Some major points simplified.

"Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" is a chapter in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s book "Dialectic of Enlightenment" which discusses their famous notion of the "culture industry".

In this chapter Adorno and Horkheimer view capitalist society's culture industry as an aspect of the enlightenment has betrayed itself by allowing instrumental logic to take over human social life.

- According to Adorno and Horkheimer culture industry is a main phenomenon of late capitalism, one which encompasses all products and form of light entertainment – from Hollywood films to elevator music. All these forms of popular culture are designed to satisfy the growing needs of mass capitalistic consumers for entertainment. Adorno specifically notes that the term "culture industry" was chosen over "mass culture" in order to make sure that it is not understood as something which spontaneously stems from the masses Got article summaries, reviews, themselves.

- According to Adorno and Horkheimer this means that every work of art is then up for others to use - turned into a consumer product and is shaped by the logic of capitalist rationality (i.e. whatever sells best).

- The main argument of "Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" is that the commodification of culture is the commodification of human consciousness. Adorno and Horkheimer assert that culture industry eradicates autonomous thinking and criticism, serving to preserve the reigning order. It provides easy entertainment which distracts massed from the wrongs and sickness of the ruling order.

- They argue that culture industry has taken over reality as the prism through which people experience reality, thus completely shaping and conditioning their experience of life. In addition culture industry serves to keep workers busy, expressed by the famous quote from "Dialectic of Enlightenment": "Amusement has become an extension of labor under late capitalism". Popular culture appears to be offering a refuge and distraction for work, but in fact it causes the worker to further dwell into a world of products and consumerism. The only freedom culture industry has to really offer is a freedom from thinking.

- In "Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" Adorno and Horkheimer stress the fact that culture Mass industry uses a production-line mentality in producing cultural products. Seemingly all films and TV shows we watch are different, but in fact they follow the same recycled formulas as in other types of consumer goods. Like consumers goods, it feels like "there is something for everyone" here but in fact it's all variations of (Example of new iPads etc.)of the same thing. This is a main feature of the culture industry, for the fact that all products are produced under the same scheme allows them to be "readable" and effortlessly digested.

- This is how culture industry imposes conformity – with things that only seem to be different but are in fact all (slight) variations of the same thing. The final argument posed by Adorno and Horkheimer is that people under capitalism suffer the same fate of art
under the culture industry – they are reduced to the exchange value with no intrinsic or unique traits as the Enlightenment dreamed. A piece of art proposes a vision of how the parts and the whole fit together. The trashy products of the culture industry have no such vision. This is why mass cultural products emphasize details rather than the unifying vision of the entire work.

- The culture industry imposes sameness on its products. For this reason, it overvalues stylization, which is falsely differentiating. Also, by making every last detail of the cultural product conform to the chosen style, the culture industry imposes a false unity on its products.

- Great artworks do not have this same uniformity of stylization. Austrian composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's compositions, for example, "contain objective tendencies which resist the style they incarnate."

- Because the culture industry is "nothing other than style, it divulges style's secret: obedience to the social hierarchy."

- In 18th- and 19th-century Germany, the educational system had the patronage of the state. This educational system included not just universities, but also museums, theaters, and other cultural institutions. The patronage of princes gave culture independence from the demands of the market.

- This shelter no longer exists. The culture industry is completely compliant with the market.

- There has been an inversion in the relationship between artist and prince. The philosopher or writer used to have to include an effusive dedication to their patron, even if the content of their work might subtly undermine princely power. Today, producers in the culture industry are openly friendly with representatives of the state but inwardly servile to the state's ideology.

- The old artworks fostered connoisseurship and expertise, but the culture industry reviles these capacities. Its cultural products are democratically available to everyone's understanding.

- The masses lap up the cultural products prepared for them. They have no defense against the culture industry because the people most harmed by a ruling system are the ones who embrace it most enthusiastically. "They insist unwaveringly on the ideology by which they are enslaved," write Horkheimer and Adorno.

- The culture industry is monotonous, but it frantically demands novelty: "The machine is rotating on the spot."

- The split between serious art and light art expressed a contradiction in society, the split between the classes. Serious art kept its autonomy by restricting access, excluding the lower classes from the enjoyment of art. "The split between them [the two kinds of art] is itself the truth," write Horkheimer and Adorno. The culture industry is so impoverished, it cannot promote even such bland ideals as harmony. The culture industry is all advertisement and cannot promote anything but promotion itself. It dismisses value judgments—which would allow one to rank artworks—as "fiction, untruth."
The culture industry relies on stereotype because its imagination is impoverished. Instead of offering people the nourishing bread of richly imagined worlds, it offers people the “stone of stereotype.”

The culture industry also thrives on sentimental depictions of miraculous rescues from wretchedness. “The emphasis on the heart of gold is society’s way of admitting the suffering it creates,” write Horkheimer and Adorno.

A dumbed-down version of tragedy is appropriated by the culture industry, where it provides a touch of bitterness, like a flavouring. In the art that proceeded mass culture, tragedy was about “hopeless resistance to mythical threat.” In today’s debased society, “tragic fate ... becomes the just [fair] punishment.”

The unjust society is cruel and people compete to prove their fitness for it. Under late capitalism, existence is reduced to “a permanent rite of initiation.” Therefore, “everyone must show that they identify wholeheartedly with the power which beats them.”

Individuality is marred by capitalism. “The individual, on whom society was supported, itself bore society’s taint,” write Horkheimer and Adorno.

The “unity of the personality” is an illusion. Celebrities vigorously support this illusion, even as they destroy it with their hollow personas.

Sources
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