

An Analysis of Hockenheim's Critique Theory of Popular Culture and Its Contemporary Value

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Abstract: Hockheimer's critical theory of popular culture reveals the commercialized, standardized, operational, and deceptive characteristics of popular culture in the context of capitalism, revealing the cultural conspiracies behind capitalist groups. As socialism with Chinese characteristics enters a new era, culture, as an important part of national development, can be used as a reference and draw experience from Hockenheim's critical theory of popular culture in its construction process. This is of great significance for building a strong socialist cultural country with Chinese characteristics.

Keywords: Hockenheim; Critical theory of popular culture; Construction of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics

1. The Basic Connotation and Background of Hockenheim's Critique Theory of Popular Culture

Popular culture was first interpreted as a newly emerged culture in a region, community, or country that is widely believed and accepted by the public. But the "popular culture" criticized by Hockenheim refers to the popular culture that is disseminated by the masses and popular among the general public, usually including mass produced works of art such as pop music, novels, and art films. These artworks incorporate multiple factors such as contemporary politics, commerce, religion, and philosophy bestowed upon them by the social class, and their value is no longer dominated by creators, but determined by rulers. The capitalist group allows the people to enjoy a false and hedonic culture in their leisure time, indirectly cultivating their sense of obedience and ultimately achieving the goal of long-term rule over society and maintaining social order.

Hockheimer's critical theory of popular culture emerged during the period of transition from capitalist society to a monopolistic stage. At this time, the economy of Western capitalist countries was characterized by centralization and organization, intense competition between countries, and the division of global spheres of influence was also in turmoil. At that time, German fascism came to power, and the Nazi Party led by Hitler implemented dictatorship and totalitarianism against the German people. In order to better control the public's thinking, the Nazi Party strictly controlled the field of mass culture and used it as a propaganda tool to brainwash the people through cultural dissemination channels such as newspapers, movies, and radio. Hockenheim felt deeply threatened and decided to shift his focus, placing his hopes on the "free, democratic, and equal" United States. Little did he know that the United States was just a wolf in sheep's clothing. It used science and technology, which was different from Germany's violent rule, to use popular culture as a tool for rulers to control the people. After identifying the phenomenon of popular culture, Hockheimer fiercely criticized it, aiming to reveal the false nature of popular culture, explore the hidden harm that modern capitalist society brings to the people, break free from the control of a single social class, restore human subjectivity, and display the characteristics of richness and diversity in culture.

2. Characteristics of Hockenheim's Critique Theory of Popular Culture

2.1 Object of criticism: Ideology

Hockenheim's theory of mass culture criticism has a strong ideological critique color, revealing the essence of mass culture as a tool of ideological domination. Marx believed that the ideology of capitalism was inherently deceptive, and Hockenheim inherited and developed Marx's critical theory of ideology, believing that capitalist ideology was indeed just a form of deception or illusion. Popular culture is a means for the bourgeoisie to infiltrate ideology, usually appearing in cultural forms that cater to people's tastes. After putting on beautiful and false colored clothes, it faithfully spreads the idea of enslavement to the ruling class, thereby controlling the thoughts and behaviors of the people and making them conform to the fate of being ruled. In order to make it easier for the people to accept and obey the existing social order and rules, rulers often create social anxiety, fear, and unease, making the people afraid to resist and change. This psychological manipulation makes the people unknowingly become maintainers and supporters of the capitalist system.

2.2 Critical Core: Social Implicit Dictatorship

Hockenheim emphasized the subtle influence of popular culture on the people, expressing concern about the implicit authoritarianism of capitalist society. Hawk's Sea assumes that this is a highly destructive social phenomenon that is not easily detected, hidden in various fields and structures of society. It imposes specific values and ideologies of the bourgeoisie on the public through seemingly ordinary means such as popular culture and propaganda media, making people silently accept and identify with these concepts under implicit control and manipulation. This gradually leads to the loss of independence and criticality in individual thinking, and the public becomes a puppet that can be manipulated at will. In Hockenheim's view, the spread of this implicit authoritarianism not only changes the ideological concepts of the people, but also exacerbates social imbalances. With the improvement of scientific and technological levels, people pursue maximum benefits, and cultural products are traded and produced as commodities, making the people slaves to the consumption of a single cultural product. Rulers stand from the perspective of God and mock the people for their inability to escape their manipulation, allowing authoritarianism to quietly hide in various fields of society, exacerbating social inequality and imbalance, and making the people unaware of its hidden means. Hockenheim intends to stir up the public's resistance consciousness, enhance their critical thinking and independent thinking abilities through critical means, in order to resist this implicit authoritarian power.

2.3 Critical dimension: interdisciplinary research

Interdisciplinary research is a classic feature of Hockenheim's critical theory of popular culture, which provides a unique perspective and comprehensive approach for the public to gain a deeper understanding of popular culture. Firstly, as a Marxist scholar, Hockenheim inherited Marx's critical theory and conducted an in-depth analysis of the commodification and fetishistic characteristics of popular culture from the perspective of Marxist philosophy, revealing the fact that capitalist popular culture has lost its inner soul and only remains a shell that has been utilized by people. Secondly, using psychological research methods, Hockenheim criticized abstract rationalism through psychoanalysis and emphasized the importance of a comprehensive examination of the spiritual world. From a psychological perspective, Hockenheim was able to explore where popular culture affects people's psychology and thoughts. In addition, Hockenheim also has considerable insights in the field of sociology. He silently pays attention to the creative process of popular culture, observes the values formed in the dissemination process of popular culture, and how the commercial interests and political rights of ruling groups are controlled through mass media. Obviously, from this perspective, Hockenheim can reveal the power relationships and social structures involved behind popular culture. Hockenheim has deeply criticized popular culture by integrating various disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, and sociology. By critically examining the theoretical frameworks and assumptions of each discipline, he has explored potential problems and limitations, thus forming his own unique interdisciplinary critical theory.

3. The Enlightenment of Hockenheim's Mass Culture Criticism Theory on the Construction of Contemporary Chinese Socialist Culture

3.1 The Spirit of Struggle in the New Era - Ideological Criticism Ability

The critical ability of ideology can be summarized as the ability to discern and effectively criticize and resist erroneous ideas. Fundamentally speaking, the spirit of struggle and criticism of ideology in the new era is not only limited to theoretical level, but also reflected in practical activities. Today, with the advancement of technology, the dissemination of information is becoming more rapid, which provides convenience for the infiltration of ideology. The infiltration of ideology in Western hegemonic countries and neighboring countries is not uncommon. Single and vulgar content is constantly emerging in video software, and the public often faces a crisis of infiltration. Hockenheim inherited Marx's critical spirit and dared to criticize false popular culture. In the process of socialist cultural construction, we should draw inspiration from the critical spirit of Hockenheim, be good at examining and analyzing various ideologies from a rational perspective, reveal the truth and essence behind them, consolidate the leadership role of Marxist ideology in China, continuously cultivate people's fighting spirit, inspire people to dare to criticize erroneous ideologies, and firmly believe that Marxists will always stand firm in the face of truth.

3.2 Core Concept of the New Era - Adhering to the Development Concept of Putting the People at the Center

Any theory has prominent characteristics that reflect its essence, and people-oriented is the most distinctive character of Marxism. After revealing the non popularization nature of popular culture, Hockenheim proposed the importance of focusing on the subjectivity of the people. He opposed authoritarian rule, called for social revolution to achieve social freedom and equality, paid attention to the survival status of the people, and mercilessly revealed the ugly side of capitalist society, revealed the hypocrisy of human nature, and showed us the harm brought by capitalist society. Therefore, when carrying out socialist cultural construction, we should be wary of the temptation of erroneous concepts, always adhere to the concept of putting the people at the center, deeply understand the needs of the people, and ensure that culture can present characteristics of diversity, subjectivity, and popularity.

3.3 Cultural Mission of the New Era - Maintaining the Uniqueness and Autonomy of Chinese Culture

There is a saying that "excellent traditional Chinese culture is the root and soul of the Chinese nation." It emphasizes the importance of inheriting excellent traditional culture and the necessity of enhancing cultural consciousness and strengthening cultural confidence. The world is a hodgepodge of constant communication, and cultural collisions are inevitable. Therefore, it is important to maintain independence and autonomy when communicating and borrowing from other cultures, strengthen cultural security protection, and resolutely resist the impact and erosion of foreign cultures. Hockenheim's default mass production of popular culture resulted in artworks being sold as commodities by emotionless producers, losing the unique cultural color. However, the culture of any ethnic group is irreplaceable. It is necessary to consider the differences and particularities between different cultures from the perspective of a community with a shared future for mankind. While promoting the excellent culture of our own ethnic group, we should also learn to appreciate the culture of other ethnic groups, forming a trend of world culture where "a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred birds compete".

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