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## FREE TIME

The question concerning free time, what people do with it and what opportunities could eventually evolve from it, must not be posed as an abstract generalisation. Incidentally the expression 'free time' or 'spare time' originated only recently – its precursor, the term 'leisure' (*Muße*) denoted the privilege of an unconstrained, comfortable life-style, hence something qualitatively different and far more auspicious – and it indicates a specific difference, that of time which is neither free nor spare, which is occupied by work, and which moreover one could designate as heteronomous. Free time is shackled to its opposite. Indeed the oppositional relation in which it stands imbues free time with certain essential characteristics. What is more, and far more importantly, free time depends on the totality of social conditions, which continues to hold people under its spell. Neither in their work nor in their consciousness do people dispose of genuine freedom over themselves. Even those conciliatory sociologies which use the term 'role' as a key recognize this fact, in so far as the term itself, borrowed from the domain of the theatre, suggests that the existence foisted upon people by society is identical neither with people as they are in themselves nor with all that they could be. Of course one should not attempt to make a simple distinction between people as they are in themselves and their so-called social roles. These roles affect the

innermost articulation of human characteristics, to such an extent that in the age of truly unparalleled social integration, it is hard to ascertain anything in human beings which is not functionally determined. This is an important consideration for the question of free time. It means to say that even where the hold of the spell is relaxed, and people are at least subjectively convinced that they are acting of their own free will, this will itself is shaped by the very same forces which they are seeking to escape in their hours without work. The question which today would really do justice to the phenomenon of free time would be following: what becomes of free time, where productivity of labour continues to rise, under persisting conditions of unfreedom, that is, under relations of production into which people are born, and which prescribe the rules of human existence today just as they always have done? Free time has already expanded enormously in our day and age. And this expansion should increase still further, due to inventions in the fields of automation and atomic power, which have not yet been anywhere like fully exploited. If one were to try and answer the question without ideological preconceptions, one could not avoid the suspicion that 'free time' is tending toward its own opposite, and is becoming a parody of itself. Thus unfreedom is gradually annexing 'free time', and the majority of unfree people are as unaware of this process as they are of the unfreedom itself.

I should like to elucidate the problem with the help of a trivial experience of my own. Time and time again, when questioned or interviewed, one is asked about one's hobbies. When the illustrated weeklies report on the life of one of those giants of the culture industry, they rarely forego the opportunity to report, with varying degrees of intimacy, on the hobbies of the person in question. I am shocked by the question when I come up against it. I have no hobby. Not that I am the kind of workaholic, who is incapable of doing anything with his time but applying himself industriously to the required task. But, as far as my activities beyond the bounds of my recognised profession are concerned, I take them all, without exception, very seriously. So much so, that I should be horrified by the very idea that they had anything to do with hobbies – preoccupations with which I had become mindlessly infatuated merely in order to kill the time – had I not become hardened by experience to such examples of this now widespread,

barbarous mentality. Making music, listening to music, reading with all my attention, these activities are part and parcel of my life; to call them hobbies would make a mockery of them. On the other hand I have been fortunate enough that my job, the production of philosophical and sociological works and university teaching, cannot be defined in terms of that strict opposition to free time, which is demanded by the current razor-sharp division of the two. I am however well aware that in this I enjoy a privilege, with both the element of fortune and of guilt which this involves: I speak as one who has had the rare opportunity to follow the path of his own intentions and to fashion his work accordingly. This is certainly one good reason why there is no hard and fast opposition between my work itself and what I do apart from it. If free time really was to become just that state of affairs in which everyone could enjoy what was once the prerogative of a few – and compared to feudal society bourgeois society has taken some steps in this direction – then I would picture it after my own experience of life outside work, although given different conditions, this model would in its turn necessarily alter.

If we suppose with Marx that in bourgeois society labour power has become a commodity in which labour is consequently reified, then the expression 'hobby' amounts to a paradox: that human condition which sees itself as the opposite of reification, the oasis of unmediated life within a completely mediated total system, has itself been reified just like the rigid distinction between labour and free time. The latter is a continuation of the forms of profit-oriented social life. Just as the term 'show business' is today taken utterly seriously, the irony in the expression 'leisure industry' has now been quite forgotten. It is widely known but no less true therefore that specific leisure activities like tourism and camping revolve around and are organised for the sake of profit. At the same time the difference between work and free time has been branded as a norm in the minds of people, at both the conscious and the unconscious level. Because, in accordance with the predominant work ethic, time free of work should be utilized for the recreation of expended labour power, then work-less time, precisely because it is a mere appendage of work, is severed from the latter with puritanical zeal. And here we come across a behavioural norm of the bourgeois character. On the one hand one should pay attention at work and not be

distracted or lark about; wage labour is predicated on this assumption and its laws have been internalized. On the other hand free time must not resemble work in any way whatsoever, in order, presumably, that one can work all the more effectively afterwards. Hence the inanity of many leisure activities. And yet, in secret as it were, the contraband of modes of behaviour proper to the domain of work, which will not let people out of its power, is being smuggled into the realm of free time. In earlier times children were allotted marks for attentiveness in their school reports. This had its corollary in the subjective, perhaps even well-meaning worries of adults that the children should not overstrain themselves in their free time; not read too much and not stay awake too late in the evening. Secretly parents sensed a certain unruliness of mind which was incompatible with the efficient division of human life. Besides, the prevalent ethos is suspicious of anything which is miscellaneous, or heterogeneous, of anything which has not clearly and unambiguously been assigned to its place. The rigorous bifurcation of life enjoins the same reification, which has now almost completely subjugated free time.

This subjugation can be clearly seen at work in the hobby ideology. The naturalness of the question of what hobby you have, harbours the assumption that you must have one, or better still, that you should have a range of different hobbies, in accordance with what the 'leisure industry' can supply. Organized freedom is compulsory. Woe betide you if you have no hobby, no pastime; then you are a swot or an old-timer, an eccentric, and you will fall prey to ridicule in a society which foists upon you what your free time should be. Such compulsion is by no means merely external in character. It is linked to the inner needs of people in the functional system. Camping – an activity so popular amongst the old youth movements – was a protest against the tedium and convention of bourgeois life. People had to 'get out', in both senses of the phrase. Sleeping out beneath the stars meant that one had escaped from the house and from the family. After the youth movements had died out this need was then harnessed and institutionalized by the camping industry. The industry alone could not have forced people to purchase its tents and dormobiles, plus huge quantities of extra equipment, if there had not already been some longing in people themselves; but their own need for freedom gets functionalized,

extended and reproduced by business; what they want is forced upon them once again. Hence the ease with which the free time is integrated; people are unaware of how utterly unfree they are, even where they feel most at liberty, because the rule of such unfreedom has been abstracted from them.

Taken in its strict sense, in contradistinction to work, as it at least used to apply in what would today be considered an out-dated ideology, there is something vacuous (Hegel would have said abstract) about the notion of free time. An archetypal instance is the behaviour of those who grill themselves brown in the sun merely for the sake of a sun-tan, although dozing in the blazing sunshine is not at all enjoyable, might very possibly be physically unpleasant, and certainly impoverishes the mind. In the sun-tan, which can be quite fetching, the fetish character of the commodity lays claim to actual people; they themselves become fetishes. The idea that a girl is more erotically attractive because of her brown skin is probably only another rationalization. The sun-tan is an end in itself, of more importance than the boy-friend it was perhaps supposed to entice. If employees return from their holidays without having acquired the mandatory skin tone, they can be quite sure their colleagues will ask them the pointed question, 'Haven't you been on holiday then?' The fetishism which thrives in free time, is subject to further social controls. It is obvious that the cosmetics industry with its overwhelming and ineluctable advertisements, is a contributory factor here, but people's willingness to ignore the obvious is just as great.

The act of dozing in the sun marks the culmination of a crucial element of free time under present conditions – boredom. The miracles which people expect from their holidays or from other special treats in their free time, are subject to endless spiteful ridicule, since even here they never get beyond the threshold of the eversame: distant places are no longer – as they still were for Baudelaire's *ennui* – different places. The victim's ridicule is automatically connected to the very mechanisms which victimize. At an early age Schopenhauer formulated a theory of boredom. True to his metaphysical pessimism he teaches that people either suffer from the unfulfilled desires of their blind will, or become bored as soon as these desires are satisfied. The theory well describes what becomes of people's free time under

the sort of conditions of heteronomy, and which in new German tends to be termed *Fremdbestimmtheit* (external determination). In its cynicism Schopenhauer's arrogant remark that mankind is the factory product of nature also captures something of what the totality of the commodity character actually makes man into. Angry cynicism still does more honour to human beings than solemn protestations about man's irreducible essence. However, one should not hypostatize Schopenhauer's doctrine as something of universal validity or even as an insight into the primal character of the human species. Boredom is a function of life which is lived under the compulsion to work, and under the strict division of labour. It need not be so. Whenever behaviour in spare time is truly autonomous, determined by free people for themselves, boredom rarely figures; it need not figure in activities which cater merely for the desire for pleasure, any more than it does in those free time activities which are reasonable and meaningful in themselves. Even fooling about need not be crass, and can be enjoyed as a blessed release from the throes of self-control. If people were able to make their own decisions about themselves and their lives, if they were not caught up in the realm of the eversame, they would not have to be bored. Boredom is the reflection of objective dullness. As such it is in a similar position to political apathy. The most compelling reason for apathy is the by no means unjustified feeling of the masses that political participation within the sphere society grants them, and this holds true for all political systems in the world today, can alter their actual existence only minimally. Failing to discern the relevance of politics to their own interests, they retreat from all political activity. The well-founded or indeed neurotic feeling of powerlessness is intimately bound up with boredom: boredom is objective desperation. It is also, however, symptomatic of the deformations perpetrated upon man by the social totality, the most important of which is surely the defamation and atrophy of the imagination (*Phantasie*). Imagination is suspected of being only sexual curiosity and longing for the forbidden by the spirit (*Geist*) of a science which is no longer spirit. Those who want to adapt must learn increasingly to curb their imagination. For the most part the very development of the imagination is crippled by the experience of early childhood. The lack of imagination which is cultivated and inculcated by society renders people helpless in their free time. The

impertinent question of what people should do with the vast amount of free time now at their disposal – as if it was a question of alms and not human rights – is based upon this very unimaginativeness. The reason why people can actually do so little with their free time is that the truncation of their imagination deprives them of the faculty which made the state of freedom pleasurable in the first place. People have been refused freedom, and its value belittled, for such a long time that now people no longer like it. They need the shallow entertainment, by means of which cultural conservatism patronizes and humiliates them, in order to summon up the strength for work, which is required of them under the arrangement of society which cultural conservatism defends. This is one good reason why people have remained chained to their work, and to a system which trains them for work, long after that system has ceased to require their labour.

Under prevailing conditions it would be erroneous and foolish to expect or to demand that people should be genuinely productive in their free time; for productivity – the ability to bring forth something that was not already there – is the very thing which has been eradicated from them. At best what they then produce in free time is scarcely better than the ominous hobby – the imitation of poems or pictures which, given the almost irrevocable division of labour, others could do better than these amateurs (*Freizeitler*). What they create has something superfluous about it. This superfluosity makes known the inferior quality of the product, which in turn vitiates any pleasure taken in its production.

Even the most superfluous and senseless activity undertaken in people's free time is integrated in society. Once again a social need is at work. Certain forms of service, in particular domestic servants, are dying out; demand is disproportionate to supply. In America only the really wealthy can afford to keep servants, and Europe is following close behind. This means that many people carry out activities which were formerly delegated. The slogan 'do it yourself' latches onto this as practical advice. However, it also latches on to the resentment which people feel towards mechanization, which unburdens people, without – and not the fact itself but only its current interpretation is a matter of dispute – their having any use for the newly acquired time. Thus, once again in the interests of certain specialized industries, people are

encouraged to perform tasks, which others could do more simply and more proficiently for them, and which for this very reason, deep down, they must despise. Actually, the idea that one can save the money one spends on services, in a society based upon the division of labour, belongs to a very old level of bourgeois consciousness; it is an economy made from stubborn self-interest, an economy which flies in the face of the fact that it is only the exchange of specialized skills which keeps the whole mechanism going in the first place. William Tell, the obnoxious paradigm of absolute individuality, proclaimed that the household axe spared the need for the carpenter – indeed a whole ontology of bourgeois consciousness could be compiled from Schiller's maxims.

'Do it yourself', this contemporary type of spare time behaviour fits however into a much more far-reaching context. More than thirty years ago I described such behaviour as 'pseudo-activity'. Since then pseudo-activity has spread alarmingly, even (and especially) amongst those people who regard themselves as anti-establishment. Generally speaking there is good reason to assume that all forms of pseudo-activity contain a pent-up need to change the petrified relations of society. Pseudo-activity is misguided spontaneity. Misguided, but not accidentally so; because people do have a dim suspicion of how hard it would be to throw off the yoke that weighs upon them. They prefer to be distracted by spurious and illusory activities, by institutionalized vicarious satisfactions, than to face up to the awareness of how little access they have to the possibility of change today. Pseudo-activities are fictions and parodies of the same productivity which society on the one hand incessantly calls for, but on the other holds in check and, as far as the individual is concerned, does not really desire at all. Productive free time is only possible for people who have outgrown their tutelage, not for those who under conditions of heteronomy, have become heteronomous for themselves.

Free time then does not merely stand in opposition to labour. In a system where full employment itself has become the ideal, free time is nothing more than a shadowy continuation of labour. As yet we still lack an incisive sociology of sport, and particularly of the spectator. Nevertheless one hypothesis, amongst others, springs to mind; namely that, by dint of the physical exertion exacted by sport, by dint of the functionalization of the body in team-activity, which interestingly



enough occurs in the most popular sports, people are unwittingly trained into modes of behaviour which, sublimated to a greater or lesser degree, are required of them by the work process. The accepted reason for playing sport is that it makes believe that fitness itself is the sole, independent end of sport: whereas fitness for work is certainly one of the covert ends of sport. Frequently it is in sport that people first inflict upon themselves (and celebrate as a triumph of their own freedom) precisely what society inflicts upon them and what they must learn to enjoy.

Let me say a little more on the relation of free time and the culture industry. Since Horkheimer and I coined the term more than thirty years ago, so much has been written about this means of domination and integration, that I should like to pick out a particular problem, which at the time we were not able to gain a proper perspective on. The ideology critic, dealing with the culture industry, and working on the premise that the standards of the culture industry are the ossified standards of what was formerly entertainment and low art, has the tendency to believe that the culture industry totally and utterly dominates and controls both the conscious and the unconscious of those people at whom it is directed – the same people out of whose taste during the liberal era the culture industry grew. Nevertheless there is reason to believe that production regulates consumption in the process of mental life, just as it does in that of material life, especially where the former has so closely approximated the latter, as it has in the culture industry. One would have thought the culture industry was perfectly adapted to its consumers. But since the culture industry has meanwhile become total – itself a phenomenon of the eversame, from which it promises temporarily to divert people – it is doubtful whether the culture industry and consumer-consciousness can be simply equated with one another. A few years ago at the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research we conducted a study devoted to this problem. Unfortunately, the full analysis of this material was postponed in favour of more pressing tasks. Nevertheless a passing inspection of it does reveal something which might well be relevant to the so-called problem of free time. The study concerned the wedding of Princess Beatrix of Holland with the junior German diplomat Claus von Amsberg. The objective was to assess the reactions of the German

public to the wedding, which was broadcast by all the mass media, dwelt on incessantly by the illustrated weeklies, and so consumed by the public in their free time. Since the way in which the event was presented, like the articles written about it, accorded it an unusual degree of importance, we expected the spectators and readers to treat it just as seriously. In particular we expected to observe the operation of the characteristic contemporary ideology of personalization; through which, as a clear compensation for the functionalization of reality, the value of individual people and private relationships is immeasurably overestimated in comparison to actual social determinants. I should now like to say with due caution, that these expectations were too simplistic. In fact the study offers a virtually text book example of how critical-theoretical thought can both learn from and be corrected by empirical social research. It was possible to detect symptoms of a split consciousness. On the one hand people enjoyed it as a concrete event in the here and now quite unlike anything else in their everyday life: it was to be a 'unique experience' (*einmalig*) to use a cliché beloved of modern German. To this extent the reaction of the audience corresponded to the familiar pattern, according to which even the relevant, possibly political news was transformed into a consumer item by the way in which the information was transmitted. The format of our interview, however, was devised in such a way that the questions concerned with determining the immediate reactions of the viewers, were supplemented by control questions about the political significance that the interviewees ascribed to the grand event. Here it turned out that many of the people interviewed – we shall ignore the exact proportion – suddenly showed themselves to be thoroughly realistic, and proceeded to evaluate critically the political and social importance of the same event, the well publicized once-in-a-lifetime nature of which they had drooled over breathlessly in front of their television sets. What the culture industry presents people with in their free time, if my conclusions are not too hasty, is indeed consumed and accepted, but with a kind of reservation, in the same way that even the most naive theatre or filmgoers do not simply take what they behold there for real. Perhaps one can go even further and say that it is not quite believed in. It is obvious that the integration of consciousness and free time has not yet completely succeeded. The real interests of individuals are still

strong enough to resist, within certain limits, total inclusion. That would concur with the social prediction that a society, whose inherent contradictions persist undiminished, cannot be totally integrated even in consciousness. Society cannot have it all its own way, especially not in free time, which does indeed lay claim to people, but by its very nature still cannot totally claim them without pushing them over the edge. I shall refrain from spelling out the consequences; but I think that we can here glimpse a chance of maturity (*Mündigkeit*), which might just eventually help to turn free time into freedom proper.