FOSTERING STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE: THE ART SPACE AS AN ESCAPE FROM ALIENATION

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ABSTRACT: This article reflects upon the Marxist tradition of considering industrially produced cultural products as being inherently deceitful and politically misleading, trying to go beyond the avant-gardist prejudice of the Frankfurt School that denies the spectator any agency. By giving an extensive rethinking of initially Marx's concepts, such as commodification, it is argued that it cannot be an object — an art object in a specific space— in and by itself that offers a way to escape from the working day, but that it is the tension between the object and the space in which it is presented that accords agency to the observer; whereby, the relation between object and subject are inherently different from, and eludes, alienation. In order to reach this conclusion, the article uses examples from both late 20th century and contemporary art[1].

> Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s a steady stream of German exiles in flight from the Third Reich travelled from the East Coast to settle in Los Angeles. As if by magic, a substantial portion of the Weimar intelligentsia found itself transplanted along a line running from the Oceanside community of Pacific Palisades through Brentwood, Bel Air, and Beverly Hills to Hollywood (Schmidt 2004, 148).

The German exiled James Schmidt refers to counted Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Even if they lived just outside Hollywood, Adorno and Horkheimer's view of the culture that was being produced there was anything but positive. When writing about the culture industry in their work *Dialectic of Enlightenment* they state:

> [T]he technical media are relentlessly forced into uniformity. Television aims at a synthesis of radio and film. [I]ts consequences will be quite enormous and promise to intensify the impoverishment of aesthetic matter (Adorno 1989, 124).

[1] I would like to thank Volkan Çidam for his outstanding teaching on Marx. Without his diligence I could not have written this article.

In the renowned chapter of their 1944 work, "The Culture Industry", from which the previous quotation is taken, Adorno and Horkheimer seem to despise popular culture quite severely. Indeed, in his *Aesthetic Theory,* Adorno makes a clear distinction between the high and the low arts, a categorization that is also found, although not referred to by using the same categorical terms in "The Culture Industry". Even if this paper will mostly look into the opposition between the culture industry and the arts that emerges from Adorno and Horkheimer's consideration of the culture industry in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the terms of high and low art will be used as an additional way to refer to the distinction. The divide between "low art, [or] entertainment" (Adorno 2002, 240) and the high arts, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* can be solely understood to be based upon the way entertainment is produced: in industrial fashion. Indeed, the technology of the culture industry [led to] no more than the achievement of standardization and mass production (121), whereby culture became an industry like any other industry under capitalism. However, the culture industry, by producing commodities that can be the vehicle of messages, like films, makes products that can be, and are intentionally, endowed with powerful qualities of deception. The term of commodity as used by Adorno and Horkheimer should be understood like Karl Marx describes it in his *Capital.*

In the first chapter of his *magnum opus*, Marx explains that the commodity "appears as [an] autonomous [figure] endowed with a life of [its] own" (1982, 165), whereby the "relation between people" that the object encompasses "takes on the character of a thing" (Lukács 1971, 83). The appearance of products as being detached from any social interaction is due to both the way an object is being produced, by "individuals who work independently from each other" (165), and the manner in which the products get exchanged. Because the working process is more and more atomized, the only significant social interaction that people undertake takes place during the exchange process, whereby the normal social relations of production themselves become obscured. The latter process certainly also holds true for the culture industry. However, the cultural product has another dimension, because it can express something and convey a message. The cultural product does not only hide social relationships between men because of the way it is produced and exchanged, but also intentionally hides "social reality" (124) in order to maintain the hierarchy based upon the distinction between "the dispossessed" and "the people at the top" (121) who are the industrialists. Adorno and Horkheimer, in order to show how cultural products legitimize social hierarchy, analyze standard film plots and come to the conclusion that they propagate the illusion that being in a position of power, and the possession of riches is largely a matter of chance obtained by "winning a prize" (146) or marriage, whereby, the person in this advantageous position cannot be held responsible neither be contested. Thus in a similar manner to the commodity Marx speaks of in *Capital,* the cultural commodity also does not portray social relations justly.

Adorno, in his *Aesthetic Theory*, accords great importance to what he calls the truth content of art. "The truth content of artworks is fused with their critical content" (Adorno 2002, 35). As Michael Kelly confirms it, the question of art for Adorno is above all a question of "how art can best realize its truth content and thus its capacity for critique" (Kelly 2007, 100). In contrast to the high arts, entertainment, according to Adorno, does not dispose, as he demonstrates in "Culture Industry", of any truth content. On the

contrary, he repeatedly refers to it as the untruth. Seeing a distinction between the high and the low arts based upon the way they are produced or their ability of offering social critique, however, seems quite an irrelevant position to be taking in the 21st century. Contemporary art, broadly dated from the 1950s onwards, presents many cases of artworks that are produced in industrial fashion and do not engage in direct social critique. Andy Warhol is a perfect example of an artist who adapted intensive modes of production that he retrieved from the media business, and even called his studio *the factory*. The efficiency of taking Warhol's practice as a way to prove that Adorno's categorization of high and low art do hold anymore is indeed doubtful, for it has to be acknowledged that Adorno also views the new to be a quality of the high arts.

High art, according to Adorno, distinguishes itself from the culture industry by continuously challenging itself in finding new forms of aesthetic expression. Indeed, Warhol's manner of production was quite revolutionary in the art world at the time. However, trying to determine which one has more weight on the other, the mode of production or challenging to find new forms of expression, in order to classify Warhol, does not bring its appreciation any further. In addition to which, it is debatable whether his work was intended as a controversial critique of the popular media. The imitation of its style and fascination for celebrities, however, makes it impossible to deduce from his art itself whether it was or not intended ironically. Tracey Emin's work *My Bed,* firstly exhibited in 1999,

> expressed the aftermath of a relationship break-up, with dirty, rumpled sheets, and detritus including cigarette ends, condoms, desiccated apple cores, contraceptives, a used tampon, a child's toy, vodka bottles and dirty knickers (Fanthome 2008),

by exhibiting, as the title indicates, her own bed. Emin's work is self-reflective upon very intimate and private matters. It does not concern itself, overtly, with larger societal questions. The work in itself is a ready-made: a mass-produced item exhibited in an art space. Thus, both Warhol's and Emin's work contain elements which are found in Adorno's view of the culture industry and low art. Judging upon the previously discussed features of the art works, it could be concluded that both do not deserve the name of art. Simply trying to determine whether we should call something art or not is likely to reveal more about the preferences of the categorizer than about the artwork or object itself. Therefore, it might be more fruitful to depart from another consideration that can be distilled from Adorno and Horkheimer's text, which looks at the relation between a cultural product and its audience or spectator and its subsequent effects. It is in this view that Emin's and Warhol's work will be reconsidered later on.

Fig. 1. Tracey Emin, 1998. *My Bed*[2].

[2] Emin, Tracey. 1998. *My Bed.* Tate Modern, London. Source: Wikipedia, posted 24 July 2011, accessed, 08 January 2015, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Bed#/media/File:Emin-My-Bed.jpg>.

Apart from giving a definition of the culture industry based upon the manner in which it organises the production process, or upon the inherent untruth content of low art, Adorno also briefly insinuates a consideration of cultural products based upon an interaction between object and spectator. Adorno sees a paradoxical claim in amusement. "[U]nder late capitalism", cultural products are told to offer "an escape from the mechanized work process", and yet Adorno observes, they are but "the prolongation of work" (Adorno 1989, 137). It is very important to note that the kind of work meant by Adorno in this case is "the mechanized" form he mentions, i.e. factory work, and not any other type. The entertainment industry, in order to produce the oblivious bliss that the worker desires after his hard day of work, avoids "[a]ny logical connection calling for mental effort" (139), whereby it does not distinguish itself from the work he is accustomed to carry out. By the latter intentional lack of complexity, or demand for participation, the cultural commodity does not accord any agency to the observer; in opposition to high art which does incite the audience to reflect. By according agency to someone you affirm his or her existence as person who is able to reason. Whereas Adorno views the latter quality of art to be inherent to the work itself, it will be argued, in this paper, by mainly looking at contemporary art, that it is not the object in and by itself that offers a way to escape from the working day, but that it is the tension between the object and the space in which it is presented that accords agency to the observer; whereby, the relation between object and subject are inherently different from, and eludes, alienation.

In order to determine the importance of space, here understood as the contemporary art space[3] whether it is a museum, a gallery, a temporary exhibition or a public space, Adorno's view of the artwork's capacity to accord agency to the spectator will be put into the light of Marx's conception of estranged labour. Subsequently, it will be shown, by using the distinction Hito Steyerl makes between the factory and the museum, that it is not necessarily the object in itself that accords agency to its observer, but the space in relation to the object. Throughout the essay, emphasis will be put upon illustrating every argument by examples from contemporary art, as a way to peruse how the art world in the 21st century can offer resistance to alienation as defined by Marx.

Although it is not specifically mentioned in "The Culture Industry", the reason why art can offer an escape from work can be explained when put into the light of Marx's conception of estranged labour. The more apparent reason given why entertainment cannot offer a way out of the worker's routine is that "mechanization has such power over a man's leisure and happiness, and so profoundly determines the manufacture of amusement goods, that his experiences are inevitably afterimages of the work process itself" (Adorno 1989, 137). Labour is, thus, overwhelming to an extent that the worker cannot easily put it out of his mind when spending time at the cinema, in addition to which the manner films are being produced are reminiscent of factory work. However, as mentioned earlier on, the cultural product; does not demand any effort on behalf of the consumer. "No

[3] Spaces, as referred to throughout the essay, will here denote art spaces as they are most commonly experienced today. Not only the white cube, but any space curated as to exhibit artworks. This paper will not hold any historical claim by contrasting current curating practices with older ones. The conclusion, certainly, is not that our contemporary practices are preferable in any way to, for example, the Victorian gallery customs.

independent thinking must be expected from the audience: the product prescribes every reaction" (137). Adorno's previous observation means that the audience does not undergo any interaction with the cultural product: he or she is a passive consumer. The state of being passive, thus, although seemingly contradictory is indirectly equated with the labourer's routine. The latter equation can be understood when considering Marx's *Paris Manuscripts,* in which he describes the process of becoming alienated: an inevitable consequence of capitalist labour and production.

According to Marx, the "essential being of man", or "man's essence", is defined by his "free conscious activity" and "conscious life activity" (Marx 1964, 328), which he can realize through the "appropria[tion of] nature" (334) by means of which he sustains himself, i.e. work. However, under capitalism, or in another system in which a superior owns another man's activity, labour is estranging, since it "does not belong to [the worker's] essential being", whereby consequently he cannot "confirm himself in his work" (327).

In order to understand how alienation works in connection to "man's essence" (328), apart from another man owning the activity and the products of labour of another man, it is helpful to look into Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's conception of self-consciousness as appears in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. According to Hegel, self-consciousness is inherently part of man. At the same time, man is not aware of the truth of his own self-consciousness, or being-for-self, which needs to be triggered by an external object. The previous process is explained to take place between subjects. Firstly, subject A recognizes subject B to be self-conscious, like him. However, subject A does not yet recognize subject B as an independent self-conscious being, and therefore needs to supersede subject B in a conflict whereby he will realize that subject B is an independent subject. Hegel's understanding of self-consciousness recognition can, thus, be said to be about becoming aware of your own humanity via an externality.

Marx's ideas regarding the products of labour and labour itself function in a similar manner. By means of my labour I realize myself in the external world, whereby I can recognize myself in the world surrounding me. Within a similar process that Hegel describes, but in this case without subjects but objects, by looking at the products of my own labour I would be able to become certain of the truth of my own self-consciousness. However, due to the relations of production under capitalism the worker labours for somebody else, producing great quantities, and not in the image of what he is. Therefore, he is unable to recognize himself in the external world, which leaves him alienated, estranged from his own humanity. He is unable to recognize his own distinctly human essence as a free conscious being. As a consequence, man becomes quite close to an animal state, "acting freely only in his animal functions – eating, drinking and procreating"(Marx 1964, 327). Whereas animals only produce to maintain themselves, man can do so disinterestedly. By suggesting the existence of an alienated state of man, Marx at the same time pre-supposes the existence of a non-alienated state. Therefore, the non-alienated state of subjects would be when they are able to realize themselves as human beings, according to its humanist definition. Indeed, Marx's view of estranged labour should be seen as fully inscribed in the humanist tradition that views man's essence to lie within his capacity to shape the world around him due to his intellect. Of course, the validity of Marx's humanistic stance is debatable

and can be easily criticized from a post-humanist perspective. His view, however, is valuable when put into the context of Adorno's analysis of the culture industry, which will offer a way to understand why entertainment is an extension of the factory.

Apart from cultural commodities not having the quality of offering subjects the possibility to realize themselves, they also do not function as objects of recognition. When the worker watches a film he cannot realize himself; he cannot express his own humanity in relation to the cultural product because it asks him, above all, not to think. Therefore, the cultural products as described by Adorno, sustain the worker's alienation, instead of offering temporary relief. In addition, the commodities Adorno describes do not reflect truth content, or social reality, since the culture industry only seeks to maintain the hierarchy it needs to sustain itself, which ultimately is the social domination that capitalism holds up and requires:

> The dependence of the most powerful broadcasting company on the electrical industry, or of the motion picture industry on the banks, is characteristic of the whole sphere, whose individual branches are themselves economically interwoven. All are in such close contact that the extreme concentration of mental forces allows demarcation lines between different firms and technical branches to be ignored (Adorno and Horkheimer 1989, 123).

Adorno shows how the culture industry, therefore, does not represent the world of the labourer, but only the one that the capitalists want its workforce to believe in. Taking into account the previously mentioned intentions on behalf of the industrialists, cultural commodities do not deny that life is hard and that some suffer. On the contrary, they admit it. The cultural products depict stories in which, because of the kindness of others "[n]o one is forgotten; everywhere there are neighbors and welfare workers" (Adorno 1989, 150). As an illustration he uses the 1942 drama film *Calling Dr. Gillespie*. The eponymous character represents those of whom the "hearts are in the right place and who, by their kind intervention as of man to man, cure individual cases of socially-perpetuated distress" (151). By painting a society as being bearable due to the charity of others its suffering has been admitted to, embraced, and accepted in the view of the aid and warmth of others. The previous image is very unlikely to stir up a revolt in the cinema seats; the very end the culture industry aims at, according to Adorno. The images that "mass culture" provides deliberately do not offer a true possibility of recognition for the working class. The laborers when consuming the products of the culture industry, as a consequence, are unable to find some relief for their daily toil in the factory, as the mechanism of recognition of one's own self-consciousness cannot take place. Entertainment leaves the worker as estranged as he or she was when leaving the conveyor belt.

Since Adorno sees the non-interaction between object and subject as undesirable, it equally means that the opposite, the existence of interaction, is the more desirable way of humans to relate to objects. This consideration of Adorno's view regarding cultural commodities is not specifically mentioned in *Dialectic of Eightenment*. However, the distinction between the erotic and the pornographic he makes could be seen as a differentiation between objects that accord agency to the viewer and those that deny agency. "The culture industry is [characterized as] pornographic", giving the audience the fulfillment of longing that can never

be realized. Mass culture shows "the objects of desire, breasts in a clinging sweater or the naked torso of the athletic hero" (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1989, 140) in incessant repetition. The "erotic situation" on the other hand, "does not fail to indicate unmistakably that things can never go that far". In Adorno's view the dissimilarity between the erotic and the pornographic lies above all in that it "cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises" (140). However, acclaiming that works of art "by representing deprivation as negative, they retracted, as it were, the prostitution of the impulse and rescued by mediation what was denied" implies that the work of art undergoes a relation by taking the reality of the subject into account. The erotic, by imaging a world from the perspective of a possible real subject, allows for recognition on behalf of the one who interacts with it; whereby, it grants the subject agency.

Although it can probably not be claimed, judging from Adorno's description, that the erotic asks the observer to think or to engage with the object consciously; works of art, however, can be analyzed as engendering such effects on behalf of its viewers. Coming back upon the firstly mentioned criteria of distinction, Anish Kapoor's 2004 giant sculpture *Cloud Gate* is a good example of a piece that does not offer any social critique and was produced, just like most of Kapoor's work, in an industrial manner. When considering the secondly treated criteria of categorization, Kapoor's piece has qualities that are very reminiscent of Adorno's consideration of art in opposition to entertainment. Kapoor's *Cloud Gate,* a ten-meter high mirror-surfaced object, accords agency to the visitor of Millennium Park. The sculpture is mute to the extent that it asks all interpretation on behalf of its viewers and forces them to be engaged with it by means of showing them their own reflection. Although the structure presents an abstract shape, the mirror surface quite literally serves the purpose of recognition in the object. At such, it becomes a place for reflection to be used by each in his or her own manner. When reviewing the works earlier mentioned, Emin's work *My Bed*, and, for example, Warhol's *Orange Car Crash Fourteen Times* they, like Kapoor's work, draw the audience into active participation. Even if *My Bed* presents the particular state that Emin found herself in, during a period of depression, the unmade room and the sheer mess are two points of recognition for all, and offer a point of departure to think about general psychological problems or more personal concerns, let alone about one's own definition of art.

Warhol's 1963 *Orange Car Crash*, which as the title suggests, depicts an identical picture from an automobile accident found in a newspaper fourteen times, equally, shows scenes that everyone recognizes, perhaps, from personal experience, but most likely from the news. The repetition of the prints asks the viewer to question not only the work in itself, but the obsession with which death and blood are being mediatized.

Fig. 2. Anish Kapoor, 2004. *Cloud Gate*[4].

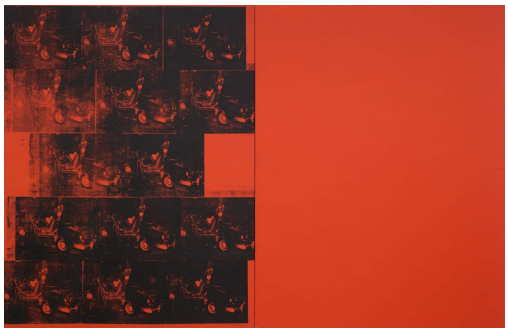

Fig. 3. Andy Warhol, 1963. *Orange Car Crash Fourteen Times*[6].

The only problem that, however, remains with Emin's and Warhol's work is that it is highly unlikely a person engages in conscious reflection caused by the sight of his own bed every morning, or incessantly questions the validity of the content of his newspaper. Adorno's observations regarding the effects of cultural commodities upon its consumers originate from the objects in themselves. Mass-produced entertainment always forces upon its users a created need[5]: it greatly insults his or her agency. The work of art, however, does not fill in the blanks, nor tells its audience necessarily what to think, but gives some space for interpretation. *My Bed* and *Orange Car Crash*, however, suggest that the previous quality of art does not stem from the objects themselves, in which case there would be no difference between manufactured goods and art.

Steyerl's essay "Is a Museum a Factory?" offers a view in order to understand how space can function as an entity that enables its visitors to act as conscious agents. Steyerl's first observation is that the museum and the factory can be compared to each other because they both produce:

> In the museum-as-factory, something continues to be produced. Installation, planning, carpentry, viewing, discussing, maintenance, betting on rising values, and networking alternate in cycles. An art space is a factory, which is simultaneously a supermarket –a casino and a place of worship whose reproductive work is performed by cleaning ladies and cellphone– video bloggers alike (Steyerl 2012, 63).

When considering how each space controls bodies, however, she continues to argue that the museum is essentially distinct from the industrial factory but similar to the social factory. The factory receives and releases bodies at a set time

[4] Kapoor, Anish. 2004. *Cloud Gate*. Stainless steel sculpture. 33 ft × 42 ft × 66 ft. Millennium Park, Chicago. Source: Wikipedia, posted 06 Oct. 2007, accessed 08 January 2015, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cloud_Gate#/media/File: Cloud_Gate_(The_Bean)_ from_east%27.jpg>.

[5] As we have already seen through the distinction between the eroticism and the pornography —or the erotic object and the pornographic one—. The pornographic does not correspond to a real need but presents an unrealizable one, whereby it, at the same time, creates the need it depicts.

[6] Warhol, Andy. 1963. *Orange Car Crash Fourteen Times*. Silkscreen ink on synthetic polymer paint on two canvases. 8' 9 7/8" x 13' 8 1/8" in. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Source: Flickr Creative Commmons, posted 2012, accessed, o8 Dec 2016, <https://flic.kr/p/cKVBp9>.

of the day; and confines them. This observation leads Steyerl to compare the industrial factory to the classical cinema, which both function in the same confining manner in regulating bodies. When going to the cinema people are together in a room from one set point in time until another, just like in the factory;

> workers leaving the factory. Spectators leaving the cinema –a similar mass, disciplined and controlled in time, assembled and released at regular intervals (Steyerl 2012, 67).

The museum, on the other hand, "doesn't organize a coherent crowd of people. People are dispersed in time and space– a silent crowd, immersed and atomized" (67). Steyerl, therefore, stresses that there exists a "difference between mass and multitude", which "arises on the line between confinement [that characterized the cinema and the factory] and dispersion". The museum is characterized by the dispersion of the multitude, the cinema by the mass. Bodies organized by the museum take on the shape of the social factory, rather than that of the industrial factory. By using the term of the social factory, Steyerl refers to Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's theorization of the phenomenon. The social factory, as Negri describes it, is the "factory without walls", and represents the productive norm of the "new epoch" that succeeded Fordism (Gill and Pratt 2013). The era that Negri describes, it is marked by the factory getting "increasingly disseminated out into society as a whole". The social factory places "the whole society at the disposal of profit" (28). Although the all-encompassing effects of post-Fordist production, as depicted by Negri, seem to have rather devastating effects of domination on the whole of society, he equally asks himself: "what is the working class today, in this specific crisis, no longer merely as objects of exploitation, but the subject of power?" (29). As Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt explain: "more recent writing of […] Negri (2004) focus[es] on the potentialities and capacities of the new post-Fordist proletariat, revisioned to fit their conceptualization of the dispersed social factory, as multitude, operators and agents" (Gill and Pratt 2013, 29). This paper does not necessitate to go as far as mentioning the value of the multitude that is seen by Hardt as a new social formation that offers new "possibilities of acting politically". However, seeing a potentiality of political engagement in a societal structure functioning according to the social factory model does imply that the latter form of production allows for a space of expression and self-initiated action. Consequently, the fact that Steyerl refers to the concept of the social factory, clearly, indicates that she recognizes the museum visitor as an agent actively engaged within an unrestrained space, in opposition to the cinemagoer who is enclosed temporarily and spatially.

It is valuable to put Steyerl's view of the museum as social factory in the light of Jonathan Beller's vision on cinema that she supports, in order to consider it within Adorno's theory of the cultural commodity and alienation. Beller holds that "cinema and its derivatives — television, internet, and so on— are factories, in which spectators work" (Steyerl 2012, 65). He claims: "to look is to labor". Steyerl, therefore, clearly sees a distinction between the cinemagoer and the visitor of a museum, when engaged with the object of interest. In Beller's view, the term *labour* should be understood as the type of work found in industrial factories. Mass production does not allow the worker to have any say in the production process, and often is engaged in the manufacture of such a small part of the whole commodity that

he or she is not even aware what the end result looks like. The type of work Steyerl and Beller associate with the cinema, thus, is the type of work that Marx calls estranging. The interaction between the cultural product, the film, the confining space, and the watcher, all contribute to the subject being reduced to a similar state of passivity as found in industrial labour. Although Adorno does not emphasize the importance of space, he notices that the cultural industry by asking the

> rhetorical question, "What do people want?" addresses —as if to reflective individuals— [its question] to those very people who are deliberately to be deprived of this individuality (Adorno and Horkheimer 1989, 144).

The deprivation of individuality that the culture industry undergoes via the denial or any agency on behalf of its consumers is carried out by means of determining what the desire of the public might be; an endeavor that starts by asking the question: What do people want? As Adorno ironically, states:

> if a movement from a Beethoven symphony is crudely "adapted" for a film sound-track in the same way as a Tolstoy novel is garbled in a film script: then the claim that this is done to satisfy the spontaneous wishes of the public is no more than hot air (122).

Space, however, as seen in Steyerl's essay, contributes to this status of passivity of the audience by controlling the way people are allowed to interact with an object. In a museum, a visitor can choose to spend more time contemplating one piece rather than another, or decide to leave in the middle of a video projection. This free movement in space allows people to choose what they want to see rather than it being imposed on them. The way space is organized thus allows the visitor to make use of his or her individuality, Adorno sees cinema to deprive the subject of.

The art of Emin, Warhol and Kapoor, equally, should be considered in terms of the space they are being exhibited in, not only regarding the concrete material aspect of the geographical, but also in view of its symbolic significance. Emin's *My Bed* and Warhol's *Orange Car Crash* are both placed in the context of the museum and therefore lend themselves more easily to be subjected to Steyerl's consideration of the museum as a social factory. Because *My Bed*[7] and *Orange Car Crash* find themselves in a space that gives people a degree of liberty and that recognizes their individuality, both works can be contemplated in a sufficiently free manner as to solicit conscious interaction between the one who observes and the artwork. In the case of *Cloud Gate,* although not being placed in the traditional environment of an art institution, the interaction between passer-by and object functions in the same manner. Millennium Park is public space and thereby does not confine in anyway. The public is emancipated in terms of seeing art in public space[8]. When coming across a

[7] Since March 2015 Emin's work is exhibited again in the space it was firstly shown to the public: Tate Modern.

[8] Here of course Arthur C. Danto's influential essay "The Artworld" needs to be mentioned. When the spectator is seen as "emancipated," it is because he or she already possesses knowledge about what is considered to be art or not. "To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry —an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld" (2017, 580). This does not undermine the main claim of the essay, as it argues that interaction between space, object and subject to be one of the main factors in triggering interpretation.

sculpture someone is aware that it is a work or art, just like *Cloud Gate* is. However, *My Bed,* would not function within the same context as *Cloud Gate*, since it does not bear the marks of the type of art that is normally seen in public space. The artwork of Emin would probably be considered as illegal waste dumping. An aspect that Steyerl does not take into consideration, the symbolic significance of spaces, therefore, is very important for the manner in which a work of art interacts with subjects. In 1917, Marcel Duchamp already showed how important the meaning of context is, by placing his ready-made, or mass-produced urinal signed "R. Mutt" on a plinth in a gallery whereby it began to be considered as artwork. The museum, as the ultimate space dedicated to art, immediately asks the visitor to consider objects at display as art and to engage with them: to think. *My Bed,* in the same manner as Duchamp's *Fontaine,* stirred vivid debate regarding the question of the meaning of art and whether these mass-produced products should be worthy of the name. The debate in itself already shows, hereby, that the objects accord a great amount of agency and individuality to the observer who can, by reflecting upon the work of art think about his or her own considerations of what ought or ought not be honored a place in the museum. Certainly, the space in which an object is presented needs to be adequate for a subject to engage with it freely: he or she being able to decide whether to grant it any attention. However, if the object of inquiry does not incite interaction in anyway, i.e., Emin's bed being placed on a public square, interpretation on behalf of the viewer cannot occur, and neither does escape from alienation. It could be said that the symbolic significance of a given space of contemplation, such as Millennium Park, is communicated to its passers-by through the relation between the sculpture, *Cloud Gate,* the place and, as earlier mentioned, acquired knowledge about art in public spaces. An object, any object, can, by being in a space that allows for people to move freely and which carries a connotation that calls for it to be viewed as art, demand on behalf of the viewer its active participation.

Adorno defines cultural products conceived in industrial fashion as objects that rob the consumer of its individuality. Popular culture allows no thinking, or no creativity, on behalf of the spectator. High art, however, undergoes a wholly different relationship with the viewer: it respects his or her agency. The lack of humanity that is granted to the audience by entertainment makes it reminiscent of the estrangement caused by industrial labour. Just like factory workers cannot recognize themselves in the products of their labour, cinemagoers cannot recognize themselves in the stories of Hollywood. The culture industry offers no escape from daily hardships. Adorno's writings indicate that art, on the contrary to amusement, permit to elude the estrangement of the work environment. However, whereas the philosopher suggests that the latter quality is inherent to the object, examples from contemporary art, such as *My Bed,* show it not to be the case. The ability of objects to call for its observer to interact, and to reflect, resides in the relation that the work of art undergoes with the space it finds itself in, and subsequently, with the viewer. The context an object is in, thus, is determinate in engendering its capability to offer a way to elude estrangement. Contemporary art, as shown by the examples used, appears to be in a quite advantageous position to offer a vehicle by the means of which subjects can recognize themselves, and thereby, realize themselves as free conscious beings. Adorno states that "[s]erious art has been withheld from

those for whom the hardship and oppression of life make a mockery of seriousness, and who must be glad if they can use time not spent at the production line just to keep going" (Adorno and Horkheimer 1989, 135). However, when staying within the same geographical area Marx was concerned with, Adorno's statement has become eroded. *Cloud Gate,* already is an example of how art can reach out to society in a less exclusive manner. As Negri and Hardt claim, society in the 21st century is not orchestrated in the same manner as during the times of Fordism, and the way everyone is engaged in generating profit today, putting an increasing number of people in the position of operators, offers new perspectives for social organization. Art, especially in the public sphere, or at least in a space accessible to all, by the way in which it accords agency to the observer, offers a moment of resistance to estrangement. It could be further imagined how art can function as a strategic element in the new agency and political potentiality that subjects gained within the post-Fordist world.

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