Kathryn Atherton

Reading Record

Herbert Marcuse

The Conquest of the Unhappy Consciousness: Repressive Desublimation

from *One-Dimensional Man*

Response:

Marcuse’s discussion of art helped me better connect the ideas of what we have read thus far to each other and to ideas I have learned in other cultural classes. I agree with Marcuse’s argument that art is the human way to escape from life and critique society and that industry cheapens its cultural value. I feel as though today, while technology has given humanity the ability to create new types of art, commercialization has made a lot of entertainment more about product placement and making things that “sell”, rather than creating a societal conscience.

Discussion Question:

What can be considered to be today’s “art” by Marcuse’s definition/description within this chapter (i.e. something that brings about social conscience, escapes the audience from today’s world, not mass-produced/commodified)?

Outline of Argument:

* Technology integrating into “higher” culture
* Technology has surpassed fiction
* Culture no longer at odds with reality, blends together to make every part of life seamless and easier
* Culture becoming more materialistic
* Pre-industrial Western culture is better because there’s an escape from the business side of life
* Western art portrays business as being moral
  + Affirms that industrialization of culture is correct, rather than one way of life
* Reminiscent of the pre-technological era
  + Rhythm of universe/nature (now replaced by rhythm of machine, as was discussed in the last chapter?)
* Art and abstract thoughts now reality with technology
  + What’s old is new
* Art is like the entropy of the technological world, creating disorder in an increasingly logical society
* Art can no longer be an escape from the world when it is commercialized and commodified
* Art fuels the negative/negation thinking
  + Thinking back to freedom from politics/economy/etc., not freedom in politics/economy/etc.
* Technology ruins the tragedy of art by solving problems
  + Thinking about “if movies had smartphones” memes (*Home Alone*, The *Breakfast Club*, *Cinderella, Harry Potter & the Order of the Phoenix*)
* Positive and negative art both protest society and create a new, ideal world
* Upper class ‘celebration’ of art requires full submersion into the world
* Wealthy people and working-class people had access to different types/levels(?) of art
* Everyone has the same access to the fine art of the day, but quality is not the same
* Technology has changed art, old art no longer has same value culturally
* Physical changes in the world change the meaning of symbols
* \*\*\*Entertainment is learning/communication (67)\*\*\*
  + Makes me think of *El hombre que se convirtió en perro* play (Dragun, 1957-reflection about audience’s own life, dehumanization of capitalist society)
* Art is reaction to society
* Poetry goes beyond normal language, rejects structure
  + Mirrors how art rejects structure of society
* Art entertains and comments on society without endangering the comfort of technology
* Problems are being solved by technology, which weakens the artistic side of life
  + Technology creates order and logic in what is where art explores what could be
* Art expresses unhappiness in society (71-72)
  + Mass production of art’s unhappiness leads to quick, immediate solutions, eliminates unhappiness/opposition to society
* Industrialization of environment = less joy coming from environment = more joy concentrated in sex
* Without physical labor, work is more sexy and social
  + Work gives satisfaction, prevents opposition
* Sublimation enforced by power and barriers/differences between people
* Satisfaction in life’s small freedoms prevents opposition to society
* Sexual/romantic fulfillment leads to one’s downfall in society or completely harmless
  + Depends on how society wants to spin it
* Freudian theories about psychology
  + Man is tied to society, no matter how transparently bad it is; it is still rational
* Society manipulates violent instinct of man to be more productive
* Consciousness of society ignored by satisfaction of needs/in life
* Rationality of technological society has no moral values
* RAND game simulates war - cannot simulate negotiations
  + Sounds like D&D meets Risk
* Society: everything for the good of the whole