

## The Use of Art in the Cultural Industry in the Light of Adorno

### ARTIGO

**Diego de Oliveira da Cunha**<sup>i</sup>

Universidade do Grande Rio – Unigranrio, Duque de Caxias, RJ, Brasil

**Ely Severiano Júnior**<sup>ii</sup>

Universidade do Grande Rio – Unigranrio, Duque de Caxias, RJ, Brasil

**Davi José de Souza da Silva**<sup>iii</sup>

Universidade do Grande Rio – Unigranrio, Duque de Caxias, RJ, Brasil

### Abstract

The role of art in human history has always been prominent and remains so today. Theodor Adorno of the Frankfurt School coined the term "culture industry" to criticize the use of art by the economically dominant. This article analyzes the principles and mechanisms of massification and alienation through the use of art by the cultural industry. Adorno questions the loss of subjectivity through the use of technology to control the population. The study reveals the objective of the cultural industry to promote consumer goods under the capitalist system. It is suggested that future studies explore the originality of the masses and compare them with the effects of the cultural industry, as the mass is an important factor in the execution of its mechanisms. Art has a fascinating impact on human beings, but the cultural industry exploits it to serve its purposes, leading to the loss of human autonomy and total control of the population.

**Keywords:** Cultural Industry. Mass Alienation. Use of Art.

### O uso da Arte na indústria cultural à luz de Adorno

### Resumo

O papel da arte na história da humanidade sempre foi proeminente e permanece assim até hoje. Theodor Adorno, da Escola de Frankfurt, cunhou o termo "indústria cultural" para criticar o uso da arte pelos economicamente dominantes. Este artigo analisa os princípios e mecanismos de massificação e alienação através do uso da arte pela indústria cultural. Adorno questiona a perda de subjetividade por meio do uso da tecnologia para controlar a população. O estudo revela o objetivo da indústria cultural de promover bens de consumo sob o sistema capitalista. Sugere-se que estudos futuros explorem a originalidade das massas e as comparem com os efeitos da indústria cultural, pois a massa é um fator importante na execução de seus mecanismos. A arte tem um impacto fascinante no ser humano, mas a indústria cultural a explora para servir a seus propósitos, levando à perda da autonomia humana e ao controle total da população.

**Palavras-chave:** Indústria Cultural. Alienação de Massa. Uso da Arte.

## 1 Introduction

The objectification of the culture industry and its ideology cannot be achieved without a source that reaches the entire human being. It is from this perspective that, according to Adorno, it discovers the artistic fascination in the human being and, using art, alienates the masses with its theories, making them conform to ideas that only serve to enrich the economically strongest. Thus, art, with its power over men, is used in the culture industry as an anesthetic that prevents them from realizing what is being done to them (Santos, 2014).

The modern world, marked by a managed society, builds an environment where mass culture is widely disseminated, based on cognitive and artistic aspects. There is a dissemination of consciousness sublimated in the death of creative characters, generating a mentality in which the false truth of cultural totality prevails (Brunelli *et al.*, 2019; Reche, 2021).

Reche (2021) states that the culmination of the systematic control generated by the culture industry creates an idea of consumerist need, leading human beings to submit to the power of capital, settling into artistic fascination and developing with it. The result of this process is the passivity and alienation proposed by the great mass of society in the face of what is offered to them, a clear and unquestionable fact.

By structuring its plans around the mechanisms offered by art, the culture industry acquires sufficient strength to carry out its project in society. By combining the forces of artistic fascination with the absolute power of capital, we can see how easy it is to realize the project of the culture industry. An environment where there is no room for individual creative structures, which consequently ends up stifling the creative freedom of each individual, since it generates a social system dictated by the industry. Thus, no other system can exist, nor can there be any opposition, because what prevails over everything and everyone is the hegemony of the economically strongest. And so the ideals of this process develop based on the dictates of the power of the culture industry (Camargo, 2018).

Art is part of human action and therefore provides individuals with the ability to evolve and transfer the totality of the mechanisms imposed by the culture industry, in order to take a new direction in terms of its function in the human being. Formulated for the masses, the culture industry has the task of sharpening consumerism and organizing beings in a submissive way. In this case, every objectification of this control project must have the characteristic of ingraining itself in the human essence, leaving it connected only to what is offered by the industry system (Lima, 2019).

Aguiar (2018) states that the execution of this plan brings various benefits to those who carry it out, however, the great masses are exposed to the power concentrated in the hands of a few and thus lose their capacity for transformation and autonomy. This problem causes losses in the constitution of the human essence, in artistic construction and in the manifestation of both the individual and art in society.

In view of the above, this paper aims to provide a detailed understanding of the culture industry, taking into account its principles and its mechanics of massification and alienation through art. In this context, this article aims to provide a critical reading of how the process of this industry takes place, how the discoveries made by the articulators of art influence human actions and how the process of the cultural industry develops through the use of art.

## 2 Theoretical background

### 2.1 The culture industry and its goals

The systematic process of culture today is marked by the rule of a set imposed by industry and its market technique. The centralization of the power of capital in the hands of a few and global development mean that industry generates mechanics in which profit becomes the goal. This creates a culture for the masses, where industry dominates the economic process and, in turn, popular groups.

Culture, made in series and industrially for the general public, is seen not as an instrument of criticism and knowledge, but as a product to be exchanged for money and

which must be consumed like anything else. Its products must be made according to norms, in other words, standardized as a kind of kit to assemble a type of pre-made product, made to meet the needs and tastes of a public that doesn't have time to question what it consumes. “A perishable culture, like any garment, created to be used as exchange value” (Coelho, 1993, p. 11).

Adorno and Horkheimer call this process the culture industry, a term that marks Adorno's questioning and which, in turn, stands out in terms of the use of manipulative social techniques. Therefore, in order to better understand the techniques used and why such a system is necessary, the nomenclature deserves a closer look.

For Adorno, “The culture industry is a circle of manipulation and retroactive necessity, in which the unity of the system becomes ever more cohesive [...] It is the power that the economically strongest exercise over society” (Adorno, 1985, p. 114). Its goals are alienating. It is a machine set in motion for exclusively destructive purposes. Its creation only meets the interests of imposing consumerism, and the masses, in turn, not realizing this, adhere to the system, abandoning the total autonomy acquired throughout their evolutionary history.

As a result, the culture industry establishes itself as one whose primary goal is to pass on the alienated message that the individual needs what the industry has produced. Thus, according to Adorno, “cultural and intellectual production is guided by the possibility of market consumption” (Adorno, 1985, p.118). Everything becomes a commodity through the appropriation of the object. For the author, “The whole world is forced to pass through the filter of the Cultural Industry” (Adorno, 1985, p.118), a process that causes human beings to lose their autonomy and identity.

If we can currently say that we live in an age of enlightenment, this has become very questionable in view of the unimaginable pressure exerted on people, whether simply by the organization of the world itself, or in a broader sense, by planned control, by the culture industry or even by the whole of inner reality (Adorno, 1995. p. 181).

By deceiving all kinds of forces opposed to its objectives, the culture industry instills in the human mind “exhortations to conform to what is in the interests of the powerful”,

which, for Adorno, “replaces man's conscience, alienating it from the real interest of doing so” (Adorno, 1975, p. 290).

To this end, the culture industry throws thousands of messages at individuals every day in order to win them over. Its techniques range from a simple “good morning” to the most complex technological devices created to induce consumerism and alienation (Costa, 2013; Camargo, 2018).

Relying on mechanisms such as the beauty of images, the sound of music, the action of a movie or even the comedy of a play, the culture industry, in order to convince the masses, makes itself present in any environment where it can instill in the human mind the desire for need. This is what sustains it and makes it powerful.

In this context, the culture industry and its mechanics start to anaesthetize individuals, preventing them from perceiving what is being done to them. The systematic control generated by the culture industry is based on the idea that the need to consume creates in human beings a submission to the power of capital. The intention is to make the individual derive an alienated idea of satisfaction from this system, creating a false sense of independence. “I can, I am”, in other words, the deceptive idea of a generation of ‘enjoy without hindrance’, a true *carpe diem*. In the objectification of the culture industry, the great mass of society becomes passive in the midst of what is offered to them and dependent on what is proposed to them.

With its products, the culture industry reinforces social norms, repeating them to exhaustion and without discussion. In this way, there is another function: the promotion of social continuity. In addition to these central aspects of its functioning, there are others, consequences or by-products of the first:

The manufacture of products whose purpose is to be exchanged for currency; the misrepresentation and degradation of popular taste; the maximum simplification of its products, in order to obtain an always passive attitude from the consumer; the incorporation of a paternalistic attitude, directing the consumer instead of placing itself at their disposal (Coelho, 1993, p. 26).

Without limits in its objectification, the culture industry, when it comes to fulfilling these goals of human alienation, uses a variety of principles to achieve them. It regulates

relationships, manipulates the social environment by determining consumption and, above all, discards what doesn't fit into its normalization. Adorno says that, in the process, the strategy leaves no room for subterfuge, “something is planned for everyone, so that none can escape; the unprejudiced unity of the culture industry” (Adorno, 1985, p. 07). The only principle that prevails is that everything and everyone must be guided by the dictates of the culture industry.

It lives, in a sense, as a parasite on the extra-artistic technique of producing material goods, without worrying about the determination that the objectivity of these techniques implies for the intra-artistic form, but also without respecting the formal law (Adorno, 1975, p. 290).

In order to disseminate its ideas, the culture industry establishes its own language and thereby legitimizes its production. In this language, “each product presents itself as individual, thus strengthening its ideology, awakening the illusion that what is objectified and mediatized is a refuge” (Adorno, 1975, p. 289).

The enchantment, the ready-made, polished and finished thing, which, according to Adorno “is nothing more than a mere illusion”, does not generate discomfort in the individual fascinated by what is on offer, because it contains within itself “a model of the gigantic economic machinery which, from the outset, gives no one a break” (Adorno, 1985, 119). This cultural industrial machinery starts to live in homes, at work, on the streets, in every environment, telling us what we should and shouldn't do.

In this inductive automation of consumerism, its function, according to Adorno, is to “determine that everything that is produced corresponds to its tables and ideas”. In this case, in order for the action produced by the culture industry to be successful, it is necessary to generate a scheme in which standardization and satisfactions occur equally in all individuals, so that they succeed in their scheme. This is yet another misleading idea about the process. When referring to this moment, Adorno says that “Contemporary culture gives everything an air of sameness”, aiming to “perpetuate the individual as if he were independent, submitting him to the absolute power of capital” (Adorno, 1985, p. 113).

With the apex of the compulsive consumerist attitude, the culture industry reaches the peak of objectifying its ideals in the individual. Man comes to think that the industrial

product on offer is exactly what he needs. This idea obviously doesn't arise spontaneously, but because they've been made to think so, through its mechanisms. In this scheme, the entire dominant capitalist structure is maintained, sustaining power and its stakeholders.

In his critique of the culture industry, Adorno invites people to analyze this system, which is arbitrarily imposed on society as a whole. According to the author, only in this way will people find the means to deal with this manipulative mechanism in a liberating way.

The importance of this industry in the psychic economy of the masses does not exempt us from reflecting on its objective legitimization, on its being in itself, but on the contrary, it forces us, especially when it comes to a supposedly pragmatic science, to take it critically and not bow down to its monopoly (Adorno, 1975, p. 290).

In this way, the culture industry is marked, according to Adorno, by the destructive tendencies of the masses, and this characteristic determines all its actions. Murdering the human creative character is its main goal. In order to make everything the same and dependent on its characters, it needs to control the individual actions of each human being and instill in them the needs it wants. With this, it begins to determine and exercise its power discreetly but comprehensively over everything and everyone in a society that opts for complacency (Costa, 2013).

## 2.2 Art in the Cultural Industry

Interested in provoking reactions in the individual aimed at unbridled consumerism, the culture industry and its own language put its alienating project into practice. Adorno says that “in order to legitimize the garbage they purposely produce, they need something to draw the masses to themselves” (Adorno, 1985, p. 48), something like the force of a magnet that attracts metals. In this logic, it discovers the fascination of the power of art.

To build its system, the culture industry brings together elements that have long been commonplace, giving them a new quality. It forces the union of domains that have been separated for millennia: high art and low art. To the detriment of both. “Higher art is frustrated from its seriousness by speculation about effect; lower art loses, through its civilizing domestication, the element of resistant and rude nature that was inherent in it while social control was not total” (Adorno, 1975, p. 28).

The emotion generated by art and what it conveys to man is extremely profound. It moves him, makes him express himself and takes him to infinity. Upon discovering that art has this attractive power over human actions and that, since the beginning, its fascination has directly enchanted human beings, the culture industry began to use it as its main anesthetic and social manipulative product.

In the entertainment of yesteryear, now managed, integrated and qualitatively disfigured by the culture industry [...] no work can be what it is in order to accommodate, to reduce its distance from the spectator. [...] In an age of overproduction, art's use value also becomes problematic and it finally submits to the secondary delight of prestige, fashion and its own commodity character: parody of aesthetic appearance (Adorno, 2008, p. 28).

The culture industry takes art as a possession and makes it alien to itself, “the work of art is disqualified” (Adorno, 2008, p. 29), distorting its character as a human creative action, injecting into it a mechanic of manipulation and, with this, making art alienated, even from itself. According to Adorno, “insofar as art corresponds to a manifest social need, it has largely been transformed into a business governed by profit, which persists as long as it is profitable” (Adorno, 2008, p. 30).

In the culture industry, art becomes nothing more than an object of commerce, serving merely as an entertainment mechanism that strengthens the industry's existing power, dictated by previously established rules. As a result, it constantly allows itself to be manipulated by capital power. “In the culture industry, everything that concerns art is no longer evident, both in itself and in its relationship to the whole, and even its right to exist” (Adorno, 2008, p.11).

Obsessed with controlling society more and more and depriving it of its total freedom, the culture industry disguises its real interests. With the spiritualization of art as its possession, it encourages society to adhere to the new mechanism it proposes: “consumer art”. In other words, art, in its construction, is used purely as a commodity, which the consumer, on taking home, uses and then discards in a garbage can, thus ignoring the undoubted value of the supreme and inexhaustible character of the artistic work.

For Adorno, art is “a constitutive protest against the pretension to the totality of discourse” (Adorno, 2008, p. 117). In other words, it is magnanimous in the sense that it



praises the subjectivity implicit in each human being. However, according to him, “if, however, art imperturbably tolerates the mechanisms of the culture industry, if it accepts being blind like enchantment, then it debases itself to the illusory act and to its own claim to truth” (Adorno, 2008, p. 74). Thus, by submitting to the mechanics of the consumer industry, art loses its creative potential and, by being manipulated, loses its meaning.

The culture industry can be proud of having vigorously carried out the often clumsy transfer of art to the sphere of consumption, of having stripped entertainment of its unseemly naivety and of having perfected the format of commodities. The more total it became, the more ruthlessly it forced outsiders to declare bankruptcy or join the union (Adorno, 1985, p. 126).

Artistic autonomy within the culture industry was annihilated, and with it, all those who wanted to feel unique. Within this system, art, losing its autonomy, submits to the barbarism imposed by those who manipulate social rules.

In a society where “art no longer has any place and which is shaken by every reaction against it, it fades into an objectified and numbed cultural property and into obtaining the pleasure that the client recovers and which, in most cases, has little to do with the object” (Adorno, 2008, p. 27).

In terms of truth, art has lost that objective appearance of building towards evolution, and has become the sameness of everyday life. In addition, due to its social circumstances, it has become a presupposition for legitimizing capitalist actions. In the capitalist world, Adorno states that “Art, culture and entertainment are reduced through subordination in order to recognize a single false formula: the totality of the culture industry” (Adorno, 1985, p. 127). In other words, everything and everyone must submit to the culture industry, including art.

Obstinate to achieve its goals and understanding that art has sufficient conditions to contribute to achieving them, the culture industry seizes on artistic characteristics and, with them, elaborates its attacks on the social field. With the help of artistic mechanisms, it establishes itself socially and projects its consumerist market.

The characteristics of the culture industry, combined with the fascinating power of art, give rise to the realization of the schema that spreads consumerism. This would be the

summit, the consolidated apex of its plans for the masses. With the achievement of its objectives, the loss of art's constitutive qualities is realized, a fact that obviously impoverishes its abilities.

The culture industry developed with the dominance that effect, performance and technical detail achieved over the work of art; the latter, which was once a vehicle for ideas, was liquidated. “The harmonious effect that existed in music, in the color of painting, in the novel or even in architecture came to an end with the totality of the culture industry” (Adorno, 1985, p. 118).

Adorno's reflection on the artistic work associated with the ideology of the power of capital is that art instrumentalized by the culture industry loses the power of enlightenment it possesses and thus fails to provide human beings with the capacity for emancipation. The culture industry thus violates the relationship between art and man, oppressing both by the force of its mechanized reason. The result of this is the apogee of artificialized reality, in which the social masses only have in mind the conceptualization created and given to them by the industry.

The artistic production that arises from the mechanisms of the culture industry, as well as creating artificial reality, masks the dynamics of the capitalist market. It conceals from the masses the dynamics adopted to carry out the plan to trap human beings in a world of merely material and disposable values. This solidifies the capitalist system and expands it on a global scale.

### **2.3 Adorno's Conception of Art and the Deconstruction of the Artistic Concept**

Adorno's conception of art is entirely focused on its creative and transformative character, considered to be a primordial mechanism in the valorization of the human being. It is for this reason that the author is indignant when he sees the situation to which art has been subjected in the process of the culture industry.

In Adorno, the concept of art is always associated with the social aspect. The sociological character of art is marked by its function of overcoming one state of lived situation for another, generally better than the previous one. Hence the importance of the

existence of art without manipulation, which is Adorno's criticism of the defense of pure art, without influence, especially from the capitalist field.

In the author's view, art becomes concrete in subjectivity and spreads widely in the social environment. This is indicative of the public recognition of the work and, consequently, of the artist. However, considering the conditions imposed by the culture industry system, this process comes up against a lack of commitment to passing on legitimate art to others.

By discovering art as a fascination in human behaviour and taking possession of it, the culture industry definitively trivializes the artistic concept, thus deconstructing its character of reflection, investigation and social contribution. In this sense, art ceases to play its social role as an instrumental “logos” in human subjective development, and no longer has a direct link with the individual. In this way, it loses its capacity to transform society and to contribute to enlightenment, enabling human beings to have the capacity to be fully emancipated (Habowski *et al.*, 2018).

This factor becomes crucial in the critical Adornian analysis of the cultural industry's deconstruction of the essence of art. While the process of art in the social environment takes place mainly through the creative subjectivity of each individual, in the culture industry this function is appropriated, not allowing art to develop naturally. As a result, the individual loses their creative artistic power. As a result, art in the culture industry is de-characterized and deconstructed.

The developing technological reality undermines not only traditional forms, but the very foundations of the artistic structure - in other words, it tends to invade not only certain styles, but also the very essence of art. A trend towards a one-dimensional society. In the field of culture, this new totalitarianism manifests itself precisely in a harmonizing pluralism, in which the most contradictory works and truths coexist peacefully, but with indifference. “Images and artistic classics are incorporated into a society and thus become advertisements, they seal, comfort, excite, alienate from the very dimension of truth” (Read, 1983, p. 33).

With the process established by the culture industry, its operating mechanics and its objectives, art loses the crucial factors that constitute it. Aspects such as arousing the magical field of creativity, valuing autonomy, bringing freedom, movement and emancipation cease to exist and so art, in the culture industry, becomes passive and mechanical.

In fact, absolute freedom in art, which is always freedom in a particular domain, contradicts the perennial state of non-freedom in the whole. The place of art has become uncertain. The autonomy it acquired, after freeing itself from the cult function and its duplicates, was based on the idea of humanity. However, this was shaken as society became less human (Adorno, 2008, p. 11).

Adorno says that “in the present age, the fatality of all art is that it is contaminated by the untruth of the dominating totality” (Adorno, 2008, p. 72). Thus, it is worked in such a way that its function is done exactly as the culture industry wants it to be, i.e. art submits to the dictated system.

The work of art is disqualified. The poles of its *Entkünstung*, which translates as “disartification”, are as follows: on the one hand, it becomes a thing among things; on the other, it becomes the vehicle of the spectator's psychology. “The spectator replaces what the rectified works of art no longer say with the standardized echo of himself that he perceives from them. The culture industry sets this mechanism in motion and exploits it” (Adorno, 2008, p. 29).

While art manifests itself widely in the individual, in the culture industry it is mechanical, has limits and does not open up beyond what is offered. Thus, art loses its prestige and is only valued according to the values of the market and the system of social constraints that act behind the rhetoric of democracy, spreading an illusory image of equal rights.

Art, which for centuries lived on the search for “effect”, that is, to provoke reactions with its constructions, was abolished with the arrival of the culture industry, no longer responsible for exercising this function. Now, the culture industry is in charge of infusing this effect into its products, giving them their basis and essence, turning art into just another object in the process.

With the control of art by the culture industry, the result could only be the total dependence and deconstruction of the artistic concept, which moves away from social logic, blinds itself and becomes the deception of the masses. Adorno uses the German term *Entkunstung* to denounce the deconstruction of art's potential in the midst of the tangled structure of unbridled consumption to which the culture industry has subjected society. Contaminated by untruth, art loses its potential and denies the expressive force it contains in its essence.

In the broadest sense, the program of the culture industry, which shines under the sign of the triumph of capitalist power, has the pretension of assuming the patriarchal function, having total control over society, resulting in human desensitization. Technique, essence, knowledge, image concepts, in other words, all the mechanisms associated with human action, everything is deconstructed, and art, as part of the process, is also lost in the face of this system, favoring a climate of culture that culminates in the recurrence of the barbaric world.

### 3 Methodology

Methodologically, we analyzed how the culture industry and its principles can influence the mass alienation of the individual, based on the concepts brought up by Adorno in his works. Using a qualitative approach, we look at the way in which some authors make their contributions, based on art. The article's data was collected through various bibliographic databases, consulted in an unsystematic way, including articles indexed in journals and books. The articles used as a basis for this research were chosen by searching databases that contain works with the keywords: "Cultural Industry", "Art" and "Use of Art", mainly with a view to the period of current works - the last five years - and classic works on the subject.

According to Botelho et al. (2011), a bibliographic or literature review is used to describe the state of the art of a particular theme or subject, making it possible to update knowledge, taking into account that particular period in which it was used. In this context, we used the literature review to understand and deepen our knowledge of the cultural

industrial sector, mainly through the lens of the use of art. In terms of purpose, this research is defined as exploratory because, although there are other works that draw analogies between the use of art and the cultural industry, this one aims to bring a new perspective that has not yet been explored in relation to this subject.

## 4 Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Resultado da Massificação e Alienação Social e Consequências do Uso da Arte

With art losing its primary function as a human creative force and becoming the main raw material, it is now used as an indispensable mechanism in the process of massification, which in turn leads society to alienated behavior.

Today, works of art, like political slogans, are opportunely adapted by the cultural industry, offered at reduced prices to an audience, and their use becomes accessible to all, like the use of parks. “The dissolution of its character contributes, under current social conditions, to the very ruin of culture and to the progress of barbaric inconsistency” (Adorno, 2009, p. 38).

Art has lost the ability to develop on its own and, with that, human critical and rational production has come to an end. Society no longer has the capacity to think and manage its own line of critical sense.

Art without dreams, produced for the people, fulfills the dreamy idealism that seemed exaggerated in critical idealism. Everything starts from a sense of consciousness, and in art for the masses, consciousness comes from a production board (Adorno, 2009, p. 08).

With the use of art by the culture industry, its ability to generate creative capacity in human action is lost; art ceases to be a source of creative inspiration and becomes just another means of entertainment and manipulation, contributing to the conformity and passivity of individuals in society. When this capacity ceases to exist in the individual, they become complacent and accept what is given to them as ready-made. As a result, sensitivity atrophies and human beings condition their senses to the structuring

mechanisms of the culture industry. While a few gloat, savoring the profits gained from carrying out the alienating project, the mass of society is immersed in the farce of sadism offered by art and its derivatives in the development of the culture industry.

Therefore, through the culture industry, human beings have become puppets. This process has taken place in an environment where technology has gained a great deal of influence over society, expressing the power of the economically strongest. “The main weapon of the culture industry is standardization, the progressive destruction of creativity and the universal imposition of certain cultural and artistic products with a view to eliminating any manifestation of difference” (Santos, 2009, p. 2).

The conquest acquired by the culture industry system, which is the total convincing of society that they need what is offered to them, takes society to the maximum degree of decline ever thought of for a rational being. In the name of inconsequential consumerism, the culture industry trivializes the social condition and everything that derives from it.

One of the worst losses caused by the promotion of the culture industry's artistic goods is the de-characterization of the humanizing action that each being possesses. The social individual ceases to be what is in his essence, he ceases to be human. They become a puppet, they no longer have their own actions, so all their movements belong to the arbitrary manipulator system. The loss of the ability to be a singular and sublime individual leaves man passive in the face of situations and makes him, more often than not, a mere object. According to Adorno, this impoverishes the human figure.

## 4.2 From the Domain of Conscience to the State of Barbarism

Intentionally, by taking over art, the culture industry transforms all artistic characters into a cultural formation that, according to Adorno, “becomes a socialized *Halbbildung*, the omnipresence of the alienated spirit, which, according to its genesis and meaning, does not precede cultural formation, but succeeds it” (Adorno, 1996, p. 389 ), in other words, within the process of the culture industry, there is an art that takes on the role of semi-formation, whose function is to mediate the path between culture and the product to be consumed, so that this association can generate results. For Adorno, this is when

there is a danger of misusing art, because its use as semi-formation “becomes the dominant form of present-day consciousness” (Adorno, 1996, p. 388), thus depriving human beings of their freedom and autonomy.

The domination of consciousness, caused by the integration of artistic mechanisms into capitalist reality, leads society to a problem that until then it seemed to be freeing itself from. In the book **The Frankfurt School**, Rolf Wiggershaus endorses one of the many letters written by Adorno:

It seems to me that in our time, people are undergoing changes that are too profound to be captured by psychology alone. Everything is happening as if the very substance of man had changed along with the foundations of our society... The religious emancipation of the middle classes, despite all its “progressive” appearance, is now revealing itself as a force for dehumanization, however much it likes (or has liked) to disguise itself as humanism. We are witnessing a change that transforms men into simple passive centers of reaction, into subjects of “conditioned reflexes” because they no longer have centers of spontaneity, they no longer have obligatory measures of behavior, nothing that transcends the most immediate of their desires, needs and aspirations. And what is happening today can only be properly understood when it is placed against the backdrop of the whole of the development that has reduced and truncated man until it has made him what he seems to be today (Wiggershaus, 2002, p. 303).

The end of a society that was independent of the medieval religious mechanisms and indicators that marked reality until the mid-19th century indicated a new social direction. This even meant the very freedom of artistic functions, which were under the ideological judgment of morality, religious worship and the general culture that made up society. Art, however, on emerging from its medieval conditioning factors, yielded to the indicative process of the new society: it became the supreme formative item of a society of appearances.

The whole climate of culture produced by the culture industry leads to a situation in which people think they can claim to be rational and free in a society that is also rational and free. For Adorno, this is called semi-formation: “it is the spirit conquered by the fetish character of merchandise, which leads to adaptation and conformism, subduing the emancipatory dimension” (Adorno, 1996, p. 400).

The decline of human potential in the pre-established society leads, in turn, to the great success of the project developed by the economically strongest. Thus, the development of the culture industry system exerts strong influences on man. Adorno



strongly criticizes this scheme, because the aim of this process is to control consciousness, which culminates in a state of barbarism of the individual's autonomy.

With this, Adorno criticizes the constitution of mass culture organized by the industrial system. For him, the state of barbarism reached by today's society is the conclusion reached by a population that has allowed itself to be alienated by the mechanisms governed by the culture industry system. The return to barbarism leads to contempt for the progress that man has achieved throughout his history. Teixeira Coelho says that, “the advanced state of ‘cultural barbarism’ is capable of producing or accelerating the degradation of man - this function would be alienation” (Coelho, 1993, p. 14). A process that exterminates the culture of freedom that every being possesses and gloriously celebrates the success of the culture industry system.

### 4.3 The Loss of Human Autonomy

Semi-formation, articulated by the process, ends up causing forced socialization, in which each individual feels part of what is presented to them, so that awareness of subjectivity no longer exists. The need to belong to the group speaks louder. Adorno says that, “The culture industry in its broadest dimension leads everyone to laugh together, to delude themselves that they have achieved an identification” (Adorno, 1996, p. 395). Under the hegemony of the system dictated by the culture industry, human beings begin to lose the sublime characteristics that constitute them, in this case, the very hegemony of consciousness, which makes them autonomous.

The growing gap between power and social powerlessness denies the powerless the real prerequisites for autonomy that the concept of cultural formation ideologically preserves. The veil of integration, especially in the categories of consumption, is strongly established as the mouthpiece of ideals (Adorno, 1996, p. 394).

The condition of being autonomous is highly defended by Adorno. For him, the submission of this quality, inherent to each individual, leads human beings to a decline in the characteristics of supremacy in relation to other existing things. A debasement that leads to a return to the culture of barbarism.

The lack of humanization and the use of art as a means of social manipulation lead to a very well debated analysis in the book **Dialectic of Enlightenment**, where Adorno and Horkheimer indicate that the culture industry prevents the formation of autonomous, independent individuals, capable of judging and deciding consciously. In this line of reasoning, Adorno bases his theory on the constitution of the need for one's own individual thought, which each individual must possess.

The autonomy of each being is what allows the individual to question and free themselves from the system. For Adorno, “only the autonomous self can critically turn in on itself and eliminate its illusory embarrassment” (Adorno, 2008, p. 137). In other words, only the autonomy of the individual makes it possible for the individual to be authentic and have a will of his own. In this case, Adorno even emphasizes art's ability to give man this opportunity. For him, the autonomous being is constituted in artistic manifestation.

The culture of artistic autonomy is seen by Adorno as the awakening to the appreciation of the subjective and the awareness of the construction of society as a whole based on the creative being that each person possesses. In this case, art, in its autonomous manifestation, awakens a being of conscience, one who, through it, acquires knowledge and, through this, builds their environment.

In opposition to culture's tendency to reproduce and make people hear the same thing over and over again, autonomous art, as a form of life, according to Adorno's thinking, plays a completely different role in society: “it would be part of knowledge, would then be better appreciated and would lead in its open character to more concrete and developed experience” (Kogler, 2009, p. 85).

However, autonomous art is stifled by the systematic organization of the culture industry. The being of subjective constitution, with the potential to manifest its autonomy, ceases to exist. Suppressed of their potential, individuals put aside their essence and become extras in the capitalist system's society of appearances.

The cultural goods that feed the masses make the moment of adaptation dominant, fitting into an adapted society and breaking with the memory of what would be autonomous. As a result, those who are vulnerable to the system lose the ability to relate to the other, to something that is effectively external, remaining only able to

refer to the representation they themselves make of this external other (Adorno, 1985, p. 25).

With the end of each person's ability to express themselves, there is also a new understanding of the environment in which they live. The great problem generated by the loss of autonomous power in the human being is precisely the constitution of a society of appearances.

19

The formative experience, characterized by the difficult mediation between social conditioning, the moment of adaptation, the autonomous sense of subjectivity and the moment of resistance, breaks with the symbolism of the domination of the objectified collective over the individual and of the formal abstract over the empirical concrete. “The loss of the ability to have formative experiences is not a problem accidentally imposed on people from outside, nor is it caused by subjective intentions, but corresponds to an objective tendency of society and the way it produces and reproduces itself” (Adorno, 1985, p. 26).

The loss of the capacity for autonomy, so sublime in man, leaves him passive in the face of situations and, more often than not, makes him a mere object. This, in turn, according to Adorno, impoverishes the human figure, leading to alienation and causing society to represent itself in the given reproduction, isolating itself and forgetting its mass reality.

In the culture industry, those who don't adapt are massacred by economic impotence, which is prolonged in the spiritual impotence of the isolated. Excluded from the industry, it's easy to convince them of their inadequacy. While now, in material production, the mechanism of demand and supply is in the process of dissolving, in the superstructure it operates as a control for the benefit of the bosses. The consumers are the workers, the employees, the farmers and the petty bourgeois. The totality of existing institutions imprisons them body and soul to the point where they succumb without resistance to everything that is offered to them. Thus, today's deceived masses are more submissive to the myth of success than the fortunate themselves, who have what they want and stubbornly demand the ideology that serves them (Adorno, 2002, p. 16).

Systematic control, based on the idea of consumerist need, creates in human beings a submission to capital power. The emphasis on autonomous work and its socio-political essence become threatened and, more often than not, suffocated, causing man to quietly endure what is forbidden by social suppressive forces. According to Adorno, “Those who do not conform are punished with an economic impotence that is prolonged in the spiritual impotence of the individualist” (Adorno, 1985, p. 125).

#### 4.4 Massification and Alienation - the Culmination of the Cultural Industry

The distortion of the artistic character causes a major problem generated by the culture industry system. Art, which in its essence arose in the human environment with the intention of being the supreme force of the creative being, now belongs to the mechanisms of social alienating massification. The “effect” caused by art occurs only as a “self-help” objectification, thus indicating to man what he should and shouldn't do. It leaves him limited and, at the same time, transforms him into a slave of something created by himself. In his thinking, Theodor Adorno criticizes precisely this condition to which both art and the human being have been subjected.

By reducing the work of art to a simple fact, the mimetic moment of its essence is also sold, until it reaches total administration. In this context, consumers project themselves into the will present in art: they read, listen and contemplate until they forget. Their emotions then become indifferent and disappear (Adorno, 2008. p. 29).

With this, Adorno's critique focuses on the question of the great culmination of the project articulated by the ingenious machinery of capitalism. Man subjects himself to the fascination offered by the culture industry and fully adheres to the proposal of “equality” of desires and wishes, as if each individual were not himself, but a group, a mass. Teixeira Coelho says that “Mass culture alienates, forcing the individual to lose or not form an image of themselves in society” (Coelho, 1993, p. 12). It's the loss of the sublime power to assert oneself socially. The manipulation of the regime to which the human being is forced to adhere constitutes him as an object of enrichment, strengthening the system, leaving him unable to manifest his subjective human creativity.

The alienation of man should be understood as a process in which the individual is led not to reflect on himself and on the totality of the surrounding social environment, thus becoming a mere plaything and simple product that feeds the system that surrounds him (Coelho, 1993, p. 14).

In this case, the process of massification that leads to human alienation causes a devastating break with the condition of criticality that the human being possesses, resulting in absolute docility in relation to a humanity metamorphosed into clientele by suppliers. In the name of consumers, those who have control over culture repress everything that could allow it to escape the total immanence of the prevailing society, allowing only what unequivocally serves their purposes (Adorno, 2002, p. 52).

For Adorno, this mechanism produced by the culture industry undermines the productive capacity, the condition of freedom and the evolutionary potential that individuals naturally have within themselves. This creates a problem that begins with the individuality of each person and culminates in the loss of characteristics that lead a group of people to constitute themselves as a society.

The abolition of cultural privilege through liquidation and sale at low prices does not introduce the masses into domains previously closed to them, but contributes, under current social conditions, to the very ruin of culture and the progress of barbaric inconsistency (Adorno, 2002, p. 38).

The decline and passive acceptance of the consumerist system's proposal breaks down the capacity for perception which, in turn, would lead the individual to transformation. Adorno says that "in the art of the masses, that of the earthly board of production, details have become fungible" (Adorno, 2002, p. 09), in other words, the objectification, the intention behind this induction, cannot be perceived. In this case, Alex Thomson says that "art is made without reflection, becoming fantasy and denying the full humanity of a people" (Thomson, 2010, p. 92).

People who assume themselves more or less freely are placed in a kind of permanent state of command exception. "The only effective power would be autonomy, the power for reflection, self-determination and non-participation" (Adorno, 1985, p. 124).

Thus, conforming to the given system is of paramount importance. Recognizing in an enlightening way that submitting to it only degrades the potential that each being

possesses leads the individual to transform and break the system. According to Zuin, “it is necessary to understand that this type of psyche only forces people to actively participate in the construction of their own misery” (Zuin, 2001, p. 4). This is the tentative option that Adorno and Horkheimer advocate in the construction of an enlightened society, “enlightenment is the way out of the inculpability of men” (Adorno, 1985, p. 168).

## 5 Conclusions

Adorno's contribution is of great value in the process of understanding and demystifying society. Adorno's current thinking provides data that, in turn, expresses a reality that seems to have never ended in the history of humanity: social manipulation.

For Adorno, art, as a creative manifestation of every being, should never be reduced to mechanisms that prevent it from expressing its essence. Art is sovereign and arises from the autonomous action of each individual. This condition is essential for the harmony of the subjective being and its position in the collective social context. Centered on the position that each being is unique, he defends the thesis that free manifestation must be paramount. Art, as a creative manifestation of each individual, must not suffer alienating influences, so that autonomy in manifestation is distorted.

When analyzing the American reality, Adorno did not fail to take a critical stance and denounce the great machinery for deconstructing man's freedom and autonomy. The action that each individual has and their free artistic composition is important. The deprivation of individual artistic potential imposed by the culture industry breaks this harmony between man and art. In order for everyone to realize the importance of a creation that expresses their own desires, this situation must be denounced.

The structures created and worked on by the culture industry are really marked by an organization designed to really carry out its objective on the masses. A task that, with the help of artistic mechanisms, marks society in such a way that it has no choice but to accept what is imposed on it. Escaping the foundations of this system seems increasingly impossible, given the articulation and power concentrated in the hands of those who administer it.

The alienated progress spread by the capitalist system only marks the regression of years of human history, which has conquered its space in nature through creativity. Losing this condition indicates regression, decadence: a return to barbarism. Adorno states that the culture industry “has destroyed productivity, creative capacity, leading the individual to superfluity, and thereby causing him to lose his inner joy.” (Adorno, 1995, p. 67) This condition to which man has been subjected has led to a series of difficulties, culminating in the loss of his very essence.

In this sense, Adorno's reflection on the use of art in the culture industry aims to better understand the traits disseminated by the capitalist system, especially with regard to the promotion of consumer goods. An action to raise awareness about the mechanisms executed by this socially alienating system, articulated via the culture industry, must be widely disseminated, so that people can be in a position to choose for themselves, becoming autonomous beings. Breaking down this structure of trivialization of culture and art, in which society is immersed, must be a priority for everyone, so that society as a whole can resume its reflexive criticism and assume its own identity.

## References

ADORNO, T. W. **Conferência Radiofônica, A indústria cultural**. Ed. orig.: *Ohne Leitbild – Parva Aesthetica*. “Résumé über Kulturindustrie”. Editora Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1967. Trad. Amélia Cohn. Org. Gabriel Cohn. **Comunicação e indústria cultural**. São Paulo, Editora Nacional, 1975.

ADORNO, T. W. **Crítica cultural e sociedade**. Trad. Maria Helena Ruschel, Petrópolis, Editora Vozes, 1995.

ADORNO, T. W. **Educação e Emancipação**. Trad. Wolfgang Leo Maar. Rio de Janeiro, Ed. Paz e Terra, 1985.

ADORNO, T. W. **Indústria Cultural e sociedade**. Trad. Augustin Wernet e Jorge Mattos Brito de Almeida. São Paulo, Editora Paz e Terra, 2002.

ADORNO, T. W. **Teoria da Semicultura**, 1972-80. Tradução de Newton Ramos-de-Oliveira, Bruno Pucci e Cláudia B. M. de Abreu, Paula Ramos de Oliveira. Revista

Educação e Sociedade, Campinas – SP, CEDES, n. 56, ano XVII, dezembro de 1996, pág. 388-411.

ADORNO, T. W. **Teoria Estética**. Trad. Artur Morão, Lisboa, Edições 70, 2008.

ADORNO, T. W. **In search of Wagner**. Verso Books, 2009.

ADORNO, T. W.; HORKHEIMER, M. **Dialética do Esclarecimento**. Trad. Guido Antônio de Almeida. Rio de Janeiro, Jorge Zahar Ed, 1985.

AGUIAR, W. F. Adorno e a dimensão social da arte. **Maringá: Revista Urutúgua– revista acadêmica multidisciplinar (DCS/UEM)**, n. 15, 2018.

BOTELHO, L. L. R.; CUNHA, C. C.; MACEDO, M. **O método da revisão integrativa nos estudos organizacionais**. *Gestão e sociedade*, v. 5, n. 11, p. 121-136, 2011.

BRUNELLI, P. B.; AMARAL, S. C. S.; SILVA, P. A. I. F. Autoestima alimentada por “likes”: uma análise sobre a influência da indústria cultural na busca pela beleza e o protagonismo da imagem nas redes sociais. **Revista Philologus**, v. 25, n. 53, p. 226-236, 2019.

CAMARGO, S. A indústria cultural e suas vicissitudes: entre o conceito e a realidade. **Veritas (Porto Alegre)**, v. 63, n. 2, p. 691-710, 5 out. 2018.

COELHO, T. **O que é indústria cultural**. Coleção Primeiros Passos, volume 8. São Paulo, Editora Brasiliense, 1993.

COSTA, J. H. A atualidade da discussão sobre a indústria cultural em Theodor W. Adorno. **TRANS/FORM/AÇÃO: Revista de Filosofia**, v. 36, n. 2, p. 135–154, 2013.

HABOWSKI, A. C.; CONTE, E.; BRANCO, L. S. A. A violência institucionalizada pela indústria cultural: debates educativos. **Revista Internacional de Educação Superior**, Campinas, SP, v. 4, n. 2, p. 481–498, 2018.

KOGLER, S. Música, linguagem e a autonomia da arte. **Artefilosofia**, v. 4, n. 7, p. 73-85, 2009.

LIMA, F. E. M. Indústria Cultural. **Revista Docentes**, v. 4, n. 10, 2019.

READ, H. **Arte e alienação o papel do artista na sociedade**. Trad. Waltesin Dutra; Zahar Editores, Rio de Janeiro, 1983.



RECHE, Bruna Donato. Cinema em Walter Benjamin e Theodor Adorno. **Revista Espaço Acadêmico**, v. 21, n. 229, p. 43-53, 2021.

SANTOS, B. C. Arte como processo cultural. Por uma ampliação do humano. **Redes. com: revista de estudios para el desarrollo social de la Comunicación**, n. 5, p. 341-368, 2009.

SANTOS, T. D. Theodor Adorno: uma crítica à indústria cultural. **TRÁGICA: Estudos de Filosofia da Imanência**, v. 7, n. 2, 2014.

THOMSON, A. **Compreender Adorno**. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2010.

WIGGERSHAUS, R. **A Escola de Frankfurt: história, desenvolvimento teórico, significação política**. Trad. Lilyane Deroche-Gurgel; Ed. DIFEL, Rio de Janeiro, 2002.

ZUIN, A. A. S.; OLIVEIRA, B. R. **Adorno: o poder educativo do pensamento crítico**. 3ª Edição, Editora Vozes, Petrópolis, 2001.

<sup>i</sup> **Diego de Oliveira da Cunha**, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0738-046X>

Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro - UFRRJ

Doutor e Mestre em Administração (Unigranrio), Especialista em Informática na Educação (IFMA), Tecnólogo em Processos Gerenciais (UCB) e bacharel em Administração (Unifatecie). Professor do IFRJ e UFRRJ.

Authorship contribution: data analysis, writing, reviewing and supervising the text.

Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/1879513446052971>

E-mail: [diegooliveirac@ufrj.br](mailto:diegooliveirac@ufrj.br)

<sup>ii</sup> **Ely Severiano Júnior**, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5930-8251>

Instituto Federal do Rio de Janeiro – IFRJ

Doutorando e Mestre em Administração (Unigranrio/Afya), Especialização em Gestão e Governança de TI (Senac/SP) e graduado em Sistema de Informação pela Faculdade de Educação Tecnológica do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (FAETERJ). Professor do IFRJ.

Authorship contribution: data analysis, writing, reviewing and supervising the text..

Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/8079002574341271>.

E-mail: [ely.severiano@ifrj.edu.br](mailto:ely.severiano@ifrj.edu.br)

<sup>iii</sup> **Davi José de Souza da Silva**, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7625-191X>

Universidade do Grande Rio, UNIGRANRIO | Afya

Doutorado em Filosofia (UFSC), Mestre em Direito (UFPA) e bacharel em Direito (Unama). Pró-Reitor de Pós-graduação e Pesquisa e Professor do PPGA da Universidade do Grande Rio - UNIGRANRIO

Authorship contribution: revision and supervision of the text.

Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/5114374665706148>.

E-mail: [davi.silva@unigranrio.com.br](mailto:davi.silva@unigranrio.com.br)

**Responsible publisher:** Genifer Andrade

---

**Ad hoc expert:** Cláudia Maria Ribeiro, Paulo Jorge Morais Alexandre e Ana Elisa Spaolonzi Queiroz Assis

26

**How to cite this article (ABNT):**

CUNHA, Diego de Oliveira da.; SEVERIANO JÚNIOR, Ely.; SILVA, Davi José de Souza da. O uso da Arte na indústria cultural à luz de Adorno. **Rev. Pemo**, Fortaleza, v. 6, e13074, 2024. Available at: <https://revistas.uece.br/index.php/revpemo/article/view/13074>

Received on May 9, 2024.

Accepted on June 4, 2024.

Published on September, 2024.