

# Communication, economics and music: the role of culture industry in the composition of subjectivities over the twentieth century

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## Abstract

The goal of this paper is to propose a critical analysis of the central role played by the increasingly powerful economic determinations of the culture industry throughout the 20th century in the formation of subjectivities and intersubjective practices, with emphasis on the question of musical tastes. It is a historical approach, inspired by the well-known critical theory of Adorno and Horkheimer, that defends its actual relevance but also accuses its limits, comparing it with some Hobsbawm's reflections on music. It also considers the new horizons recently opened for the world of music by new communication technologies, with caution.

### Key words:

Music. Taste. Culture industry.

## 1 Introduction

In the beginning, in 1892 (TINHORÃO, 1981, p. 4),<sup>1</sup> the record company limited itself to reproducing and placing in circulation those songs that people produced and liked. Nowadays, in 2011, despite the promising novelties offered through cyber-culture, digital cultures, new dynamics of production, distribution and consumption of music in cyber-space, the majority of people still appear to limit themselves to reproducing and liking songs that the record company produces, reproduces and, in conjunction with radio and TV, places in circulation. The record company, radio and TV, however, do not base their operations on judgments of taste, but rather judgments of profits. An inversion, therefore, has occurred, where musical taste has become a matter of accounting judgment. This paper is an analysis and critique of this inversion.

## 2 Taste and the market

The first relationship between the culture industry and musical tastes (industry reproducing people's tastes) was transformed, over the period of a

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century, into the second (people liking what industry produced), apparently within a defined social space: the market. The market is the idyllic surface of the capitalist mode of production, where free exchanges of merchandise occur — work for money, money for produced goods — among free individuals.

Observing this vibrant surface, one may object to our postulation that there has been an inversion, responsible for the subordination of peoples' tastes to the accounting judgments of the culture industry. After all, no one can deny that, although the record company, radio and TV produce and broadcast things to be sold, for them to do so they must satisfy the public's taste. Moreover, it is not the companies' financial departments, but musicians and singers, freely contracted, who effectively produce the songs, in cooperation with music producers — whose assistance, in fact, has become increasingly indispensable — engineers and sound technicians. As far as the public goes, in the market each one is free to like whatever they want, according to their own judgment.

Below this surface, however, the real production relations are hidden and are much less idyllic. So it is in the underground of the production, an

area to which the public does not have access, where the objection proves itself to be false. This is because if, in the beginning, the selection and formal structure of what is to be produced (recorded), reproduced (serialized) and placed in circulation (commercially publicized) was directly guided by imperatives of the taste of the artists and public — which were formed amidst an entire set of pre-media intersubjective practices — soon thereafter, show business proved to be so lucrative that the selection and formal structure of the products, and consequently the taste of the artists and public, little by little, began to be guided by the economic imperatives of production, until arriving at the current paroxysm.<sup>2</sup> To state that these imperatives coincide with “popular tastes” is at best a tautology, since if people like what they like, they can only like what they know, and in the majority of cases nowadays, they only know the music that the culture industry produces, reproduces and places in circulation. Whoever, on the other hand, has access to other sources of information and formation outside mass communication media —academy, popular traditions, alternative or vanguard spaces —, tends to express judgments of taste far different from so-called “popular

<sup>1</sup> This date refers to the early days of phonogram sales, more precisely to the first public exhibition of a phonograph in Rio de Janeiro — practically simultaneously with presentations in the USA and Europe. Tinhorão also mentioned an exhibit of the device in Porto Alegre in 1879.

<sup>2</sup> As demonstrated by Attali (1999), if a job is only considered “productive” from the standpoint of capital insofar as the capital invested in the “rental” of the labor force is converted into more capital, musical production only enters this circuit when sales began of musical editions, and this process only gained more relevant economic importance with the development of the culture industry. And it is from then on that economic imperatives of production began to determine production, reproduction and circulation — consequently, consumption of music.

taste”, which permeates the populist discourse of the culture industry, although both opinions may coincide at certain points.

Yet how did the inversion about which we postulate here, practically come to pass? Well, if taste is not a given, a ready thing, but rather a process, a socially-mediated formation, and if this formation reproduces in each society, in the final analysis, the contradictory economic imperatives that govern it (which is the idea defended herein), even though indirectly and in a complex manner; that is, non-linearly, mechanically and automatically, the increased economic importance of industrialized musical production is related, primarily, to the intensive growth of urban concentrations during the 20<sup>th</sup> century throughout the world.<sup>3</sup> These concentrations promoted contacts, affections, conflicts and miscegenation among spatially dislocated distinct pre-urban local cultural traditions. This meant, on the one hand, that notable possibilities arose for enriching and renewing these traditions. On the other, contradictorily, it lead to the configuration of a social situation capable of annihilating them in their capacity for development and creative diversity, forming new massive common tastes determined by ideological imperatives, and especially economic imperatives of the culture industry.

To understand this phenomenon, one must consider, as we are told by Martin-Barbero (1997, p. 191), that

[...] what happens in culture when masses emerge cannot be thought of if not in relation to the re-adaptations of hegemony, which, since the 19th century had made culture a strategic space for reconciliation of classes and reabsorption of social differences.

If by “readaptations of hegemony” we understand reconfigurations of social relations of power, and if we accept the hypothesis that this power in the end is determined by the economic position that the subjects occupy in the midst of class struggle, this necessarily means that the subject with his/her tastes must be seen as an economic subject, that is, a subject that produces and consumes. The specific form of how she or he produces, that is, the position occupied in terms of labor relations, is the condition that primarily determines what and how she or he consumes – in other words, it determines the person’s role with regards to these readaptations.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, parallel to the fact that culture may be considered “a strategic space for reconciliation of classes and reabsorption of social differences”, the “emergence of urban masses” also presented itself as a magnificent opportunity for gains of scale to the emerging culture industry. Furthermore,

**3** Hobsbawm (1997) paid special attention to the processes that culminated, in the second half of the 20th century, in a demographic configuration unprecedented in history: the majority of the population begins to live in cities.

**4** It is reasonable to assume that before these social transformations, conditioned by the rise of the capitalist mode of production, it would be difficult to speak of a more or less homogenous “popular taste” on a large scale, only localized and varied popular tastes.

everything indicates that, repeating the proven formula of success ad infinitum or varying from it superficially, with the luxurious assistance of an immense propaganda and marketing apparatus, the risks of rejection by consumers can be minimized, which does not exactly represent a brotherly concern by the investor with the internal satisfaction or aesthetic formation of the public, but rather exclusively a concern in minimizing risks and maximizing profits on investments. Contemporary industry merely radicalized the process on a global scale. The same is true of the culture industry.

Nonetheless, the objection may again be raised here that, on the contrary, capitalist industry is characterized by the imperative of novelty, a trend that has been intensifying recently, with planned obsolescence of products. This, at least with regards to music produced within the culture industry, is rarely a consequence of organic novelties (that is, formal renovations directly due to experiences guided by aesthetic imperatives and/or by the exhaustion of existing formal possibilities),<sup>5</sup> rather, particularly nowadays, 1) from an accelerated super-productivity, an expression of the chaotic effervescence of productive forces and huge competitive pressure, which drives a frenetic races among transnational monopolies, made up of increasingly fewer surviving and dominant gargantuan companies, to transform money (D) into more money (D'), that

is, capital), and 2) the predictable saturation of and seeking of new (and moribund) markets, due to the slowdown of the world economy. In other words, both repetition and novelty remain, in the end, determined by economic imperatives.

A consequence of this process, of giving preeminence to mass broadcasting of a few formulae in detriment to an immense variety of others, both existing and potential, is to block the socialization of an infinity of formal experiences, which remain restricted to the realm of musicians and elite or popular circuits marginalized by mainstream media, or simply disappear. Their disappearance also has two other possible consequences: they take with them the concrete existential content they expressed, or they become mute. In the terms of Calvino (1994, p. 58):

[...] at a time when other media triumph, endowed with startling speed and a very extensive radius of action, threatening to reduce all communication to a uniform and homogeneous crust, the function of literature is communication among that which is diverse because it is diverse, sharpening instead of dulling the difference, according to the vocation of written language.

When Calvino speaks of literature and in the “vocation of written language”, I believe one could extend this line of thinking to all forms of surviving (or resisting) symbolic production, based on modes of production prior to the supercharged stage of the culture industry, such as part of literature, music, academic production,

**5** See Jameson (1995).

etc. (I say part because, for example, self-help books, jingles and some academic production are completely subordinate to it), maintaining a greater degree of relative autonomy, even though on the fringe or underground of its sphere of activity. What characterizes this supercharged stage of the culture industry is the current historical moment, in which the culture industry has become, or is increasingly becoming its own reference. Over time, this leads to forgetfulness, exhaustion and destruction of all other modes of symbolic production, and the risk pointed out by Calvino of “reducing all communication to a uniform and homogeneous crust”, in other words, self-reproduction. Musical production in the 20th century, whether samba, choro, jazz, rock, tango or dodecaphonic music, it runs the risk of attaining the dubitable status of folklore.

It is therefore only on the fringe of the system, or in its underground, less directly subordinate to the automatism of the economy, and therefore less automatic, where I believe efforts for production and accumulation of relatively autonomous symbolic value survive. These are linked to more organic cultural movements, transformational traditions or roots traditions, from which one might expect counterattack activities, when the underground becomes mature enough to transform itself into avant-garde, and through

the struggle for radical democratization of means of production, distribution and consumption, appropriated by the supercharged culture industry,<sup>6</sup> if one day this will be possible. This emergence of the underground would likely be magmatic, volcanic. This, far from representing an unfeasible return to previous modes of production, suggests a metamorphosis into new unforeseen modes of production (not necessarily discarding those in existence), where the only limit to the autonomy of the field (BOURDIEU, 1999) of symbolic production would be the use value of its products measured by the exchange value of erotic affection between non-alienated forms – i.e., not mediated by capital – of production and consumption, with the means remaining as means, no longer beginning and end.

### 3 Attack, defense and counterattack

If all hegemony, however, is a historical construction, articulated over the class struggle, this necessarily implies that there is counter-hegemonic articulations as well. At the extremes of the conflict between two antagonist forces, when the conflict does not end peacefully, there can only be three possible solutions: victory, defeat or synthesis – in which one of the two original forces tends to be represented, more or less transformed, in a degree of higher power than the other, in proportion equal to or greater than in its former relationship.

**6** By “supercharged” culture industry, we understand its current stage, monopolist and with technological convergence. Over the period of the 20th century, the culture industry, in former times secondary to the steel industry, petrochemical industry, energy industry, etc., as highlighted by Adorno and Horkheimer (1985), took on an increasing economic importance, and has now attained the monopolist stage referred to by Lenin regarding capitalist enterprises in general.

During the conflict, that is, before the consummation of one of the three possible solutions, there can also only be three movements: attack (domination), defense (resistance) and counterattack (revolution); such as in soccer. One of these three possible movements will be the most suitable for each given moment, according to the general make-up of the conflict and degree of power of each of the forces.

Considering the contemporary Supercharged Culture Industry (SCI) – at once spokesperson and one of the major sources of expanded reproduction of capital in modern times – as one of the historically used forces, and, as the other force – to facilitate representation – a hypothetical autonomous sub-field (in relation to the economic field, or the power field) of production, reproduction, circulation and independent musical consumption (ASF), which is part of the larger field of symbolic production, we find the following:

1. the SCI has a much higher degree of socializing power than the ASF, due to its immense economic power, to the fact that it is the socially dominant mode of production and because it constitutes a set of its own means of production (record), reproduction (serialization on an industrial scale) and circulation (means of distribution, sales and dissemination on a massive scale) of symbolic goods. What it does not dominate is code (musical knowledge), the human

body and of one or another work instrument (part of the means of production: musical instruments, microphones, computers, etc.), which the sub-field sometimes has; its capacity for social penetration and reproduction is nearly omnipresent. In brief, it is the hegemonic force;

2. The ASF only has its own body (besides one or another instrument, etc.), domination of the code or accumulated symbolic value (advantageous access to a given collective symbolic heritage, training, artistic talent, recognition by part of the field), and it has neither economic power nor means of large scale production, reproduction and circulation of symbolic goods. It is the counter-hegemonic force.

Considering that the object of the dispute is production of social taste, a condition for the survival and growth of both forces, and the disparity of power between the forces in conflict, attack is the obvious movement of the stronger power – attack represented herein in the movement to systematically alienate (expropriate) symbolic value historically accumulated by the field of symbolic production, and to repress its power of symbolic value production, transforming existing and potential symbolic value into media capital (capital plus social prestige acquired through large investments of capital in the music economic circle) through this double operation. In practice, this practice occurs



through gradual occupation by capital of nearly all means of and social spaces for production, reproduction, circulation and consumption of symbolic goods<sup>7</sup>, while the possibility of defense or counterattack by the weaker power, that is, the musicians and composers, can only take place in a relatively autonomous sphere of production, reproduction, circulation and non-mass consumption.<sup>8</sup> Defense, however, when possible, only makes sense as a preparation for counterattack; in other words, relative decrease of autonomy in the field of symbolic production<sup>9</sup> (reactive resource) which, in the conflict, is necessary for the very survival of the field at the time of the defense, must have an underground accumulation of autonomous symbolic value (active resource) as reserve ammunition, to be used at the time of the counterattack, which is when the underground becomes the vanguard, due to the sum of marginal conquests of the defense, or due to the impossibility of its survival, in which case the counterattack is a similar to the action of the kamikaze. Such a strategy is not due solely because of the disparity of the forces in the conflict, but also because there is another crucial agent in the process: consumers of symbolic goods who are not at the same time producers, that is, the 'people'.

Producers who are also consumers are alienated (expropriated) from accumulated symbolic value and its potency of production of symbolic value is repressed, becoming media capital, from the production to consumption spheres; the same occurs with consumers who are not producers, except only in the consumption sphere. Potency of production and accumulation of symbolic value are synonymous with the power to produce tastes (flavour/knowledge) according to nothing more than the relative autonomy of the field of symbolic production with regards to the field of power. These depend on ownership of the means of production, reproduction and circulation being in the hands of the direct producers, or related to them in a balance of forces. Production and accumulation of media capital, on the other hand, is alienation of accumulated symbolic value and repression of the potency to produce symbolic value, is non-produced taste (or produced through its exchange value, with low autonomy of taste, regardless of its potential use value), therefore not consumed, either due to exclusion by direct producers of access to means of production, reproduction and circulation of symbolic goods, or due to the imposition on producers to only reproduce media social taste, with relatively little

**7** See Schneider (2010).

**8** If we consider the internet, a few independent labels, community and pirate radios 'mass means', at the disposal of the field of symbolic production, its socializing power increases, although it still remains far below that of the power field.

**9** Under the media pseudo-aura, all autonomy is given in relation to the media. Therefore, fields of autonomous production can be both the vanguard (middle and upper classes) and folklore (popular class).

symbolic value and low taste potential. Media social taste is equal to idolatry, fetishism of symbolic merchandise.<sup>10</sup>

Would it be conceivable in music to clone certain formulae of success ad infinitum bereft of any ballast of more autonomous new (or old) formal extra-media experiences? Unfortunately, as a trend, to a certain extent, the answer is yes. Yet not entirely, because one should not neglect the possibility of new miscegenations, not molded by pop, of the many popular forms that still exist in the world.

Going back to what we said elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> in an initial stage of development, according to the logic of a merchandise-producing system, there was an alternation, with relative delicacy, between a movement to preserve traditional values<sup>12</sup> and the principle of novelty. This is due to the imperative of the capitalist market to be constantly launching new products into circulation, new merchandise, supporting one of the stages of capital self-reproduction and expansion. Thus, the culture industry and the vanguard still maintained certain

affinities. Besides, although they preserve a part of their traditions, agents of the different groups of symbolic production move in time and space, promoting reciprocal affection in large cities and causing formal fissures and fusions, which, from the standpoint of capital, provided rich symbolic material<sup>13</sup> to be expropriated (alienated) by the culture industry in its process of primitive accumulation of media capital. At this stage, the culture industry can afford to effectively renew itself cyclically and favor a rich renewal of fields in its expansion. As Hobsbawm (1997, p. 88-89) observes and illustrates, in his *The Jazz Scene*, outside the large urban centers:

The local public is completely different from the public from another town. For someone living in New Orleans, 'Canal Street Blues' refers to an unidentifiable street, '2.19 Blues' refers to an unidentifiable train. To the local minstrel who sang 'I'm goin' to Houston, Texas, 'Lighting Hopkins is the man I want to see' [...] his blues had a specific purpose: in this particular case one guitar player (Sam 'Lightning' Hopkins) being challenged by another (Brownie McGhee). To the outside public, it is just a blues song, the meaning of its title and text - and therefore music - is just as remote as that of records with exotic names, taken from Harlem slang. Folklo-

**10** Media social taste does not refer to an alleged "popular taste", since it predominates in all classes, although not entirely. It is never an exaggeration to insist that one must avoid the current mistake of confusing the term popular as a reference to production and taste of the people— a category that, in turn, has become increasingly problematic - and popular as correlating to popularity, that is, high rate of consumption. This confusion, first and foremost, reflects the legitimizing discourse of the agents of the culture industry to justify the choice of the products they broadcast, for being "what the people want". Regarding this, see Hall (2003).

**11** See Schneider (2010)

**12** Due to the survival of social "taste" habits and customs of production and consumption prior to the culture industry, as well as mass dislocations in time and space, this is, from the rural to the urban areas.

**13** Both that which is historically accumulated in traditional forms as well as, modern fact, the one who is produced by novelty of formal mobility, enabled by the intensification of cultural miscegenation processes.



ric art therefore loses much of its concreteness when it leaves the community that recognizes its allusions and references. As jazz became a generic musical language for Black immigrants who came to the cities, it inevitably lost some of its roots.

Here Hobsbawn refers to decontextualizing meanings as a result of spatial migrations. The culture industry, in turn, increasingly places greater value on more generic forms and discourses (which is economically necessary due to the growing and historically inevitable concentration of capital, pressures from competition and the scale in which it operates), promoting unilateral migrations of meanings, decontextualizing the symbolic expression of its specific extra-media roots, producing fetishism or idolatry: cults of false images and of false gods. False, not in opposition to Jehovah or any universal truth, but by being in unconscious subordination to automatism of the economy, to the totalizing nature of capital. As was said by Marx (apud McLENNAN; MOLINA; PETERS, 1980, p. 307),

[...] labour is of course in each single case a specific labour, but capital can come into relation with every *specific* labour; it confronts the *totality* of all labours and the particular one it confronts at a given time is an accidental matter<sup>14</sup>

We may infer from this reflection that this “accidental” nature, speaking of production of symbolic goods, points to an absence of any determining criteria, of actual aesthetic

guidance, in choosing formulae produced and broadcast by the culture industry, or more precisely it reveals subordination of any of these criteria to the totalizing imperatives of capital. Moreover, that this trend is inevitable insofar as symbolic producers will only find work more or less directly related to the culture industry, and depend on it for their survival.

On one hand, it is precisely the existence of intersubjective extra-media practices that allow the existence of diverse readings of the same discourses, or different fruitions of the same aesthetic objects, and differentiated symbolic productions, which are not subject to the tautology of the circuit of the culture industry, which, in a certain manner, counterbalances the homogenizing vector, and even, one might say, “re-grounds it” in an original form in the practices of subjects. These extra-media practices therefore constitute the objective ballast that ensures, in average social terms, some variety of tastes and judgments of taste.

The massifying trends, however, prevail, given the near-omnipresence of the culture industry in contemporary societies, so the outsourcing of part of the means of musical production (studios, computers etc.) has done little to alter the phenomenon, for the time being: in addition to the fact that this

equipment and leasing of studios is not as inexpensive as is often said, the pressing factories and satellites and antennae that carry the reproduction and circulation of symbolic goods have owners. As far as the alternative route of the internet goes, for the time being, it is nothing more than that: an alternative route, although one must acknowledge that new horizons have opened to music, with the exponential growth of the number of users, social networks, search engines, means of giving recommendations, etc., which makes it much more promising than it was a few years ago,<sup>15</sup> when a personal website of an unknown musician was something like a letter in a bottle thrown by a shipwreck into the ocean.

In any case, the increasing economic value attained by music over the 20th century has created an inversion of priorities, with the imperatives of the taste of the artists and public subordinate to the economic imperatives of the culture industry. The

culture industry – its capital, its machinery, information networks, working groups, political lobbies, commercial objectives, ‘public’ concessions, their scoops, that is, their means of production and formal legal apparatus and informal apparatus - do not belong to the artists or public, rather to the capitalist class.<sup>16</sup>

Now, if taste is a socially-mediated formation, we can then conclude that the owners of the culture industry currently maintain hegemony over this mediation. It is not that these bosses conspired to impose their personal taste on everyone, which, in the end, has little interference in the process – it is this lack of criteria that also characterizes the irrationality of the model: everyone’s tastes, including those of the capitalist himself, are subordinate in the practices of the culture industry to the imperatives of the self-expansion of capital, inasmuch as the exchange value, due to the development of the culture industry, the herald of capital,

**15** See Herschmann (2010).

**16** On this regard, Renato Ortiz (2010) ponders: “With the new technological achievements, there was also a diversification of production. A small studio, with minimal technical resources, is capable of producing a CD. Nevertheless, one cannot forget that the broadcast policy, which results in access to television, radio, magazines and newspapers, as well as an important investment in propaganda and marketing, is defined outside the scope of these studios. Seen in another manner, the concentration of these oligopolies prescinds ownership of the ‘means of production’: what matters is control of the distribution channels and public access to the world of media.” In fact, seen from the standpoint of the outsourcing of recording studios, one could say that the recording industry, taken by itself, may have attained the point of prescinding “ownership of the means of production”. In practice, of course, it does not nor can it exist by itself, rather only as a sector of the culture industry as a whole. Therefore, “control of distribution channels” – which involves extremely sophisticated equipment to produce, capture and broadcast messages, etc (transmitters, antennae, satellites, cable, etc.) – by the culture industry taken as a whole, to not mention human resources, networks of influence, etc., is the same as ownership of the means of production, or of its most substantive part as a point of power in contemporary society.

gradually became the predominant nature of music, while its use value, which pertains to the order of pleasure, has produced a social taste with clear signs of fetishism, in consequence of this inversion.<sup>17</sup>

#### 4 Freedom and fetish

Here one can predict a new objection, and an agitated one: “So what? What right does one have to judge the forms people choose to obtain pleasure?”

Stated like that, truly no one should take on such a right, unless you’re talking about some aesthetic fanatic or unfeeling moralist. After all, there seems to be no doubt that the fetishist obtains pleasure through his or her practice, and more so if that practice is inoffensive to the person and to others, then we completely agree than it is nobody’s business. The objection, however, is not properly framed. Because 1) the fetishist does not choose the forms by which he or she obtains pleasure, these being, as it were, chosen for him or her; and 2) the point is not to criticize some personal idiosyncrasy, rather a historically determined social standard.

In other words, we do not intend to prepare a critique against subjective freedom, but on behalf of a possible intersubjective freedom. In

this sense, and remembering that this critique has no normative moral or aesthetic objective, it is important to identify the characteristics of the socially hegemonic fetishist pleasure.

The relevance of the question, apparently irrelevant unless one lives from music - after all, who cares what music people like or not? - is based on the hypothesis of a supercharged capitalism, after having colonized the time, body and a good part of people’s ideas, with the more efficient than ever assistance from the culture industry, in its current stage tends to exercise monopolist control over the major part of their most intimate sensory and cognitive activities, as well as their intersubjective references.

The culture industry seeks to direct the chaotic concert of these references in these times - and is hugely successful in its endeavor, howbeit not completely. It not only selects what is broadcast guided by primarily economic imperatives (disguised by the fetish concept of a ‘popular taste’), and not only uses incessant repetition and propaganda, but especially it uses its media pseudo-aura to confuse conflicts within and between classes, blurring the concrete boundaries of varied experiences of life in a common symbolic game

**17** We use the term here with a degree of liberty, understanding fetishism as an experience of fixation, and sublimation as an experience of a stream of potentially progressive and liberating pleasure. What is similar to the psychoanalytic and Marxist meaning of the word fetish, which we use synthetically, is the fact that, in fetishism, you have transfer of energy (libido or work force) from subject to object, transferring the latter value (erotic, symbolic or economic) alienated from the former, insofar as the subject is subjected to the object.

with no grounding in common experiences. It is not a game to stimulate thinking and a sense of criticism, much less a game to bring enchantment to its players, but rather a biased reactionary vision of reality, which acts to reproduce and legitimize the relations of power in force in the common imagination.

Nevertheless, we deem it essential to consider what are the different grounds in the extra-media symbolic universes. Above all, the concrete daily experience that enables distinct readings of the same symbolic products differ, and what is chosen to be reproduced and placed in circulation, although excluding (which is inevitable in any selection), somehow meets some existing demand (which, however, is not fruit of “popular taste” as a “natural” expression of some ghost-like “popular soul”, but instead of the formation of consumers, determined by their position within labor relations). On the other hand, we deem it even more important to identify the terrible unity of social approval, even though through cross-cutting readings, of the same discourses and hegemonic tastes. In other words, the fact that there are different readings of a set of political or religious discourses, for example, of songs or soap operas, does not negate the other fact, which in our view is the most relevant: this is the only set; there are no

others, placed in circulation. Why? Why do the “people” like it? Who are the “people”? And, whoever they may be, who can guarantee they wouldn’t like other things?

We deem these questions to be pertinent, as the dominant trend we unfortunately see nowadays is the massacre of concrete diversity under the weight of fetishist unity, is the flattening of significant cross cutting aspects and assets in a passive idol-worshipping quid pro quo, despite resistant and potential plurality, which unfortunately cannot be heard on the most-watched programs on free TV.

## 5 Conclusions

Opposing certain positions highlighted in academic discourse on current communications, we believe that part of the critiques of Adorno and Horkheimer on the culture industry are still quite current. Nonetheless, a fallacious aspect of this critique is the insufficient attention given to class struggle in the arena of culture, to be revealed by paying close attention on the dialectic tension between hegemonic and homogenizing vectors of the culture industry (which they defined so well), their internal tensions, more organic emerging cultural forms and surviving extra-media cultural traditions, particularly popular ones. After all, as Hobsbawn (1990, p. 35) said:

The raw material of mass entertainment is, in great part, a formation adapted from

previous entertainment, and to date industry continues to recycle itself from time to time, returning to the source, and finding some of its most fruitful activities in the older, perennial and less 'industrialized' forms of popular creation.

To maintain itself, the culture industry does not wipe out these traditions, rather it appropriates them, reinforces, alienates, channels, homogenizes them, to a greater or lesser degree, but at times strengthens and promotes them. To fail to consider these variables is a clear demonstration of theoretical myopia, based on economistic reductionism associated to an aristocratic aesthetic attitude.

Within this tension, the flat land the critics of Frankfurt mapped never existed, since, although leveling, the culture industry has not to date achieved 100% of its objectives. If it had, it would kill the very strength it appropriates and would have nothing left to appropriate. This means that there are indeed tactics of resistance and creative reinventions from the field of subordinate symbolic production - which should not, on the other hand, be overestimated, under risk of losing sight of the culturally impoverishing hegemonic tendency of the culture industry.

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**Comunicação, economia e música:  
 o papel da indústria cultural  
 na composição de subjetividades  
 ao longo do século XX**

**Resumo:**

O objetivo deste trabalho é propor uma análise crítica do papel central desempenhado pelas cada vez mais poderosas determinações econômicas da indústria cultural ao longo do século 20 na formação das subjetividades e das práticas intersubjetivas, com ênfase na questão dos gostos musicais. Trata-se de uma abordagem histórica, inspirada na conhecida teoria crítica de Adorno e Horkheimer, que defende a sua atualidade, mas que acusa os seus limites, confrontando-a com algumas reflexões de Hobsbawm sobre música. São também considerados os novos horizontes recentemente abertos para o universo da música pelas novas tecnologias da comunicação, com prudência.

**Palavras-chave:**

Música. Gosto. Indústria cultural.

**Comunicación, economía y música:  
 el papel de la industria cultural en la  
 composición de las subjetividades a  
 lo largo del siglo XX**

**Resumen:**

El objetivo de este trabajo consiste en proponer un análisis crítico del papel central de las determinaciones económicas cada vez más poderosas de la industria cultural en todo el siglo 20 en la formación de las subjetividades y de las prácticas intersubjetivas, con énfasis en la cuestión de los gustos musicales. Se trata de un enfoque histórico inspirado en la conocida teoría crítica de Adorno y Horkheimer, abogando su actualidad, sino que acusando a sus límites, comparándola con algunas reflexiones sobre música de Hobsbawm. También se consideraron los horizontes abiertos recientemente para el mundo de la música por las nuevas tecnologías de comunicación, con precaución.

**Palabras clave:**

Música. Gusto. Industria cultural.

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