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Bourdieu and Adorno
on the Transformation of Culture in Modern Society:
Towards a Critical Theory of Cultural Production

Simon Susen

Introduction

This chapter examines the transformation of culture in modern society by drawing upon the works of Pierre Bourdieu and Theodor W. Adorno. Far from intending to embrace the entire complexity of Bourdieusian and Adornian thought, the analysis focuses on some key dimensions that are particularly relevant to understanding the relationship between modern culture and modern society. This study seeks to show that comprehending the transformation of culture in the modern world requires taking into account the transformation of society as a whole. In order to demonstrate this, the chapter is structured as follows.

The first section briefly elucidates *the concept of culture*. Given the central importance of the concept of culture for the analysis of this chapter, it seems sensible to clarify its different meanings. If the concept of culture can be used and defined in several ways, it is necessary to specify with which of its various meanings the present study is mainly concerned.

The second section centres upon *Bourdieu's analysis of culture*. More specifically, the Bourdieusian approach to culture allows us to understand the transformation of culture in modern society in terms of three significant tendencies: (i) the differentiation of culture, (ii) the commodification of culture, and (iii) the classification of culture. Taken together, these three social processes are indicative of the complexification of culture in the modern world, which manifests itself in the emergence of an increasingly powerful 'cultural economy'.

The third section gives an overview of some of the key elements of *Adorno's analysis of culture*. Similarly to the methodology of the previous

section, the Adornian approach to culture is scrutinised by differentiating three tendencies that are symptomatic of the transformation of culture in modern society: (i) the heteronomisation of culture, (ii) the commodification of culture, and (iii) the standardisation of culture. In essence, these three social developments are due to the colonisation of culture by industrial capitalism, leading to the rise of the ‘culture industry’.

The fourth section offers a brief *comparison* between the Bourdieusian and the Adornian accounts of the transformation of culture in modern society. Instead of opposing Bourdieusian and Adornian strains of thought to one another, this section suggests that the similarities between the two approaches permit us not only to compare them, but also to integrate them and thereby to enrich our understanding of the transformation of culture in modern society.

I. Preliminary Reflections on Culture

The concept of culture is far from unambiguous, for it can be used and defined in different ways. Despite the variety of its meanings, we can distinguish three main conceptions of culture: culture as a *sociological* category, culture as a *philosophical* category, and culture as an *aesthetic* category.

First, as a sociological category, the concept of culture refers to a specific *form of life* produced and reproduced by a given group of people. From this perspective, ‘culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour’ (Williams, 1994: 48). In this sense, culture can be regarded as a sociological, and indeed an anthropological, category which describes a particular – that is, a spatiotemporally specific – way in which a given form of human coexistence is organised.¹

Second, as a philosophical category, the concept of culture can be conceived of as a human *ideal*, that is, as a distinctively human quality to which all mature subjects should aspire. According to this conception, the formation of humanity depends on the creation of culture. Thus, the notion of culture describes ‘a state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute or universal values’ (Williams, 1994: 48). This view is situated in the German tradition of idealist thought, which suggests that culture can be identified with the realm of ‘the mind’ or ‘the spirit’. From this perspective, the existence of the transcendental realm of culture manifests itself in the existence of the material realm of society: ‘the cultural spirit’ of humankind is embodied in the consolidation of ever

more sophisticated social institutions, constituting evolutionary expressions of the transcendental quality of culture. In this sense, culture can be seen as a philosophical category which captures the species-constitutive properties of human civilisation. In other words, the project of society is driven by the anthropological quest for the development of humanity through the creation of culture: the *Bildung der Gesellschaft* (the formation of society) depends on the *Bildung der Menschen* (the education of the people).²

Third, as an aesthetic category, the concept of culture denotes a distinctively human expression of *artistic creativity*. Hence, 'culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which, in a detailed way, human thought and experience are variously recorded' (Williams, 1994: 48). From this point of view, culture constitutes a vehicle for creativity and imagination, capable of challenging and developing both the rational and the emotional potentials of human existence. Human subjects are capable of elevating themselves above their own existence through the existence of culture: it is by virtue of culture that the distinctively human exercise of artistic transcendence can be realised. In this sense, culture can be considered as an aesthetic category which refers to the human capacity to attribute meaning to the world through the expressive power of artistic production.

It is this third – that is, the aesthetic – perspective that is particularly important for the analysis of culture developed in the present chapter. This does not mean that the sociological and philosophical approaches to culture are irrelevant or that they can be ignored. On the contrary, all three interpretations have to be taken into account: the sociological, philosophical, and aesthetic meanings of culture are closely interrelated and should not be regarded as mutually exclusive. Every human form of life is permeated by ideals and allows for artistic creativity; human ideals are influenced by particular forms of life and can be articulated through artistic creativity; and artistic creativity is situated in specific forms of life and often inspired by human ideals. In short, the *sociological*, *philosophical*, and *aesthetic* potentials of culture are symptomatic of the *normative*, *purposive*, and *creative* nature of human life.

Whatever theoretical approach to culture one may wish to defend, the transformation of culture in the modern world cannot be fully understood without accounting for the transformation of society in modern history: the rise of mass culture is inextricably linked to the emergence of bourgeois society. To suggest that cultural criticism is necessarily a form of social criticism is to recognise that culture is embedded in society. As remains to be shown, Bourdieu and Adorno articulate two diverging but complementary accounts of the relationship between culture and society. In the following sections, the transformation of culture in modern society shall be explored by looking at the theoretical approaches developed by these two thinkers.

II. Bourdieusian Reflections on Culture: The Cultural Economy

Bourdieu's sociological theory can also be regarded as a cultural theory in that it presupposes that the comprehensive study of society must be committed to the critical examination of culture.³ Put differently, there is no general theory of society without a general theory of culture. In order to understand the transformation of culture in the modern world from a Bourdieusian perspective, we need to examine three social processes: (i) the *differentiation* of culture, (ii) the *commodification* of culture, and (iii) the *classification* of culture.

i) *The Differentiation of Culture*

Inasmuch as Bourdieu's general sociology of society is a general theory of the economics of material practice, 'his general sociology of culture is a general theory of the economics of symbolic practice' (Lash, 1993: 193). A critical sociology of human practices must strive to understand both the economy of material practices *and* the economy of symbolic practices, for the former and the latter are intimately interrelated. If we acknowledge that cultural relations are necessarily embedded in material relations just as material relations are unavoidably situated in cultural relations, then we also need to recognise that every society produces its own cultural economy.

The power of *social stratification* depends on society's capacity to reproduce itself through an economy of *cultural differentiation*. The reproduction of class relations cannot be dissociated from the reproduction of cultural relations: in order to comprehend how social hierarchies are consolidated and sustained we need to account for the ways in which they are symbolically mediated and legitimated. To be more precise, economic and cultural relations are both interdependent and interpenetrative power relations: as *interdependent* power relations, they function in relation to one another to ensure their efficiency; as *interpenetrative* power relations, they colonise one another to guarantee their ubiquity.⁴ This is not to suggest that class relations can be derived from, or even reduced to, cultural relations; rather, this is to accept that the material power of class relations is inconceivable without the symbolic power of cultural relations.

The rise of capitalism led to the 'autonomization of intellectual and artistic production' (Bourdieu, 1993 [1971/1985]: 112). For one consequence of capitalist modernisation is the emergence of relatively independent fields of cultural production. The modern world is characterised by the appearance of two main cultural fields: 'the *field of restricted production*' and 'the *field of large-scale*

cultural production' (ibid.: 115, italics in original). Both constitute social arenas which are aimed at the production of cultural goods. Yet, whereas the cultural creations of the former are 'objectively destined for a public of producers of cultural goods' (ibid.), the cultural creations of the latter are 'destined for non-producers of cultural goods, "the public at large"' (ibid.).

Hence, the transformation of the cultural sphere in modern society manifests itself in the *binary differentiation* between the 'restricted production' and the 'large-scale production' of cultural goods. The more the former succeeds in separating itself from the latter, the more profound 'the dialectic of cultural distinction' (ibid.) turns out to be. To the extent that the restricted fields of cultural production can claim relative autonomy from the universally accessible fields of cultural production, the heterodoxy and idiosyncrasy of the former must be distinguished from the orthodoxy and conventionality of the latter. In this sense, the autonomisation of the cultural sphere in the modern world constitutes a particular characteristic of 'the field of restricted production', since it is capable of functioning independently of the imperatives that govern the mass-oriented nature of 'large-scale production'. A relatively autonomous field is a relationally constructed social realm able to assert its existence by virtue of its own logic of functioning. Therefore, 'the autonomy of a field of restricted production can be measured by its power to define its own criteria for the production and evaluation of its products' (ibid.). Autonomous culture can only be created by its own creators, judged by its own judges, and appreciated by its own appreciators.

The autonomy of every field is based on its capacity to create and maintain its own codes of legitimacy, through which it distinguishes itself from the imperatives that govern the logic of other fields of social reality. 'Thus, the more cultural producers form a closed field of competition for cultural legitimacy, the more the internal demarcations appear irreducible to any external factors of economic, political or social differentiation' (ibid.). It is the gradual liberation from the constraints of economic reproduction which allows the cultural field to generate conditions of social refraction.

If the 'degree of autonomy of a field has as a main indicator its power of refraction, of retranslation' (Bourdieu, 1997a: 16)⁵, the degree of heteronomy of a field has as a main indicator its power of assimilation, of absorption. The relative autonomy of the field of restricted cultural production is inconceivable without the relative heteronomy of the field of large-scale cultural production. Contrary to the former, the latter 'principally obeys the imperatives of competition for conquest of the market' (Bourdieu, 1993 [1971/1985]: 125). Thus, it is not only largely dependent upon the logic of the market, but it is in fact driven by it. The autonomisation of cultural production in the privileged sphere of the *société distinguée* goes hand in hand with the heteronomisation of

cultural production in the popularised sphere of the *société massifiée*. Whereas the former is granted the power to bypass the imperatives of the market, the latter is largely governed by them. The conquest of artistic autonomy can challenge the ubiquity of economic instrumentality; the surrender to artistic heteronomy confirms the absorbability of culture by economic functionality.

To be sure, all cultural fields – that is, both the field of restricted cultural production and the field of large-scale cultural production – are *irreducible* to other social fields (see Susen, 2007: 289). Even the ubiquitous power of the economic field cannot eliminate the potentiality of culture towards autonomous reproduction. It would be naïve to assume that the fields of artistic production are completely independent from the economic organisation of society, but it would also be misleading to suggest that the fields of artistic production depend entirely on the economic constitution of society. By definition, the relation between fields of artistic production and fields of economic production is characterised by both relative autonomy and relative heteronomy: the former are relatively *autonomous* insofar as they can never be totally determined by the latter; at the same time, the former are relatively *heteronomous* insofar as they cannot exist independently of the latter. Nevertheless, whereas the field of large-scale cultural production depends directly on the imperatives of the market, the field of restricted cultural production derives its relative autonomy from its capacity to circumvent the logic of economic functioning that prevails in modern capitalist societies. The autonomisation of culture, then, is both a reality and a potentiality: as a reality, it is *always already* existent, challenging the hegemonic universality of large-scale cultural production; as a potentiality, it is *always still* to be realised, affirming the self-sufficient particularity of restricted cultural production.

The binary differentiation of culture is symptomatic of the historical shift from traditional to modern society. In traditional societies, artistic production is largely controlled and regulated ‘by a small number of very powerful legitimising forces or agents’ (Jenkins, 1992: 135). In advanced capitalist societies, by contrast, artistic production is increasingly divided between the realm of large-scale cultural production, which is driven by the imperatives of the economy, and the realm of small-scale cultural production, which is shaped by the quest for symbolic autonomy.

ii) *The Commodification of Culture*

Cultural production under capitalism leads to the creation of *symbolic goods*, a term standing for ‘a two-faced reality, a commodity and a symbolic object’ (Bourdieu, 1993 [1971/1985]: 113). Symbolic goods can be described as the ambivalent carriers of both cultural and economic values that are only

relatively independent from each other, since the cultural sanction may come to reinforce their economic consecration, just as ‘the economic sanction may come to reinforce their cultural consecration’ (ibid.). The potential autonomy of these goods is reflected in their symbolic nature; their potential heteronomy, on the other hand, manifests itself in their commodity character. In other words, under capitalism the cultural *use value* of symbolic goods is gradually colonised by their economic *exchange value*. The commodification of culture represents a central feature of late capitalist society, illustrating the ineluctable entanglement of use value and exchange value which permeates every market-driven ‘economy of cultural goods’ (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]: 1).

The economy of cultural goods can be regarded as an integral component of late capitalist reproduction. Inasmuch as commodities are increasingly culturalised, culture is increasingly commodified in late capitalism. The ambivalence of symbolic goods consists in the simultaneous articulation of their *autonomy*, rooted in the power of cultural creativity, and of their *heteronomy*, regulated by the logic of economic functionality. As symbolic objects, they reaffirm the undeniable strength of cultural forces; as material objects, they illustrate the inescapable presence of economic forces. To the extent that symbolic objects cannot break away from the parameters of the material world, economic objects cannot escape from the parameters of the cultural world. In capitalist society, symbolic goods are unavoidably absorbed by the imperatives of market forces. The particularity of symbolic goods stems from their cultural idiosyncrasy, just as the universality of symbolic goods derives from their systemic commodifiability.

Both the production and the consumption of culture require that subjects are equipped with a subjectively internalised system of collectively constructed schemes of perception, appreciation, and action: the *habitus*.⁶ To be more precise, the habitus constitutes ‘an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted’ (Bourdieu, 1977 [1972]: 95). Hence, the habitus forms a dynamic conglomerate of generative classificatory structures subjectively internalised and intersubjectively developed: the habitus exists inside subjects’ subjectivities, but it ‘only exists in, through and because of the practices of actors and their interaction with each other and with the rest of their environment’ (Jenkins, 1992: 75). As a *sens pratique* – literally, a ‘practical sense’ (see Bourdieu, 1976 and 1980) – the habitus represents ‘a structured and structuring structure’⁷ by virtue of which actors shape their environment whilst at the same time being shaped by it. To the extent that society is driven by the functional imperatives of the cultural economy, human agency is permeated by the power of symbolic determinacy. A market of symbolic goods cannot be divorced from a market of symbolic capacities; a market of cultural fields cannot dispense with a market of a cultural habitus.

To be sure, the *commodification* of culture is not limited to the *creation* but extends to the *consumption* of culture. For not only the *production* but also the *perception* and *reception* of culture become increasingly commodified in capitalist societies. The power of culture is only conceivable as ‘symbolic power’ (Bourdieu, 1992 [1977])⁸, that is, as a form of power which determines how we make sense, or how we fail to make sense, of reality by virtue of cultural codes. The more commodified the symbolic world in capitalist societies, the more our capacity to participate in the cultural world becomes subject to the force of exchange value. The more the market succeeds in imposing itself as the ultimate source of social legitimacy, the more it manages to transform our habitus into a subjective appendage of systemic commodifiability.

The commodification of culture reinforces ‘the affirmation of the primacy of form over function, of the mode of representation over the object of representation, [...] of the saying over the thing said’ (Bourdieu, 1993 [1971/1985]: 117), of the signifiers over the signified, in short, of appearance over substance. Cultural struggles are always struggles over the parameters of social legitimacy. In advanced industrial societies, a commodified culture is quasi-naturally legitimated by the systemic hegemony of the capitalist mode of production. The degree of commodification of culture indicates the degree of colonisation of society by the market. In order for a cultural product to succeed in a market-driven society, it needs to prioritise its external form and representational transcendence over its internal content and social immanence. A cultural commodity draws its symbolic power not from its material substance but from its social significance. When we buy into the symbolic power of cultural commodities we are subject to both the powerful nature of the symbolic and the symbolic nature of power: we seek to acquire the value the commodity *represents*, and we aim to obtain the authority the commodity *contains*. To feel both represented and empowered by a cultural commodity means to identify with and subscribe to it. The commodifiability of culture confirms the ubiquity of the market.

iii) *The Classification of Culture*

‘If modernization entails the differentiation of an autonomous aesthetic field, then the appreciation of (modern) art that this brings about entails the inculcation of a “differentiated” habitus’ (Lash, 1993: 197). The complexification of cultural fields manifests itself in the emergence of increasingly differentiated forms of cultural habitus. In order for a relatively autonomous aesthetic field to be created and appreciated by the ‘distinguished’ parts of society, its members need to develop and share a ‘distinguished’ form of collective habitus, allowing them to articulate their

cultural idiosyncrasy by virtue of their codified legitimacy. The legitimacy of every social field depends on the legitimacy of its actors. Without necessarily being aware of their field-specific determinacy, human actors have a tendency to reproduce the legitimacy of the specific social fields in which they find themselves immersed.

In order to convert themselves into effective carriers of legitimacy, social actors need to be capable of translating the schemes of classification and distinction which are imposed upon them *by* the world into parameters of differentiation and stratification which are projected by them *upon* the world. There are no reliable forms of social reproduction without effective patterns of social identification: identifying with particular codes of legitimacy, we situate ourselves in the world as reproductive participants of society. Powerful forms of legitimation require efficient types of classification. Hence, to the extent that the social world is divided by different fields with multiple codes of legitimacy, social actors are divided by different forms of habitus with various types of capital. In order to participate in a cultural field, we need to acquire cultural capital. In order to play a part in the economic field, we need to attain economic capital. In order to be involved in society, we need to dispose of social capital. Our habitus is composed of different forms of capital, which enable us to position ourselves in different fields of society. In short, *a legitimately situated actor is a legitimately classified and classifying actor.*

The struggle for and against classification is dialectical in that 'economic *and* cultural capital are both the objects *and* the weapons of a competitive struggle between classes' (Jenkins, 1992: 142, italics in original). The functionalisation of cultural capital by economic capital and the functionalisation of economic capital by cultural capital constitute two complementary social processes which lie at the heart of the cultural economy. Inasmuch as the differentiation of economic capital contributes to the reproduction of social stratification, the differentiation of cultural capital reinforces the classificatory power of symbolic domination.

The economic and cultural reproduction strategies of society stem from a 'competitive struggle' (ibid.) over power and resources, that is, from a struggle which defines the separation between the dominated and the dominant classes. This '[c]ompetitive struggle is the form of class struggle which the dominated classes allow to be imposed on them when they accept the stakes offered by the dominant classes. It is an integrative struggle and, by virtue of the initial handicaps, a reproductive struggle, since those who enter this chase, in which they are beaten before they start [...], implicitly recognize the legitimacy of the goals pursued by those whom they pursue, by the mere fact of taking part' (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]: 165). Hence, class struggle is a struggle over the legitimacy of a given form of social reproduction.

‘Productive interests in the artistic field [...] find “homologies” with class interests in the social field’ (Lash, 1993: 197)⁹. Essentially, cultural classification systems reflect the socio-economic division of the class system (cf. Fowler, 1997: 48–49). The division of labour manifests itself in the division of culture: economic forms of social segregation go hand in hand with cultural forms of social classification. The instrumentalisation of culture as both a target and a vehicle of legitimacy is due to the fact that ‘art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences’ (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]: 7). Since cultural forms do not constitute invariant and natural categories, they can be efficiently integrated into the social construction of structural differences between human subjects. In other words, inasmuch as cultural forms are socially constructed, their contingency can be efficiently functionalised by the contingency of the class system of a given society. The spatiotemporally determined contingency of social domination is symptomatic of the relative arbitrariness of social classification.

The consumption of culture depends on subjects’ capacity to absorb and interpret culture. Yet, our capacity to make sense of the cultural world reflects a socially acquired, rather than naturally given, competence: our perception *of* the world is shaped by our social engagement *with* the world. Just as the internalisation of our external world cannot be separated from the externalisation of our inner world, the externalisation of our inner world cannot be divorced from the internalisation of our external world.

Our perceptive faculty (*Wahrnehmungsvermögen*) is both a capacity (*Vermögen* in the sense of *Fähigkeit*) and a property (*Vermögen* in the sense of *Besitz*): as a capacity, it ensures *that* we are able to absorb and interpret the world; as a property, it determines *how* we absorb and interpret the world. Put differently, our perceptive faculty is based both on our ability to comprehend the world and on our mastery of the field-specific tools that determine the ways in which we comprehend the world. Thus, the consumption of culture through our perceptive apparatus is never a neutral but always an interested act, that is, it constitutes a social performance that is permeated by relationally determined schemes of legitimacy.

Authoritative ‘talents of perception’ emanate from powerful ‘programmes for perception’ (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]: 2). Culture and art can be systematically transformed into instruments of social distinction (cf. Robbins, 1991: 121). Even the seemingly most personal taste and even the ostensibly most individual form of aesthetic judgement contain implicit references to socially pre-established patterns of appreciation and perception. The perceived is never simply ‘out there’ but it is always also ‘in here’: that is, *in* the eye of the perceiver. By definition, every perception of reality is composed of both a perceived

object and a perceiving subject. The perceived object allows for the fact *that* something is to be perceived; the perceiving subject determines *how* it is to be perceived. Certainly, perception is not a solitary affair. Even the most personal perceptions are shaped by collectively constructed patterns of classification assimilated by socialised individuals. The perceiver exists never simply 'in himself' or 'in herself', but always 'in relation to other selves'. Legitimacy is a product not of individual determinacy but of social acceptability. We become who we are in relation to what surrounds us. Our perception *of* the world is not absolved from our determination *by* the world. Only if the act of perception is understood in terms of its social and historical contingency can we succeed in comprehending the nature of culture in terms of its collective determinacy.

Patterns of consumption need to create corresponding patterns of perception in order to generate successful patterns of legitimation. The omnipresence of socially constructed codes of legitimacy, which induce us to make sense of the world in accordance with pre-established modes of appreciation, destroys any illusions about the possibility of a 'natural empathy' between the perceiver and the perceived, of a 'disinterested relationship' between the consumer and the consumed, or of a 'horizontal exchange' between subject and object. Our capacity to consume culture is always dependent on our ability to be consumed by it. There is no cultural empathy without social legitimacy. The empathy *with* a cultural object is inconceivable without the sympathy *of* a cultural subject, for the legitimacy of cultural objects depends on their acceptability by cultural subjects.

Every act of consumption presupposes an act of acceptance; every act of cultural integration is accompanied by an act of cultural classification. In order to consume, we need to be able to classify. As consumers, we classify what we like and what we dislike, what we appreciate and what we deprecate, what we accept and what we reject. 'Consumption is [...] a stage in a process of communication, that is, an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code' (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]: 2). All cultural struggles constitute classificatory struggles over historically contingent forms of perception. Put differently, all cultural struggles are concerned with both the construction and the destruction of legitimate and illegitimate forms of classification.

As shown above, the *differentiation*, *commodification*, and *classification* of culture constitute pivotal features of the transformation of culture in modern society. They represent overlapping and complementary processes which illustrate that the structural conditions of the production and consumption of culture have been profoundly transformed under late capitalism. (i) The *differentiation* of culture implies the gradual separation between the field of restricted cultural production and the field of large-scale cultural production: 'culture as a source

of human *creation*' competes with 'culture as a source of social *distinction*'. (ii) The *commodification* of culture has created a situation in which the use value of symbolic goods is colonised by their economic exchange value: 'culture for the sake of the *created*' is confiscated by 'culture for the sake of the *market*'. (iii) The *classification* of culture is based on the imposition of different codes of legitimacy which reveal the historical contingency of different schemes of appreciation and perception: 'culture motivated by individual *creativity*' exists in relation to 'culture programmed by collective *legitimacy*'. Hence, in modern society cultural struggles are struggles over the differentiation, commodification, and classification of culture.

III. Adornian Reflections on Culture: The Culture Industry

Adorno's analysis of culture is highly complex and, as stated in the introduction, this chapter does not intend to offer an exhaustive account of the Adornian approach. Rather, it centres on three social processes which, from an Adornian perspective, are indicative of the changing nature of culture under late capitalism: (i) the *heteronomisation* of culture, (ii) the *commodification* of culture, and (iii) the *standardisation* of culture.

i) The Heteronomisation of Culture

The term 'mass culture' should not be conceived of as synonymous with the term 'culture industry'. The former may evoke positive connotations, depicting 'the mass' or 'the people' as legitimate creators and responsible carriers of an autonomous culture. The latter, on the other hand, brings to mind negative connotations, portraying 'the mass' or 'the people' as manipulated buyers and alienated reproducers of a heteronomous culture. Mass culture – if it is not imposed 'from above' but emerges 'from below' – has at least the potential of producing autonomous individuals able to construct their lives as creative subjects. The culture industry, by contrast, is based on the necessity of producing heteronomous individuals condemned to degenerate into instrumentalised objects. In short, whereas mass culture is not necessarily antithetical to the empowerment of subjects, the culture industry is only possible through their disempowerment.¹⁰

One of the great paradoxes of modern society consists in the fact that 'culture is taken over by the very powers it had criticized. Consumer culture is the degradation of culture' (Bernstein, 1991: 15). In other words, the

term 'culture industry' contains a dialectical irony: on the one hand, the notion of 'culture' can, in principle, be associated with human autonomy, social emancipation, and improvisational creativity; on the other hand, the notion of 'industry' cannot be dissociated from human heteronomy, social domination, and instrumental rationality. The culture industry robs culture of its ontological foundation, namely its *raison d'être sans raison d'être*. For, under capitalism, 'culture has come to function as a mode of ideological domination, rather than humanization or emancipation' (Kellner, 1989: 131). The emergence of the culture industry has led to the gradual abolition of radical criticism, since it is precisely radical criticism which could jeopardise its existence. From an Adornian perspective, however, culture needs criticism as an integral component of its very existence, since culture 'is only true when implicitly critical' (Adorno, 1967 [1955]: 22).

The culture industry is the epitome of non-criticality, for its existence depends on the uncritical reproduction of its own imperatives. 'The power of the culture industry's ideology is such that conformity has replaced consciousness' (Adorno, 1991 [1975]: 90). Society's conflicts are allowed to be solved in appearance, in a world of surface only, since the solution of people's substantial problems in their real lives would inevitably imply the dissolution of the culture industry as such. It is precisely because the culture industry manages to *appear* to have the capacity to solve people's real problems that its social reproduction can be guaranteed. The domination of the dominated through the culture industry is nourished by the illusion that the dominated are the dominators of their own fate. As long as the ideological substance of this creed can be sustained, the material substance of the culture industry will hardly be dissolved. People's structural heteronomy, imposed by late capitalist society, is maintained through the belief in individual autonomy, allegedly granted by the culture industry. In the culture industry, appearance is everything whereas substance is nothing, just as heteronomy is everything whilst autonomy is nothing. As long as the appearance of autonomy is controlled by the essence of heteronomy, the culture industry does not have to fear the dissolution of its own solutions.

According to Adornian parameters, the only true social function of art is its functionlessness: 'the necessity of art [...] is its nonnecessity' (Adorno, 1997 [1970]: 251). Since art is precisely defined by its capacity to transcend from the mundane materiality of social life, it is the very quality of standing above the functionality of reality which characterises the functionlessness of art. To go beyond reality through art, however, does not mean to escape from reality. The illusory escape from reality forms part of the false promises of the culture industry. In the culture industry, art is not 'functionless' (*funktionslos*) but 'functionfull' (*funktionsvoll*), since its existence is degraded to the functional

reproduction of the social system in place. Conversely, the functionlessness of truly autonomous art is rooted in its structural independence from the systemic reproduction of society based on the liquidation of autonomy. This is not to assert that art can be deployed and interpreted independently of the material conditions of society, as an idealistic perspective may suggest. Rather, this is to acknowledge that truly free and emancipated art is only a viable possibility if it is not completely absorbed and colonised by the material conditions of society. The potential social functionlessness of art consists in its capacity to transcend the mundane reality of material life while at the same time standing within this reality. It is the transcendent immanence and immanent transcendence of art which enable art to autonomise itself through its very functionlessness from the heteronomy of the functionality of social reality. Removed from the functionality imposed by society, art stands in the centre of its own reality.

‘If art were to free itself from the once perceived illusion of duration, were to internalize its own transience in sympathy with the ephemeral life, it would approximate an idea of truth conceived not as something abstractly enduring but in consciousness of its temporal essence’ (Adorno, 1997 [1970]: 28–29). Heteronomous art believes, and makes one believe, in its ahistorical and detached, or at least detachable, existence. The culture industry reinforces this systemic illusion by detaching itself ideologically from its material attachment to the foundation of capitalist society: class antagonism.

The ‘relative’ autonomy of art is always an autonomy which exists in ‘relation’ to its material existence. Heteronomous art and heteronomous culture, as produced and celebrated by the culture industry, can *pretend* to escape the material determinacy of society; yet, the more art and culture pretend to be autonomous by ideologically detaching themselves from their material determinacy, the more slavish and erroneous they turn out to be. Real artistic transcendence faces up to its own societal immanence. We can only transcend our societal immanence by accepting it, since going beyond the givenness of reality presupposes being situated within it. The preponderance of the object can be challenged but never overcome by the subject. A subject that is critical of its own functions, a *funktionskritisches Subjekt*, is a subject that is critical of its historical situatedness, a *geschichtskritisches Subjekt*. The culture industry is uncritical *both* of its own function as a systemic conglomerate capable of instrumentalising culture *and* of its own history as a systemic missionary capable of maintaining capitalism. The real falseness of the culture industry emanates from its false realness: even the quest for ‘functionlessness’ (*Funktionslosigkeit*) fulfils a function and even the quest for ‘historylessness’ (*Geschichtslosigkeit*) has a history. To the extent that the function of the culture industry needs to be historicised in order to relativise the appearance of its functionlessness, the

history of the culture industry needs to be functionalised in order to uncover the essence of its functionladdenness.

Inasmuch as any 'artwork that supposes it is in possession of its content is plainly naïve in its rationalism' (Adorno, 1997 [1970]: 27), any culture that makes the human subjects believe they are in possession of their identity is caught up in a dangerous game of existential self-sufficiency. The culture industry does not undermine but reinforces the illusion of worldly completeness by virtue of systemic effectiveness: by autonomising the industry and heteronomising culture it invites us to industrialise our autonomy and cultivate our heteronomy. In the universe of the culture industry, *Aufklärung* (enlightenment) asks not for an *Erklärung* (explanation) but for a *Verklärung* (transfiguration) of reality: under the unwritten law of the culture industry, the idea that everything can be sold is sold to us as the order of things. The order of the market is converted into the order of things.

'Art, even as something tolerated in the administered world, embodies what does not allow itself to be managed and what total management suppresses' (Adorno, 1997 [1970]: 234). The structural integration of art into the totally administered world (*die total verwaltete Welt*) destroys any illusions about the innocence of culture: there is no culture beyond society, just as there is no society beyond culture. By definition, culture is situated in society and society is situated in culture. Our – tacit or overt – complicity with the givenness of reality always precedes our – possible but by no means unavoidable – break with the reality of the given.

Even the most subversive work of art cannot escape its immersion in society. Nonetheless, true art always refuses to be the tolerated appendage of the tolerating totality. What suppresses art is what invigorates the culture industry, and what suppresses the culture industry is what invigorates art. The administration of art is just as contradictory as the improvisation of administration: both are ultimately impossible. 'Modern art is questionable not when it goes too far – as the cliché runs – but when it does not go far enough' (Adorno, 1997 [1970]: 34). Administration *is* questionable when it goes too far,¹¹ but it is not questionable when it does not go far enough, when it does not aim at its proper abolition. The questionableness of the culture industry derives from its ontological non-self-questioning. It ought to be the task of art, as a form of critical culture, to challenge the self-ontologisation of the culture industry, a form of uncritical *Unkultur*.

'Neutralization is the social price of aesthetic autonomy. [...] In the administered world neutralization is universal' (Adorno, 1997 [1970]: 228–229). The neutralisation of the culture industry consists in the simultaneous heteronomisation of culture and autonomisation of the industry. The neutralisation is universal, but this universalisation is not neutral: it attacks the

heart of artistic autonomy. ‘The categories of artistic objectivity are unitary with social emancipation when the object, on the basis of its own impulse, liberates itself from social convention and controls’ (Adorno, 1997 [1970]: 231). The only convention of autonomous art is its non-conventionalism; the only control over itself is its non-control; its identity is its non-identity with social reality; its breaking through society is achieved through its breaking free from the chains of reality; in short, its immanence in-itself rests on its transcendence beyond-itself.¹²

ii) *The Commodification of Culture*

‘The principle of idealistic aesthetics – purposefulness without a purpose – reverses the scheme of things to which bourgeois art conforms socially: purposelessness for the purposes declared by the market’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997 [1944/1969]: 158). The heteronomisation of culture is not limited to its administration but intensified by its commodification. The functionlessness of art is functionalised for the functionality of the imperatives of the market. As the purposefulness without a purpose has been transformed into purposelessness for purposes, the artistic character of art and the cultural character of culture have been overridden by the commodity character of society. To acknowledge that art and culture become gradually commodified means to recognise that even the most autonomous spheres of society can be heteronomised by the market. It is not the autonomy of the market that has been heteronomised by culture, but, on the contrary, the autonomy of culture that has been heteronomised by the market. Since the most inner quality of art, autonomy, has been confiscated by the market, the potentialities of culture have been degraded to a state of impotence, of apparent powerlessness. The omnipresence of the market in every single social sphere seems to reveal its omnipotence.

‘Culture is a paradoxical commodity. So completely is it subject to the law of exchange that it is no longer exchanged; it is so blindly consumed in use that it can no longer be used’ (Adorno, 1997 [1944/1969]: 161). In the culture industry, culture is systemically – by capitalism – and systematically – by its administration – transformed into a centralised commodity. The culture industry has made culture lose its integrity and sovereignty, its autonomy and spontaneity. This is why it is the notion of *Kulturindustrie*, not the notion of *Industriekultur*, which characterises the commodification of culture in late capitalism: whereas the former implies that it is the industry, the market, which dominates culture, the latter could misleadingly suggest that it is culture which predominates over the industry, the market. In the concept *Kulturindustrie*, however, *Kultur*, the ‘ideological prefix’ of society,

unambiguously depends on *Industrie*, the ‘material suffix’ of society. For symbolic relations are always embedded in the economic realm of society. Hence, it is not so much culture that penetrates the market, but, on the contrary, the market that penetrates culture.

It is worth pointing out that the notion of *Kulturindustrie* stems from a Marxist interpretation of society: although culture, as part of the ideological superstructure of society, must not be reduced to a mere reflection of the market, as the economic base of society, the former cannot be fully understood without taking into account the latter. Culture should not be conceived of as a completely independent realm existing merely ‘in-itself’, as an idealistic perspective might suggest; nor should it be reduced to an epiphenomenon of an omnipresent material base, as an economic perspective might assume. The conceptual dichotomisation of society does not allow for its ontological binarisation. The holistic concept of *Kulturindustrie* indicates that social reality constitutes a unity of – directly and indirectly – interconnected particularities. In this sense, culture is a social particularity that cannot be divorced from the social whole. To the extent that the relationally constructed conglomerate of society is increasingly commodified by the market, culture – as a *relatively* autonomous social sphere – cannot escape its penetration by the economy. The most autonomous social microcosm can be colonised by the macrocosmic force of the market.

A central problem of art under late capitalism consists in its incapacity to overcome the power of commodity fetishism as long as the predominance of the market is not ideologically challenged and materially undermined. Given its ineluctable situatedness in society, art cannot avoid this contradiction unless the contradiction itself is resolved. It is part of the nature of art to be part of the nature of society. ‘If art cedes its autonomy, it delivers itself over the machinations of the status quo; if art remains strictly for-itself, it nonetheless submits to integration as one harmless domain among others. The social totality appears in this aporia, swallowing whole whatever occurs’ (Adorno, 1997 [1970]: 237). Regardless of whether art is consciously opportunistic or deliberately self-sufficient, it cannot escape its absorption by the market machinery. Even the most anti-integrationist art is only food for the chronic integrationism of the culture industry. All artistic ‘ways out’ end up in ‘ways in’, all artistic circumvention remains trapped in social convention, all artistic solutions can be disarmed by social convulsion, and all artistic euphoria can be converted into social aporia.

The commodity fetishism of late capitalist societies describes ‘a situation in which things only have substance and value insofar as they can be exchanged with something else’ (Jarvis, 1998: 117). It turns society upside down in such a way that the objects created by the human subjects become

subjects that transform the human subjects into objects. The objectification of human relations goes hand in hand with the subjectivisation of economic relations. The gradual disempowerment of society emanates from the increasing empowerment of the economy. 'The source of art's power of resistance is that a realized materialism would at the same time be the abolition of materialism, the abolition of the domination of material interests. In its powerlessness, art anticipates a spirit that would only then step forth. [...] A liberated society would be beyond the irrationality of its *faux frais* and beyond the ends-means-rationality of utility. This is enciphered in art and is the source of art's social explosiveness' (Adorno, 1997 [1970]: 29 and 227).

Materialism cannot be transcended without realising it, nor can it be realised without transcending it. As long as the categorical imperative of society is the market imperative of material interests, art in particular and culture in general will remain unable to slip out of the omnipresent reification of society. A realised capitalism necessarily involves the thingification of society (*Verdinglichung der Gesellschaft*); a realised materialism inevitably requires the socialisation of things (*Vergesellschaftlichung der Dinge*). Art carries the negation of exchange value inside its humanised and humanising subjectivity. Its repudiation of fetishised social relations is a core element of the sociability intrinsic to art. The splendour of the market is the mutilation of art. The splendour of art is the mutilation of the market. To realise materialism means to abolish it.

iii) The Standardisation of Culture

The consolidation of the totally administered world is expressed in the rationalisation, centralisation, and homogenisation of society, that is, in its gradual standardisation. The triumph of standard is the defeat of the individual. The regress of autonomous art is complementary to the progress of industrialised mass culture. The heteronomisation and commodification of culture is perfected through its standardisation. '[W]hile critical philosophy is inadequate without aesthetic experience, this experience needs critical philosophy' (Jay, 1984: 158); while the culture industry is adequate without critical aesthetic experience, this experience does not need the culture industry, for the pervasiveness of aesthetic autonomy is antithetical to the preponderance of social heteronomy. Genuine art, as the epitome of cultural transcendence, needs individuality and spontaneity; the culture industry, as the embodiment of systemic immanence, needs conformity and standard.

'Culture is the condition that excludes the attempt to measure it' (Adorno, 1967: 91).¹³ The only control of art is its non-control. Authentic art cannot be

controlled by any external systemic force; it cannot even be controlled by itself. Controlled art could hardly overcome a state of compulsory improvisation, of monopolised plurality, of standardised individuality.¹⁴ The culture industry is based on the economic necessity to measure culture, since it is its exchange value that is most relevant to the market-driven standardisation of society. The culture industry forces culture to wear the standardised corset of the standardising market. Only by destroying the corset of systemic standardisation, however, can culture become truly free and emancipatory. The standard of the culture industry is norm, its general feature is its generalisability, and its particularity is its universality. The standard of true art is its non-standard, its general feature is its non-generalisability, and its universality is its particularity. The market does not know any limits in imposing its own limits. Art does not know any limits in transcending its own limits.

Art is about the possibility of expressing the disunity of our internal world with the unity of our external world. Art allows us to articulate the non-identity of our subjective world with the identity of our objective world. A creative subject does not necessarily intend to rebel against society, but it seeks to assert its individuality by acting upon and shaping the world. The creative subject will never leave the world as it is, but will always strive to explore what the world could – or even should – be. Our distinctively human capacity to reverse the universe is inextricably linked to our distinctively subjective ability to unify ourselves with ourselves through our disunity with the world. Human beings do not only have a deep-seated need to *create* their own creations; they also have a deep-rooted tendency to *abandon* their own creations. We are at peace with ourselves as long as we know that we can abandon ourselves. We affirm our unity with ourselves most poignantly when we insist upon our disunity with the world. The world is ours only insofar as we are of the world. We are of the world only insofar as we create our own world. We feel at home in the house of being as long as we remain the architects of the house of being. The space of humanity is a place of reconstructability. We are what we become.

Our unity with ourselves depends on our potential disunity with our existence. ‘The question is not whether culture has lost its unity, but whether the possibility of expressing disunity may have been lost’ (Rose, 1978: 116). Standardised culture unifies art to such an extent that art is robbed of its ontological cornerstone, disunity. To unify art with the market means to divide art from art. ‘Illusory universality is the universality of the art of the culture industry, it is the universality of the homogeneous same, an art which even no longer promises happiness but only provides easy amusement as relief from labour’ (Bernstein, 1991: 6). The more standardised this domination, the more dominated culture becomes. Ideology, including standardised culture, is

a business, for '[a]musement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997 [1944/1969]: 137). Culture is transformed into mere entertainment. Entertainment ossifies into boredom, guaranteeing that its perception by the masses does not require excessive creative or intellectual efforts.

Art becomes artificial, as the unadorned Adornian critique reveals: '[m]ass culture is unadorned make-up' (Adorno, 1991 [1981]: 67–68). By virtue of its monopolistic artificiality, it aims at the constant monopolisation of society. As 'consummated conflictlessness' (ibid.: 67), art conceals the basic antagonisms of society. Art itself is translated into a decisive moment of the material reproduction of society. As a consequence, it has lost its capacity to transcend the systemic immanence of social reality, because in the empire of the culture industry it is not culture that has transcended the market but, on the contrary, the market that has transcended culture. Culture appears as the standardised and standardising appendage of the administered world. The forcing-into-line of society (*die Gleichschaltung der Gesellschaft*) leads to the total synchronisation of culture, equalling the factual liquidation of its normative potentiality. Standardisation is pseudo-individualisation, since it allows difference to exist only as long as it fits into the overall picture. The standardisation of culture is realised through the systemic and systematic 'promotion and [...] exploitation of the ego-weakness to which the powerless members of contemporary society, with its concentration of power, are condemned' (Adorno, 1991 [1975]: 91). The subtle totalitarianism of a standardised society degrades culture to a reliable vehicle of standardised domination.

As shown above, the *heteronomisation*, *commodification*, and *standardisation* of culture can be regarded as complex manifestations of the transformation of culture in the modern world. (i) The *heteronomisation* of culture reflects a colonising process which attacks the autonomy of culture: 'culture as a source of *artistic creativity*' is replaced with 'culture as a vehicle of *systemic functionality*'. (ii) The *commodification* of culture constitutes a colonising process which degrades culture to a functionalised appendage of the imperatives of the market: 'culture as an expression of *purposefulness without a purpose*' is converted into 'culture as *purposelessness for the purposes of the market*'. (iii) The *standardisation* of culture stands for a colonising process which subjugates culture to a steering medium of an increasingly synchronised and synchronising society: 'culture as a realm of *transformative individuality*' becomes more and more of a fiction in the face of 'culture as a machine of *reproductive sociality*'. Thus, in the modern world cultural struggles are struggles over the heteronomisation, commodification, and standardisation of culture.

IV. Comparative Reflections on Culture: Between Bourdieu and Adorno

The above analysis has sought to demonstrate that the transformation of culture in the modern world needs to be understood in the context of the transformation of society as a whole. Despite the existence of substantial differences between Bourdieusian and Adornian thought, the two approaches share some fundamental assumptions (cf. Karakayali, 2004). This is not to suggest that the two perspectives can be considered congruent; rather, this is to acknowledge that they possess some striking affinities. It is the purpose of this section to elucidate these points of convergence and thereby to put forward a critical theory of cultural production which sheds light on the relationship between (i) *culture and economy*, (ii) *culture and domination*, (iii) *culture and legitimacy*, (iv) *culture and history*, and (v) *culture and emancipation*.

i) Culture and Economy: The Commodification of Culture

Culture cannot be divorced from the material reality in which it is embedded. One central feature of modern society is the commodification of culture, constituting a powerful social process which is driven by the market economy. Both Bourdieu's concept of *cultural economy* and Adorno's concept of *culture industry* imply that culture becomes gradually commodified in late capitalist societies.

To be sure, both concepts are indicative of a theoretical shift from the classical Marxist insistence on the material nature of reality to the neo-Marxist emphasis on the interpenetration of the material and the cultural realms of society. In advanced capitalist societies, the material economy is intimately entangled with the cultural economy. Metaphorically speaking, base and superstructure do not collapse but they are more and more intertwined, indicating how the material and the cultural dimensions of social life become almost indistinguishably interwoven. Due to its socially contingent and historically variable character, culture fits into the logic of an economic system whose existence depends on the production of socially contingent and historically variable commodities:

By an effect of circular causality, the structural gap between supply and demand contributes to the artists' determination to steep themselves in the search for 'originality' [...], ensuring the incommensurability of the specifically cultural value and economic value of a work. (Bourdieu, 1993 [1971/1985]: 120)

The abstractness of the new is bound up with the commodity character of art [...], artworks distinguish themselves from the ever-same inventory in

obedience to the need for the exploitation of capital. [...] The new is the aesthetic seal of expanded reproduction, with its promise of undiminished plenitude. (Adorno, 1997 [1970]: 21, translation modified)

Given their potential for ‘originality’ and ‘incommensurability’, as well as for ‘distinctiveness’ and ‘newness’, cultural products meet the capitalist need for novelty and exploitability embodied in the commodity. The resourceful contingency of culture can be smoothly absorbed by the purposeful contingency of the market. Artistic creativity is thereby degraded to a cultural commodity. In capitalism, the symbolic value of culture is subdued by the exchange value of the market.

ii) Culture and Domination: The Functionalisation of Culture

Every form of culture can be transformed into a constitutive component of social domination. One pivotal characteristic of modern society is the functionalisation of culture by the established social system. Both Bourdieu’s concept of *competitive struggle* and Adorno’s concept of *social struggle* are based on the assumption that culture and domination are closely interrelated in late capitalist societies.

Again, both notions are symptomatic of a theoretical shift from the classical Marxist concern with class domination and class struggle to the neo-Marxist preoccupation with cultural domination and cultural struggle. Just as different forms of economic domination are entangled with different forms of cultural domination, different forms of class struggle are intertwined with different forms of cultural struggle. There are no efficient modes of material domination without effective modes of symbolic domination. In late capitalism, economic domination is increasingly mediated by, although not replaced with, cultural domination. Base and superstructure are not dissolved, but economic and cultural mechanisms of domination superimpose themselves upon one another; their functional reciprocity reveals their ontological unity. The social functionality of culture matches the systemic elasticity of the capitalist economy:

Competitive struggle is the form of class struggle which the dominated classes allow to be imposed on them when they accept the stakes offered by the dominant classes. It is an integrative struggle and, by virtue of the initial handicaps, a reproductive struggle, since those who enter this chase, in which they are beaten before they start [...], implicitly recognize the legitimacy of the goals pursued by those whom they pursue, by the mere fact of taking part. (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]: 165, already referred to above)

Social struggles and the relations of classes are imprinted in the structure of artworks [...]. (Adorno, 1997 [1970]: 232.) But the secret doctrine [...] is the message of capital. It must be secret because total domination likes to keep itself invisible: 'No shepherd and a herd'. Nonetheless it is directed at everyone. (Adorno, 1991 [1981]: 81)

Domination in late capitalism is mediated by culture. In advanced capitalist societies, culture constitutes both a vehicle *and* a motor of class domination. As a vehicle of class domination, culture is an instrument of power; as a motor of class domination, culture is a source of power. Domination through culture is subtle but total, since it penetrates every single sphere of society far more efficiently and reliably than the most perfected totalitarian political regime ever could. The systemic mechanisms of cultural domination in late capitalism do not abolish the economic division of society; they only conceal this division.

iii) Culture and Legitimacy: The Classification of Culture

The power of every form of culture depends on its degree of legitimacy. One important element of modern society is the classification of culture for the maintenance of social order. Both Bourdieu's concept of *affirmation* and Adorno's concept of *justification* allow us to understand how the legitimacy of culture can contribute to the legitimacy of society:

Any act of cultural production implies an affirmation of its claims to cultural legitimacy [...]. (Bourdieu, 1993 [1971/1985]: 116.) [T]he field of production and diffusion can only be fully understood if one treats it as a field of competition for the monopoly of the legitimate exercise of symbolic violence. (Ibid.: 121.) [A]rt and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences. (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]: 7)

No ideology even needs to be injected [...], art becomes a form of justification [...]. (Adorno, 1991 [1981]: 57.) Mass culture allows precisely this reserve army of outsiders to participate: mass culture is an organized mania for connecting everything with everything else, a totality of public secrets. (Ibid.: 72)

The stability of any social system depends largely on the degree of legitimacy it is able to obtain. The most legitimate legitimacy is a form of legitimacy that is not forced to be legitimated because it is based not only on tacit consent and implicit approval but also on integrative opportunism and doxic complicity. The legitimacy of symbolic violence is nourished by the outsiders' participation

in the cultural legitimisation of their own domination. Classified culture classifies classified people, just as much as classified people classify classified culture. The consecration of culture in modern society is a manifestation of the classificatory division of society as a whole.

iv) Culture and History: The Contextualisation of Culture

Every form of culture is historically situated. One crucial facet of modern society is the resignification of culture according to the imperatives of the market. Both Bourdieu's concept of *reference* and Adorno's concept of *immanence* point towards the fact that the power of culture is always contingent upon the horizon of meaning in which it finds itself historically situated:

Science can attempt to bring representations and instruments of thought [...] back to the social conditions of their production and of their use, in other words, back to the historical structure of the field in which they are engendered and within which they operate. [...] [O]ne is led to historicize these cultural products, all of which claim universality. But historicizing them means not only [...] relativizing them by recalling that they have meaning solely through reference to a determined state of the field of struggle [...]; it also means restoring to them necessity by removing them from indeterminacy (which stems from a false eternalization) in order to bring them back to the social conditions of their genesis, a truly generative definition. (Bourdieu, 1993 [1987]:263–264)

The immanence of society in the artwork is the essential social relation of art, not the immanence of art in society. (Adorno, 1997 [1970]:232)

To contextualise culture means to accept its contingency by facing up to its intrinsic historicity. The constitution of culture in the modern world cannot be understood without taking into account the constitution of society as a whole. The situatedness of culture *within* society destroys any illusions about the possible indeterminacy of culture *beyond* society. The creative transcendence of culture is possible because of, rather than despite, its societal immanence, for what seeks to write its own history needs to face up to its own determinacy.

v) Culture and Emancipation: The Liberation of Culture

Culture contains an emancipatory potential. One significant aspect of modern society is that it challenges us to exploit the emancipatory core of culture in order to abolish the emancipation of exploitation. Both Bourdieu's concept of *open work* and Adorno's concept of *the unspeakable* seem to suggest that the quest

for the autonomy of human culture cannot be separated from the quest for the autonomy of human existence:

The production of an 'open work' [...] [is] the final stage in the conquest of artistic autonomy [...]. To assert the autonomy of production is to give primacy to that of which the artist is master [...]. (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]: 3)

[T]here is no art without individuation, [...] art must be and wants to be utopia, and the more utopia is blocked by the real functional order, the more this is true; [...] only by virtue of the absolute negativity of collapse does art enunciate the unspeakable: utopia. (Adorno, 1997 [1970]: 32.) The categories of artistic objectivity are unitary with social emancipation when the object, on the basis of its own impulse, liberates itself from social convention and controls. (Ibid.: 231)

The individuation of artistic openness is the opening of artistic individuation. Art liberates the subject just as much as the subject liberates art by speaking the unspeakable. The categories of liberating art are uncategorical for the categorical imperative of liberation is the abolition of categories, just as much as the realisation of materialism is the abolition of materialism. The impulse that drives the conquest of artistic autonomy can only be fully realised through the realisation of the quest for human sovereignty, which is always already existent in social objectivity. There is no realised individuation without a realised society, just as there is no realised society without realised individuation. As long as art can go beyond society, society will be able to go beyond itself.

Conclusion

Drawing upon the works of Bourdieu and Adorno, this chapter has explored the transformation of culture in modern society. Rather than seeking to embrace the entire complexity of Bourdieusian and Adornian thought, the chapter has deliberately focused on some key dimensions that are particularly relevant to the critical analysis of the relationship between modern culture and modern society. As demonstrated above, the transformation of culture in the modern world cannot be understood without taking into account the transformation of society as a whole.

The 'cultural economy' constitutes a market of symbolic goods driven by economic and cultural struggles. In essence, it is shaped by three simultaneous social processes: the differentiation, commodification, and classification of culture. (i) The *differentiation* of culture is embedded in a binary separation between the field of restricted cultural production and the field of large-scale

cultural production: in modern society, culture oscillates between its symbolic independence from and its material dependence upon the ubiquitous power of the market economy. (ii) The *commodification* of culture cannot be dissociated from the culturalisation of commodities: inasmuch as culture is increasingly commodified, commodities are increasingly culturalised in modern society. (i) The *classification* of culture is an expression of the stratification of society: cultural struggles are basically struggles ‘about’ social classification ‘through’ representational classification, reflecting the deep material and symbolic divisions of modern society.

The ‘culture industry’ represents both the product and the vehicle of an increasingly synchronised and synchronising society. Its powerful influence upon the constitution of modern society manifests itself in three simultaneous social processes: the heteronomisation, commodification, and standardisation of culture. (i) The *heteronomisation* of culture stems from the subjugation of artistic creativity to systemic functionality: the culture industry feeds the empowerment of the economy and contributes to the disempowerment of humanity by autonomising the industry and heteronomising culture. (ii) The *commodification* of culture is symptomatic of the omnipresent power of the capitalist economy, in which the symbolic value of culture is subdued to the exchange value of the market: the culture industry liquidates the autonomous core of culture by commodifying it. (iii) The *standardisation* of culture illustrates the homogenising power of totally administered societies: to standardise culture means to deculturalise culture; it means to unify the ontological disunity of art; in short, it means to divide culture from culture and art from art. The subtle totalitarianism of late capitalist society is equipped with the unwritten recipe of standardised domination.

Despite the substantial differences between Bourdieusian and Adornian social theory, the two approaches offer complementary, rather than antithetical, perspectives on the transformation of culture in modern society. As shown above, the two accounts converge on five levels, allowing us to make a case for a critical theory of cultural production. (i) Both approaches are concerned with the *relationship between culture and economy* in that they explore the social implications of the *commodification* of culture. The search for originality and novelty, which is essential to the creation of artwork, matches the need for invention and reinvention, which is fundamental to the reproduction of the ‘cultural economy’ and the ‘culture industry’. (ii) Both approaches highlight the *relationship between culture and domination* in that they study the social implications of the systemic *functionalisation* of culture. Social antagonisms seem to disappear behind the make-up of the unadorned adornment of systemic domination. (iii) Both approaches shed light on the *relationship between culture and legitimacy* in that they draw our attention to the social implications of the *classification*

of culture. Cultural authority is one of the most powerful vehicles of social legitimacy. (iv) Both approaches emphasise the *relationship between culture and history* in that they study the social implications of the *contextualisation* of culture. Just as we need to recognise the historicity of society, we need to face up to the contingency of culture. (v) Both approaches insist on the *relationship between culture and emancipation* in that they reflect on the social implications of the possible *liberation* of culture. Emancipatory forms of society cannot dispense with emancipatory forms of culture. To reappropriate society would mean to reappropriate culture.

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Notes

- 1 On the concept of culture as a socio-ontological foundation of the human condition, see, for example, Susen (2007: 287–292).
- 2 The German term *Bildung* has several meanings. In the most general sense, it refers to the ‘formation’ or ‘shaping’ of something. In a more specific sense, it can also signify ‘education’, that is, literally the ‘formation’ or ‘shaping’ of a person.
- 3 See, for example, Bourdieu (1984 [1979]), Bourdieu (1993), Bourdieu and Passeron (1990 [1970]), and Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992a: esp. 87–89). See also Bohman (1999), Fowler (1997), Lash (1993), LiPuma (1993), Swartz (1997), and Wacquant (2002).
- 4 On the polycentric nature of social power, see, for example, Susen (2008a) and Susen (2008b).
- 5 On the autonomy of the field, see also Susen (2007: 176–177).
- 6 See, for example: Bourdieu (1977 [1972]: 83), Bourdieu (1980: 28, 90, and 122), Bourdieu (1982: 16), Bourdieu (1982: 84), Bourdieu (1997: 44, 166, 205, and 222), Bourdieu (1998: 102), Bourdieu (2001: 129), Bourdieu, and Chamboredon and Passeron (1968: 46). See also Susen (2007: 188, 255, 296, and 299).
- 7 On the notion of the habitus as ‘a structured and structuring structure’, see, for example: Bourdieu (1976: 43), Bourdieu (1980: 87–88 and 159), Bourdieu (1997b: 118, 172, and 219), and Bourdieu (2001: 154). In the secondary literature, see, for example: Bonnewitz (1998: 62), Dortier (2002: 5), Jenkins (1992: 141), Knoblauch (2003: 189), Lewandowski (2000: 50), Liénard and Servais (2000 [1979]: 87), Vandenberghe (1999: 48), and Wacquant (2002: 33).
- 8 See also Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992b. In the secondary literature, see, for example, Lash (1993: 196) and Susen (2007: 142–145).
- 9 Cf. LiPuma (1993: 16): ‘[...] an “almost perfect homology” between the structures of culture and those of social organization’.
- 10 See Adorno (1991 [1975]: 85). Adorno writes: ‘In our drafts we spoke of “mass culture”. We replaced that expression with “culture industry” in order to exclude from the outset the interpretation agreeable to its advocates: that it is a matter of something like a

culture that arises spontaneously from the masses themselves, the contemporary form of popular art.' On the concepts of empowerment and disempowerment in contemporary critical theory, see, for example, Susen (2009a: 84–105) and Susen (2009b: 104–105).

- 11 In Adorno's writings, Auschwitz epitomises the dark side of a totally administered world.
- 12 On Adorno's insistence upon the emancipatory nature of art, see, for example, Susen (2007: 107–111).
- 13 Cf. Jay (1984: 118 and 181n.22).
- 14 Adorno's arguments against the artistic legitimacy of Jazz are particularly relevant to his notion of compulsory improvisation. See Jay (1973: 186–187). Cf. Adorno 1991 [1981: 76]. See also Kodat (2003: 114).

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