



How about some leisure time!



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Theodor Adorno engages in a brief discussion with students about aesthetics.

Philosopher: Greetings! I am Theodor Adorno. Allow me to introduce myself. I was born in Frankfurt in 1903, the same year Marie Curie became the first woman to win the Nobel Prize in Physics. You might think that it is not relevant, but I would say that it is significant, because it was a reversal, and my life was full of reversals. My full name is a mouthful, so you don't need to know it. Besides, that was one reason I chose the second half of my mother's name as my last name when I became an American citizen in 1930. My family was prosperous and cultured. My father, a wine merchant, was of Jewish descent, but converted to Protestantism at university. Up until my twenties, I aspired to a career in music and more specifically in music composition and criticism.

David: I love music, too. This is awesome!

Philosopher: Yes! At University I studied musicology, psychology, sociology and philosophy, with the latter being the one that finally won me over. I can say that I was a bit of an anarchist when I was young and that was something I enjoyed, despite its challenges.



Peter: So, you weren't exactly following all the rules?

Philosopher: Well, I did follow some. Just not all of them. On another note, I would like you to know that "The construction of aesthetics" was the title of my diploma thesis, which earned me the title of professor in 1928. In 1933, my Jewish origin led me to lose this title and be forbidden from teaching in German universities.

Irene: Was this during the time of Nazism?

Philosopher: Yes, you remember correctly! It was the time of Nazism and I had to move away in 1934. I first went to Oxford, then in 1938 to New York and finally to Los Angeles. It was nice in California, although I had concerns about how people used their free time.

Mary: Why, what was wrong with that?

Philosopher: First of all, it's about how you use your free time. In the past, there was no such thing as 'free time.'. The workers had to fight to earn the right to rest and to have holidays. If you don't believe me, you can google that too. You will find thousands of videos on what they call it... oh, on YouTube. In my opinion, free time should not be just about relaxing or, as it is often said, escaping worries.

Free time should be dedicated to what makes us evolve, improve and acquire the tools to bring about change in society. A good movie, a quality book or playing music could contribute to this purpose. I know I might sound like your mother or maybe even your grandmother. It's called the generation gap and I don't have much hope of convincing you otherwise. To complicate matters further, I will invoke Marx, according to whom, work is necessary to be a human. However, given that your work serves someone else's interests, your true freedom lies in your free time.

Karen: Does the 'culture industry' serve this mission?

Philosopher: The "culture industry" has another mission, one that's connected to a kind of psychological control. Imagine this: at the end of a long day of estranged paid work, you are not looking for art. You want to relax by watching sports, a movie, or a reality show. On the one hand, we have the active producer providing standardized content,



and, on the other hand, the passive consumer. The two complement each other perfectly, in order to maintain the same situation eternally.

Alice: That's why the cultural industry should change and promote art as art makes people feel...

Philosopher: I will give you the example of pop music, which mainly focuses on emotions, which stem from romantic relationships, implying that happiness can only come through them. Of course in my time, there were no such singers like the so-called 'trappers' and I might not consider this genre as traditional music, but something tells me that you too, listen to this kind of music.

Adrian: Well, it is a type of modern music! Can art survive in a late capitalist world or, more specifically, can it contribute to its transformation?

Philosopher: Shake-spearean question, but allow me to pose another one. Is true life possible in a false world? I say no. What do you think? The modern world is experiencing the suffering of false life. People are continuously let down. Some of us might see what is offered to us as mere products, entertainment, simplified communication, or easily accessible events or objects. Not everyone seeks deeper meaning. It is like the fairy tales we read, in which people understand the language of birds because of their profound connection with nature in all its forms. The one who can understand the language of music, like the heroes in fairy tales, can understand the language of birds and search for the truth in a distorted reality. Art should be about respecting the masses, envisioning their potential rather than conforming to their diminished state. It should try to uncover the deep meaning in everything in our lives.

Henry: So, what is the purpose of art?

Philosopher: The purpose of art is, or at least it should be, to distance you from consumerism. However, in your era, it often works the opposite way. The super-rich can invest their money in buying works of art. Aesthetics should not see artworks as mere objects of interpretation. In the modern world, understanding what's essential can be perplexing.



David: How do you consider yourself? Revolutionary or reactionary?

Philosopher: I consider myself a revolutionary. Towards the end of my life, however, I was labelled a reactionary when, fearing vandalism, I sought police assistance to prosecute the students who had occupied the Frankfurt Institute. That made me a target of the students. In 1969 there were riots inside my classroom. Whatever the case, suddenly being labelled as a reactionary (who ... me?) carries a touch of irony. But I think the hour has passed. It's time for a break.

Karen: On behalf of our class, we would like to thank you and are glad to have met you.

Philosopher: Thank you. Engaging in discussions with students is always a rewarding .