1 Popular Culture and Post-Traditional Arts

Debates and Controversies During Adorno's Exile in the USA

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1 Contents and Effects of Art in the New Media

During Theodor W. Adorno's exile, a far-reaching debate took place in the USA on the changes affecting art and culture on account of the new means of communication. Adorno's involvement in the Radio Research Project, directed by Paul Lazarsfeld, is indicative of an interest in the theories developed in Europe; in particular, those concerning the social dimension of artistic production, the role of the media in its reception, and the origins of mass culture.[1] Before their emigration, a significant part of the studies carried out by members of the Institut für Sozialforschung was focused on these issues. Once they had taken up posts in American academic institutions, Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Siegfried Kracauer, Leo Lowenthal and Herbert Marcuse explored these topics, dealing with lines of research that were already established or taking shape in the USA; this applies in particular to the approach of the so-called 'New York intellectuals' and to research on public opinion by sociologists rooted in pragmatism.[2] Exposure to these currents of thought occurred in varying degrees amongst the members of the Institut für Sozialforschung. However, it is not an exaggeration to say that the Frankfurt School's approach to the cultural industry underwent changes. This was not only due to the ability to compare their own ideas with the specific aspects of mass culture in democratic society, but also their absorption of topics developed in those schools of thought, even if it was not always openly declared.

Horkheimer's 'Art and Mass Culture' was the first study published in the USA in which a member of the Frankfurt School discussed the problems and contradictions that culture faced under the influence of the new media (Horkheimer 1941). In this essay, which was available to American intellectuals well before the English translation of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, we find the themes that will go on to animate the post-war discussion. I am referring in particular to the dislocation of interior life in what was no longer the exclusively private sphere of free time, to the escapist function of culture in mass society, and to the break that modern art made with the dominating symbolic system. Unlike idleness in pre-modern societies, leisure is a sphere of socialisation that, in principle, should be removed from the constraints of work;

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nevertheless, as Horkheimer observes, the 'late-capitalist' society subjects it to the same criteria of production and valorisation from which it should be freed. The debate intensified in this period also thanks to the belated reception of Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, in which we find a first formulation of the thesis on the escapist role of culture and an early criticism of consumer society (Veblen 1899).[3]

In a retrospective article, Eliuh Katz and David Foulkers link leisure to the concept of alienation and the ideological function of the mass media: 'People are deprived and alienated, it is suggested, and so they turn to the dreamlike world of the mass media for substitute gratifications, the consequence of which is still further withdrawal from the arena of social and political action' (Katz & Foulkers 1962: 379). Despite this admission, the two authors object to critical theory as not taking into consideration the multiple repercussions of the exposure of individuals to the media, ironing out the analysis on the manipulation of consciousness. Katz, whose doctoral thesis is integrated into the first part of *Personal Influence* (co-authored by Paul Lazarsfeld), approaches the themes developed by Leo Lowenthal in the context of the sociology of literature (Robinson 2006). In a methodological article, which probably adopts themes from the lectures held at Columbia University in 1948, Lowenthal's line of reasoning opens up a new space in Adorno's and Horkheimer's otherwise inflexible critique of the culture industry:

> Take the commonly accepted notion that the main function of mass literature is to provide an outlet for the escapist drives of frustrated people. How do we know that this was ever true or is still true today? Perhaps the functional content of the novel today is much less escapist than informative: literature has become a cheap and easily accessible tool for orientation in a bewildering outside and inside world. The reader is looking for prescriptions for inner manipulation, an abridged and understandable psychoanalytical cure, as it were, which will permit him by way of identification and imitation to grope his way out of his bewilderment. Escape involves an attitude of self-reliance and is much more likely to be found in times of individual stability than in our present period, characterized by ego-weakness needing alien crutches for survival. Whether this hypothesis is justified or not, it might fruitfully be pursued in studying the patterns of identification and imitation offered by mass literature.
>
> (Lowenthal 2016b: 280)

If one follows this reasoning, it must be assumed that two forces are at work in the circuits of popular culture: on the one hand, popular culture acts as a means of promoting 'false consciousness', generating neurotic behaviour and blind submission to the dominant ideology; on the other, it acts as a field of reflection for the desires and expectations of the individual *hic e nunc*, and therefore the scholar should reflect upon 'the question of how mass media can be used as instruments for encouraging the cultural and educational development of broad segments of the population' (Lowenthal 2016d: 59).[4]

In this first phase, centred in New York, a series of exchanges took place, with intellectuals and artists gravitating around *Partisan Review* and *Commentary* (Hohendahl 1992). 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' by Clement Greenberg, which Adorno approvingly quotes in *Philosophy of New Music*, is a paradigmatic work for that heterogeneous current known as 'Western Marxism' which laid the roots for the anti-establishment movements of the 1960s (Greenberg 1939).[5] In a single move, Greenberg rejects socialist realism and the commercialisation of cultural products in capitalist societies, placing the artistic avant-gardes, 'the only living culture we now have' (Greenberg 1939: 101), as the driving force of cultural progress. On a social level, however, Greenberg notes that their relationship with the bourgeois elite, who had supported artistic innovation from its very beginnings, was weakening. In the previous phase of history, the only market for 'formal culture' consisted of those who, in addition to knowing how to read and write, possessed the essential requisites for any type of cultivation: leisure and comfort. Literacy was inseparable from this condition of economic and social ease. Greenberg uses the German term 'kitsch' to define the cultural surrogate devised to satisfy the urban classes, spawned by industrialisation who no longer identify themselves with folk culture. This surrogate, which uses 'the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture' (Greenberg 1939: 102) has taken on the same character as other products of capitalist society: commodity.

The relationship between the Frankfurt philosophers and the New York intellectuals is studded with elements of reciprocity. For example, in an influential article on his investigation of popular music, Irving Howe welcomes the theme of standardisation introduced by Adorno and extends it to film production (Howe 1948). Conversely, the notion of 'Middlebrow', advanced by Dwight Macdonald 1953, includes traces of Adorno's 'Theorie der Halbbildung' ['Theory of Half-Education'] ([1959]1972a).[6] However, amongst the American sociologists, whose writings reveal greater congruence with critical theory, the names of David Riesman and Charles Wright Mills stand out. In 1950, in collaboration with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, Riesman published *The Lonely Crowd*, a book that exerted a notable influence on the sociology of communication and on culture theory (Riesman, Denney & Glazer 1950). His analysis of American society, in particular of its 'outer-directed character', owes much to the social psychology of Erich Fromm, an exponent of the Frankfurt School. Fromm contributed to the dissemination of the methods and contents of critical theory with two books that made the bestseller list for decades: *Escape from Freedom* and *Man for Himself* (McLaughlin 2001). In the early 1940s, Riesman had been a patient of Fromm, and he is mentioned, along with Adorno and Lowenthal, in *The Lonely Crowd* and in several connected essays. In turn, the Frankfurt School paid particular attention to Riesman's work; this is demonstrated by both the scattered references to the above mentioned book in several of Adorno's writings, and by Lowenthal's initiative to dedicate a collection of studies to the most salient issues that he had addressed (Adorno 1954).[7]

The pragmatist terrain on which Riesman develops his theory allows us to focus on phenomena of mass society that remained secluded in the writings of the Frankfurt thinkers: the ways in which the mass media worked, their position in different socio-political contexts, and the formation of communities around symbolic values (Hardt 1992: 31–76). A key role in Riesman's sociology is played by the notion of the 'peer-group', i.e. a set of persons of a comparable age, social class and cultural background. Riesman observes that the mass media 'exert a constant pressure on the accepted peer-groups and suggest new modes of escape from them … autonomy, building on an exploration of a tension between peers and media, must take advantage of both sides of the tension' (Riesman, Denney & Glazer 1950: 291). These ideas form the basis of an article that Riesman dedicated to the reception of popular music (Riesman 1950). Adorno's writings on radio music and the psychoanalytic investigation of cinema by Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites are cited here as examples of 'content analysis' (Wolfenstein & Leites 1950).[8] In his critique of the culture industry, however, Riesman sees the risk of a one-sided and rigid vision that could cause misunderstandings about the ongoing social processes; for this reason, he proposes to integrate 'content analysis' with 'audience analysis'. Empirical research can show, for example, that the audience 'manipulates the product (and hence the producer), no less than the other way around' (Riesman 1950: 409). In an approach akin to that of Howard Becker, though with more ambitious objectives, Riesman turns his attention to the sometimes even numerically small communities that formed around lifestyles and symbolic systems (Becker 1951 and Becker 1953). Jazz listeners are a particularly interesting case, described as 'individualists who reject contemporary majority conformities' (Riesman 1950: 415). The collective component of rebellion underpins certain reactions in the fruition of cultural products conveyed by the media: 'Far more frequent will be the peer-group's opportunity to establish its own standards of criticism of the media. Groups of young hot-jazz fans, for instance, have highly elaborate standards for evaluating popular music, standards of almost pedantic precision' (Riesman, Denney & Glazer 1950: 108). A scale of values can thus be produced within social groups, as a consequence of their members' interactions and their emotional investment in participating in cultural events and processes; this hierarchy can have a distinct autonomy and diverge significantly from prevailing standards.

The concept of content at the basis of 'content analysis' seems to be the polar opposite of effect; however, such a contrast is illusory and can give rise to paradoxical outcomes.[9] First of all, the word 'content' is used in various ways. Bernard Berelson, one of the representatives of the nascent sociology of media, defines it as 'that body of meanings through symbols (verbal, musical, pictorial, plastic, gestural) which makes up the communication itself. In the classic sentence identifying the process of communication – '*who* says *what* to *whom, how*, with *what effect* – communication content is the *what*' (Berelson 1952: 13). He considers analysis as a 'research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication' (Berelson 1952: 138). The adjective 'manifest' reveals its

unsuitability for grasping ambiguous or latent contents; this limitation merely shifts the problem, since symbolic content – as George Gerber points out – can consist of layers, some of which are not immediately perceptible (Gerber 1958).[10] Reflecting on these problems within the framework of the research on the mindset of the citizens of the Soviet bloc, which he carried out from 1951–1952 for the International Public Opinion Research in collaboration with Paul Berkman, Kracauer proposes 'qualitative analysis' as an integrative and corrective method for the 'quantitative' one (Kracauer & Berkman 1956). This technique, which may also apply to content, continues to be based on empirical findings, but does make use of statistical procedures:

> Qualitative analysis by definition differs from quantitative analysis in that it achieves its breakdowns without special regard for frequencies. What counts alone in qualitative analysis … is the selection and rational organization of such categories as condense the substantive meanings of the given text, with a view to testing pertinent assumptions and hypotheses.
>
> (Kracauer 1952–53: 637–638)

Kracauer recalls Rudolf Arnheim's research on soap operas and Lowenthal's study on biographies as examples of qualitative analysis (Arnheim 1944 and Lowenthal 1994). Among the objects of investigation, he does not make a clear distinction between literary texts and the interviewees' statements, making certain passages of his reflection obscure. However, in both spheres, the analysis assumes the character of an exegesis of a text that takes into account ethical and political premises, implicit intentions and the context of phrasing. Thus, the method shows points of contact with literary hermeneutics, but also differs from it by paying particular attention to the channels of the communication process, and the social effects that came about in each historical phase. The intertwining of content analysis and effects analysis emerges intentionally in a study on cinema by Marjorie Fiske, a member of the first group of researchers at Columbia University's Bureau of Applied Social Research, co-written with Leo Handel:

> Content analysis of any medium of communication serves two functions. It may constitute the basis for a sociological study to determine what cultural patterns and stereotypes are reinforced in a given medium or in a given segment of a medium, or it may be used as the first step in an 'effects' study. The first type of content analysis is a major research undertaking itself, and may comprise analyses of settings, plots, characters, symbols, or any other specific attribute of content.
>
> (Fiske & Handel 1946: 130)

The debate on content turns out to be part of a wider discourse concerning the relationship between empirical research and critical theory. This dual path was a much-discussed topic within the Bureau of Applied Social Research;

the director, Paul Lazarsfeld, offers a detailed analysis in an article published in the first American issue of the journal of the Institute for Social Research. The two sectors appear here as 'administrative research' and 'critical research': the former being financed by a public or private body and subordinate to its needs, while the parties involved in the latter independently set out to investigate 'the general role of our media of communication in the present social system' (Lazarsfeld 1941: 9). Lazarsfeld's goal was to promote an integration of the two approaches, which could have consisted in a modification of the theory according to the data collected or, conversely, in focusing the interviews on the problems identified through critical reasoning. A paradoxical situation arose with regard to the activities carried out under his direction: on the one hand, the empirical investigations made by various collaborators – Adorno, Lowenthal, Fiske and Herta Herzog – were effectively guided by the criterion of blending the two approaches, albeit in different degrees and with a different focus; on the other hand, the methodological discussion became ingrained between irreconcilable positions (Lasswell & Leites 1949; Lowenthal 1961; Adorno 2000).[11] Adorno had already expressed his objections in a document for a staff meeting of the Princeton Radio Research Project held in 1938. He suggested that greater weight should be given to individually focused interviews, abandoning the administration of a set of questionnaires aimed at establishing average values; for him the methodological flaw in the statistical procedure consisted in assuming that the individual is autonomous and not a product of the social powers, which should represent the final goal of the research. Here, Adorno also mentions the need for a transition to qualitative analysis, which in the case of the enjoyment of radio programmes became an examination of the issues underlying the emotional reactions observed by the researcher (Adorno 2006b: 671–676).

The approach of Charles Wright Mills, who worked at the Bureau of Applied Social Research between 1945 and 1948, is also characterised by an entanglement of elements of critical theory and pragmatism. In this perspective, he repeatedly calls into question 'experience', a term that had its origin in the philosophy of John Dewey, and went on to play an important role in the debate on popular culture (Dewey 1934) involving the cognitive processing of sensations, their objectification in linguistic forms, and their subsequent relocation within a shared framework of meanings. In a lecture given at the London School of Economics in 1959, part of an unfinished project entitled *The Cultural Apparatus*, Mills claimed that men 'are aware of much more than they have personally experienced, and their own experience is always indirect. … their experience itself is selected by stereotyped meanings and shaped by ready-made interpretations' (Mills 2008: 203).[12] Here the dialectic of immediacy and mediation that will become the driving force of Adorno's texts and the affiliated critical theories of communication takes shape: immediacy manifests itself as a false image of what is instead the result of mediation; on the other hand, mediation can reach such a degree of

internalisation that it is perceived in the form of immediacy. In Mills' work, the category of experience takes the place of Adorno's consciousness and therefore, unlike Dewey, involves the question of 'false consciousness'. In this repositioning, it largely loses its individual perspective, and enters the sphere of intersubjectivity: experience is indeed an individual fact, but it is grounded in social interactions. Herbert Mead's idea of the 'generalized other' resonates in this theoretical framework, laying the foundation for the 'internalized audience' and the dialogic structure of communication (Mead 2015).[13]

The 'cultural apparatus' that Mills outlines is the set of organisations, institutions and environments in which the artist, the scientist and the intellectual carry out their work; it represents the theatre in which communication takes place, and at the same time its limitations. Our standards of truth, our definitions of reality, our modes of sensitivity are determined 'much less by any pristine experience than by our exposure to the output of the cultural apparatus' (Mills 1958: 175). When he describes experience in his famous book, *The Power Elite*, Mills observes:

> The media have not only filtered into our experience of external realities, they have also entered into our very experience of our own selves. They have provided us with new identities and new aspirations of what we should like to be, and what we should like to appear to be. They have provided in the models of conduct they hold out to us a new and larger and more flexible set of appraisals of our very selves.
>
> (Mills 1956: 314)[14]

2 Debates within the Frankfurt School

The Frankfurt School did not develop a truly defined theory on media. The works of its members that concern media fell within the framework of a critique of culture, deemed necessary, both in order to revise the Marxist theory of superstructure, and to carry out an in-depth analysis of the use of cultural propaganda by European dictatorships, before and after the Second World War.[15] This twofold rationale must be taken into account in order to explain the primary role the members of the Frankfurt School attributed to the manipulation of opinions and the pre-formation of needs. As Jürgen Habermas points out, they developed 'theories of fascism and of mass culture which deal with the socio-psychological aspects of a deformation that penetrates into the deepest regions of subjectivity and takes hold of the motivational foundations of the personality, which explains cultural reproduction from the perspective of reification' (Habermas 1984: 368–369). Adorno's essay on the regression of listening, which outlines the loss of the use-value of cultural assets and their flattening into the form of goods, is an important key to understanding this set of issues (Adorno 2002). Habermas believes that this is exactly where a flaw of the critique of mass society lies: having overlooked the fact that the media are 'technical amplifiers of linguistic communication,

which overcome spatial and temporal distances and multiply the possibilities of communicating; they intensify the network of communicative action, without, however, uncoupling action orientations from lifeworld contexts as such' (Habermas 1984: 372, translation slightly modified).

As Habermas notes, the image of the culture industry presented in the homonymous chapter of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* is closely linked to the ways in which authoritarian regimes obtained consent and imposed subordination. It is then no coincidence that radio and cinema, the new media put into play to achieve these goals, are the preferred objects of Adorno's and Horkheimer's criticism. During their exile, the Frankfurt philosophers worked on extensions and variations of that interpretative model, transferring it to the so-called 'late capitalism'. It was precisely in the context of this relocation – Habermas fails to point out – that a rift emerged within the Frankfurt School: on the one hand, the idea prevailed that the media and culture industry were tools for the consolidation of a centralised and ubiquitous power; on the other, research was addressed towards recognising and exploiting the spaces of free action that the media by their very nature generated. Evidence of the latter trend can be found in the writings of Kracauer and Lowenthal, without them having abandoned the principles of the former. The topics of their works written during the period of emigration are emblematic: Kracauer continued his studies on cinema and finally published *Theory of Film*, many passages of which can be viewed as a theory of media and audience; Lowenthal published research on biographies, which aroused great interest in the academic community, and he continued to work on the history of popular culture in Europe from the eighteenth century to the rise of Nazism (Kracauer 1960a; Lowenthal 1944; Lowenthal & Fiske 2016).

It is worth pointing out that the representatives of both trends adopted a similar stance, one that cannot be reduced to the drastic alternative for or against the culture industry; they all recognised the disruption that the media have produced throughout the history of culture and artistic creativity, and judged this situation to be irreversible. The difference between these two camps lies rather in the theoretical consequences that can be drawn from this recognition. For Adorno, artistic creativity was linked to resistance and denial; there was no room for positive content in the restrictive conditions imposed by the culture industry. Instead, for Kracauer and Lowenthal mass culture – as they call it, according to the Anglo-Saxon conventions – was not only an observation field of the manipulation of consciousness, but also contained indications for understanding the symbolic system and its potential for change.[16] This line of thought was less structured but historically relevant because it prefigured the path on which the 'march through the institutions' of the 1968 movements would be defined, and Habermas would develop his theories of public sphere and communicative action (Habermas 1989; Negt & Kluge 1972).

In the early 1960s, Lowenthal raised a series of questions that foreshadowed an alternative or complementary approach to the theory of the culture industry:

> (a) *Are we really dealing here with a dichotomy* or are the two concepts simply formed in different logical contexts? …
> (b) *Are the equations* art ↔ insight ↔ elite *on the one hand, and* popular culture ↔ entertainment ↔ mass audience *on the other valid*? Do elites never seek entertainment and are the broad strata *eo ipso* alienated from high culture? Does entertainment, on the other hand, preclude insight? …
> (c) This leads to a further question, namely *whether and under what conditions art can become popular culture.* …
> (d) But if we confine ourselves to contemporary expressions, the question remains *whether the gap between art and popular culture will widen* as the mass media spread through modern civilization …
> (e) This leads to the important problem, no less familiar to a nineteenth-century historian than to a twentieth-century social scientist: *who makes decisions about the kinds of entertainment and art offered in a given society*? …
> (f) In connection with these questions, there arises the problem of *what is "good" and "bad" in the arts and popular culture*?
>
> (Lowenthal 1961: XIX–XX)[17]

Cinema is one area where the gap between the two positions was clearly visible. If we compare the writings of Adorno and Kracauer, two complementary facts immediately capture our attention: 1 in *Theory of Film* Kracauer only occasionally cites *Composing for the Films* (without making any reference to Adorno's co-authorship), even though his discussion of the functions of music in film touches on various theories that were developed in that book; 2 in 'The Curious Realist', a historical-philosophical profile of his friend written for his 75th birthday, Adorno praises the *Theory of Film* for having investigated cinema as a social fact and analysed its ideological substratum, but does not delve into the main idea of the unveiling of reality, nor the implications for the relationship between traditional art and mass culture (Adorno 2019).[18] The reasons for the disagreement become all too evident in their letters, casting doubt on a possible reconciliation.[19] Adorno reproached Kracauer for having ignored the consequences of the full integration of cinema into the system of production and distribution of goods; this form of art would never manage to unfold its 'immanent law' (*immanente Gesetzlichkeit*) and thus would limit itself to being 'an entity "for other things" [*Für anderes*] not "in itself" [*An sich*]' (Adorno & Kracauer 2019: 471). Kracauer answers by claiming an autonomy of 'photographic media', which is imposed beyond political and economic conditioning; he insists that this autonomy is far more apparent in mainstream cinema than in works by 'well-intentioned intellectuals', such as Jean Cocteau and Alain Resnais, who have distorted the medium's potential by bending it towards 'higher purposes' (Adorno & Kracauer 2019: 471). The subject of the dispute was of such importance that Adorno proposed a radio roundtable on *Theory of Film*. [20]

In his exchange of ideas with Kracauer, Adorno insisted, as he had previously in *How to Look at Television*, on the close relationship between the economic, social and aesthetic dimensions. This was meant in a hierarchical way: the marked dependence of film production on the industrial system places this aspect at the apex, from which social dynamics and aesthetic properties descend; for this reason, cinema cannot be art except in some particular cases, or it is so 'intermittently'.[21] In later years, also thanks to his association with Alexander Kluge, Adorno was drawn to the group that had formed around the Oberhausen festival; which, already in the 1950s, was programming films by François Truffaut, Norman McLaren, Alain Resnais, Bert Haanstra and Lindsay Anderson, and represented a key moment in the development of directors of the New German Cinema, in particular Werner Herzog, Volker Schlöndorff and Wim Wenders. In his last article on cinema, *Transparencies on Film*, Adorno refers to the Oberhausen Manifesto of 1962, which concluded with the following remarks:

> This new film needs new freedoms. Freedom from the conventions of the established industry. Freedom from the outside influence of commercial partners. Freedom from the control of special interest groups.
>
> We have concrete intellectual, formal, and economic conceptions about the production of the new German film. We are as a collective prepared to take economic risks.
>
> The old film is dead. We believe in the new one.
>
> (MacKenzie 2014: 153)[22]

Unlike Adorno, Kracauer was convinced that cinema as a medium had the right characteristics to be able to assert itself beyond the changing socio-economic conditions; he presumed a space of authenticity that escaped the ideological structure; on this basis a concept of art was produced that diverged from the traditional one. However, in order to clearly support the thesis of the 'redemption of reality', Kracauer tended to identify the 'essence' of cinema with the realistic school, thus barring his theory from areas of audiovisual creativity that escaped the established channels of distribution – his silence on the *nouvelle vague* is most telling.[23]

3 Cinema and Jazz: Fields of Observation for Critical Media Theory

The concept of experience plays a decisive role in *Theory of Film* (Hansen 2012). After citing Dewey and Whitehead, Kracauer states that the remedy for the abstraction produced in the contemporary world by technology and scientific thought is 'the experience of things in their concreteness' (Kracauer 1960a: 296). This looks like a homeopathic remedy: the malaise caused by technology should be cured with technological tools. Experience was also central for Robert Warshow, a member of the editorial board of *Commentary* and *Partisan Review*, who dedicated an entire research project to cinema and

'immediate experience' and was one of Kracauer's most important interlocutors during the gestation of *Theory of Film* (Moltke 2016). In his application for a scholarship at the Guggenheim Foundation in 1954, Warshow cited Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* as an example of an approach that considered films as 'indexes to mass psychology or, sometimes, the "folk spirit"' (Warshow 2002: XXVI), a trend that opposed the one represented by Sergej Eisensteijn and Arnheim, which focused instead on the strictly artistic aspects.[24] In Warshow's opinion, these two approaches neglected 'the actual, immediate experience of seeing and responding to the movies as most of us see them and respond to them' (Warshow 2002: XL).[25] An affinity therefore exists between Kracauer's commitment to discovering in cinema the medium that allows contemporary man to grasp the complex determinations of reality and the need posed by Warshow – which is not so distant from Lowenthal – for 'a criticism of "popular culture" which can acknowledge its pervasive and disturbing power without ceasing to be aware of the superior claims of the higher arts, and yet without a bad conscience' (Warshow 2002: XXXVIII).

In his review of Ernest Lindgren's *The Art of Film*, Warshow makes it clear that this is not a choice between two irreconcilable fields of expression, or between an outmoded method and one aligned with the contemporary era (Lindgren 1948). Lindgren, who was also mentioned in *Theory of Film*, glimpsed an 'operation of the mind' in the editing process that was comparable to when Cezanne stood in front of a blank canvas; thus the director's work shared the characteristics of invention and production of the traditional arts. Warshow does not dispute this, but rather the conceptual apparatus with which Lindgren approached the 'seventh art':

> And in the films, though it is obviously desirable to respond as fully as possible to the aesthetic complexities of technique, these 'pure' values are at least equalled in importance by the medium's immense power of communication, which always raises aesthetic problems that go beyond the boundaries implied by the idea of 'appreciation'.
>
> (Warshow 2002: 286)

In the chapter on 'Issues of Art' of his *Theory of Film* Kracauer warns against the tendency to consider cinema as an artistic medium only in cases (like German Expressionism) in which films do not so much explore reality as they create it freely. This would be a misstep because these films ignore the medium's reproductive obligations and put themselves in competition with theatre or fiction; it also would obscure the specific value of the films that fully satisfy the inner requirements of the medium. In Kracauer's reflection, the immediacy of the film experience became the starting point for a series of mediation processes: 'In experiencing an object, we not only broaden our knowledge of its diverse qualities but in a manner of speaking incorporate it into us so that we grasp its being and its dynamics from within – a sort of blood transfusion, as it were' (Kracauer 1960a: 297). As regards that

particular quality that Warshow called 'the absorbing immediacy of the screen' (Warshow 2002: XLII), cinema has the ability to reproduce (not 'copy') reality with a degree of pervasiveness that induces a synthetic and mobilising experience in the viewer.[26]

In the post-war period, the debates on cinema and jazz showed points of intersection that could help to recompose the diverging branches of a critical theory of mass culture. The first question is whether their products can be considered art. This question not only concerns aesthetic legitimacy and social prestige, but reveals a problem of principle in applying the criteria of aesthetics to these areas of creativity, which were added to the traditional arts at the end of the nineteenth century. In this sense, one can define cinema and jazz as post-traditional arts.[27] These two genres were strongly anchored in the technologies of reproduction: cinema for the production process itself, jazz as it enjoys a wide and markedly authorial diffusion thanks to record production (Borio 2015; Caporaletti 2015). The roots of the controversy probably lie in their lack of adherence to the principle of autonomy: cinema and jazz are closely linked to industrial production and the means of distribution; their products are characterised *ab ovo* by their commodity character, and their reception is linked to the circuits of mass communication.[28] The film and record industries tend towards monopolistic management, the homologation of styles and the creation of idols (the charming actor or actress, the virtuoso musician). Furthermore, it is a fact that within the dynamics of mass culture the production system allows and even encourages the formation of niches characterised by experimental languages, which in certain phases can be associated with political trends. Finally, regular exposure to these two artistic genres is closely linked to free time, recreation and leisure; the type of reception is in both cases immersive, that is, coherent with the social form from which they originated, and which resists the categories of traditional aesthetics.

All of these features made cinema and jazz targets of opponents of the culture industry. Nevertheless, the debate on the aesthetic claim that took place during those decades found its justification in a series of phenomena that eluded the pattern of either/or. First of all, a scale of values was outlined that became the benchmark for criticism (and for the community of artists) and was not necessarily connected to the degree of commercial success. In the preface to an emblematic reader for the new trends in jazz criticism, edited by Nat Hentoff and Albert J. McCarty, the two editors observe:

> The nature of writing on jazz has begun to change markedly. In place of appreciators whose main means of analysis were adjectives, there are now historians and critics who are applying the disciplines of historical and critical traditions in other fields to jazz.
>
> (Hentoff and McCarty 1959: Preface, page without number)

The gradual recognition of the artistic nature of jazz came about in two moments: first, the reconstruction of a history with protagonists, schools and

technical innovations; and then the analysis of harmonic and rhythmic structures which highlighted the constructive logic of the individual pieces.[29] However, the primary impulse came from the musicians themselves, who began to conceive compositions of a certain length with formal complexity and expressive intensity, pieces that were not amenable to being performed in nightclubs. Added to this was the creative process in the recording studio, in which the musician could concentrate his/her thoughts without the influence of external factors. Hentoff observes:

> Within the community of jazz musicians, most young players feel that jazz has become a music primarily to be listened to rather than a background for dancing and drinking, or both; and it is, therefore, 'art music' in that sense.
>
> (Hentoff 1959: 327)[30]

Thus a type of 'work of art' was born that did not collide with apparently extra-artistic factors: the improvisational component, collective authorship, the role of technology, and involvement in a profit-oriented production system.

On a sociological level, the two forms of expression – cinema and jazz – appear as platforms for the recognition and sometimes self-reflection of the new social groups whose hybrid composition makes classification difficult. This subject matter, which had already emerged in Kracauer's writings prior to his exile, is evident in the passages that Robert Warshow dedicated to the gangster figure in Hollywood films. Here, the key concept of experience reappears:

> What matters is that the experience of the gangster as an experience of art is universal to Americans …. In ways that we do not easily or willingly define, the gangster speaks for us, expressing that part of the American psyche which rejects the qualities and the demands of modern life, which rejects 'Americanism' itself.
>
> (Warshow 2002: 100)[31]

Experience here indicates a field of interaction between author and spectator that goes beyond a naive identification as a diminished mode of reception, as bad immediacy.[32] This concept was also popular amongst communities of jazz musicians, as the following statement by Charlie Parker reveals: 'Music is your own experience, your thoughts, your wisdom. If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn' (Shapiro & Hetoff 1955: 405). This experience corresponds with the user's side: the audience establishes a special bond with the musicians who, through sounds, come across a common search for meaning; the identification of the listener and his/her participation in the psychophysical process of the performance has a psychological aspect, without which the musical content would occur in a reduced form. Finally, both cinema and jazz

have established a competitive relationship with the official arts; both are involved in searching for a specific social place for the new creativity, which in its various forms (night club or outdoor venue) is characterised as a receptacle for an indistinct community – *Faces in the Crowd*, as the title of Riesman's second book indicates.

Notes

1 On the origins of the Princeton Research Project and Lazarsfeldt's work see Morrison 1978a. On the difficult relationship between Adorno and Lazarsfeld, see Morrison 1978b and Jenemann 2007.
2 The intertwining of these trends is tangible in a collection of essays published in the period in question: Rosenberg & Manning White 1957. A similar approach, but in a historical retrospective, is found in Peters & Simonson 2004. On the relationship between American sociology of communication and critical theory, see Hardt 1992.
3 The debate on leisure can be reconstructed by consulting Larrabee & Meyersohn 1958; in particular see the articles by Greenberg and Riesman. See also the quarterly *International Social Science Journal: Sociological Aspects of Leisure* 12/4 (1960), which includes among others 'Popular Culture: A Humanistic and Sociological Concept' by Leo Lowenthal (reprinted in Lowenthal 2016c: 303–314). See also Adorno 1983, and Adorno 1991.
4 See also Hardt 2012.
5 See Greenberg 1939; Adorno 2006a: 13.
6 See also Adorno [1959] 1972b.
7 Lowenthal edited with Seymour Martin Lipset a book dedicated to Riesman: *Culture and Social Character: The Work of David Riesman Reviewed* (1961). Lowenthal had asked Kracauer to write an article for the book (see their letters) and he himself published a chapter: 'Humanistic Perspectives of *The Lonely Crowd*' (2016a).
8 Riesman had probably never read the 'Musikalische Warenanalysen', which Adorno had written in the 1930s, and which can be considered exemplary for this type of study in the musical field (see Adorno 1978); Cf. also Adorno 2006b: 477–496.
9 See Adorno's later critique of Alphons Silbermann (Adorno 1972b).
10 Gerber quotes Lowenthal on p. 88: 'Creative literature conveys many levels of meaning, some intended by the author, some quite unintentional' (Lowenthal 1986: ix).
11 See also Katz & Katz 2016.
12 In *The Politics of Truth* also see pp. 174–176. On the whole project see Sawchuk 2001.
13 See also Carey 1997.
14 In general, see the chapter 'The Mass Society', pp. 298–324.
15 'The affirmative character of culture' by Marcuse can be considered a milestone in this field that is linked to the chapter on the cultural industry in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. See Marcuse 2009.
16 The dual pathway can also be recognised within Adorno's writings; see Mariotti 2016: 1–24.
17 See also Lowenthal 2016c [1967].
18 In his last article on cinema, Adorno takes some motifs from Kracauer's book, opening up the perspective to a different assessment of the creative potential of the audiovisual arts; see Adorno 1966, and Hansen 2012.

19 See also Kracauer 1960b.
20 Adorno proposed this to the critic Enno Patalas who had published a review he felt to be extremely pertinent: Patalas 1965. Kracauer was put out by this proposal as Patalas had misunderstood several aspects of the book; see Adorno & Kracauer 2019: 482–483.
21 See Adorno & Kracauer 2019: 475 and Adorno 1966.
22 See also Adorno 1966.
23 See also Kracauer 1960: 175–192.
24 See also Arnheim 1957 and Arnheim 1963.
25 This belief seems to anticipate the problem of experiential immediacy, recently developed by Richard Shusterman in a free interpretation of John Dewey's texts. However, Shusterman's version of pragmatic aesthetics and the discussions that followed deviate markedly from the context I am reconstructing. Neither in Warshow nor in Dewey does the broad vision of aesthetic experience imply the vindictive use of popular culture over traditional culture; moreover, the priority of the carnal dimension over the spiritual one is not presupposed by these authors.
26 According to Miriam Bratu Hansen, Kracauer's theory leads us to understand cinema as 'sensory perceptual matrix of experience' (Hansen 2012: 255).
27 Mill's reflections on the work of the designer are useful to understanding the problem of post-traditional arts; see Mills 1958.
28 In his review of the books by Wilder Hobson and Winthrop Sargeant, Adorno notes: 'Jazz and the radio match each other as if they were patterned in the same mold. One might almost say that jazz is the sort of music which in its life performance already appears as if it were transmitted by radio' (Adorno, 1941: 177–178).
29 See particularly Schuller 1958.
30 See also Russo 1959.
31 See also Kracauer 1946.
32 This is one of the critical remarks appearing in Adorno 1981.

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