Kitsch

The Culture Industry

Final Exam
Electronic Arts Theory

Spectacle

The medium

The Simulacrum

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The Cyborg

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Kitsch is art of the masses. It controls the people through art production and it also separates art into low and high art. Kitsch was taken from the German verb meaning, "to make cheap". Kitsch has come to mean vulgar, mass-produced imitations of 'objects of high' art and design. Today, the concept of kitsch is problematic since, as the old adage goes, 'one man's kitsch is another man's culture'. Moreover, there has been a tendency in Post-Modern art and design to use kitsch 'knowingly' in order to parody concepts of good taste.[1]

Clement Greensburg explained that Kitsch is popular, commercial art and literature. Kitsch is also a product of the industrial revolution which urbanized the masses of Western Europe and America. Kitsch, using for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates this insensibility. It is the source of its profits. Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations. Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times. Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money-not even their time.[2]

In the 1930s, for instance, the Yes-and No cast of mind was very difficult to justify. The problems of that decade were problems in regard to which no ambiguous or intermediate position could be held: one was for or against Hitler, for or against Franco, for or against Roosevelt. Whoever hedged on those issues was a scoundrel. The 1930s were also a period during which there

[1] Liz Dawtrey, Toby Jackson, Mary Masterton, Pam Meecham, Paul Wood," Investigating Modern Art",

was a genuine divide between high art and kitsch. The big artist - Braque, Matisse, Bonnard, Klee - was a sainted hermit, rarely seen in forum and quite untainted by what were to be known twenty years later as 'the mass media'. Even the surrealists, though in principle totally subversive, were in fact among the priests of the temple. This is the context in which Clement Greensburg published Avant- and Kitsch. The renewed celebrity of this essay dates from its re-printing in 1961, but it remains a document of the late 1930s - a period at which, as Greenberg says, 'the personal philistinism of Hitler and Stalin was not accidental to the political roles they play' and the abhorrent qualities of the Horst-Wessel song related as much to its part in Nazi mythology as to its purely musical shortcomings. This was the context in which Greenberg spoke of 'that thing to which the Germans give the wonderful name of Kitsch: popular, commercial art and literature with their chromeotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics, Tin Pan Alley musicals, tap dancing, Hollywood movies, etc. etc.'. Kitsch, he said later, is 'vicarious experience and faked sensations … the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times'. He also spoke of the precondition for kitsch; 'the availability close at hand of a fully matured cultural tradition whose discoveries, acquisitions and perfected self-consciousness Kitsch can take advantage of for its own ends'. Between kitsch and high culture the relationship was all take and no give, all looting and debasement and exploitation, with nothing to counterbalance it. The most that could be said in 1939 was that now and then

kitsch produced 'something that had an authentic folk flavor'. The rest was petit-bourgeois pap.[3]

It is difficult to explain the meaning of Culture because its precise meaning may vary from one discipline to the next. In the last century it would have been safe to generalize. Culture was the material expression of a society. However, nowadays culture is not just a reference to material production in itself but to the range meanings generated by all manner of human activities. So, in this point, I discuss about Culture Industry. As technologies have developed, new medium appeared to our culture. Films, radio and magazines are parts of the birth of technology. Some people think that the outgrowth of technology can be parts of art. However, as Max Horkheimer and Theodor .W. Adorno explained in a book " Dialectic of Enlightenment", The truth that they are just business is made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce. They call themselves industries. The culture industry means that those who serve up the data of experience, entertainment industry, which has the most rigid of all styles, or pornographic and prudish.

Automobiles, bombs, and movies has made the technology of the culture industry no more than the achievement of standardization and mass production, sacrificing whatever involved a distinction between the logic of the work and that of the social system. This is the result not of a law of movement in technology as such but of its function in today's economy.[4] Now, our culture is made through the filter of the culture industry which determines its own

[2] Clement Greenberg, "Art and culture", 1939,p.9-10

language by the use of culture industry's filter. Culture Industry is a link technology to mass culture.

The style of the culture industry, which no longer has to test itself against any refractory material, is also the negation of style.[5] The system of the culture industry comes from media culture like movies, radio and magazines. The fusion of culture and entertainment that is taking place today leads not only to a depravation of culture, but inevitably to an intellectualization of amusement. This is evident from the fact that only the copy appears in the movie theater, the photograph; on the radio, the recording. [6]What is new is not that it is a commodity, but that today it deliberately admits it is one; that art renounces its own autonomy and proudly takes its place among consumption goods constitutes the charm of novelty. Art as a separate sphere was always possible only in a bourgeois society. Even as a negation of that social purposiveness which is spreading through the market, its freedom remains essentially bound up with the premise of a commodity economy. Pure works of art which deny the commodity society by the very fact that they obey their own law were always wares all the same.[7]

Spectacle is a phenomenon of our society and culture. It is recycle images like propaganda, commercials, comics and films. Spectacle is also the aspects of everyday of life and the way we think that capitalism is linked to all

[3] John Russell and Suzi Gablik, "Pop Art Redefined", Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, p. 24-25
[4] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W.Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment- 1944, p.121
[5] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W.Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment- 1944, p.129
[6] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W.Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment- 1944, p.143
[7] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W.Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment- 1944, p.157

area of life. Guy Debord wrote about the definition of spectacle in his book "Society of the Spectacle" as following;

The spectacle is general, as the concrete inversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the nonliving. The spectacle presents itself simultaneously as all of society, as part of society, and as instrument of unification. The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images. The spectacle is both the result and the project of the existing mode of production. It is not a supplement to the real world, an additional decoration. It is the heart of the unrealism of the real society. The spectacle's form and content are identically the total justification of the existing system's conditions and goals. The language of the spectacle consists of signs of the ruling production, which at the same time are the ultimate goals of this production. The concept of spectacle unifies and explains a great diversity of apparent phenomena. The spectacle presents itself as something enormously positive, indisputable and inaccessible. In the spectacle, which is the image of the ruling economy, the goal is nothing, development everything. The spectacle aims at nothing other than itself. The spectacle is the main production of present-day society. The spectacle is capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image. What the spectacle offers as eternal is based on change and must change with its base.[8]

Marshall McLuhan was the most talked about intellectual in the art world of the sixties. He even became a cult figure, particularly to Pop artists and to

[8] Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle, 1967, Black&Red, # 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15, 34, 71

those in the circle of his friend, John Cage who was attempting to introduce new technologies into art. McLuhan took the limelight soon after his book Understanding Media was published in 1964. McLuhan proclaimed that a revolution in communications was in progress. This was being brought about by the decline of old technologies and the five centuries since Gutenberg's invention of movable type was typographical-linear. All linearism, said McLuhan, was obsolete. McLuhan's theories were used to justify the new art of the new generation, which had focused its attention on the properties of the various media. McLuhan believed that television was a "cool" as opposed to "hot" medium. A "hot" medium provides a great deal of information to viewers, so that they need not participate; they remain passive observers. In a "cool" medium, such as television, imagery is poorly defined, low information. It has to be filled in by the viewers; their response must be active, or "hot." Like television, sixties art was "cool"; there was talk, as I recall, that this was because the generation of artists who created it had been reared on television. Thus notion of "hot" and "cool" media is problematic. So is McLuhan's basic idea that the medium is the message, or so it seems today, but in the sixties, both conceptions were plausible.[9]

The medium means that a totally new environment has been created in terms of the electronic age and the content of this new environment is the old mechanized environment of the industrial age. The new environment reprocesses the old one as radically as television is reprocessing the film. The

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[9] Irving Sandler, American Art of the 1960s,Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, p.78-79

medium turned nature into an art form. The medium is the message because medium shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action. The effect of the medium is made strong and intense just because it is given another medium as "content". The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance. The serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity, just because he is an expert aware of the changes in sense perception.[10]

Hot medium is low in participation; for example, Radio, Movie, Photograph, we, past mechanical time, and waltz. Cool medium is high in participation or completion by the audience; for example, telephone, television, cartoon, speech, backward countries, television age, and jazz. It makes all the difference whether a hot medium is used in a hot or a cool culture. The hot radio medium used in cool or nonliterate cultures has a violent effect, quite unlike its effect, where radio is felt as entertainment. A cool or low literacy culture cannot accept hot media like movies or radio as entertainment. They are, at least, as radically upsetting for them as the cool TV medium has proved to be for our high literacy world.[11]

Simulacra are less of referencials and fetishism of the copy. Simulacra are not original and it looks like computer space. Simulacra are a generated models of a real without origin or reality. For example, a flower in the garden is reality and origin, but when we move it to a frame, that is simulation that is

[10] Marshall McLuhan, "Understanding Media", 1964, McGraw-Hill Book co.

not real. Usually, mass media generates and use Simulacra in the political events and Olympic, for instance.

Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory- Precession of Simulacra - it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the desert which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own: The desert of the real itself.[12]

Hyperreality and simulation are deterrents of every principle and of every objective; they turn against power this deterrence which is so well utilized for a long time itself. For, finally, it was capital which was the first to feed throughout its history on the destruction of every referential, of every human goal, which shattered every ideal distinction between true and false, good and evil, in order to establish a radical law of equivalence and exchange the iron law of its power. It was the first to proactive deterrence, abstraction, disconnection, deterritorialization, etc.; and if it was capital which fostered reality, the reality principle, it was also the first to liquidate it in the extermination of every use value, of every real equivalence, of production and

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[11] Marshall McLuhan, "Understanding Media", 1964, McGraw-Hill Book co., p.30-31

wealth, in the very sensation we have of the unreality of the stakes and the omnipotence of manipulation. Now, it is this very logic which is today hardened even more against it. And when it wants to fight this catastrophic spiral by secreting one last glimmer of reality, on which to found one last glimmer of power, it only multiplies the signs and accelerates the play of simulation. [13]

Jack Burnham introduced the term "Cyborg Art" into art theory discussions in 1968. He described electromechanical systems with a life like behavior as well as man-machine systems that take on some of the features of biological organisms by means of feedback. In the sixties technology was used to against object-oriented and handicraft art. The artists in the late sixties like Robert Rauschenberg and John Cage, continued the traditions of the Futurists and the Bauhaus artists, they attempts to reunion art and technologies.

Patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism make people have gender, race and class consciousness. The new technologies of communication and biotechnologies help to build a world that all heterogeneity can be submitted to disassembly, reassembly, investment and exchange. In "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," Donna J. Haraway wrote, "High-tech culture challenges these dualism in intriguing ways. It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. It is not clear what is mind and what body in machines that resolve into coding practices. In so far as we know ourselves in both formal discourse (for example, biology) and in daily practice (for example,

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[12] Jean Baudrillard, "Art after Modernism", 1984, p.253

the homework economy in the integrated circuit), we fine ourselves to be cybrogs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras."[14] The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code."[15]

Like the mass media, new technology like computer technology is transforming our life and culture. Many people feared the new technology since it imitated many human functions even more thinking. Moreover, new technology appeared to be hostile to the existence of art. Some artists think that the new technology threatens their feeling of fine art and also think that humanists are dying as technology develops. However, we should agree with the fruits of technology. The coming technological society might have a technological art.

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[13] Jean Baudrillard, "Art after Modernism", 1984, p.268
[14] Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 1984, Simians, Cyborgs, and Women, p.177.
[15] Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 1984, Simians, Cyborgs, and Women, p.163.