COMMUNICATION & SOCIETY

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Reviewing the cultural industry: from creative industries to digital platforms

Abstract

The goal of the present study is to broadly reconstruct the international debate on the cultural industry, from its origins to today. In particular, the links with other related concepts (creative industries and digital platforms) will be highlighted. The article is divided in three sections: the first reconstructs the origin of the concept, from the 1930s and 1940s, highlighting the theoretical heritage of Adorno and Horkheimer and, more generally, the scholars of the Frankfurt School. Together with Marcuse, those scholars identified, on the one hand, the consonances between industrial mass production and new forms of culture production and, on the other, formulated a radical critique of this change. In the same years in which the theories of this school were disseminated, Morin proposed a less pessimistic view of the same transformation. In the second section, the evolution of the concept of cultural industry during the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 2000s is studied. During this period, the classical theories – after a phase of partial obscurity– were taken up. On one hand a socio-historical perspective emphasized the role played by national industries in shaping contents and styles. On the other hand, a series of scholars enlarged the definition to the creative industries.
In the third section, some hypothesis are built about the evolution of the digital platforms and their links with the traditional definition of cultural industry.

Keywords
Cultural industry, Frankfurt School, creative industries, digital platforms.

1. Introduction

The goal of the present study is to broadly reconstruct the international debate on the cultural industry, from its origins to today. We followed its development in the light of history highlighting the intersections with other related concepts, from creative industries to digital platforms.

The work is divided into three sections. In the first, the origin of the concept is reconstructed, highlighting the theoretical heritance of Adorno and Horkheimer (more in general, the scholars of the Frankfurt School) and Morin. In the second section, the concept is compared, on the one hand, with its historiographical evolution and, on the other, with (now better known) creative industries. In the third section, some hypotheses are built about

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the links between the debate on cultural industries and the recent discussion on digital platforms.

2. The origin of the concept of cultural industry

Since its beginning –which will be soon discussed– the definition of cultural industry emerged as an oxymoron. Two Italian scholars, Abruzzese and Borrelli, highlighted this contradictory nature through the etymology of two terms:

> From the beginning, industry (*endo-struere*, build from the inside, secretly) defines a difference between identity and machine, between interiority of the individuals and the exteriority of their doing. The construction of the word industry underlines the original pre-societal and anti-societal character of machination, a scheme devised by builders and technicians, outside, and sometimes to the harm of the community. (Abruzzese & Borrelli, 2000, p. 14).

and

> The European root, from which the term culture derives, denotes the action of 'rotating', 'going around' (hence the word 'neck', the anatomical part that makes the head rotate), i.e., in the figurative sense, socialisation, the act of becoming a participant in the world and, at the same time, the world becoming a participant too. The relative semantic specialisations in the cognitive (culture), religious (cult), or economic-productive (cultivation) spheres can be attributed to this original sense of interest and protection. (*ibid*).

Therefore, the combination of these two concepts reveals, according to the authors, the prejudices and fears that have always accompanied the industrial and technological development of culture:

> The first is that industry, as a machination that directly responds to private interests, colonises culture in the sense that separates it from the real demands of the social body; the second is that the operational and technical component of the concept of cultivation suffocates and dispels the role of the ideological and symbolic dimension, related to the spheres of culture and cult, with the development of expressive and communicative forms. (*ibid*).

These observations illustrate very well the implicit matrix of the first theoretical foundation of the concept of cultural industry, which dates back to the Frankfurt School. The intellectuals who adhered to this school, already in Pre-Nazi Germany, had begun a deep reflection on the cultural consequences of modernity. In particular, Walter Benjamin, both in his life's work (*lebenswerk*) devoted to the Parisian passages and in his reflections on photography (Benjamin, 1991), had highlighted the transformations that the industrial production-distribution and consumption circuit had caused and was causing in the daily life of the new metropolis, in the same forms of artistic representation.

After the arrival of National Socialism in Germany, Adorno and Horkheimer, as well as Marcuse, took refuge in the United States, where they came into contact with the advanced forms of mass culture production, namely: newspapers; radio; cinema; music (especially jazz). After a first moment of astonishment, they formulated a radical critique, in which the very concept of industry acquired a negative connotation, overlapping the idea of massification, mystification, and low cultural quality. In particular, the musicologist Adorno, contrary to recognise jazz as an artistic form, very clearly highlights the premises of that type of criticism. Mass production for large audiences inevitably implies the need for simplification (for example, with respect to jazz, the use of the pentatonic scale, which represents a reduction of the traditional scale, and even more the recent dodecaphonic experiments) that is in accordance with the scarce culture of the vast public and, at the same time, is presented as quality music, because it is based on improvisation and the spectacular nature of its execution.

This anti-industrial behaviour produced unforgettable works of incredible theoretical impact, such as the 'Dialectic of enlightenment' (*Dialektik der Aufklärüng*) (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1947). This study has a fundamental chapter precisely dedicated to the cultural industry, presenting the fundamentals of the criticism of the products from the great western media. As is well known, Horkheimer and Adorno focused on the ambiguous complexity of capitalist ideology, which suppresses the dialectic between culture and society, assimilating the cultural sphere to social fatality. Thanks to the apparatus of the cultural industry, the consciousness of the masses adapts itself, since, according to the authors, the Hollywood industry actually performs that role, which Kantian criticism attributes to pure forms, i.e., it becomes the only possible framework of thought.

Perhaps, the Frankfurt approach gave its most extreme results when Marcuse's thought –expressed above all in 'One-dimensional man: studies in the ideology of the advanced industrial society' (Marcuse, 1964)– widely influenced the response in American universities and the alternative cultural production. In the line of the original Frankfurt scholars' thought, it is possible to identify some background theses, which the subsequent debate had to face repeatedly and in several ways.

The first issue is related to the character of capitalist companies of the large productive agents. There is no doubt that –at least after the industrial printing revolution at the beginning of the 19th century, both in Europe and the USA– the demands of large-scale production required the development of the three classic elements of industry, namely: capital investment; mechanisation; and organization of ideation, productivity, and distribution. On the other hand, the development of demand, the exponential growth of the public, which slowly replaced the small circles of users and commission agents of art and culture, somehow reversed the very perspective of creativity, linking it to the demands of diversified public, although often (especially in the initial stages of cultural industrialisation) relatively uncultured and poorly schooled.

This revolution, which first concerned the print industry (books and newspapers), then the cinema, and finally the so-called instantaneous media (radio and television), had important consequences. For example, it influenced the image of authors, increasingly linked with economic-productive mechanisms and, not surprising, protagonists of battles for the recognition, both artistic and economic, of their educational role. On the other hand, the different regulations on copyright developed in the 19th century emblematically reflect the various industrial cultures in different countries. For example, while European legislation tends to predominantly protect the rights of the inventors of creative ideas, the American legislation favours the rights of the entrepreneurs. In addition, the progressive extension of the validity of rights during the 20th century makes it possible to understand how, what at the beginning was intended to protect the artists in Europe, the United States increasingly supported the monopoly of cultural contents on the part of the big companies in the sector.

The second thesis developed by the scholars of the Frankfurt School was focused on the nature of the products of the cultural industry, i.e., level and quality. According to Adorno and Horkheimer's perspective –but also to Marcuse's– the products inevitably seem to be of low quality precisely because they are produced industrially. From the Marxist point of view, these products are affected by the alienation of the workers; however, in a broader sense, they lose the specificity and the uniqueness of the artistic product as such. Curiously, this issue clashes with Benjamin's perspective ('The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction" / "*Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*" [Benjamin, 1991]), for whom the end of the aura of the work of art caused by reproduction technologies does not necessarily has to be considered a loss but, more in general, a change of paradigm. In fact, the aura can also be interpreted as the historical consequence of peculiar pre-industrial productive forms.

It is common that productive seriality implies the use of standards objectively. This fact is explained by the peculiar nature of mass narrative 'genres' (from science fiction to thrillers, from terror to adventure). These genres are not limited to frameworks and norms followed by the authors and with which they sometimes play; they structure the productive organization to reduce costs and optimise time. However, this perspective reveals some contradictions. The most obvious consists in the diffuse and shared recognition of the artistic character of certain films. In Italy, these films are usually attributed the definition 'genre film' or 'consumption film' to indicate purely industrial products. Therefore, the role of a person in charge of the creative dimension, who in these cases would take the lead in the industrial apparatus, is usually emphasised. However, who is the author of a film? For a few decades, in Europe, the authors were considered to be the directors, but it is absolutely clear that this figure is not an author in the same sense in which writers are the authors of their novels, given the relevant role of scriptwriters, authors of the musical setting, and camera operators, without taking into consideration the importance of the actors. It should be recognised that, although big cultural industries keep the distinction between creative and author roles in their own organization, in the credits of their own productions, they do not 'work' like pre-industrial subjectivities. Furthermore, this operation diversity does not imply lower quality or lower public value of the industrial product.

The third implicit and sometimes also explicit thesis in the Frankfurtian perspective is the link with the 'mainstream'. This is the symbolic force (in terms of quality, and, therefore repetition and capacity to satisfy the needs and the instinctive desires of the public) that has the ability to impose formal and content standards.

This debate appears again and almost constantly outside the Frankfurtian approach, and even outside a strictly Marxist approach. In fact, it also considers the perspectives of Ortega and Gasset (1929), and reappears several times in subtle intellectual analyses conducted in various post–Second World War periods. I will present two examples to clarify this approach. The first refers to Macdonald, who in his "Against the American grain" (Macdonald, 1962), in concomitance with the affirmation of mass society and the industrialisation of culture, focused on the development of new cultural forms, which, according to him, were regressive. After the traditional contrast between high culture and popular culture, Macdonald recognises two more cultural forms, 'masscult' and 'midcult.' In essence, the first is pop culture, which expresses itself by means of the products of great diffusion through the media, namely: comics; newspapers; genre narrative; pop music in its various forms; cinema; and television. This culture (says the same term 'cult') is not really culture, but characterised by a ritualistic fruition, capable of generating phenomena such as the star system or compulsive consumption. The second, on the other hand, is the bad imitation of high culture that produces simulated art for the middle class, which aspires to an aesthetic dimension beyond its reach due to its cultural limits. A phenomenon such as the collection of copies or multiple copies is a perfect example.

Macdonald's perspective, which is the application of Adorno and Horkheimer's postulates, can be found in many of the polemics against the cultural industry. Naturally, such an approach is influenced by the Marxian critique of ideology, which for Marx was the epiphenomenon of power relations in the economic structure. There is vast literature that in substance resumes this background position, although often reworking it in an original way. For example, at the beginning of the 1960s, Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart wrote a violent critique of the Disney universe as a 'superfetation' of the values of U.S. capitalism ("How to read Donald Duck"; Dorfman & Mattelart, 1971). On the other hand, the Italian author Alberto Mario Banti has recently published a reinterpretation of American pop culture, precisely from the mainstream perspective, indicating the persistence of core values in the products of the Hollywood industry or the major record companies (Banti, 2017).

Conversely, a more conservative perspective of the application of Frankfurtian theories has been discussed by Bettetini and Fumagalli (1998). For these authors, many products of mass culture, such as the American TV series, do not meet the tastes of the public, which are forged from the perspective of the dissemination of an extremely open narrative from the point of view of sexual morality.

In any case, the versions I have mentioned entail the idea of coherence of the symbolic production system, represented by the cultural industry, and, at the same time, the idea of its efficacy in creating and spreading ideological values. On the one hand, as this perspective is integrated with consciousness, the symbolic systems are not coherent at all, but contradictory and subject to conflicts, fractures, and renewals. On the other hand, phenomena such as political dissidence or resistance from minority cultures –and even the extensive examples offered by cultural studies on alternative readings of mass content– show that the objective force of the industrial supply of culture is not able to mechanically determine transformations in the complexity and plurality of social subjectivities.

Returning to the preliminary definitions of the cultural industry, in this first theoretical phase, an important step towards a refinement of the concept was taken by the French scholar Edgar Morin in his work "The spirit of time" (*L'esprit du temps*) (Morin, 1962). It is no coincidence that the Italian translation of this work is entitled "The cultural industry" (*L'industria culturale*). For the French author, the cultural industry is not only an ideological tool, but also a gigantic laboratory in which collective desires and expectations are forged. According to Morin, the products of this 'apparatus' –in particular those of the film industry– result from a commitment between the emerging forces of the repressed social issues and the powers of censorship or sublimation, coming from the economic and power systems. According to this approach, the role of the public is active and capable of constructing meanings. More focused on culture as energy that permeates the collectivity and forge (being forged in turn) needs and desires, the French sociologist considers the transformations of the industrial society and the role of the masses less severely (Morin, 1956 & 1957). Above all, this author perceives the contents of the industrial system that produces pop culture not only as a regression of culture, but, in a broader sense, as a profound and irreversible transformation, whose forms and reasons should be deeply investigated. This is how he anticipates the new perspectives that the sociology of media and communication will focus on during future decades.

At the same time, almost throughout Europe, the focus of the cultural industry was enriched with different contents and methodologies. For example, in 1964, Umberto Eco published "Apocalyptic and integrated" (*Apocalittici e integrati*) in Italy (Eco, 1964). In this work –which would have a long-term success– the author identified two opposing behaviours between intellectuals and academics. On the one hand, there were those who accepted the transformations of the culture produced by industrialisation and mass consumption without questioning. On the other hand, there were those critics who were not very willing to mediation and who conceived industrial-cultural products and strategies as the end of Western culture, as it had been conceived up to that time. Cautiously, Eco seemed to be in favour of a still judicious anti-industrial and anti-capitalist perspective. However, later, amusement and interest in popular mass culture undoubtedly prevailed in some of his analyses.

3. From cultural to creative industries

Throughout the 1970s, the perspective of the Frankfurt School, with its different variations and derivations, played a very important role in the debate about the media. However, since the end of that decade, certain elements favoured both the reduction of their centrality and their deep revision.

Regarding the first issue, the emergence and the affirmation of the paradigm of Cultural Studies at the Birmingham School, initiated by Stuart Hall, should be highlighted (see, for example, During, 2007). This line of thought, which skilfully integrated the contributions of semiotics, deconstructionist philosophy, and ethnographic-type and qualitative field research, emphasised the ability of cultural identities (linked to ethnicity, class, territory, and other aspects) to oppose the mainstream of cultural industry products. Those identities formulated autonomous interpretations, independent of the original intentions of production, and, at the same time, produced alternative subcultures (such as punk with respect to more institutionalised rock music). Among all the theoretical references of these perspectives, it is worth mentioning the investigations of Michel De Certeau, especially in his work "The practice of everyday life" (*L'invention du quotidien*) (De Certeau, 1980). In addition, the French structuralism and the works of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida can be pointed out as other important sources.

In essence, the various elaborations of the Cultural Studies (with the variations of the studies of audience and reception, user studies, and, in general, the ethnographies related to the theory of domestication) emphasise the role of the recipients of the messages, observing their autonomy both in terms of interpretation and the ability to contrast industrial strategies with individual and group tactics. An example of these phenomena is 'fandom', in which groups of fans of a film star, film, or television series constitute networks of exchanges, in which the standard meanings foreseen by the production can be reworked in a creative way. Fandom can even influence the production, for example by insisting that television series about to end should continue or, on the contrary, boycotting characters or products that clash with the values of the group.

If these theories question some pillars of the Frankfurtian perspective on the cultural industry, other investigations promote their revision. I refer in particular to two obvious trends: historicization; and the paradigm of creative industries.

We begin with the phenomenon of historicization. I refer to studies on the evolution of culture industrialisation, which often results from an alliance between a sociological and a historiographical perspective. To illustrate this phenomenon, I would like to mention the case of my country, Italy, where books on the history of the media have multiplied since the 1990s. The inspiration for this type of studies was David Forgacs, with his pioneering work "Italian culture in the industrial era 1880-1980: cultural industries, politics and the public" (Forgacs, 1990). The study "The cultural industry in Italy" (*L'industria culturale in Italia*) conducted by Michele Sorice (1998) and my work "Subtle culture. Media and cultural industry in Italy from the nineteenth century to the nineties" (*La cultura sottile. Media e industria culturale in Italia dall'ottocento agli anni novanta*) (Colombo, 1998) were published with an interval of less than a decade.

In the same period, along with general history of the national cultural industry, important studies on the history of radio and television (see, for example, Monteleone, 1992 & 2001; Grasso, 1992, with later editions in 2000, 2004 & 2008; Menduni, 2002) and extensive works of complete historical reconstruction were published. For example, it is worth mentioning the great "History of the Italian cinema" (*Storia del cinema italiano*) published in several volumes by Marsilio, "History of the Italian press" (*Storia della stampa italiana*) (Castronovo & Tranfaglia, 1976, also in several volumes), and "History of Italian journalism" (*Storia del giornalismo italiano*) (Murialdi, 2006).

In the second decade of the 21st century, this perspective evolves towards more specific studies on certain periods, considered crucial in the Italian society. It is no coincidence, for example, if in these investigations the eighties and their role are particularly important, already investigated by sociologists (Ciofalo, 2011; Colombo, 2012), film or television scholars (Morreale, 2009), historians (Gozzini, 2011), and very scrupulous publicists (Morando, 2011 & 2016). The change is due to the attempt to start qualifying and approaching the issue of a

national cultural industry in a more global perspective, including interactions with trends (cultural and industrial) in the international arena. In all the cases I cited, as well as in the vast literature on the history of national cultural industries that could be analysed, many of the critical assumptions of the Frankfurtian approach were greatly attenuated by increased attention paid to changes and complexity, which progressively replaced the various anti-industrial damages.

We turn now to the second approach that implies a revision of the Frankfurtian paradigm. This is articulated in a complex series of studies that cover several issues: from a cultural sociology to a new definition of the industrial production of culture, i.e., from studies that are attentive to intellectual professional skills or equally creative skills that perform the role of intermediaries in several cultural circles (see, for example, Crane, 1994; Griswold, 1994) to studies that deepens the production-distribution-consumption circle from a socioeconomic perspective (for example, Bovone & Mora, 2003; Bouquillon, Miège & Moeglin, 2013). The highlights of this research perspective seem to be two. The first is the field of studies, which has extended from the media to other forms of industry (or cultural crafts, such as fashion), challenging the reductionist approach that identified the pillars of the cultural industry mechanisms only in the media. The second level is the approach of creative dimension, in dialectical and problematic dialogue with certain literature (see Florida, 2002) that considers this dimension to be a salient feature of contemporaneity. In fact, in recent times, the expression 'cultural and creative industries' has been progressively replacing, at least in institutional discourse, the expression 'cultural industry' (with results, I think, quite ambiguous; see the report "Creating growth: measuring cultural and creative markets in the EU" of 2014).[1] Facing the issue of professionalism, considering the skills, abilities, training, and routines, has allowed breaking the glass wall, which studies on cultural industry, inspired by scholars of the Frankfurt School, had preferred to keep intact.

In general terms, it seems that this type of studies, which has been extended to many other authors and contributions, in addition to those mentioned so far, can be perfectly incorporated into the reflection on the Italian cultural industry. It can also be considered that the integrations promoted by those studies between the world of the media and other cultural industries suggest useful guidelines for future studies.

4. Platforms as cultural industries

From the first decade of the 21st century, studies on the cultural industry have been addressing another challenge: the digital revolution, i.e., the arrival of large digital platforms that, with their somewhat revolutionary characteristics, coincide with complete digitalisation in all sectors of cultural production, from music to cinema, from television to books.

In fact, the arrival of platforms such as Google, Facebook, and large companies like Amazon and Apple seemed to open new possibilities for a Frankfurtian interpretation since the beginning. For example, in a crucial year like 2004, Enrique Bustamante published an article entitled "Cultural industries in the digital age" in an important magazine like *Media, Culture and Society* (Bustamante, 2004). On the one hand, this author highlighted the novelties of the new scenarios (the definition 'web 2.0' was coined the following year), and, on the other hand, their continuity with the traditional industries of culture. Bustamante focused on the possibilities that public radio and television services had to maintain their role, even in the face of new competition. However, in a few years, it would be clear that the new challenges would be much more radical.

Next, I summarise the scenarios that emerged with the arrival of the great platforms, baptised by De Bustos and Casado del Río (2016) as GAFA (Google, Amazon, Facebook, and Apple), and lead to reflect on the industrialisation of culture addressing literature that, I

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[1] http://www.creatingeurope.eu/.

believe, includes some intuitions of the tradition that I have just outlined, but also some totally new issues (Van Dijk, 2013; Colombo, 2013; Meikle, 2016).

I will start by discussing specific socioeconomic aspects. From this point of view, there are two important innovations: on the one hand, the new size of large companies, which today are among the first in the world, and which, therefore, have reached an unusual size in comparison with the tradition of the usual cultural industries; on the other hand, their nature based on the economic advantage for the users (who, for example, have free access to information or entertainment content through Google or Facebook). These characteristics have allowed these companies to exercise monopoly power over the demand (instead of the supply, as usually happens in the case of monopolies), without national laws that could easily reduce their strength. This type of situation is called 'monopsony', and the competition pays for the users' benefits. In this case, the growth of large platforms is detrimental to the information, record, and television industries, and foreshadows unpredictable scenarios. Some scholars (for example, McChesney, 2013; Fuchs, 2015; Wu, 2016; and Taplin, 2017) have shown the risks of this situation on two fronts: on the one hand, the professional work of the operators, increasingly depreciated (as in the case of journalists, replaced with content generated by users in some large platforms); on the other, the quality of products, which, especially in the field of information, seem increasingly subject to devaluation (as in the well-known case of 'fake news').

Also, regarding the socioeconomic structures, it should be noted that the 'free of charge' for the consumers of the products circulating on the platforms is paid by those consumers through a growing transfer of information about themselves, their habits, their values, and their social networks. This is the well-known case of data surveillance, which is a completely new form of control. Before the birth of large platforms, control of content was exerted by companies through 'gatekeeping'. However, access to content is now quite free (at least in democratic systems), whereas consumption is systematically monitored and elaborated by algorithms.

A crucial aspect refers to convergence, which offers large platforms the possibility of mediating content of all kinds, such as literary, musical, and audio visual, making them available both in computers and mobile devices, thus exponentially increasing the distribution of culture at all levels. Thus, in addition to being global subjects, large companies are also fully multimedia subjects, constantly present due to their offers to consumers.

Other important aspects of the novelties related to the operation of the platforms have to do with the articulation of their supply. For a long time, the products of the cultural industry have been available in the market only at certain times, and have enjoyed a variable life cycle. While Hegel already noticed that reading the newspaper constituted the morning prayer of the civilised man (with a ritualistic fruition that corresponded to the circulation of the main morning newspapers, and that made the product obsolete in the interval of one day), a film had a much longer life cycle (from its premiere to the moment they stopped running in the theatres), which could be calculated in months, if not in years. Later, the arrival of radio and television introduced a structuring of the supply in terms of programming. This way, what the listeners or viewers did not immediately seize was lost. The exception was a series of products for devices, such as music on disk or, first of all, books, which could have a longer shelf life, despite the fact that their success followed a precise 'normal' curve pattern. For most of all these products, the memory they could guarantee was not a problem for the manufacturing companies, but in any case for the public sector, which had to make a selection in libraries, newspaper archives, media libraries, etc.

The platforms have replaced the logic of film, television and radio programming due to the permanent availability of their products on the web, constituting in fact an immense memory that is not entirely public, but subject to some form of payment. They have also introduced a type of supply that makes products previously closely linked to programming

(such as television series) very similar to books or discs, even though they can be provided without physical support (as in the case of streaming music services).

As for the supply itself, we should underline another important transformation. The traditional production of the cultural industry is linked to certain stability of the genres (western, dramatic, science fiction, etc.), which has always allowed an efficient productive articulation. However, in recent times, the acceleration of the production-distribution-consumption cycle has progressively reduced traditional rigidities in favour of greater fluidity between genres. It seems that television series, in particular, are always experimenting new combinations, releasing the creativity of authors and screenwriters to a greater extent.

The third set of change factors linked to the platforms concerns their use and valorisation. Social media has made audiences more active, in particular by giving them the opportunity to comment, share, and often even produce original content related to the fruition of cultural industry products. On the other hand, we have observed that the availability of such content at all times and in all places implies some important novelties, such as what some experts have begun to define as 'coalescence', i.e., the ability of audiences to mix different content with different languages, going from one to another in different platforms. Integrated audiences, to which platforms can reach more easily due to their convergent and always available supply, are perhaps the most evident novelty of recent transformations. Obviously, this change is possible thanks to a new economic valorisation of the public: if cultural industries have historically based their economy on the attention they managed to attract and ask their clients (attention captured by advertising and exploited during fruition), nowadays, the issue valued by industries is performance: choosing content by activating it with a click; making a search; and selecting a purchase. This is possible due to the nature of the funding on which the platforms are based. They obtain benefits not only through advertising and the sale of products, but also and above all from the increase in network traffic and the sale of users' data (data that users make available precisely through their browsing choices).

Obviously, the management of the enormous flow of information generated by users is elaborated by the algorithms used by the platforms, which are capable of predicting and promoting specific and personalised future consumption options. From this fact derives another feature of the enjoyment of cultural content through platforms: the continuous and dynamic circularity between demand and supply, between individual choice and the proposal of content providers.

What are the consequences of these transformations? We can mention the concept of 'remix' (i.e., continuous reuse including users of industrial cultural products), which Lessig (2008) mentioned a few years ago as an example of continuity between classical cultural forms and those of industrial modernity. Today, in the age of the platforms, Meikle (2016) states that remix seems more and more a non-spontaneous format, but originally conceived during the programming of a product, which is launched on the market calling the public to elaborate more texts and products, and allow the industries to make them part of their supply. A limit case is, of course, YouTube, which is nourished by all the products of those who adhere to the slogan of the platform: 'Broadcast Yourself.' As an effect, the creativity of individuals (often inspired by the content offered by the media) is at the service of the large public of the platform.

5. Conclusion and further research

To summarise the path that has been taken so far, I would like to underline again the three phases of studies on the cultural industry. The first phase was marked by the development of the concept by the Frankfurt School, from the 1930s. In particular, Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse, on the one hand, identified the consonances between industrial mass production and new forms of cultural production and, on the other, formulated a radical critique of this

change. In the same years in which the theories of the Frankfurt School were disseminated, Morin proposed a less clearly critical view of the same transformation. While for most members of the Frankfurt school the industry had the strength to impose its own consumption standards by alienating its public, for Morin the needs of the public were partly and effectively represented in the supply of the industry that knows how to capture the profound transformations of modern life.

In the second phase, which extends from the late 1970s to the early 2000s, the theories of the cultural industry –after a phase of partial obscurity– were retaken, on the one hand, in a socio-historical base, with the emergence of literature that was often national, but increasingly oriented to the understanding of more global trends, and, on the other, with the expansion of the field, which also implied a change of definition: from cultural industries to creative industries.

In the third and final phase, which dates back to the mid-first decade of the 21st century, reflection on cultural industries faced the digital revolution, which seemed to question some foundations of supply, demand, and articulation of the contents of cultural production. Perhaps it is from here, from this impressive reflection in progress, that in the near future we should expect new contributions in the theoretical field.

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