

## IDEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE OF CULTURE\*

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### ABSTRACT

In spite the fact that culture and ideology are incompatible, even though those two forms of societal conscience often conflict in their struggle to dominate the entire spiritual and societal spheres, the two forms nevertheless constantly overlap. As much as culture makes ideology nobler and richer, so much ideology devastates and uses culture in everyday political practice. In that manner, the efforts to express sincerity and touch the truth is used as a boost to ideological illusions. This work features, through diverse forms of culture (elite, mainstream, counterculture, people's culture, subculture, popular culture, mass culture and media culture), their ideological discourses, aims, real outcomes and consequences of their work.

*Key words:* ideology, culture, politics, media, values, creativity, attitudes

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## Introduction

Any discussion on culture automatically implies a discussion on mankind. Cultural frameworks point to individuals who created them. However, by observing human characters, wills, ambitions, values and intentions, it is easy to establish which cultural values those things are prone to. Simply put, there is no culture outside the man, nor a man outside the culture. In other words, *differentia specifica* of *Homo sapiens* is neither *work nor intelligence, but his creative abilities*, primarily the ability to create spiritual. For that reason, culture as man's second nature belongs exclusively to his world in which he lives as if that is his first nature. Only when a man becomes aware of the infinity of space and time in which he dwells as a passing being, does he start to search for ways to extend his existence. Yet, since nothing that belongs to nature including, man's essence is not uniformed, this tendency has also been expressed as a sort of binary opposition. Namely, the man who is sensible to himself and the world around makes attempts to ennoble the imperfect world by the most subtle spiritual gifts in order to leave a trace of his existence. At the same time, the other one, being aware of passing nature and frailty of everything, makes efforts to supply both himself and those around him with material goods and the mightiest ruling hand possible. That is how the man of spirituality and the man of materiality found each other diametrically opposed. Opposed are also the man of culture and the man of ideology, the man of truth and the man of illusion, the man who creates and the one who destroys. History contains records of their animosity and conflict as well as those rare periods when these two conflicting natures got closer, when they cooperated and when pragmatic and utilitarian world deprived itself of its privileges in the name of creative ones who in turn ennobled it and celebrated it as a pinnacle of human wisdom.

If culture pertains to the world of spiritual which a number of theoreticians separate and even contrast to the world of civilization (*Herbert Marcuse, Friedrich Nietzsche, Alfred Weber, M. Arnold, Ruth Benedict, Oswald Spengler...*), then *Antonina Kłoskowska* rightly points out to the fact that culture cannot be processed. She writes:

„Achievements of civilization spread around easily, that are they are subjected to diffusion because they serve practical goals. In that process those achievements are being destroyed by consumption and constantly seek renewals.

In its narrower and true meaning, cultural sphere represents a range of values deprived of practical use, selflessly cherished and developed with regard to internal experience related to those values. The value of culture is characterized by differentiation that comes as outcome of relativity of attitudes and assessments. That is why there is a lack of outstanding progress whose criteria cannot be explained in a convincing manner as instrumental civilization elements. The values of culture transcend the goods of civilization by their lasting character. Their perception, however, is not based on devastation caused by consumption.” (Kłoskowska: 1985: 80)

Herbert Marcuse believes that authentic cultural values instigate humane feelings. He thinks that culture does not imply so much better as much as nobler world which is not to be achieved by upheaval in domain of material order, but by occurrences in individual minds. Humane attitude is an internal state of mind, he says. In that state of mind, freedom, validity and beauty become qualities of the soul. Therefore those gifted with that gift are capable of understanding anything human. They recognize anything that is great in all times. They are sensible to hard and elevated; they respect the history of coming it into existence. That makes culture more than an ordinary ideology. Considering proclaimed goals of the Western civilization, culture is the process of humanizing which, by collective efforts, aims to preserve human life, quit the strife for existence, or limit it to the point where it can be subjected to control, as well as to strengthen productive organization of a society by developing spiritual capabilities of individuals, while diminishing any form of aggression, violence and misery, says *Marcuse* and concludes:

„The utmost pleasure is what one may find in philosophical knowledge of that which is true, good and beautiful. It contains features opposed to material factual quality because it gives that which is permanent in a change, pure in impure, free in unfree.“ (Marcuse, 1977: 47)

Opposed to ecumenical and humane image of culture, a number of theoreticians see ideology as a product of class awareness and give it a significant status in all forms of societal life. Others mostly recognize a consciousness of interest and therefore a twisted awareness of it, as something that creates a world of illusion by use of fiction and lies, thus being prone to interest of the ruling and not only ruling classes, castes and societal strata's. In other words, if culture has proclivity to truth, or at least to preservation and expression of sincere feelings and attitudes, every ideology aims to contribute to a realization of certain interests by creating ideological myth and illusion. Since its basic characteristic is its tendency to identify the normative set of values, it is not capable of accepting any individual specific features.

Nevertheless, *Antonio Gramsci* deems ideology in a broader context. He includes symbolization elements and processes into ideology as well as mythical transpositions, tastes, styles, fashions, actually the entire way of life. Ideology always tends to achieve a total coherency which is never really achieved. For that reason it has immanent inclination to artificially harmonize the world. That means that the role of ideology is not exhausted by attempts to constitute a uniform ideological scheme, nor its efforts to constitute a monolithic socio-economic formation. Rather, it is exhausted by maintenance of that unity on imaginary plain. That reveals a significant role of ideology to conceal the true relations in society by its transposition into imaginary societal relations that may express the unity of societal formation only on an imaginary plain. The efforts to maintain such a unity are recognized today in claims that ideology has completely lost its former meanings and has entered the time of its end. Yet, the myth about the end of ideology and complete disideologisation of societal life is just a new ideological theory which again is trying to hide its true face.

Bulgarian theoretician *Kiril Darkovsky* recognizes in the mass culture something that might be termed as „ideology of disideologisation“.

He writes that “mass culture is one of the main producers and distributors of disideologisation virus. However, in that manner mass culture at the same time is expressing a function of ideology. As disideologisation factor, ‘mass culture’ ignores or covers serious societal and existential problems. Not only does it incentive, but it also slows down, discourages and disorients a deep critical thought about it”. (Darkovsky, 1974: 43 – 44)

### Culture as ideal ideology

In order to conceal the ideological physiognomy of mass culture, certain theoreticians have attempted to identify it with popular (Lat. *popularis*) culture. However, even though it certainly flirts with that type of culture, mass culture is quite distant from it.

First of all, the contents of mass culture evolve as the result of techno-managerial efforts by individuals hired from centers of political and economic powers, while popular culture evolves, develops and exists as a spontaneous expression of popular spirituality. Secondly, mass culture would hardly survive on the market with no promotion in mass media, while popular culture succeeds to survive even in particular totally isolated enclaves.

Mass culture has a special part in the cultural milieu of contemporary cultural pluralism. For that reason, if it is true that such a culture is related to quantity, materialism, stock and market, mediocrity, roughness and ignorance, that by itself does not speak enough, or says nothing about its ideological traits and foundations. However, its ideological essence becomes recognizable as soon as its destructive work against traditional cultural heritage becomes discerned. In such cases it approaches a set cultural value in the same manner as new ideological dogmas do when it comes to older dogmas. By cancelling any values

that it is not capable or not willing to fit into its cultural framework, while at the same time accepting only those that are in some way at least useful to it, mass culture in the manner of any other ideology aims to make its system a lasting quality. Thus, its approach resembles that of revolutionary movements which overthrow all class, racial, traditional, religious and other barriers in order to unify them under a new, all encompassing and more just order. However, mass culture has not become an ideal ideology because it has achieved its proclaimed goals in totality, neither because it has canceled social differences, but because it has abolished awareness of such. It actually offers achievement of happiness through participation in a mass madness. It requires complete participation in it because the mockery will be recognized only by those who take no part in it. Therefore, mass culture becomes a type of a new religion for earthly salvation and a particular ideological system that is a safe foundation to authorities and opposing force to any change. Alike all the other ruling ideologies, it tends not to have its interests in conflict with diverse societal interests. It also tends to achieve at least formalistic relations of equality by reconciling societal contradictions. That shows that even mass culture, alike other ideologies, wants to raise its interests to the level of universality. Because of that it brings new, fresh and interesting ideas when it advances. Yet, as soon as a „formula“ is set, then all the ideas are formed according to its rigid criteria and established patterns. Such ideas that are deprived of images least correspond to authors who feel limited and exploited in such a limited creative sphere. They usually turn to auto-censorship as the result of protecting themselves from external pressures and internal feelings of remorse. In that way that which is in mass culture visible as democratic, inside mass culture it is actually in the process of direct production and is expressed as a rigid dictate and dogma that allows no declination from that which has proven to be a successful matrix. Any surprising factor is unwanted in mass culture. Only when one model of it has been used completely there comes a careful process of forming a new one which is but a modification of the old already accepted model.

Hyper-production of mass culture products demands a massive market. That is one of the most essential reasons why it aims to reach the widest target

group possible. In order to be acceptable to everyone it uses entirely simple language which does not reflect a mere desire for unimpeded communication, but a need to maintain both intellectuality and spirituality on a level where interventions have no impediments.

Information that is presented through mass culture is rarely composed of something that represents clear and consistent messages. They mostly display the surface, but not the essence of something. That makes half-intellectuals satisfied as they are convinced that the knowledge is comprised of memorizing data as opposed to a deep thought process. When the door is closed to serious thinking, the gate is wide open to shallow and superficial feelings. In any case, mass culture (in contemporary societal frameworks usually in the role of mainstream culture) just as any other ideology, does not address the rational mind, only the heart.

That which is truly new in that encounter of culture and ideology is that ideology is decreasingly being imposed to culture as its tutor. It is taking more and more the role of cultural auspice, thus using its spirituality to promote its own values.

If culture had come into existence when one began to see himself and the world around him as a failure, then he is not destined only by that what he is, but also by opportunities that he has not achieved yet, which drive him forward. That is why culture has ambivalent character. On one hand it is spirituality that allows transcendence of the existing reality. On the other hand, it is a given value that depraves one of humanity and boils him down to an object controlled by a force independent from him and with no clear image. Therefore, contemporary culture is not always the standard for spiritual richness, but a border to be crossed because culture is often used as a means to tame individual and adapt it to the world of labor and institutions of authority. Professional performers of cultural contents become hired service for the order, while those individuals that are truly called as „cultured“ are only well adapted for the existing reality, but not truly free. For that reason once the culture becomes affirmation of the existing reality it takes upon itself all the characteristics of an ideology. When culture is actually a critique of ideology as

well as a tendency to overcome the limits of ideology, then it takes upon itself the characteristics of humanism whose basic tendencies are directed toward

„... securing one from all the forms of his subjection to the products of his work, institutions of his societal life and another human. The basic content of humanism is the inclination to freedom, while an important content of freedom is self-determination and self-realization.“ (Životić, 1982: 10)

### Culture as spiritual rebellion

If mass culture is on the level of simple recognition, always placed within the perception of senses, which in reality may strongly affect the feelings that are deprived of intellectual and spiritual processing, if it exists in the framework of profane, adapting itself to the most popular tastes (which it itself incentive as well), then elite culture is that which transcends the level of sensual-perceptive and recognizable and places far greater ambitions before itself and the public. Those ambitions are to get to know, to think and act, to stimulate imagination and find the answers for those important yet hidden meanings. Thus, where mass culture floats on the surface of sentimentality and intellectuality, elite culture aims to penetrate to the deepest mind areas without preset goals and clear vision what the final form of the real work will be. A creative act deprives the author of knowledge of how the communication between him and public will be carried out through his work. That is why evolution of any work of elite culture poses a risk because such a work was not created by known patterns and calculated expectations that are set in advance. That is why *Sigmund Freud* writes that literature is „daydreaming“<sup>3</sup>, while *Slobodan Selenić* claims that“

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<sup>3</sup> See: *Sigmund Freud, Der Dichter und das Phantasieren – Das Unheimliche, Aufsätze zur Literatur.*



„if a man is real anywhere, that is primarily in his fantasy, in a masquerade through which he releases his true nature, his dark and perverted sexuality, his antisocial attitudes, his hypocritical civility and morality. Only in dreams does a man succeed to create – certainly not real – more or less real representation of himself.“ (Selenić, 1971: 224)

One of the greatest German writers, *Nobel* prize winner *Thomas Mann* is even more decisive and uncompromising when he writes about creative acts. In his novel *Death in Venice* he says:

„... for art is a work, exhausting struggle for which rarely anyone today has an enduring strength. A life of overcoming and persistence, a life sour, steady and with abstinence, of which he made the symbol of a gentle and perfect hero.“ (Mann, 2009: 88 – 89)

In his second novel *Tonio Kröger*, *Thomas Mann* is even more sour, precise and perfectly honest when he describes the psyche and antisocial attitudes of creative persons. He writes:

„A feeling, warm and heartfelt feeling is always raw and useless, while artistic feelings are irritations and cold ecstasies of our corrupted and aristocratic nervous system. It is necessary for a man to be outside of humanity and inhumane in order to be strangely distant from humane, with no real participation in humane, so that he would be able and even tempted to play, to play with it, to display it with taste and effectively.“ (Mann, 2009: 155).

In the same work *Mann* further writes:

„Literature is not a calling, it is a curse... When do we start to feel that curse? Early, terribly early. At the time when we should rightly live in harmony with god and the world. You start feeling rejected. You feel the

mysterious opposition between yourself and those others, those egocentric and upright. The gap of irony, opposition, knowledge, feelings that separate you from people becomes ever wider. That is why there is no more understanding." (Ibid. 157)

That which is not so deep, yet stepped out as a strong opposition to mainstream culture became obvious in the middle of 20th century as counterculture and subculture. Counterculture was marked by a group of alternative cultures which emerged at the end of 1950s and were profiled in 1960s, mostly as the culture of hippie movement. Their roots were marked by film productions in which *James Dean*<sup>4</sup> and *Marlon Brando*<sup>5</sup> opened an entirely new chapter in the quest of young people for their identity. Good sons and daughters were replaced by rebellious and defiant generations willing for the first time to mock the world of adults and let it know that their youthful culture was a serious opposition to opportunistic and hypocritical culture that dominated at that time. The ideology of counterculture, based on teachings of idealism and zen buddhism, became substrata to peace and ecological movements, while it existed in underground production, was socially formed through protests, meetings and concerts, expressed as a way of life in communes and associations. That ideology strove to replace the system of social hierarchy and authority with relations of equality and polycentricism. It also aimed to replace the commercial and synthetic world of the Western civilization with existence of a new naturalism.

The most significant years for counterculture social movement were 1968 and 1969. The former was marked by a cultural revolution that ignited almost the entire world, while the latter marked the end of a pop decade in which *Woodstock* concert (*New York, United States*), a rock spectacle never seen

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<sup>4</sup> *James Dean* has reached international fame with only three movies, in which he played rebels, loners and outsiders.

<sup>5</sup> *Marlon Brando* was very early declared as an opponent of segregation. He also supported the struggle and the movement of *Martin Luther King*. As an active participant in the civil rights movement, Marlon declined to receive *Oscar* prize in 1972 as the best actor in *The Godfather*, because of abuse of Native Americans in the film industry.

before gathered around 300.000 youth and became the central spiritual point for a generation.

Unlike the counterculture movement, the subculture social movement did not express so explicitly its conflict with mainstream culture. Having had the lessons of negative experience of its predecessor, this movement based its ideology in domain of symbolism, through the fashion of freak, punk, reggae, neo-nihilism and dadaism. For that reason, subculture relied on the mass culture production, but used it in a totally perverted way in which it mocked the adult world and its values. That is why subculture speaks in the language of anti-aesthetic and symbolism of ugly, thus letting everyone know that their advocates are just freaky descendants of a mad and deviant civilization. Avoiding the nets of commercialism, alike counterculture, subculture changed its forms of expression by cacophonous mutations. That is why no subculture music group ever repeated success that the Beatles had. The Beatles brought outstanding annual revenues to the British monarchy. Those who belonged to subculture social groups did not form a mass front against the mainstream culture. However, as they discredited the ruling social models and lost the basic norms, they themselves remained with no guidelines to live, which in turn caused a feeling of insecurity and such a young person was:

„... cut off from the rest of society, pushed toward his own age group. With his peers he made a micro society which maintained its important relations within the group and only some links to the external adult world.“ (Coleman; 1961: 3)

Anachronous, hypocritical and by conventions slick adult world was rejected with indignation. What represented the intense life was going on within the informal groups. For example, *Teddy Boys*, dressed in a way that resembles old days, actualized the manner of masculinity, males who know to be gallant and also the manner of courtship; *Rastafarians* threw off the clothing of „western brothers“ with indignation. They wore tunics, females returned to dread curly hair styles and again enveloped in the smoke of marihuana and with dub

rhythm imaginarily rushed to the areas of green Africa; *Punk* had its „recognizable art“ made of pins, parts of TV sets, razors etc. It insisted on provocation ideology; *Skinheads*, with their bold heads and heavy leather boots expressed aggressive attitude to foreigners who supposedly took their jobs and living space...

All the protagonists of subculture social groups were not always aware of the ideology that the group style was based on. Within those groups there were individuals who stood out by the way they behaved, or by their discourse. They shaped groups with their ideas, while there were always multitudes of followers who were there not only because of their convictions, but also due to fashion fads. Nevertheless, both the leaders and followers had defiant attitude that helped them elevate their littleness they paraded with in order to let the world know that it, not them, was guilty for what they were doing. That sort of resistance often extended the limits of defiance and became an ideology of transgression.

„That can be achieved in various manners, by sadism, masochism, eroticism, drugs, violence, theft, thought, love, sex – with all that seems to have limits. If the limits are barely perceived, they are marked to be stepped over. Desecration was now only considered a gentle indication of the coming transgression.“ (Lefebvre, 1979: 223-224)

That is how drugs became a permanent factor in counterculture and subculture social groups, while rebellion against incommensurable world found its expression in messages in the public places. *Ratko Božović* wrote about that phenomenon. He notes that:

„by the act of ‘desecration’ of a clean wall, one draws attention to self by violating the law and starting a communication in a way contrary to normative cultural model.“(Božović, 1990: 351)

In his book *Kult-ura Božović* further writes:

„Graffiti in a controlled world is a rebellion against the spirit of ‘supervision’ and spiritual policing. Filthy and denied whiteness registers individuality of a graphomaniac and his counter attitude to taming emotions and sentiments. Unlike the external order, graffiti defends the spirit of spontaneous expression as an emanation of freedom. It usually shows the thinking of subconscious which is suppressed yet a dynamic, affective and eruptive release of frustrated energy. Due to repressive conditions and perhaps even more to impulsive inventions, graffiti are far from being a conservative aesthetic form. They are even far from any permitted and accepted moral form of life.“ (Ibid. 355)

Since counterculture and subculture mostly fill the space of leisure, they receive imaginary rather than real forms in their transcendence of reality. However,

„... by exposing their „solutions“ only in their own arena, subculture movements make a „magical“ attempt to demolish contradiction that is before them because moving toward leisure involves suppression rather than transcendence of those other key areas where contradictions are generated.“ (Clarke, 1976: 189).

Subculture forms can be also manifested in forms that are acceptable to established orders, but only if they do not display that sort of radicalism which may endanger the system. For example, a carnival masquerade organized by club supporters is acceptable as long as destructive passions do not erupt. Also, the feminist movement that was received reservedly for a long time was tolerated as long as it represented opening of encapsulated female world. When it started expressing the character of leftist ideology, feminism was simply banished from the public scene. A similar fate befell numerous ecological movements. For as long as they represented sympathetic „greens“, they were spoken of with sympathies. As soon as they began to come forward with clearly

defined political programs, the sympathetic „greens“ were looked upon as pretty unpleasant political opponents. On the other hand, *Susan Sontag* wrote back in 1964, in essay *Notes on Kamp* about affectations and exaggerations. Even though it involves artificial attitudes and plays with existing cultural forms and accepted images (including theatrical manners and transvestism) with an aim to shock, today it is accepted with all its suburban elements. In fact, it is defined as „infallibly modernistic“ sensibility. Equal favor gained even post-modernistic cultural discourse, because it defined itself as totally undetermined. Rap (R-rhythm and rime, A-and and P-poetry and politics) also scored well in this distribution of sympathies.

Since mass media have truly colonized culture with their expansion, today we can rightly speak about media culture. Yet, *Douglas Kellner* thinks that:

„Ideology of media culture should be analyzed in the context of social conflicts and political debates rather than as a mere product of false consciousness.“ (Kellner, 2004: 183).

Finally, *Raymond Williams* in his study *The Analysis of Culture* notes that:

„Living culture will be narrowed down to only selected documents. They were also used in that everyday form partly as a contribution (inevitably small) to the global direction of human development, partly for historical reconstruction and finally partly as a way to name and place concrete periods in the past. Such selective tradition on one level makes a global human culture. On another level it makes a historical record on a concrete society. On the third level it makes something that is most difficult to accept and access: rejection of significant parts of that which used to be a living culture.“ (Williams, 2008: 131-132)

If this analyses of culture is acceptable, then it is absolutely understandable that any ideological discourse of it should be seriously

considered, not only from the aspects of contemporary but also from the aspect of their future influences and implications.

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## ИДЕОЛОШКИ ДИСКУРС ЗА КУЛТУРАТА

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### АПСТРАКТ

Покрај фактот дека културата и идеологијата се некомпатибилни и тоа дека овие две форми на општествена свест често се борат за доминација со севкупноста на духовните и општествените сфери, сепак овие две форми постојано ѝ се поклопуваат. Колку што културата ја прави идеологијата поблагородна и побогата, толку идеологијата ја уништува културата користејќи ја во секојдневната политичка пракса. На тој начин, напорите да се изрази искреноста и да се допре вистината се користи како поттик за идеолошки заблуди. Оваа статија ги дава карактеристиките, нивниот идеолошки дискурс, нивната цел, вистинските резултати и последиците од нивната разбота, преку анализа на различните форми на култура, како што се елитата, mainstream културата, контракултурата, културата на луѓето, субкултурата, популарната култура, масовната култура и медиумската култура.

*Клучни зборови:* идеологија, култура, политика, медиуми, вредности, креативност, сатвови