Because of the control by giant corporations oriented primarily towards profit, film production in the United States is dominated by the specific genres.... blockbuster hits, thus leading to proliferation of the most popular sorts of comedies, action, adventure films, fantasies and seemingly never ending sequels.*[89] Hence the economic factor explains why Hollywood film industry (world's largest film industry) is dominated by major genres and subgenres, sequel mania and crossovers of popular films into television series. The

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[89] Kellner Douglas, 'Critical Theory and Cultural Studies: the Missed Articulations' in Jim, McGuigan (ed), Cultural Methodologies, London, Sage, 1997, p.30.

explanation holds water for the trends in Bollywood as demonstrated by the arguments.

The world of bedazzling spectacles – bewildering dreams, fantisised realities of exotic locales, palatial homes and austere beauty. The panorama of silver screen which promises a world beyond, endeavours to gratify the sensuous and sensual takes off for hair-raising encounters with the supernatural 'unknown', 'extra-terrestial' and 'aliens'. Does it keep up to its promises? Reflecting on the promises of the pre-release attractions and the question of fulfillment of the masses aspirations in the final product, Adorno says, *Every commercial film is actually only the preview of that which it promises and will never deliver.*[90]

Then how does the multimillion spectacle creating film industry justify the rationale of its products. It simply passes on the buck to the consumer and claims that it is the art of consumer hereby meaning that its projects are a culmination of peoples tastes and desires. But Adorno strongly contends this position, *'If a movement form a Beethoven symphony is crudely "adapted" for a film sound-track in the same way as a Tolstoy novel is garbled in a film script: then the claim that this is done to satisfy the spontaneous wishes of the public is no more than hot air'*[91].Adorno completely rubbishes the claim that culture industry is the art of the consumer, he says it is the *ideology of ideology* and this ideology is the *ideology of business*. Adorno fervently dismisses the consumer oriented art debate. He goes on to say, *'Art unrelated to the objective spirit of its time is equally unimaginable as art without the moment which transcends it. The separation from empirical*

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[90] Adorno, T, 'Transparencies on Film, p.160.
[91] Adorno, T, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception, p.40.

reality which pertains to the construction of art from the outset requires precisely that moment. The conformity to the consumer, on the contrary, which likes to masquerade as humanitaranism, is nothing but the economic technique of consumer exploitation.' [92] Hence like any other cultural form mediated by the culture industry, films too stir a reified consciousness of the masses for fulfillment of vested interests.

Advertising

Advertising comes up as an important tool for propagating the products of culture industry. Although Adorno has not got explicated the theme in its specificity but in the general discourse of dissemination of cultural forms by the mass media, the importance of advertising can be guaged in his writings. For Adorno, advertising is an in-built mechanism meant for popularisation of the products of mass media.

A number of his observations made in reference to television and films, critically dispel advertising as a conveyor of spectacles of forthcoming attractions which in reality are never realised. In the present scenario, advertising lies at the epicentre of culture industry. It is replete in all media forms whether television, print media, big screen and even on the net. Therefore a discussion without its inclusion would mean a task half done.

The characteristics of mass-produced items, make it possible and necessary for producers to induce most members of a society to become habituated to consuming purchased items, and to purchasing more than they need for bare subsistence. Cultural attitudes have been called into play to usher the sale of mass produced commodities through the *modus operandi* of advertising. The

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[92] Adorno, T, Transparencies on Film', The Culture Industry, p.160.

urge to buy is sanctioned, reinforced and exaggerated in ways so numerous, so enticing, so subtle that ignoring them is not an easy option.

The sales message is perhaps nowhere more vivid and insistent than on television. An official of the Reagan administratin once described television as *toasters with pictures* for it works no different than appliances it offers a direct access to the market. The linkage between the home, where most television viewing occurs and the marketplace have strengthened with introduction of instant credit. The content of an increasing number of television shows are advertisements themselves, for example: informercials, home shopping networks, video new releases, product placement which are advertisements that resemble actual news releases. Thus the television plays an indirect role in legitimising consumerist lifestyles of culture industry.

The vision of good life has been increasingly formulated by advertising in mass media. The vision is elaborated by themes oriented toward luxurious and comfortable life styles. The assumed limitlessness of desire has traditionally been analysed in terms of ephemeral satisfactions that are generated by contemporary goods and promoted by marketing practices. But Colin Campbell and Marsha Richins argue that the pursuit of wants has an inherent factor of insatiability hidden. Individuals build in their imaginations of a product – filled world informed by the images and stories grafted by culture industry. The masses revel in anticipation of consuming their constructions but are inevitably disappointed when their actual consumption fails to meet expectation in such a situation enhancement of consumption to achieve the idealised image or compensate for the feelings of inadequacy appears to the people as the best response especially when the media persistently informs that it is the right thing to do. A number of

adfilms with striking one liners like 'yeh dil mange more', 'control nahin hota', play on the spirit of insatiability leaving the masses to soar with unlimiting desire which instills in them a feeling of perpetual craving and keeps the sales shooting.

While other advertising spectacles projecting the right and ideal as explicit in slogans like, 'Believe in the Best', 'Better than the best', 'Yahi hai right choice baby!', 'the coolest one' etc make the masses thrive for ideal-types, which in actuality are untenable. The idealised images depict affluent lifestyles and beauty standards that are unachieveable by most of the population. The power of these images lies, in part, in the suggestion of fantasies as objects of aspirations, while physical imperfections of actors and actresses are hidden and boring details of life that inevitably accompany advertised circumstances are ommitted. For e.g, a leading coffee brand weaves a rosy, promising picture of life as a 'taste that gets you started up' for success in life, likewise an upmarket shoe company advertises a hi-tech life profile for the owner of their brand. Citing this concern Marsha Richin writes, *'Frequent exposure to images of wealthy, beautiful and happy people enerate a false reality in which the uncommon and ideal seems mundane and appears attainable.'*[93]

Obviously the consumer is always vaguely dissatisfied with reality and yearning for something better. Wish-directed day dreaming turns the future into a perfectly illusioned present. The illusion is always better than the reality, the promise more interesting than actuality. Window shopping becomes understandable from this perspective as does the widespread

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[93] Richins, Marsha, 'Social Comparison, Advertising and Consumer Discontent', American Behavioural Scientist 38, No.4, February 1995, p.593.

consumption of cultural products that serve as aids to the construction of daydreams, such as novels, paintings, records, films and television programs. Portrayal of consumer goods, not only in advertising but also in magazines, posters and even works of art serves to entertain as well as to advertise in a world dominated by the ethos of culture industry.

Modern advertising relies on the metaphorical power of images, symbols and icons to induce new wants. The strategy is to create a brand image with which consumers identify. By associating mass-produced goods with a continuous flow of ambiguous display of happiness, the advertising industry dupes people.

Advertising selects from society's palate of values those believed to be most effective in promoting sales. The predominating power of advertising to infilitrate modes of thought, values, social roles, languages and human goals is both covert and subtle. Advertising's power consists of its pervasiveness and contact wilth all aspects of culture. It reinforces stereotypes and produces idealised images that cultivate a sense of dissatisfaction and laxity. It sells its goods by modelling unrealistic images and fostering insecurities, anxieties, fears, ambitions, greed, lust and inadequacy. This effect is clearly visible in case of women. For women, advertising idealises and promotes the desirability of unrealistic body images that focus attention on 'deficiencies' in their appearance.

Advertising perpetuates the need to consume by constantly suggesting and reinforcing the values of buying behaviour.By romanticising goods advertising exaggerates the value of consumption at the expense of social relations. The more emotionally involved with objects, the less individuals

are involved with each other, thus diminishing the quality of human relations. Finally the advertising industry's encouragement of self interest contributes to a climate in which individual priorities seem to reflect private economic goals rather than a greater concern for socio-economic justice. Despite his aversion even Adorno acknowledges the invincible character of advertising. Commenting on this ironical context he says, *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.*[94] It means that although consumers can guage in a reasonable sense what a product has to offer, they still get entangled in the virtual trap.

The question arises then what is so compelling about the ,mythical spectacles that the consumers get cast in its spell. The ongoing analysis would unravel the reasons as we critically investigate the issue.

From Spectacle to Simulation

Unlike the conventional winding up- where the central theme is evaluated in itself and views are put as black and white, I propose a progressive culmination of the discourse to make this theoretical endeavour more meaningful with purpose of future research.

The culture industry debate which originated around five decades back has demonstrated a foresighted approach so far. The issues raised by the debate, have not lost their prominence even in the present day. Hence to carry forward the debate in contemporary times too,. it is essential to assimilate the new developments and take a rejuvenated look at the whole issue.

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[94] Adorno, T,'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', p.45.

The flight from spectacle to simulation presents the unfolding of global information society in order to provoke us to think of its implications on the political economy of culture industry. The debate on mass media so far revolved around the spectacle created by the culture industries. Briefly the pheonmenon may be revisited in its totality.

The culture industry in the age of information society reduces all genres, from news to religion to sports to the logic of commodity spectacle. The media presentation of events like sports seem to be increasingly commodified. It is quite probable in near future to have uniforms of professional sports players littered with advertisements as racing cars. Already sport icons like Michael Jordan, David Beckham, Sachin Tendulkar are commodified from head to foot. Entertainment is the dominant mode of spectacle; its code premeate news and information, politics, education and everyday life.

It appears in the society of the spectacle that a life of luxury and happiness is open to all, that anyone can buy the sparkling objects on display and consume the spectacles of entertainment and information that culture industry has to offer. When images determine and overtake reality, life is no longer lived directly and actively. The spectacle involves a form of social relations in which individuals passively consume commodity spectacles and services without active and creative involvement.

Mass spectacles are financed by advertisers, who in turn pass the costs on the consumers, who are doubly exploited in work and consumption. Consumers end up paying for spectacles of entertainment. Thus the

entertainment and information offered is a function of culture industries to advance their own interests.

Individuals in the society of spectacle constitute themselves in terms of celebrity image, look and style. Media celebrities are the icons and role models, the stuff of dreams whom the dreamers of the spectacle emulate and adulate. These are precincts of a society dominated by culture industry, whose models promote accumulation of capital by its captians. Therefore the spectacle in reality in an inversion and abstraction of reality. The world of spectacle is henceforth the world of capital and commodities of the capitalist illusions and fantasies, the very pedestal on which the project of culture industry vests.

Simulation occurs as a phenomenon marked by hyperreality and implosion. It is a hyperreal world of media, image and spectacles. For eg: major political battles that take place in the media are a part of the hyperreal world. The websites on the internet offering virtual shopping with television already displaying an array of of products in its TV home shopping networks form a part of this realm. To get one's hand on the products offered by the hyperreal world one does not even have to get up from reclining chair, the mobile and credit card do all the required.

The triumph of the hyperreal is sure to intensify with proliferation of computer culture in which the individuals live in the "virtual communities" of the internet, have cybersex, shop in virtual malls, explore virtual environments and construct their own genders and identities in new forms of cyberspace interactions. Cultural forms – radio, films, sports, advertising and so on – now the computer has become the new focus of implosion.

Digitisation with its text, image, sound and video has created a new technoculture, that needs to be taken into consideration in the debate of culture industry in the changed scenario.

The new areas of experience and interaction produced by media and computer culture needs to be addressed. With the increasing fusion of real and unreal in the world of simulation, theories have already started resorting to the postmodern theory to illuminate the strangeness of this world.

But I would strongly argue here, that simulation and hyperreality ultimately cannot be diversed from the larger analysis of capitalism and political economy. Media and computer culture are vanguards for commodity culture harnessed by the culture industry which has finally arrived in the global transnational capitalistic form.

Chapter: 5
Critical Reflections

The culture industry debate has received much critical treatment than appreciation. Its critics have strongly countered its claims and have rendered a blatant threadbare analysis of its principle axioms.

A Swingewood's *Myth of Mass Culture* is a forceful attempt to debunk the debased constructions of mass culture, as projected by the Frankfurt school. His entire exercise is a vitriolic attack on the antimass culture stance held by Frankfurt theorists and to bring in the open, the potentials of a mass culture for a plural and democratic society. Much in the similar vein Edward Shils dismisses the culture industry theorists as elitist. He thinks of them as socialist radicals who had no sympathy for the tastes of the common people. Shills designated Horkheimer and his circle as Marxian socialist who were leading the onslaught against mass culture.

Even John B.Thompson whose works on media and modern culture is largely located within the domain of critical theory is quite upset about the totalising and pessimistic conception of the Frankfurt theorists regarding modern societies. Finally the postmodern theory offended by the high art advocacy and homogenising debates of culture industry has pitted its whole discourse in a way so as to oppose the formulations of Frankfurt school. The above objections and criticisms resonate some of the problems cited previously in this work. The task that was left unfinished would be suitably addressed in this space meant for reflections. The timing for such musings is perfect because the whole gamut of issues have been explored. Thus the need is to sift the finer points through a thorough critical evaluation.

The critical points of view enumerated in the discussion serve as leads for defending and debating these positions from the Institute's theorists point of view. I would inaugurate, the defense by zeroing on the postmodern theory which puts forth the most challenging assertions in context of the culture industry debate.

The postmodern theory visualises a pluralising concept of culture, of openings to the margins, to differences, to voices excluded from the narratives of Western culture. But one could argue in the spirit of the Frankfurt school that the global postmodern simply represents an expansion of global capitalism on the terrain of new media and technologies and that the explosion of information and entertainment in media culture represents powerful new sources of capital realisation and social control. Of course, the new world of technology, culture and politics in contemporary global capitalism is marked by more multiplicity, pluralism and openness to differences and voices from the margins but it is controlled and limited by transnational corporations which are becoming powerful, new cultural arbitrators who threaten to constrict the range of cultural expression rather than to expand it.

The culture industry argument has been sharply criticised for its over emphasis on homogeneity. It is condemned for a unified perception of culture industries. But the dramatic developments in the culture industries in recent years towards merger and consolidation represent the possibilities of increased control of information and entertainment by ever fewer superconglomerate. As Douglas Kellner would argue that the globalisation of media culture is an imposition of the lowest denominator homongeneity of global culture on a national and local culture, in which CNN, CNBC and

Murdoch Channels impose the most banal uniformity and homogeneity on media culture throughout the world. Hence the postmodern impulses of *differences*, *disjunctures*, the *global* and *local* are circumscribed and counteracted by increasing homogenisation. There is a rise in the hegemony of transnational cultural indstries. For e.g: in Latin America and Europe, the situation is similar with American media culture, commodities, fast food and malls creating a new global culture that is remarkably similar on all continents. Evocations of the global post modern diversity and difference should thus take into account countervailing tendencies towards global homogenisation and sameness, themes constantly stressed by Frankfurt theorists.

Another important issue is the persistent theoretical depreciation of the claims of high modernist art by the postmodernist culture theory. But Bernstein points out that both Adorno and postmodernist thought, taking their cue from the historical avant-garde, view the reification of culture as a critical gesture whose completion would be the fufillment of high art's promise. Hence fulfilling the promise means demystifying the discourse of high art, overcoming the division between high and low, and reintegrating art with everyday life but whereas Adorno objects to a conservative approach to high culture, tendentially postemodernism assimilates high culture to its conservative apporpriation. In fact the very reconciliation of high and low art portends a deletrious state of art for Adorno because he sees this reconciliation as false and one which is engineered by the forces of culture industry. It is due to this reason one finds a vehement advocacy and a strong stimulus for preservation of high art. But as theorists like Douglas Kellner agree that the dichotomy between high culture and low-culture is

problematic and should be superseded by a more unified model that takes culture as a spectrum and applies similar critical methods to all cultural artefacts ranging from opera to popular music, from modernist literature to soap operas.

Frederick Jameson too talks of rethinking the opposition between high culture and mass culture in such a way that the emphasis on evaluation to which it has traditionally given rise to, tends to function in some timeless realm of absolute aesthetic judgement and is replaced by a genuinely historical and dialectical approach to these phenomenon. Such an approach demands that we read high and mass culture as objectively related and dialectically independent phenomenon as twin and inseparable forms of the fission of aesthetic production under capitalism.

It is quite true that Frankfurt school rigidly pits its concept of authentic art modeled on masters of the avant-garde, against popular art, which they denounce for failing to have the qualities that they find in their preferred aesthetic models. Such a model does appear quite monolithic as it limits critical, subversive and emancipatory moments only to certain privileged artefacts of high culture It is due to this that the Frankfurt school's position that all mass culture is ideological and homogenising which has the effects of duping a passive mass of consumers cannot be taken well in all its fairness. Instead, one should see critical and ideological moments in the full range of culture, and not limit critical moments to high culture and identify all of low culture as ideological. One should allow for the possibility that critical and subversive moments could be found in the artefacts of the cultural industries as well as the canonised classics of high modernist culture

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that the Frankfurt school seemed to privilege as the site of artistic opposition and emancipation.

Another charge on Frankfurt school theorisation is its passive treatment of audience. The audience or consumer appears simply at the other end, divorced and isolated from the processes of culture industries. Also their theory gives an impression of silent and uncritical reception of the products of culture industry by the audience who is easily deceived and duped in this process. But people like Kellner argue that one should distinguish between the encoding and decoding of media artefacts and recognise that an active audience often produces its own meanings and use for products of the cultural industries. What is essential to state in this regard is that Adorno's audience is not absolutely passive. He does talk of an audience which can *see through* the imagery created by culture industry (though devoid of meaning generating active notion).

Refurbishing Perspectives on Culture Industry

As we are aware that the critique of mass culture was perceived as an important part of social critique by institute's theorists. They believed that renouncing this task by either celebrating or failing to take seriously mass culture simply strengthened the power of existing society. They believed that theory could break the hold of mass culture by de-naturalising it, by developing critical perspectives that would interrogate and criticize the forms, messages and effects of mass culture and communications. Although their critique of culture industries has come up as one of the most influential aspects of critical theory, their absolute crusade against popular culture has

not been received well in theoretical circles. Yet, despite their contributions their model has serious limitations, for much of popular culture is limited to denuniciation of its ideological features.

Hence in this part, my endeavour would be to bring out the problematic areas of the debate in terms of its contrast to popular culture not from the purpose of critical analysis but more for supplanting improvements in the debate (keeping up with the contemporary academic discourses on culture). This task would not only improve upon the laxaties of the debate but would reinvent the perspective in terms of the present trends in popular culture forms.

There is a need for cultural criticism today to develop more complex strategies and develop a multidimensional approach to mass culture. Rather than seeing its artefacts simply as expressions of hegemonic ideology and ruling class interests, it is preferable to view popular entretainment as a complex product that contains contradictory moments of desire and its displacement, articulations of hopes and their repressions. In this view, popular culture provides access to society's dreams and nightmares, and contains both ideological celebrations of the *status quo* and utopian moments of transcendence, moments of opposition and rebellion. Thus culture in popular culture too should be visualised as a contested terrain, rather than seen as one-dimensional manipulation and illusion.

Hence new methods of cultural interpretation and criticism need to come up. Those which conceptualise the contradictions, the articulation of social conflicts, the oppositional moments, the subversive tendencies and the

projection of utopian images and scenes of happiness and freedom that appear within mainstream commercial culture.

Especially Adorno's work limits itself to attacking the ideology and purely retrogressive effects of radio, popular music, films,television and so forth. In this sense the model of cultural interpretation and criticism is remarkably similar to the Marxian critique of ideology which restricts cultural analysis to denunciation of ideology. This attitude leads to neglect of analysis of specific films, television programs or artifacts of popular culture, since they presume in advance that such artifacts are merely a debased form of culture and a vehicle of ideology which are not worthy of detailed study of critique.

While Adorno does anlayse examples of popular music and televison, he generally limits himself to arranging their ideologies and 'retrogressive' effects on consciousness, without anlaysing their contradictions, critical or oppositional moments. Adorno argued pcpular music may exhibit features of commodification, reification and standardisation but such a theoretical optic cannot adqueately account for genesis and popularity of many forms of popular music such as blues, rock and roll, reggae etc. Since music is so non-representational of all arts, it provides vehicles for the expression of pain, rage, joy, rebellion, sexuality and so forth which might have progressive effects.

Historically, the production of certain types of popular music was often carried out by oppressed groups, like blacks or hispanic, or by working – class whites or marginalised youth. Much popular music thus articulates rebellion against standardisation and conformity.

Adorno's model of the culture industry does not allow heterogeneity of popular culture and contradictory effects. Instead it sees popular culture in terms of reification and commodification and hence as a sign of total triumph of capital and the total reification of experience. Adorno qualified his one-dimensional condemnation of popular culture in most of his essays on mass media. Although quite uncharacteristically in *Transparencies on Film*, Adorno does admit to some extent that a certain sort of film may contain socially critical potential and the fact that the mass culture itself reproduces existing conflicts and antagonisms.

As it has already been stated earlier, Adorno did realise the limitations in the ability of the culture industry to manipulate spectator consciousness. He clearly stated in a few of his essays, here and there, that audience saw through the media hype of events and realistically perceived its insignificance.

Therefore taking the leads from the discussion above, one could safely say that even conservative mass culture often provides insights into forms of dominant ideologies. It may sometimes unwittingly provide images of social conflict and opposition. A number of studies, done in the recent decades on the commercial culture of films reveal that this form of media too exhibits a conflict of representations between competing social ideologies.

Consequently there is no one, monolithic, dominant ideology which the culture industries promote.Indeed the conflicting ideologies in contemporary culture industry artefacts, point towards continuing and intensifying social conflict within capitalist socieities.

Henceforth in an era of media saturation, there is a greater need to have a radical media studies engagement rather than a pessimistic denunciation of the area. The consideration of oppositional and emancipatory uses of the media and cultural practices needs to be given a fair chance.

Much of our discussion so far has been devoted to critical unmasking of problematic concepts in the Frankfurt school theory. Besides an effort to expand its purview by revisiting some of its rigidly denounced stands, the aim has been to renew its classical standpoints in the light of contemporary compulsions that have dawned in the world of massmedia. The very act of meticulous renewing of the theory portends that despite its rigidities and narrowness in ideas, the approach has much substance in itself.

Relevance and Signficance of Culture Industry Debate.

The question of continued use-value of the Frankfurt school theory, is most basic to comprehend its indespensibility. To begin, these traditions (of Frankfurt school) continue to be relevant because there are continuities between our present stage and the earlier ones. The current regime of capital has strong continuities with the mode of production and social organisation of the earlier stages described by the Frankfurt school. In fact, contemporary culture is more commodified and commercialised than ever before and so the Frankfurt school perspectives on commodification are obviously still of fundamental importance in theorising our current situation. The hegemony of capital continues to be the dominant force of social organisation, perhaps even more than before. Likewise class differences are intensifying, media culture continues to be highly ideological and to legtimate existing

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inequalities, the critical perspectives of the school continue to be of importance.

The new global constellation of techno-capitalism, is based on configurations of capital and technology, producing new forms of culture, society and everyday life. In this respect, the Frankfurt school furnishes resources to analyse this conjuncture because its model of the culture industries focuses on the articulations of capital, technology, culture and everyday life that constitute the current tendency on part of Adorno and Horkheimer to occasionally offer an overtly one sided and negative vision of technology as an instrument of domination – there are also aspects that make possible a critical theory of technology that articulates both its emanicipatory and oppressive aspects.

My second point of focus would be media studies which owes much to the critical theorisation of Adorno. It was guaged that cultural studies did not have a critical eye,when it came to scrutinise media. Cultural studies as it was constituted and carried out hardly undertook any critical investigation about media as shapers of cultural and moral values. In this context, Adorno and Horkheimer in a big way put media under critical focus. It is precisely the critical focus on media culture from the perspectives of commodification, reification, technification, ideology and domination, developed by the Frankfurt school that provides a perspective useful as a corrective to more populist and uncritical approaches.

The theory of culture industry contains several novel features which has significantly contributed to the study of mass communications and culture. The theory conceptualises culture and communication as part of society, and

focuses on how socio-economic imperatives helped constitute the nature, function and effects of mass communication and culture. By conceptualising these important social forces as part of socio-economic processes. Culture industry theory integrates study of culture and communications with the study of economy and society.

Although the Frankfurt school approach itself is partial and one sided it does provide tools with which to criticise the ideological forms of media culture and the ways that it provides ideologies which legitimate forms of oppression. Ideology critique is a fundamental constitutent of cultural studies as a consequence of the efforts of Frankfurt school. The Frankfut school is valuable for inaugurating systematic and sustained critiques of ideology within the cultural industries. The culture industry approach is specially useful in providing contextualisations of the cultural criticism. Members of the institute carried out their analyses within the framework of ciritical social theory thus integrating cultural studies within the study of capitalist society and the ways that communications and culture were produced within this order.

Hence the Frankfurt school can be credited for inaugurating critical communications research. Although their writings offer no happy endings but if they are read in the spirit intended, then it does make us think for ourselves and certainly makes it difficult to take the media entirely for granted. As a step forward, I would go on to suggest that if we resort to the reconstructed version of the original model as delineated earlier, then it would be immensely useful for media and cultural studies of the day.

Another area, where the Frankfurt school's efforts are commendable is its inauguration of transdisciplinary approaches to cultural studies. The transdisciplinary cultural studies gives us the opportunity to draw from disparate range of discourses and fields to theorise the complexity and contradictions of the multiple effects of a vast range of cultural forms in our lives. The Frankfurt school theorists combined analysis of the production and political economy of culture with textual analysis that contextualises cultural artefacts in their socio-historical milieu.

Lastly, I would like to highlight the rationale of the culture industry argument, with even greater enthusiasm in the present times. The new cultural environment is dramatically transformed by global media and computer technologies which compels for an anlyses of the political economy of the newly emerging global cultural industries. The proliferation of new media technologies and artefacts and their multifarious appropriations by audiences needs to be scrutinised in the critical mould of this approach..Hence on a concluding note, I would strongly argue that the culture industry debate is extremely useful for analysing the current forms of culture and society because of their focus on the intersections between technology, culture industries and the economic situation in contemporary capitalist societies. Since the present age is tremendously conditioned by new media and information technologies, we need perspectives that articulate upon this intersection.

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