

Humor within the Iron System

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ABSTRACT

In 1944 Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno published *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. By means of the text they trace thought in the West from its origins in myth, to its embrace of rationality during the Enlightenment, and finally to its reversion back to myth as manifested in the modern 'culture industry.' According to their view, Enlightenment rationality became 'instrumental reason,' a mode of thought that is only capable of realizing technical and conceptual mastery, without regard to human ends or needs as charted out by the founders of the Enlightenment. Within the culture industry, every person's identity and all language is dictated by its relation to the market. Every person is a consumer or a producer, happiness is traded for pleasure, and all forms of resistance are adapted and integrated for the production capital. Within their framework, I argue that humor as satire and parody offers a means of resistance, due to its imaginative mimetic qualities, and its ability to show the incongruities of reality as filtered through the culture industry. I then analyze the satirical newspaper *The Onion* to illustrate my argument.

"There is laughter because there is nothing to laugh at." (Culture Industry 1231)

MYTH AND ENLIGHTENMENT

In order to gain a better understanding of Horkheimer and Adorno's theory of the culture industry, it is important to gain insight into their account of the self-destructive rationality that sustains the culture industry, which is found in their collection of "philosophical fragments," *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The main thesis of the first chapter that guides the rest of the text is that "myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology" (xviii). Explanations of nature that rely on fantasy or non-conceptual approaches have usually been judged as myth; while explanations that explain phenomena seemingly objectively have typically been labeled as science, the catalyst of enlightenment hopes and ideals. Horkheimer and Adorno see the two, myth and enlightenment, as belonging together in a dialectic; they are ways of dealing with and explaining the world which are seemingly opposite and irreconcilable, but that in fact mediate each other. In theory, if these two halves were to be brought together they would reconcile the real world with the intellectual world, mental and manual labor, the general and the particular. This reconciliation would give rise to "integral freedom" as the means for social transformation and emancipation of pseudo-individuals from a sick culture.

The authors begin their text by reminding us that the "Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters" (1). The purpose of enlightened reason was to start a new age of progress for humanity by means of divorcing the intellect from belief, tradition, and fantasy; that is, to make rational thinking irreconcilable with mythical thinking. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the primacy given to enlightenment rationality and the degradation of myth lead to the divorce of humanity's relationship to the sensuous particulars of the world. This relationship to the world, which myth access by means of animism or anthropomorphism, was viewed by the leaders of the Enlightenment as false ideology grounded in fear, a socially necessary illusion to help cope with reality because more sophisticated and objective explanations of nature had not been developed yet. Mythical explanations explained the movement of particular matter due to immanent powers or hidden properties; explanations of nature on a grander scale were due to gods who resembled humans in all their faults, follies, and fears. The idea of enlightenment was to release humanity from this fear and illusion, to give people a more objective lens with which to explain and thus manipulate nature. However they claim, in the process of associating all redeemable meaning to rational knowledge in the name of progress, humanity reverted back into a mythology and form of bondage more absolute than animism or anthropomorphism: "According to enlightened thinking, the multiplicity of mythical objects can be reduced to a single common denominator, the subject. Oedipus's answer to the riddle of the Sphinx – "That being is man" – is repeated... whether in response to ... a schematic order, a fear of evil powers, or a hope of salvation" (4). Enlightenment rationality views nature in all of its multiple manifestations as reducible to numbers, and ultimately into one: the human subject.

The result from enlightenment thinking is that *everything* that exists (that is, all *being*), is split between human thought (or logos), and the whole of external reality. All distinctions between all that exists became reducible to the human subject. All phenomena exists insofar that it concerns the person when seen through the prism of enlightenment rationality. In contrast, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, myth “sought to report, to name, to tell of origins – but therefore to narrate, record, explain...each ritual contains a representation of how things happen and of the specific process which is to be influenced by magic” (5). Mimesis was the primary vehicle of myth, which ensured a relationship to the particulars that constructed reality. In contrast, enlightenment thinking is characterized by its estrangement from nature. It is only configured to nature insofar as it can manipulate and control nature for its own means. “Magic like science is concerned with ends, but it pursues them through mimesis, not through an increasing distance from the object” (7). While the anthropomorphic explanations of myth created gods and spirits that reflect human beings that allow themselves to be frightened by nature, “enlightenment is mythical fear radicalized” (11). Concerning enlightenment rationality, nature in all its complexities is known completely by the human intellect and the categories by which it subsumes it.

The world that is ‘outside’ of humans is made reducible to the concepts, classifications, and characterizations by means of subsumptive reason. When reality is filtered through subsumption “society is ruled by equivalence. It makes dissimilar things comparable by reducing them to abstract quantities...anything which cannot be resolved into numbers, and ultimately into one, is illusion; modern positivism consigns it to poetry” (5). The sensuous nature of particulars that myth honored through mimesis is disregarded by subsumption. Treating unlike things as like and subsuming particulars under concepts created by people allows for technical and conceptual mastery. Horkheimer and Adorno claim that originally subsumption was thought to serve the human subject as a means for self preservation, but as enlightenment rationality became the entirety of reason, the possibility for rationally evaluating the original ends and goals of the enlightenment project ceased. Enlightenment rationality came to serve its own ends rather than humanity’s, and thus rationality was forced into becoming irrationality. Enlightenment reverted to myth.

By means of their text *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which was originally published in 1944, Horkheimer and Adorno sought to help explain the events of their time. As a historical artifact published a few years in the aftermath of Nazi concentration camps, the nuclear bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and Stalinist terror, they explored how the Enlightenment could fall so short of its promises. What type of rationale could serve as a means to creating such events? The ‘sovereignty of man’ is certainly rooted in knowledge and wisdom; however they claim, as knowledge became divorced from wisdom and myth, and as subsumptive reason became the entirety of reason, the purposes of technical and conceptual mastery developed and proliferated without regard to human need. Thus, instrumental reason, as the realization of subsumption, came to exist for itself, and therefore turned against human freedom and happiness. Their theory of enlightenment reason helps to explain some of the atrocities of their time, such as the creation and proliferation of technology as it served warfare, particularly nuclear weapons. For Horkheimer and Adorno the rationality that gave way to technical and conceptual mastery which lead to the efficient machine known as Auschwitz was also the same rationality that was present in US culture at the time according to their theory of the culture industry. Of course, this connection can be understood as hyperbolic blasphemy. However, as J.M. Bernstein points out in his ‘Introduction’ to *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, that “while Adorno nowhere identifies the culture industry with the political triumph of fascism, he does imply, both directly and indirectly, that the culture industry’s effective integration of society marks an equivalent triumph of repressive unification in liberal democratic states to that which was achieved politically under fascism” (4). The equation ‘culture industry = Nazi concentration camp’ is certainly ludicrous, but it might be easier to accept that both are rationally integrated social phenomena.

Before going on to explain Horkheimer and Adorno’s conception of the culture industry, it will be useful to ask ourselves what could a type of thinking, reconciled with mythical and rational qualities, manifest itself as? What would buildings, automobiles, policy, education, and the liberal democratic state look like and how would they behave and operate? Commodities would be mimetic in their resemblance to nature and would be self sustaining. In the creation of living space, the landscape would not be leveled by complex and powerful machines, and the power needed to run the buildings that house people would not be fuel that destroys the environment. Architecture would imitate the landscape and attempt to fit in it rather than destroy it. The energy needed for these projects would be self sustaining, friendly to nature, and come locally. The automobiles that have isolated people from each other and that have helped create an environment of pseudo-individualism would be replaced by public transportation. Public policy would aim to fulfill enlightenment hopes and ideals, rather than the expansion of power and the acquirement of capital. Education would foster habits of mind needed for people to properly operate within a liberal democratic state, rather than teach skill sets for technical and conceptual mastery that serves the market. Rather than creating the idea that all people are equal, which occurs by means of subsuming everyone under some concept or idea of

'person,' equality would depend upon the mimetic power of people to imagine themselves as others. These are some possibilities.

THE CULTURE INDUSTRY: ENLIGHTENMENT AS MYTH

In Horkheimer and Adorno's philosophical fragment 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,' advanced modern capitalism signals the final manifestation of enlightenment rationality. While subsumption as the means towards technical mastery became the entirety of rationality and only came to serve itself regardless of human ends and needs, all production under capitalism operates outside of those same human ends and needs in the name of profit. Just as enlightened rationality reduces all phenomena regardless of their sensuous particularity to numbers, ultimately unified by a single one (the human subject), so does capitalism subsume objects according to exchange value rather than their use value.

The foundations that Adorno and Horkheimer establish produce dire effects for human beings, according to their theory. In an earlier translation located in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, the culture industry is a rationally social integrated phenomena that "impresses the same stamp on everything" (1223) regardless of an object's intrinsic particularity. This is difficult to see because of the countless trends, commodities, 'lifestyles,' political scandals, world crises, and seemingly endless complexities. Thus, there is the image of cultural chaos, but this image is an illusion due to the rational social integration that culture industry operates by. The organization of our lives as a whole is same as the organization of the cities we live in, the industries we depend upon, and the societal rules we live by. The technical mastery of work, as a means of production in the name of profit, creates one's labor as a mechanized process. The movies, music, and television of the culture industry (among its other manifestations) provide a degraded aesthetic experience that allows the laborer to escape the work process in order to garner enough strength to go to work again. According to their theory, the rational integration of society ensures that both work and play obey the rules of production. Thus, "at the same time mechanization has such power over a man's leisure and happiness, and so profoundly determines the manufacture of amusement goods, that his experiences are inevitably after-images of the work process itself" (1229). The various commodities and 'lifestyles' offered are one and the same, because all that manifests within the culture industry obeys the rules of production according to advanced capitalism. Everyone's social, political, and private identities are reducible to producers and consumers. The primacy of self-identification and language is in relation to the market.

Within the culture industry two people may seem to differ completely from one another based on what their preferences are, but this view is false when based upon Horkheimer and Adorno's theory of rational social integration. The supposed differentiation of people and their tastes are based on "a hierarchical range of mass-produced products of varying quality, thus advancing the rule of complete quantification" (1225). All objects in the culture industry are reducible to numbers, by their relation to capital. Quality of products depends not on how they satisfy human ends and needs, but by how much they cost. This ensures that the more capital that is put into an object the higher its exchange value. Money, an object that has no inherent value in of itself but that is completely manufactured by the market, determines ultimate value. Irrationality under the semblance of rationality is the hallmark of the culture industry. To talk about the difference in the products we buy is to "perpetuate the semblance of competition and range of choice" (1225). Whatever type of products we buy, the only difference is not in substance but buy how much capital was put into it. While two products may look different, they are essentially the same thing; the more expensive commodity may just have more cylinders or screens. The *supposed* differentiation between commodities illustrates the culture industry's primary realization, the "striking unity of microcosm and macrocosm...the false identity of the general and the particular" (1224). What appears to be particular and individual is not so, its characteristics are identical to the whole. This is the consequence of complete social integration.

According to their schema, the culture industry dictates largely homogenous tastes and behaviors for a stupefied audience. Success depends upon an ever increasing rational social integration that relies on the manipulation of the individual consciousness. Thinking is suppressed through the entertainment that promises escape from the work process. TV and film especially "leave no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience...[which is the] stunting of the mass-media consumer's powers of imagination and spontaneity" (1226). The entropy of the human imagination ensures further reliance upon the culture industry as people become unable to imagine any other possibilities outside of it. According to the culture industry model, people are easily deceived due to the degradation of their mental faculties. This degradation is severe. When people participate in empty amusement and buy the commodities the two theorists claim that "basically it is helplessness. It is flight; not, as is asserted, flight from a wretched reality, but from the last remaining thought of resistance" (1232). According to their theory, essentially, we are completely passive and helpless creatures whose reality is completely dictated by cultural authority. This is just one claim that made by Horkheimer and Adorno in 1944.

Understandably, for those in the present day who are familiar with these claims, they are arguments that are difficult to accept and are met with much due resistance. One counter to their argument for the culture industry model is that it is intentionally hyperbolic, necessarily false in order to arrive at some larger truth. For instance, according to Bernstein: “Only by presenting society in terms of extremes – ‘the whole is false’ and ‘truth’ is no longer true – can reveal the distortions that are less than what the ironic statement must present them to be” (9). Common description and explanation ‘neutralize’ what is at hand. The question of the culture industry was raised in regards to its possibility for meaningful social transformation according to enlightenment ideals. Based on their observations on modern mass culture in regard to this question, Horkheimer and Adorno had no interest in being disinterested or neutral. All such ‘objective’ language for them is in relation to the market and thus complicit with it. What if one were to claim that there was no hyperbole in their model, that what they were claiming they believed to be completely non-ironic? Can people really be as helpless as they claim due to an all pervasive and all determining cultural authority?

Horkheimer and Adorno realized that even in 1944 that it would be impossible to sustain the practice of projecting fixed meanings upon a passive audience as a means for rational social integration: “it has become increasingly difficult to keep people in this condition. The rate at which they are reduced to stupidity must not fall behind the rate at which their intelligence is rising” (1233). This inverse relationship manifested in the 1960’s counter-cultural movement by what Douglas B. Holt, Assistant Professor at the Harvard School of Business, has termed “Postmodern Consumer Culture.”

[It] reflected a passionate, reflexive concern with existential freedom. The revolution was to be a personal one, and it happened by treating the self as a work under construction, the authenticity of which was premised upon making thoughtful sovereign choices rather than obeying market dictates (qtd. in Heyer).

Holt’s account illustrates the success of the “false identity of the general and the particular.” For instance, the counter-culture revolution arose as a particular against the general, resistance against authority, and one against many in the movement’s pursuit for personal sovereignty. As those who participated in the counter-cultural revolution rejected corporatism and saw themselves as works under construction, they became ‘anti’ with relation to their identity: anti-religious, anti-war, anti-corporate, anti-conformity. Personal sovereignty meant establishing freedom from what the market overtly dictated. However, even this ‘anti’ identity became a brand and a lifestyle dictated by the market. Due to the fundamental relation of people to the culture industry, the counter-culture revolution became something that could be bought and sold. The assertion of personal sovereignty meant asserting one’s power as a consumer to exercise freedom of choice. What seems like a particular point of resistance to the culture industry is immediately integrated into the general as a means of production, for the further acquisition of capital. “Something is provided for all so that none may escape” (1225). This ‘something’ is the most pervasive symptom of Horkheimer and Adorno’s diagnosis of the sickness of the culture industry: entertainment.

The downfall of culture under advanced capitalism for these two theorists can be understood by its contrast to previous cultures. According to Bernstein:

Culture is no longer the repository of a reflective comprehension of the present in terms of a redeemed future; the culture industry forsakes the promise of happiness in the name of the degraded utopia of the present. This is the ironic presentation of the present (9).

For Adorno and Horkheimer true works are artifacts by which we can examine how previous culture reflected on their condition in terms of a “redeemed future.” True works of art express negation, while the entertainment of the culture industry expresses false unity. Truly reconciling intellectual labor with the opaqueness of the material world is a task that must be undertaken if meaningful social transformation is to occur. The confrontation of the two is what animates critical theory. However, the two can never be united in an utopist vision of the world, for this would be false. The negation of the two is the truth, while the false unity of the two is precisely what the culture industry perpetuates. All true works of art deny false unity of the present in order to reflect in terms of a redeemed future. “The factor in a work of art which allows it to transcend reality...is to be found in which discrepancy appears: in the necessary failure of the passionate striving for identity” (1228). The striving for unity, the necessary failure, and the recognition of this phenomenon through aesthetic sublimation was the hallmark of previous culture, of true works of art. The culture industry offers easy and instant gratification, in which “pleasure always means to not think about anything, to forget suffering even where it is shown” (1232). A redeemed future is presently what the culture industry offers, as a degraded utopia.

It would be correct to claim that many people, of all backgrounds and all levels of education, see through the hollowed happiness offered by the culture industry as reprieve from the complicated reality in which they have to operate. However, according to the culture industry model, people within it simultaneously see through the false synthesis produced by it, and yet obey it at the same time. How is one to account for this? In his 'Introduction,' Bernstein offers an overview of one of Adorno's articles in which he analyzes an astrology column out of the *Los Angeles Times*. In it, Adorno helps explain believing and not believing at the same time. The analyses astrology is applicable to the content of the culture industry.

First, the column offers pragmatic advice. Secondly, the advice comes from a source which has been institutionalized, so it has credibility. Third, unlike faith, the astrology column "permits belief and obedience without demanding readers to *overtly* sacrifice the claims of rational evidence and reflection" (13). Fourth, the column appeals to the reader by suggesting that they can change their circumstance due to their activity. Any helplessness is compensated with reward by means of conformity. Adorno goes on to show that the irrationality that frames the column is kept in the distance, "giving the content an irrational metaphysical aura in terms of its source" (15). The "imaginary" consolation of the column is accepted because the obscurity of it mirrors the opaqueness of a reality that is very difficult to comprehend, and that seems against human ends and needs. Contrary to one of the duties of being a citizen of a liberal democratic state, the reader "is never asked to evaluate the claims being made" (15). Everything is offered without any real effort being demanded. Utopia and reality are aligned. All that is asked for the reader is to capitulate.

HUMOR AND NEGATION

Horkheimer and Adorno undeniably make an especially grim diagnosis for humanity. One of the direst conditions created by the culture industry concerns people's capacity for true happiness, of which laughter is symptomatic: "In the false society laughter is a disease which has attacked happiness and is drawing it into its worthless totality" (1231). Laughter is terrible within the culture industry. What also characterizes laughter is an escape from despair and suffering, an "invading barbaric life, self-assertion prepared to parade its liberation from any scruple when the social occasion arises" (1231). For Horkheimer and Adorno this is a mockery of true art, which confronts reality to reveal its negative aspects. According to their theory, this is how desire is truly fulfilled, through aesthetic sublimation. However, in the culture industry, the "supreme law is that they shall not satisfy their desires at any price; they must laugh and be content with laughter" (1231). Terrible laughter is "jovial denial...the echo of power as something inescapable" (1231). As the culture industry uses conditioned responses for social integration, laughter is only a automatic reaction to signals.

Terrible laughter is not itself the totality of all laughter according to their theory. What makes Horkheimer and Adorno so perturbed by terrible laughter is that "what is fiendish about this false laughter is that it is a compelling parody of the best, which is conciliatory" (1231). In a culture of laugh tracks and comedy filtered through formula so as to ensure profit, it is possible to see how the two theorists would come to the diagnosis of laughter as being terrible, as a response to signals, as satisfaction for the cheap amusement profited by the culture industry. What is compelling though is their mention of a positive type of laughter, conciliatory (or reconciliatory in the newer translation). They more clearly define this type of laughter in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 'Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment.' They describe Odysseus and how he is to placate Poseidon. Odysseus is to take a carry on his shoulder an oar to an arid place without any water, where he will meet a traveler who will refer to the oar as a winnowing fan.

This must have struck the Ionian as compellingly comic. However, this comic effect, on which the reconciliation is made to depend, cannot have been directed at humans but at the wrathful Poseidon. The misunderstanding is meant to amuse the fierce elemental god, is the hope that his anger might be dispersed in laughter...If laughter up to now [in Odysseus' travels] has been a sign of violence...it nevertheless contains its opposite element, in that through laughter blind nature becomes aware of itself as such and abjures its destructive violence (60).

Laughter as described here, of the positive sort, contains an element largely absent from the individual consciousness of subjects within the culture industry, namely a self-awareness that allows for reflection to the point that the destructiveness of instrumental reason ceases to occur. Horkheimer and Adorno don't seem to offer a thorough explanation as to how this reconciliatory laughter operates. They claim that laughter merely manifests in the following two ways: one in which it occurs almost violently without any regard to others, and another in which it halts impending destruction through self-awareness.

The explanation as to how reconciliatory laughter operates is left to the reader. As a possible remedy to instrumental reason it must contain some elements of myth. As stated earlier, myth operates primarily through animism and anthropomorphism. These approaches function mainly by means of mimesis. Types of humor as we know it contain this element of mimesis, specifically satire and parody. Rather than aiming to influence by means of attaining distance as instrumental reason does, satire and parody aim to influence by means of representation. These types of humor aim to ridicule style by imitating it. Just as terrible humor is a mockery of conciliatory laughter, satire and parody aim to make a mockery of whatever it assumes a mimetic form of.

Satire has served to draw attention to flaws in society. The most famous satirist of the English language is Jonathan Swift. He drew attention to society's ill approaches to dealing with mass hunger in his essay "A Modest Proposal," and made critiques of the English culture's tendencies to use technology and social-political integration to magnify humanity's worst traits in his novel *Gulliver's Travels*. In "A Modest Proposal" Swift imaginatively assumed the mimetic form of a somber intellectual to make the sober proposal of eating newborn babies to solve problems of mass hunger in Ireland. His mimesis brought attention to the shortcomings of previous proposals. In the fourth and last chapter of *Gulliver's Travels*, Gulliver encounters a race of creatures known as Houyhnhnms, which "signifies a horse, and in its etymology, the perfection of nature" (242). These mythical creatures don't know what lies are because they see that "the use of speech was to make us understand one another, and to receive information and facts;...if anyone said the thing which was not, these ends were defeated" (248). Swift makes a mockery of understanding ourselves as the perfection of nature according to our Enlightenment ideals by comparing us to an imagined race of horses that live completely by reason all the way to its logical conclusions.

Although reconciliatory laughter adopts the mimetic qualities of myth, it cannot be reconciliatory as far as uniting myth and reason given Horkheimer and Adorno's framework. The unity of intellectual labor and the opaqueness of reality as reconciliation is necessarily false for them. It is precisely the type of terrible humor within the culture industry that operates at an objective distance that perpetuates false unity and that helps to sustain rationally administered social integration. Reconciliatory laughter and humor must be aware of the negation and irreconcilability that characterizes all culture.

Fundamentally, humor depends upon incongruity, the play and juxtaposition of our schemas. If the realization of negation as the "necessary failure of the passionate striving for identity" is primary for reflective comprehension, then so is the realization of incongruity inherent in culture. Horkheimer and Adorno's explanation of how true art operates is also true of how thwarted idealism works, or rather, nihilism. This school of thought results from the belief that how we want the world to be and how it actually is are fundamentally incongruent. In his book in which he prescribes laughter as the remedy towards our spoiled conceptions of reality, John Marmysz writes that "Nihilism reminds us that humans are not gods, and despite all our accomplishments and wonders of civilization, humans cannot alter the fact that they possess only a finite amount of master and control over their own destinies" (159-60). In order to confront the absurdity of the human condition, it seems that we must laugh, because there is nothing to laugh at. Laughter and humor allows us to confront incongruities in an unusual and original fashion. The other approach that seems available for us to use towards incongruities is to be overwhelmed, or in extreme terms to experience terror, horror, or dread. In contrast to this approach, Horkheimer and Adorno write that "Conciliatory laughter is heard as the echo of an escape from power" (1231).

Given these features as recognized through the analyses of satire and parody, and nihilism and absurdity, reconciliatory laughter can be seen as having the following two properties that make it distinct from terrible laughter. The first is that reconciliatory laughter recognizes and embraces incongruities, while terrible laughter affirms the false unification of intellectual labor and the opaqueness of reality. It recognizes the negation that will occur when the two are attempted to be brought together as neatly fitting congruous phenomena. The vehicle used to arrive at the realization of reality's absurdity is brought upon by its second property, its mimetic and imaginative quality. The truth telling mechanisms of the culture industry report that the opaqueness of reality as lived and the opaqueness of reality as filtered through the market are one and the same. By imaginatively assuming the mimetic form of these truth tellers, satire and parody make a mockery of them and show the incongruity. Humor as satire and parody helps us become aware of the culture industry we live in and the false reconciliation it perpetuates, thus turning instrumental rationality in on itself in order to "abjure its destructive violence."

Within the culture industry terrible humor and terrible laughter abound. However, just as Jonathan Swift was able to use humor to arrive at larger truths concerning the irreconcilability of reality, our modern society as it fits the culture industry model also has its satirists. One especially well known source of satire is *The Onion*, established in Madison, WI. It satirizes the newspaper medium. By analyzing three articles in from *The Onion*, one can analyze humor's function as reconciliatory laughter within the contemporary social landscape as it fits the culture industry model. It is important to see whether satire in this form performs as an act of self-awareness, of awareness of reality filtered through the culture industry and the state of affairs as they actually occur; or whether it serves as another

way to express capitulation in the iron system through the use of terrible laughter, the echo of defeat of power as inescapable.

The first article to be analyzed has the headline 'New Homeless Initiative To Raise Bottle Deposit To 12 Cents.' In this article Rep. Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD) says "'We can no longer ignore the problem of homelessness in our country...[the passing of the bill will serve as way of] boosting homeless citizens' incomes and endowing them with a sense of pride in their work.'" When commenting on the economic system as intertwined with government, Horkheimer and Adorno write that the exploitation of the "available technical resources and the facilities for aesthetic mass consumption is part of the economic system which refuses to exploit resources to abolish hunger" (1230). *The Onion* as it imaginatively assumes the form of a newspaper shows the false unity of the claims that the government makes, and the actual actions it will take in fulfilling its promises. Politicians make promises as to how their new policy will lift the plight of the poor, but the claims are all that the poor can be satisfied with: "the diner must be satisfied with the menu" (1230). *The Onion* is satirizing the fact that capitalism will always ensure a large number of people living in poor conditions under the umbrella of advanced capitalism. Those within the culture industry know that poverty is should not be tolerated, yet it is necessary for the market to work in its production of pleasure. People see through yet obey, and this occurs because "life – [is] very hard, but just because of that so wonderful and so healthy" (1234). The downtrodden are *thought* to be seen as people who do not exercise enough agency to acquire enough capital in order to live a life of security, but they are in fact viewed as those who do not capitulate fully to the system. The law of subsumption in making unlike things like, establishes that a middle class person and a homeless person are equal in their ability to capitulate fit within the structure of the culture industry, and thus it is their decision to be without shelter. As long as it is only half-measures that are taken in the guise of real action, there will never be meaningful reform. *The Onion* satirizes this by assuming the form of news; that is, the source of information for those within the liberal democratic state needed to make well informed judgments. By taking this form, it demonstrates the questionability of the promises politicians make as presented by the news.

The second story is titled 'Nigeria Chosen to Host 2008 Genocides.' *The Onion* draws the parallel of entertainment, as the Olympics, to the reality of genocide that has plagued third world countries all through the modern era. The parody again acts by assuming the form of news. Often the media usually gives more coverage to what is happening in the entertainment business than it does to the reports of genocide occurring in the present day. This is not surprising due to how the law of subsumption makes unlike things like in the realm of conceptual domination. How the news media subsumes events in its coverage practices determines their worth to the viewer. Exchange practices in the culture industry ensure that the more something costs, the more it is intrinsically worth; the more coverage an event is given, the more important that event is for the viewer to know. As the culture industry is the entertainment business, it is more important to cover entertainment than genocide because entertainment is what will keep society rationally integrated, through means of pleasure. *The Onion's* article demonstrates what it would take for third world atrocities to get the coverage they deserve; perversely, they would have to mimetically assume the form of entertainment. The parody demonstrates news as another manifestation of the culture industry as entertainment, as another messenger of kitsch, the denial of real suffering in the world. The incongruity revealed denies the false unity of what purports to be truth in the culture industry.

The last article I will analyze is an editorial entitled 'Desperate Times Call For *Desperate Housewives*.' The editorial states that "maintaining our purity of heart while staring into the widening chasm of world events is a task for which many of us feel ill-equipped ...ABC can assure you, there is nothing wrong with America that cannot be cured by what is right with *Desperate Housewives*." Consumers seek relief from a complex and seemingly integrated reality, which furthermore does not seem to conform to our most primary needs or ends. Entertainment as relief is as equally artificial and irrational as the advanced capitalistic society into which consumers capitulate. Because entertainment offers relief from everyday life and mirrors the opaqueness of reality, the two are seen as complimentary and as offering a pragmatic synthesis of reality and the means by which to filter it. Parody here renders clear the irrational absurdity of incongruent claims that the culture industry purports as both reconcilable and for the betterment of humanity's needs and ends.

Satire within Horkheimer and Adorno's conception of the culture industry serves the purpose of making the culture aware of itself and its own faults and follies, as these shortcomings manifest themselves across the social landscape as falsity masquerading as truth. The lies which mask fundamental incongruities do harm to the individual's consciousness and faculties to make well informed judgments within the liberal democratic state. There is a moment during parody in which incongruities, in their unsettling negation of what is typically thought of as truth, *may* be boldly realized by the subject. If this does happen, *may* be highly ephemeral. If it does happen at all depends upon the uptake of the person reading or hearing the joke. Parody takes what is purported to be true, by means of imaginative mimesis, to a level of distortion to reveal the incongruities of what is said to be true. A typical

way for this to happen is for stereotypes to be magnified to such a pitch that the common way the stereotype is portrayed is shown to be false. This approach may simply reinforce stereotypes rather than show their vulgarity. Simply, humans have their faults and are capable of missing the point. If one does get the point and understand what is being satirized, there is a moment in which the false reconciliation of the culture industry is revealed. Satire, like everything else that determines its primary meaning in relation to the market, can be made into a trend. Further, everything can be made ironic, and often is due to the way in which our degraded utopian present is an ironic fulfillment of past cultures' hope of a redeemed future. Of course, consumers cannot rely solely on satire and parody to deliver the truth. This form of humor rely upon knowledge of the culture's ideology as shown through its truth telling mediums, and manipulates the ideology through mimesis to show the incongruity of what is not true and that which does not fulfill human ends and needs. No matter how much irony is prevalent in the culture, there has to be forms of media that claim to be sincerely delivering the truth. This is where reconciliatory laughter can offer a point of resistance, if only on a very small scale and for a very brief amount of time.

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