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## **The Homo Mediaticus and the Paralysis of Critical Thought**

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After the end of Nazism and fascism and with the fall of the Soviet block, our society has been partly founded on the myth of the freedom of the press and the freedom of thought. Fear of an Orwellian society causes us to reject and oppose any imposition that comes from high up. The human loves to feel free to think, to act with full autonomy, completely emancipated from external influences. Paradoxically, now, never has the homologation in behaviour and in the ideas of individuals been so apparent, manifesting in the ways in which we dress, eat, and in our desires and aspiration, but, above all, there is homologation in the way we think.

The totalitarian regimes could not impose thoughts by force. In contrast, such regimes are sources of critical thought. In an obvious absence freedom of expression, the human reacts, almost instinctively, with cognitive force, developing “critical thought” to reject the “System”; in other words, facing a coercively created homologation, the human answers with nonconformist critical thought. Paradoxically, today, it seems that with the freedom to express one’s own opinions, the human does not develop critical thought. There exists an “abstract force” which imposes its own laws and advances its supremacy on politics: the market. This has happened primarily because of what the Frankfurt scholars call “the culture industry”;<sup>1</sup> a critical analysis of the economic and cultural context in which we live shows the risks derived from a serialized production of cultural products and commercialisation of art. As Debord shows, the risk of a paralysis of critical thought comes from the “society of the spectacle.”<sup>2</sup>

This article is divided into three parts. The first part will examine the illusion of pluralism, where in spite of a plurality of media, the ideas diffused are similar; they are different only in appearance and not in reality. Furthermore, this part will investigate which “eyeglasses” we use in understanding, deciphering, and elaborating the input that comes from the media system and the real world.<sup>3</sup> Autonomy of thought is in trouble and the ability to think critically has atrophied as a result of the media system. As Postman outlines “when a population becomes distracted by trivia, when cultural life is redefined as a perpetual round of entertainment, when serious public conversation becomes a form of baby-talk, when, in short, a people become an audience and their public business a vaudeville act, then a nation finds itself at risk: culture-death is a clear possibility”<sup>4</sup>. Since the advent of television there has evolved a new subject: *homo videns*.<sup>5</sup> This new subject is progressively losing its critical abilities.

The second part of this article analyzes the role of the advertising world, which imposes the immediate attainment of happiness as a categorical imperative of our age. The mass media, part involuntarily and part intentionally, has become an agent reinforcing the *status quo*, creating privileges and advantages for the power elite.

The last paragraph of the article will try to show the irrationality of our system, using the Adorno and Horkheimer analysis which states that, at the apex of its development, the rationalism of Enlightenment is inverted and becomes irrationality.

Let us start with some general considerations. Democratic societies are characterized by free elections. Indeed, their absence suggests the presence of a regime. This is an obvious truth even to those who have become accustomed to think for only “five minutes per day”. Another truth: the person who wins the election must submit to the laws of the market and to international institutions that impose their prescriptions upon every single State. If we see the ‘five minutes’ metaphor as the limit beyond which critical thought occurs, we could deduce that only those who possess and use critical thought understand the true substance of things and not only their appearance. More strongly, those who are accustomed to think in a dogmatic way based on the ephemeral will not see

the risks for the democracy of an increasingly conformist society, enslaved to the market. At the same time, those who think critically see the dangerousness and the contradictions of this society but seem unable to communicate them as in Plato's "myth of the cave". Here emerges the responsibility of the intellectual, which many authors have emphasized in different ways: Gramsci<sup>6</sup>; Mills<sup>7</sup>; Gouldner<sup>8</sup>; Brym<sup>9</sup>; Szelenyi<sup>10</sup>; Konrad and Szelenyi<sup>11</sup>; Bourdieu<sup>12</sup>; Bourdieu and Wacquant<sup>13</sup>; Bauman<sup>14</sup>.

Furthermore, the freedom to dissent is guaranteed in democratic societies. However, provocatively, we could ask: is it possible to dissent on something with which we have no acquaintance and of which we have no awareness? If the media invite us to reflect solely on ephemeral and superficial things, those who follow only this news, even if remaining free to dissent, will use this faculty in order to criticize the ephemeral, the scraps, but not the "substance". It is necessary to reflect on this point. To dissent to the things disseminated by the media is to be in discord with the appearance of these things, but not with their essence. The discussion of the difference between appearance and essence is not new. Marx notes a dyscrasia between truth and appearance. Appearance is not just a trick or optical illusion, it is much more: it is a representation contrary to the substance of the thing in question, suggesting freedom where instead slavery reigns and free exchanges where coercion exists spreading and shaping the exchanges.

Today, in the society of the spectacular and ephemeral, the 'myth of the cave' is still a pertinent issue. Everything seems to be controlled from the top, but although the system works to deceive us with the concept of pluralism (political, cultural, ethnographic), the subject it is in some way free to choose. In order to understand one needs to stop for more than five minutes to reflect. What we see is that the most important decisions in our daily lives have come from a small minority, not democratically elected which guards its own interests. The minority, in order to safeguard the advantages derived from the privileged positions it has obtained using mass media, on one hand exalt the virtues of the market and on the other try to deceive us of our continually increasing freedom. All of this would be obvious if we stopped a moment to reflect with critical thought.

Abilities and wishes are two concepts on which it is necessary to reflect. One is not able to think when one is not trained to do so. We should ask ourselves: who trains us to think? The answer is simple: the school at the beginning and the university at the end. They ought primarily to teach us to think, to supply the critical elements of thought, to elaborate and to cultivate the most precious legacy of the Enlightenment: the critical use of reason. Instead the educational institution is moving in another direction. Reforms push schools towards an ever greater professionalization. They cultivate the *homo faber* in contrast to the *Homo sapiens*, they emphasize practical and not critical abilities. In a society where the market, the economy and productivity propagandize in a cross-sectional way, advancing their supremacy on politics and values, the *homo criticus* is not only superfluous but indeed, in some cases, harmful. The school as an institution, once the most important agent of socialization and education, has given way to the media and in particular to television. It is television that educates and transmits values. As Postman states, the television as the alphabet or the printing press,

Has by its power to control the time, attention and cognitive habits of our youth gained the power to control their education. This is why I think it accurate to call television a curriculum. As I understand the word, a curriculum is a specially constructed information system whose purpose is to influence, teach, train or cultivate the mind and character of youth. Television, of course, does exactly that, and does it relentlessly. In so doing, it competes successfully with the school curriculum.<sup>15</sup>

Television is therefore in competition with the school educational system for cultural and value formation.<sup>16</sup> More than this, it is also in competition with the other fundamental educational institution, that is, the family. In fact, an increasing number of families, because they do not have the time or for comfort, entrust to “mother-TV”, the burden and the pleasure of education. Television operates not only to impose its agenda on society<sup>17</sup> or to cultivate society<sup>18</sup> or to provoke dependency, it goes further than this. Discussing the accumulated effects that the media progressively have on human behaviour and thought, we need to recognise that they influence at a

cognitive level. In other words, the long-term effects of the medium must be emphasized, namely its contribution in moulding the social processes of acquaintance. The power of the media is not only limited to providing information on which to reflect, limiting in some way our acquaintance, but also provides the cognitive categories that we absorb, from childhood, cultivating our systems of mental and cultural elaboration of meaning. The media does not only dictate what we are to think about but also how we are to think about these things. Not only do the media provide information, but acting on a cognitive level, they structure and mould the social systems of acquaintance. The media and television, in particular, influence our ability to think critically. Television, with its dynamism, invites us to think in an equally fast way which is in contrast to times of critical thought. Indeed, television is doomed by what Bourdieu calls the fast thinkers, “thinkers who think faster than a speeding bullet fast”<sup>19</sup>. Television elaborates thoughts quickly and in a way that no-one can because the thoughts are clichés. Television proposes its point of view to the public, who often accepts it or thinks about it. As a consequence, the public are trained to think quickly and not critically.

For the *homo mediaticus*, “thinking’s tiring”. He seems to be more and more “cognitive lazy” and he is losing his critical abilities that, like other faculties, will atrophy if not trained. Kant, more than two centuries ago, noted, we must have the courage to use our own intelligence, *sapere aude*, in order that we do not remain intellectually “under-age”, subordinating ourselves to some spiritual authority that thinks for us:

Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why such a great part of mankind, long after nature has set them free from the guidance of others (*naturaliter maiorennes*), still gladly remain immature for life and why it is so easy for others to set themselves up as guardians. It is so easy to be immature. If I have a book that has understanding for me, a pastor who has a conscience for me, a doctor who judges my diet for me, and so forth, surely I don’t need to trouble myself. I have no need to think, if only I can pay; others will take over the tedious business for me<sup>20</sup>.

What Kant could not predict was the capillary spread of the media that, contemporaneously and in every area, disseminates the same thoughts and ideas. This does not happen as a result of a manifesto that declares it to be so, but in an automatic way. Indeed, the capitalist system, as all systems, tries to self-perpetuate and defend itself. Critical thought, as mentioned, can be seen as a threat; for this reason the system does not train us to think in this way. In other words, the system does not encourage man to use his own intelligence and critical thought, since this could damage and weaken the system. Thinking independently can mean, as Tocqueville has stated, a conservation of the privileges of citizenship, but at the same time can make oneself feel foreign in one's own society<sup>21</sup>. It is for this reason that one often prefers to accept the more comfortable truth that is simpler and less painful that is easier to digest and assimilate into the mental framework supplied by the media and the culture of reference. This truth, or version of the truth, is preferred because, as Arendt states, we cannot live without prejudgments. No one is so clever as to have original thought every time the situation demands it of us. Such a lack of prejudgments would demand superhuman vigilance. On one hand, it is true that we are not and we cannot be *tabula rasa*; we do not have each time have to redefine the parameters of our basis of analysis, to estimate and to elaborate the information from the social context. On the other hand, it is also true that the outlines of perception and the instruments that we use as references for the world are given to us from the social system. Arendt emphasizes that the less we have these prejudices the less we are suited to living in a social context. Another issue is to see how these prejudgments are born, who carries them, and how they influence our perceptions of the world.

As Silverstone and Hirsch note, media consumption engages interactive processes such as incorporation, conversion, objectification and appropriation<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore a significant number of studies consider the process of media consumption within the context of daily life<sup>23</sup>. Indeed, as has been noted, the individual incorporates the media's material which contributes to the formation of himself<sup>24</sup>. Moreover, as Wright Mills argues, "the biographies of men and women cannot be

understood without reference to the historical structures in which the milieux of their everyday lives are organised”<sup>25</sup>. Thus, the question is: given the quasi-homogeneity of the media in every context and the increasingly poor and ephemeral level of the media’s products, what type of formation is offered to the *tele-citizen*?

The result of the media’s product, that encourages amusement and dogmatic thought, is a citizen who is depoliticized and without a sense of responsibility. This kind of media system contributes to form a citizen who prefers to reason based on easy stereotypes and slogans. Indeed, it is much more easy and less laborious, to think in a passive way, to reason in clichés. Lippmann states that it is the cognitive structure of the human who pushes to “see chiefly what our mind is already full of on those subjects. There is an economy in this. For the attempt to see all things freshly and in detail, rather than as types and generalities, is exhausting, and among busy affairs practically out of the question.”<sup>26</sup>

It is important to emphasize how these time and effort-saving stereotypes are created in our minds. Often we prefer to use what others have thought for us. They give us the general lines on which we are to reflect. This is the social role that opinion makers and opinion leaders carry out. Often the propaganda that Carey calls “Treetops propaganda” comes directly from them<sup>27</sup>. They directly influence the thoughts of their dependants and those under them. This seems to be more and more true in a society, like ours, where the subdivision of jobs and of competences is raised to the nth degree and in which there is an increasing dependency on experts to estimate and understand the surrounding world. To quote Lippmann again:

The subtlest and most pervasive of all influences are those which create and maintain the repertory of stereotypes. We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them. And those preconceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception.... But there are uniformities sufficiently accurate, and the need of economizing attention is so

inevitable, that the abandonment of all stereotypes for a wholly innocent approach to experience would impoverish human life<sup>28</sup>.

Moreover, the abuse of the mass media renders critical thought lazier, carrying it nearer to its paralysis. The *homo mediaticus* does not want, and cannot always, in any case, go beyond the superficial level of things, in order to discover what there is beyond that appearance. Indeed, not everyone has the material and intellectual means to go beyond the ephemeral and pick at the deeper nexus of things and to adopt another perspective from which or with which to see reality. In the society of the ephemeral, the *homo mediaticus* prefers, by choice and necessity, not to go beyond the iron curtain of television's world.

The side of the world that disappears from our television and, consequently, we do not know about, is becoming more vast. The world that we see is simpler. What has happened, since the advent of television as the main instrument of information, is a change in the meaning of information because according to Postman, television creates,

a species of information that might properly be called disinformation [... ]  
Disinformation does not mean false information. It means misleading information – misplaced, irrelevant, fragmented or superficial information - information that creates the illusion of knowing something, but which in fact leads one away from knowing<sup>29</sup>.

Television offers “light information” characterized by an insufficient depth of analysis. Moreover, starting from Schultz's sociology and extending the discussion by Berger and Luckmann<sup>30</sup> on the sociology of knowledge to the mass media, it is clear that the media also contribute to the construction of truth. This is because the media construct symbols and pictures which people not only think are true but which also serve to form their social and cognitive systems.<sup>31</sup> However it is the structure of the media in general and television, in particular, that superficializes and imposes a simple format on the news. Using again Postman's reflections; “embedded in the surrealistic frame of the television news show is a theory of the anticommunication, featuring a type of discourse that abandons logic, reason, sequence and rules of contradiction”<sup>32</sup>.



Television is a means of transmission of the banal because it is preoccupied more with the image of the thing and not with its substance. The “force of banality” of television is argued in Bourdieu’s test. He thinks that television is constituted of a language and symbology that is almost exclusively superficial. The language of television creates homogeneity and does not leave space for divergent ideas. The language and symbology of television are to be uncontroversial and “soft”, like a weather report. What has happened in television has been extended to the print media that try to discuss soft topics and issues that will not provoke any trouble.

The farther a paper extends its circulation, the more it favours such topics that interest “everybody” and don’t raise problems. The object – news – is concentrated in accordance with the perceptual categories of the receiver. The collective activity I’ve described works so well precisely because of this homogenization, which smoothes over things, bring them into line, and depoliticizes them. And it works even though, strictly speaking, this activity is without a subject, that is, no one ever thought of or wished for it as such<sup>33</sup>.

The problem of the conformism and banalization of the media, according to Bourdieu, is extending into many other parts of society. In the case of television and its messages, apparently nobody would want this banalization but it is what has happened. Furthermore, not only does it seem to be unintentional, but someone draws profit whether directly or indirectly from this situation. This is not to say that there is a controlling “invisible hand”. Indeed Bourdieu warns about simple and superficial analyses that often accompany reflections on television and the wider media. This kind of analysis does not examine the centre of the phenomenon and does not attempt to study all the variables and dynamics at work.

Not only is the informative window that television opens on the world mediocre but it is conceived as entertainment more than information. The *infotainment* entertains more than it informs, spectacularizing the information and inviting us to reflect on gossip and the private lives of public figures. It therefore slowly enters our daily lives. In our society pluralism seems to be merely

illusory, emptied of sense and importance. Using Marcuse's concept of repressive tolerance, we can say that people think themselves to be free but they are free to think only up to a point; they may not criticise the current power structure.<sup>34</sup>

The position of the culture industry has been made, progressively, more clearly, imposing "the myth of economic progress", the intrinsic virtuosity of the market and technical progress as universal remedies to all evils. The fundamentalism of the market and finance persuades politicians, diverting them away from their political functions and rendering them mere civil employees serving the market in way very similar to bureaucrats in totalitarian regimes. The mass market imposes standardization and organization in the form of low quality stereotypes on the tastes and the needs of the public. The human being is enslaved by market-induced passions which he considers to be his own and only when they are satisfied will he be happy in his alienation. It coincides with the qualitative deterioration of the mind and reduces the man to a simple accessory living of the production process. This involves, as its more serious consequence, the impossibility of forming a responsible and intelligent citizen, to the advantage of those who hold the reins and manage the power that is, using Mills's words, the power elite.<sup>35</sup>

In totalitarian societies the dominant class and the managing group exercise their power through mass media, directly controlling public institutions and manifestations. Education, sport, free time: all of it is directly organized according to one particular idea. The information is the voice of the State. The journalists are members of the party and the variety of the media is limited. Today the fear is the opposite: the media offers too much. A lot of this information is insignificant, useless, and often repetitive. Topics such as fear and danger are very attractive to the media and often make up a significant part of the stories having important political implications<sup>36</sup>.

Therefore the competition between the media is not only a pseudo-competition, because, as Graber noted, the media are increasingly conformist replaying the same information and analysis (Graber 1984: 80), but a sizeable part of the media seems conceived more in order to distract than in order to inform and consequently form *tele-citizens* less and less well-informed and more distracted.

A distracted citizen is easier to train. The whole of Western media is preoccupied with the ephemeral and entertainment, under market pressure<sup>37</sup>. As McChesney and Nichols point out as the population and public opinion become effectively depoliticized as a result of a daily “infusion” of meaningless news<sup>38</sup>.

Emerging here is one of the main contradictions of the “*a-thought* society”: on one hand more is communicated, thanks to the spread of the mass media which technical and scientific progress has rendered possible, but at the same time little is communicated. The communication becomes more and more tautological. The enormous amount of voices that the mass media transmit daily, rather than increasing the experiences and the acquaintanceship with the world, does not add anything more, because such a type of communication is self-referential. This is because at the base of who speaks and who listens is a progressively homogenous vision of the world. Both the panorama offered by the media and the words used to describe it have become identical across the media (Galimberti, 2004). In short, it only appears that more is communicated. The number of voices in the media circle is more but the ideas that they are carrying is less and less. This is because the mass media are owned and managed by only a minority of people. As Bagdikian notes, “nothing in earlier history matches this corporate group’s power to penetrate the social landscape. Using both old and new technology, by owning each other’s shares, engaging in joint ventures as partners, and other forms of cooperation, this handful of giants has created what is, in effect, a new communications cartel”<sup>39</sup>.

The “free market of ideas” is managed by fewer people who all have the same vision of the world. Whoever has the power to manage this “market”, has the power to establish what is to be known and what is to be discarded. As research shows, the media seek to satisfy the interests of their advertisers, which are not necessarily coincident with the interests of the consumers<sup>40</sup>. More strongly, the interests of the readers, viewers and listeners are satisfied only insofar as these are coincident with the interests of the advertisers<sup>41</sup>.

John Keane states that there exists a structural contradiction between the freedom of communication and the limitless freedom of the market since the latter tends to destroy the former. Those who have a greater opportunity to access the mass media can more easily circulate their opinions to the “free common citizens”.

Who controls the sphere of the market of the production and the distribution of the information, determined also the priorities of the communication and the products (like television books, reviews, newspapers, programs, software for the computers) that they will be produced in mass and therefore their opinions will enter officially in mass and to the inside of the free market of opinions<sup>42</sup>.

The concentration of the media in a few hands serves to testify that, in spite of there existence, a plurality of television channels, newspapers, and radio stations; there are a reduced number of opinions and ideas in circulation in the general population, forming public opinion. Media critics claim that the commercial mass media corporations have become an antidemocratic force supporting the status quo<sup>43</sup>. The mass media are an instrument of control different from those dictatorial societies based on the physical control of the social context. To manage power today means to have the ability to influence the virtual context, the place of production of the news and meaning: that is the media’s world. It is here in fact that the power “speaks expressing itself like authority”<sup>44</sup>, it is here that the production processes and the decisional strategies of the companies are simulated and managed, but, above all, it is here that the entire social atmosphere is produced.

The acceptance of life-styles, values and ideas, that is the basis of the acceptance of the *status quo*, is not only cross-sectional along political alignments, but is quasi-automatic, strengthening the power. In other words, the media serve to reinforce the *status quo* and act as a form of rhetoric support for the dominant ideology. The message of every advertisement is the same: equating happiness with consumption. Before we learn to read we receive millions of these messages. This contributes and forms the mental framework of the citizen of tomorrow. If the messages that the school curriculum teaches to children are based on the consumerist system, on egoism and social

climbing, then it would not be strange when society moves in this direction. The mass media, and the system that takes advantage of them, has a large responsibility in the anti-democratic drift of our society. According to Dahlgren,

Media theory, as a specialty within social theory, has an obligation to help us better understand not just the institutions of the media or the processes of communication, even if these are central, but also fundamental features and processes of the modern world, which is increasingly known to us via the media. This world, our societies, our cultures, are not only in rapid transformation, but also in many ways in distress, a reality that theory cannot ignore. The catalogue of ills is all too familiar and too long to repeat here, but I would simply underscore the massive discrepancy between the current states of suffering, deprivation and constraints on human freedom, and the potentials inherent in the world for transcending to some degree these circumstances<sup>45</sup>.

It is the market and economic power that dictate the laws and delineate the directives in which the military, politics and media must operate. It is the market that imposes its rules. Every day it assumes more autonomy and independence, taking on human characteristics. Indeed, often the information system describes the market as “nervous”, “tired”, and “happy” or uses sentences like “it is the market that chooses”. Issues like deforestation, pollution, the exploitation of child labour are decided by the market as if humans have no responsibility in it. The economy advances its supremacy on politics. More strongly, the economy has absorbed politics, taking the leadership of the society, in the name of pragmatism and realism with little protest.

The weakness of contemporary politics is to follow the globalization of the liberal market and assume that this process is unstoppable and uncontrollable, thus favouring it. They exalt the opportunities and the magnificent qualities of the spontaneity of an economy that alone will guarantee well-being and prosperity. Politics abdicates its responsibilities to the economy. This is the effect of the shattering force of *la pensée unique* (unique thought), propagandised through the media of which Ignacio Ramonet speaks:

The transposition in ideological terms that pretend to be universal, of the interest of a set of economic powers and those, specifically, of international capital...In the current democracies, more and more free citizens feel enticed, trapped by a sort of viscous doctrine which, insensitively, envelops all rebellious thought, inhibits it, confuses it, paralyzes it and ultimately, suffocates it. This doctrine, la pensée unique, is the only one authorised by an invisible and omnipresent “opinion police”<sup>46</sup>.

According to Ramonet social consent is constructed through the repetition of messages disseminated by different opinion leaders, the culture industry, and the mass media. The reflections of the many authoritative experts introduce only one vision of things, one that is politically correct, one that does not upset anyone. The penseé unique is fundamentally based on the economy. The financial market is accepted as an undisputed power. As Manuel Castells notes, “if globalisation is widely acknowledged as a fundamental feature of our time, it is essentially because of the emergence of global financial markets”<sup>47</sup>.

The “financial market” determines the development of a country. Trade agreements are considered to be the basis of the process of democratization. This hegemonic process creates its own institutions as it develops, from the G8 to the World Bank, from Hollywood’s myths to logos. This process hits conventional political subjects and institutions, depriving the national organisations of their ability to elect freely. Indeed, a State that accepts the directives imposed by the great international organisations, does not place obstacles in the market but receives their laws and as a result, is helped and supported, not only economically, but also diplomatically and militarily. By contrast, those who oppose the organisations suffer political, economic and also often military retaliations.

Those using critical thought who dissent and object to this system will have great trouble in impacting upon the deep-rooted ideas of the *homo mediaticus*. This is not only because some messages, as a result of the system of “filters”<sup>48</sup>, do not reach the general public, but also because where they do arrive they would not have the same force of the messages that are repeated over and

over again and are, in time, absorbed. The new hegemony has now become a transnational force, going beyond the “modern” borders of the State. As Beck points out, globalization is possible because of the development of communication technology, creating a world society without a world state and without a world government<sup>49</sup>. Moreover, Beck believes that globalization is fundamentally about “de-nationalization”, suggesting that national systems are obsolete<sup>50</sup>.

The choices that influence our daily lives come from places we often ignore. Democracy is, in some ways, emptied of meaning, persisting in appearance, but not in essence and substance. What opportunities does the citizen have to participate in the choices regarding the economic politics of their country, when it must be subject to the choices and impositions of organisations that are not democratically elected?

It would be a mistake to concentrate analysis solely on the financial and economic factors of globalization. In fact, globalisation extends beyond the economic field and into the cultural field.<sup>51</sup> According to Featherstone, “the process of the homogenization of culture, the project of creating a common culture, must be understood as a process in the unification of culture of the need to ignore, or at best refine, synthesize and blend, local differences”<sup>52</sup>.

The principles that the “*pensée unique*” and the market impose, are those of total privatization, liberalization, the dismantling of the welfare state, which was once considered to be a great achievement in democratic countries but today is seen as an obstacle to progress and development of the economy. Globalization is wide-ranging in our minds and hangs on what Petrella calls the “Holy trinity”, that is the three principles of the “globalization of thought”: deregulation, privatization and liberalization<sup>53</sup>. The obsessive repetition of these three principles slowly corrodes the stronger resistances to this process. Concepts such as “a more flexible labour market”, “pension reforms”, and “a strong currency” and so on, enter our daily language, like imperative and unavoidable elements of government action. It seems that everybody “must accept” the principles imposed by the market. Today, the dynamicity of the market seems to impose flexibility as an irreplaceable and natural element of the normal run of things.

Irrespective of political party, the government must necessarily reform the labour market in order to render it more flexible and to adapt it to a multinational purpose. To not accept this diktat voluntarily means to go outside the important international circuit. For this reason, politics has become the slave of the economy. Barthes, in his pioneering studies on publicity, has noted the privileged place of ideology as situated in the discourse of the media. In fact, discursive structures could be seen as conditions for a significant ideological impact.<sup>54</sup> Such an ideological impact is due to a false discursive representation of reality which is the origin of false conscience. Publicity is the best means the system has to self-praise or, to use Schudson's words, "Advertising is capitalism's way of saying "I love you" to itself"<sup>55</sup>.

One of the more alarming elements of our society is the transplantation of social needs into individual needs, the increasing search for luxury and comfort and transforming waste into need. Our identity is created by consumerism by the "promotion of the self"<sup>56</sup>, "the perpetual recreation of the self"<sup>57</sup>. and "our day-dreaming about consumption"<sup>58</sup>. As Bauman noted, in their "temples" the "shoppers/consumers may find, moreover, what they zealously, yet in vain, seek outside: the forthcoming feeling of belonging – the reassuring impression of being part of a community"<sup>59</sup>. Furthermore, it is through consumption that individuals construct their sense of self and their sense of society.

These rational aspects of irrationality, the imposition of false needs, perpetuate hard work, aggressiveness and injustice, which is typical of late industrial society. The development and satisfaction of these needs have a heteronomic character: it is imposed from the top. The needs of the man coincide progressively with the needs of society which are imposed by the power elite. Technology is able to penetrate inside the man, his inner space, slowly taking hold of his inner freedom. This, as Marcuse emphasizes, has as its result not the adaptation of the individual with society, but his mimesis, that is the immediate identification of the individual with his society.

In this process, the "inner" dimension of the mind in which opposition to the status quo can take root is whittled down. The loss of this dimension, in which the power of



negative thinking - the critical power of Reason - is at home, is the ideological counterpart to the very material process in which advanced industrial society silences and reconciles the opposition<sup>60</sup>.

Our society is unconscious to the irrationality of the system. Whereas, before, the classist structure was clear and did nothing to hide itself and therefore the opposition could identify and recognise that they were being imposed upon, today, the “advanced industrial society” hides its classist structure and, as a result, thereby causes a “Paralysis of Criticism”. Moreover, to paraphrase Mills, with the increasing rationality of society and the moving of the centre of rationality and its control from the individual to big organizations, we lose the possibility of reason for a large number of people<sup>61</sup>.

Our society imposes myths and the cult of the Enlightenment, i.e. the manipulation and dominion of nature. Adorno and Horkheimer have noted the self-destruction of the Enlightenment, that is the destruction of the myth of scientific progress, of the dominion of man over nature, of technological rationality. Now this instrumental reason, at the height of its development, demonstrates a contradiction: the roles of man and science are inverted. “Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings. He knows them to the extent that he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things to the extent that he can make them. Their “in-itself” becomes “for him”. In their transformation the essence of things is revealed as always the same, a substrate of domination”<sup>62</sup>.

At the apex of its development, the Enlightenment’s principles and values are reversed: what we create in order to serve us now enslaves us. In fact, man does not dominate science, science dominates him. It is the social system that dominates the man, therefore, all men, even the bourgeois who created modern society, become objects of society. The original aims are forgotten. The rationalism of the Enlightenment is transformed into irrationality since its task is to free the man compromised by the logic of the economic system which enslaves him: we are the instrument of profit-making. Horkheimer and Adorno have analyzed the causes of this paradox, not in the

irrationality which is outside of reason, but inside the same reason. Indeed, it is rationality that has generated, in a kind of short circuit, irrationality. For the sake of clarity, the reason of which they speak is the reason of scientific positivism which uses reason as an instrument of dominion. The critical rationality should be defended and developed and the media system seems unable to do this.

Man, therefore, is manipulated by the economic system. The culture industry presents itself as a realization of the dreams of an illuminated society but at the same time limits rather than increases our freedom as a result of the tide of messages, latent and obsessive, that imposes conformism. Cultural impoverishment is synonymous with cultural levelling. It gives life to a homologation of actions, that is, conformism, in which every action loses its autonomy and becomes part of the structure and function of the apparatus, in synchrony with other actions. Collaboration with the system is demanded of the individual.

Even if individuals believe they are able to escape, in their free time, to the rigid productive mechanisms imposed by the late-industrialized society, what we are consuming is a copy of the productive labour system. The culture industry tries to homogenize the individual and deprive him of his essence and identity. It is for this reason that man is less and less free, since unconsciously he is deprived of his true identity and is defrauded of his inner self. This is why man thinks he is freer when, in fact, the opposite is true. The *homo mediaticus*, deceived by the culture industry which every day extols the beauty of the consumerist society, is every day less free because his identity is homologated to others.

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