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## **THE FUTURE OF FILIPINO CULTURE IN THE FACE OF CULTURE INDUSTRY**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper aims to look into the future of Filipino culture in the face of culture industry through the investigation and critique of the popular literature today. The researcher tries to contextualize the fetishism of music in Adorno's *The Culture Industry* and the role of the mass media in the proliferation of the prevalent type of reading materials that they call "literature" but does not qualify to be called as such. This paper will be divided into four parts: introduction of culture industry and the role of mass media, the fetish character of music, the fetish character of literature, and conclusion.*

### **Keywords**

*Culture Industry, Fetishism, Filipino Culture, Filipino Pop Literature*

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### **1. Introduction**

The reading population today is mostly composed of young adults. Reading is a good habit since it makes people broaden not only their vocabulary, but also their

understanding of the human reality. Our history has produced a gargantuan range of literary classics and a wide array of literary geniuses such as Virginia Woolf, Leo Tolstoy, and William Shakespeare, to name a few. Thus, it is unacceptable for young readers not to divulge themselves into these classics.

However, in the Philippines, most of the reading masses indulge themselves into petty popular literature which basically revolves around the paltry notion of love and romance. Bookstores are plagued with huge numbers of senseless writings – most, *but not all*, young adults are patronizing this kind of writings which contributes nothing to their intellectual, spiritual, and even emotional growth. It becomes apparent then that literature has already succumbed to what Adorno called the culture industry. The aim of this article is to show the correlation of Adorno's culture industry and the status of literature in present-day Philippines. It will also show how this giving in of literature to culture industry affects the Filipino Youth.

## **2. Culture Industry**

In the book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer first used the term "culture industry." They made a proposition which demonstrates that popular culture is like a production of standardized cultural goods (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1998). This kind of standardization of cultural goods became a way of manipulation of mass society into passivity. It can be correlated to Herbert Marcuse's paralysis of critical impulse (Marcuse, 1991) – wherein the society has the capacity to paralyze the revolutionary impulse of man, that within the society our own freedom is being curtailed without us being aware of it, or most probably, we do not care at all.

In the culture industry, what happens in the society is commercial marketing – which means that all goods are being delivered to the consumers and all that is left to us is to buy. It hinders man to exercise his creativity and productivity in a sense that everything he needs and possibly wants is out there and ready to be consumed. This does not pertain solely to

material things, it is apparent in our society today that culture can be bought in the department stores, the record bars, and the bookstores even.

The vessels of culture industry today are the mass media (Mato, 2009), e.g. Television, radio, internet, etc. The mass media became the sole propagator of the culture industry – presenting to us the current norm that we *must* conform to. The subtle conditioning of our minds happen through the media – through their projections of what should we have and how should we look like is an implicit curtailing of our freedom. It can be deduced from here that mass media plays a very significant role in the emergence of culture industry. The invention that should inform the people of the truth becomes a crafter of a false culture – a culture industry.

In the next part of the paper, I will discuss the fetish character of music in order to establish the claim of this paper.

### **3. The Fetish Character of Music**

In the first chapter of *The Culture Industry*, Theodor Adorno wrote about the decline of the status of music during his time – and the production of music is being limited to the profit that one can get. He was able to give a distinction between high art and low art – in the field of music, he made a distinction between a light music and serious music. In the introduction of *The Culture Industry*, J.M Bernstein wrote on what Adorno thinks of art:

No one statement of Adorno's concerning the great divide between artistic modernism and the culture industry is either more famous or better encapsulates his view than the one found in his letter to Walter Benjamin of 3 March 1936. There he states that both high art as well as industrially produced consumer art 'bear the stigmata of capitalism, both contain elements of change (but never, of course, the middle term between Schoenberg and the American film). Both are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which, however, they do not add up (Adorno, 2001).

It shows that either types of art are manifestation of capitalism in the society. We will understand this further as we progressed in the discussion of the fetish character of music.

Adorno maintained that the modern and postmodern times are being plagued with the notion of standardized culture – hence the birth of culture industry. He maintained that during his time and today as well, music is seldom looked upon as art but merely a commodity. That music is being manufactured to be played but not really listened to – or merely listening without really understanding it. The value of music depreciates since most of them are identical. He wrote:

To like it is almost the same thing as to recognize it. An approach in terms of value judgments has become a fiction for the person who finds himself hemmed in by standardized musical goods. He can neither escape impotence nor decide between the offerings where everything is so completely identical that preference in fact depends merely on biographical details or on the situation in which things are heard (Adorno, 2001).

Emergence of true aesthetic beauty in the modern and postmodern times is difficult because due to the standardization of music everything sounds the same. Man becomes entangled in the presence of this standardized music that he cannot really identify what he really wants and is looking for in the type of music.

People today have this unknowledgeable want to listen to serious music in order to show that they are cultured and sophisticated. They listen to serious music without really understanding it or at least, want it – they just want to show that they are cultured enough to be called refined. Adorno has noted:

The illusion of a social preference for light music as against serious is based on that passivity of the masses which makes the consumption of light music contradict the objective interest of those who consume it. It is claimed that they actually like light music and listen to the higher type only for reasons of social prestige, when acquaintance with the text of a single hit song suffices to reveal the sole function this object of honest approbation can perform (Adorno, 2001).

He maintained that light music or the popular music is based on the passivity of the masses, in a way that people consume it without even knowing it's real value, or if it has value at all.

#### 4. The Fetish Character of Filipino Literature

If one frequently goes to the bookstore, for instance National Bookstore, one will see that majority of the books being sold are Filipino Romance Pocketbooks, e.g *Precious Hearts Romances* and *Wattpad presents*. This kind of books takes up the most shelves in the National Bookstore – what does it say about the reading population of the Philippines? As university students, most of us know the value of reading, but many Filipinos do not have the luxury of money to buy books or the luxury of time to read novels other than those senseless romance novels.

Today, publishing houses seem to publish almost anything that has been submitted to them. They continuously publish books that they know will bring profit to their company due to the clamour that these books are making to the uninformed public. If we look at the interests of the teenagers today, we can see that the concept of love is the most talked about concept. They waste their time imagining the perfect love that they can receive from the concept of love that they get from these romance novels that they read. The fetish characters of music can be used with literature.

At its most passionate, musical fetishism takes possession of the public valuation of singing voices. Their sensuous magic is traditional as is the close relation between success and the person endowed with ‘material’. But today it is forgotten that it is material. For musical vulgar materialists, it is synonymous to have a voice and to be a singer. In earlier epochs, technical virtuosity, at least, was demanded of singing stars, the castrati and prima donnas. Today, the material as such destitute of any function, is celebrated. One need not even ask about capacity for musical performance (Adorno, 2001).

It is true today that writer can be just anyone who writes. Today, what is important is you can produce, even if what you produce is far from being an art. Take for example, Marcelo Santos III, just a YouTube video up loader before, now has his own published books, entitled, *Para sa mga Hopeless Romantic (For the Hopeless Romantic)* and *Para sa mga Heart Broken (For the Broken Hearted)*. Personally speaking, I would not call his work a work of art, of literature, or even a work of fiction. It is a manual of things that we already know, of things that are not of importance, of things that are better to learn from one’s own experience and reflection. Yet, we can see that these books are bestsellers and even become “out of stock”, while many literary classics are being covered with dusts and become one of

those books who are being sold in a warehouse sales. The ideas of these kinds of books are what shape the mind of the Filipino today. Our youth is being fed with the idea that the only thing that they should concern themselves with is looking for the right person to love and spend their happy endings with. With this kind of conditioning, our youth becomes apathetic towards the more pressing issues at hand and it hinders them to participate in the rise against the political and social structures that prevent the over-all development of the nation. It dulls the minds of the youth and limits them to the idea that love will be the answer to every problem.

The modern and postmodern society was and is too open for production of “works of art” that it becomes less and less of an art. An art should be done with such finesse and genius to be called aesthetically beautiful. But in the culture industry, production and profit comes first and before the quality of the product.

Books and literature suffers the same fate of music – from being a beautiful form of art into a commercialized and standardized form of culture. The value of these bodies of art becomes little compared to before because of the prevalence of culture industry. Adorno maintained that:

To be sure, exchange value exerts its power in a special way in the realm of cultural goods. For in the world of commodities this realm appears to be exempted from the power of exchange, to be in an immediate relationship with the goods, and it is this appearance in turn which alone gives cultural goods their exchange value. But they nevertheless simultaneously fall completely into the world of commodities, are produced for the market, and are aimed at the market (Adorno, 2001).

What will happen then to the rich Filipino Literature, if the culture industry will continue to prevail in our society?

## **5. Conclusion**

I think if this kind of situation will continue the future of Filipino Literature will be hazy and unsure. If we will let culture industry continue, the emergence of a good literary work will be difficult because the kind of literature that culture industry produces dulls the minds of the people and thus making it difficult to differentiate good literature from a nonsensical piece of written work.

Filipinos must rise against the culture industry and try to find their way back to the true culture and away from the manufactured kind. It is high-time that we unleashed the critical thinking that is inherent in us- to start using the critical faculty that we are endowed with. We must be critical in everything that we do, in everything that we need, in everything that we watch – because we cannot trust the mass media for giving us the unbiased truth. Let not the mass media dull the critical revolutionary impulse that we are born with. Television, radio, and the internet are the ones that help in the conditioning of our minds to passively submit to the dictates of the culture industry. We are rational human beings, with our intellect and freewill, we can do so much better against this prevalent idea that surrounds us. Let us not succumb to the dictates of the society – the dictate to become passive; to become mere spectators and not participants in the shaping of the society. We must actively take part in creating a social space wherein we can think outside the invisible box that the society has already created for us.

The future of the Filipinos will be contemptible and inauthentic, if we will let ourselves become prevailed over by culture industry. Filipinos are creative human beings, we have produced many literary icons in the past and I highly believe that we can still produce as much today. All we have to do is to not let this kind of system makes us a slave of its ideologies. This is a call for all Filipinos, to not let the system run creativity out of our being and not to allow the system to enslave us because we are free beings - free and capable beings; capable of choosing for our own, and thinking on our own.

This is a call not only to Filipinos but all of mankind. A call to ignite our consciousness and to wake us from our deep slumber – that everything in our society is okay. Because it is not okay, the media continuously proliferate nonsensical ideas that hinder us from being critical.

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