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“MASS CULTURE” IN THE USA AND THE PROBLEM OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Publisher's Note

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Two aphorisms. The first, which appeared many centuries ago, belonged to a humanist who believed in the power of enlightenment: "The pen is mightier than the sword." The second, emerging in the era of relativistic physics, was coined and embraced by bourgeois sociologists: "Mass media are more powerful than the atomic bomb." One seems to follow from the other, adjusted for the times. But this is a similarity of form, not of meaning — although in both cases the power of words is portrayed as greater than that of weapons. Yet the aphorism of the medieval humanist carries a positive charge — it affirms the superiority of persuasion over coercion. The modern sociological metaphor, though it may partly include that earlier meaning, still leads to the idea of the destructive power of the complex known in the West as mass media. The comparison with not just the most fearsome but the most destructive weapon points to this.

But is this really the case? Who has the modern American truly become — a fortunate individual who can see the world and hear its voices without leaving his room, or a victim of technology that has cunningly replaced real life with the flat spirits of the television screen and the formulaic speech of news anchors? Has he acquired the longed-for ability to communicate, or, on the contrary, has he become isolated, trapped in a cage that needs no locks because the screen's magnetism is stronger than any bolt? Is this an introduction to culture or its destruction — a substitution of genuine values with their cheap mass-produced imitations, the living flesh of art with the bodilessness of copies? In short — is it the progress of civilization or the degradation of spiritual life? Or perhaps both at the same time?

Several decades ago, Ilya Ilf remarked: "In science fiction

novels, the most important thing was the radio. It was supposed to bring humanity happiness. Now we have radio, but there is no happiness."* And today's Western science fiction writers — who, it would seem, should be celebrating the fact that reality has not only caught up with but in many ways surpassed their dreams and predictions — now approach the prospects of further technological progress with apprehension, even hostility.

When an American television company organized a roundtable discussion with science fiction writers and asked the participants what concerned them the most at that moment, they answered without hesitation: "Robots. Or more precisely, how people are gradually allowing themselves to be turned into robots."** They were referring specifically to the destructive influence that mass media in the United States — or rather, those who control it — exert on the individual. The problem of the individual losing their individuality now troubles a wide spectrum of people in America, from philosophers and sociologists to writers and filmmakers. And the scientific and technological revolution and its consequences are cited as the main causes of this phenomenon. But is the evil truly inherent in the technology itself, as the Luddites once believed when they destroyed machines? Marxist philosophers, while not ignoring those consequences, nevertheless point to deeper causes.

It is absolutely clear that the technical revolution that took place at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century is significant not only because numerous machines entered people's lives, simplifying and easing production

* I. Ilf, *Notebooks*, Moscow, 1957, p. 108.

**Aubrey Singer, "Television! Window on Culture or Reflection in the Glass?" in *Sight, Sound and Society*, ed. by D. White and R. Averson, Boston, 1968, p. 160.

operations. The position and behaviour of the worker also changed. Previously, despite being alienated from the means of production, the worker still remained the master of his own time. Mechanization and automation, by breaking the process into small operations that require neither deep thinking nor high qualification, effectively turned the worker into an appendage of the machine, altering his psychosocial behaviour. At the centre of the new structure stood not the individual as a person, but impersonal labour. This very circumstance became the basis of the modern crisis of individuality, creating favourable conditions for the development of "mass culture." It effectively fills the vacuum created by the levelling of individuality with standardised ideas and thoughts — and presents them in a form that is artistically very poor.

But what exactly is meant by the term "mass culture"? The bourgeois sociologist Georges Friedmann offers the following definition of this phenomenon: "By mass culture we mean the set of cultural consumer values made available to the general public through mass communication media in the context of a technological civilization."*

But if we follow this definition, then the term "mass culture" would encompass all of modern culture in general — as is indeed claimed by bourgeois researchers of this subject in the United States, such as Daniel Bell, Dwight Macdonald and Bernard Rosenberg. They argue that "mass culture" is a natural stage in the development of human culture overall — a product of the "technical age," a cultural offshoot of "mass" or "industrial" society, which all countries are moving towards as a result of their technical and economic development. Rosenberg writes directly in the introduction to the collection *Mass Culture*: "Modern technology is the necessary

* G. Friedmann, *Enseignement et culture de masse, Communication*, Paris, 1962, p. 3.

and sufficient cause of mass culture. Neither national character, nor economic structure, nor political system plays a decisive role in this matter."*

Such a formulation raises a number of serious objections. It is incorrect to regard "mass culture" merely as a product of the "technical age," since it is essential to keep in mind the historical nature of this phenomenon. "Mass culture" existed — in different forms — at various stages of human societal development. Even in Ancient Rome, where pacifying the masses followed the slogan "bread and circuses," there were certain spectacles for the patricians and others for the plebeians. It took on a more democratic character during the Renaissance, pushing religious culture into the background. Finally, the bourgeoisie, having come to power, gave rise to a new form of this phenomenon — a complex, non-linear form, the dominant tendency of which can nonetheless be described as the aesthetic-ideological influence of the ruling class (the bourgeoisie) on public consciousness. This influence has reached threatening proportions thanks to the vast proliferation of mass propaganda and agitation tools in the age of the scientific and technical revolution.

Rosenberg's claim that neither economic structure nor political system plays a decisive role in shaping the form and content of "mass culture" is entirely untrue. There is a clear distinction between bourgeois "mass culture" and truly popular culture that serves the masses. V.I. Lenin envisioned socialist culture as accessible to the masses — but never without a humanistic and spiritual foundation. The leader of the proletariat believed that serving the people does not mean adapting to their cultural backwardness, but rather enriching

* Bernard Rosenberg, "Mass Culture in America," in *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, ed. by B. Rosenberg and D. White, Toronto, 1965, p. 12.

the people spiritually. This is precisely what bourgeois "mass culture" lacks.

Thus, the difference between it and socialist culture — which is genuinely for the masses — lies not in quantitative terms but in the very substance of the concept of "culture." That is why the term "mass culture," borrowed from Western sources, seems to us quite inadequate. Soviet scholars are still faced with the task of developing a new definition that more accurately captures the essence of the phenomenon in question.

Furthermore, one must constantly keep in mind the internal diversity of culture in bourgeois society — something V.I. Lenin also noted, emphasizing that "*every* national culture contains, at least in undeveloped form, elements of democratic and socialist culture..."* The definition offered by Friedmann, quoted earlier, equates "mass culture" with the entire content of mass communication media. He includes in this definition all works of literature and art that have achieved wide distribution.

In practice, however, cinema, television, advertising and the press in the West — particularly in the United States — offer their audiences not only low-grade products but also genuine works of art. American cinema, alongside vulgar mass productions, has released many notable and significant films, such as Chaplin's works, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Life of Emile Zola*, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, *The Dignified One*, *The Challengers*, *In the Heat of the Night* and many others. Television, alongside soap operas, also broadcasts philharmonic concerts from Carnegie Hall, a three-hour staging of *Richard III* directed by Laurence Olivier, and screen adaptations of Dostoevsky's *Notes from the House of the Dead*, Balzac's *Father Goriot*, Chekhov's *The Proposal*, as well as hard-hitting jour-

* V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 24, p. 120.

nalistic programs such as *The Murder of Blacks in the South*, *The Shame of Our Hospitals* and *Cigarettes and Lung Cancer*. In paperback, authors like Mickey Spillane and Jacqueline Susann are printed in the millions — but so are Hemingway, Faulkner and Salinger.

Can such vastly different works — in terms of content and aesthetic quality — all be grouped under a single label like "mass culture"? Should everything distributed by mass communication channels be included? It seems to us that, alongside mass reach, simultaneous perception, and the use of modern technical means in the interests of the ruling class, the defining feature of "mass culture" should still be the ideological and aesthetic unity of its cultural products — that is, those characteristics which, taken together, do not reflect life but substitute for it, offering not art but its surrogate. From this perspective, as we will see further on, the scope of "mass culture" can be quite precisely delineated.

However, it would be incorrect to claim that the problem of talent and lack thereof does not exist at all within "mass culture." This is only true of the — albeit dominant — portion of it that in the West is referred to as *kitsch* (a term thought to derive from the German verb *verkitschen*, meaning to cheapen or turn into junk). American sociologist Edward Shils argues that "the very rise in demand for kitsch products points to — however crudely — an awakening among the classes... who previously had no aesthetic aspirations."* Judging by his patronizing tone, he is referring to the working masses — forgetting that it was precisely they who created folklore and many other remarkable works of art. Interest in kitsch is more typical of the wealthy bourgeoisie, about whom Marx and Engels wrote with outrage in the previous century.

* Edward Shils, "Mass Society and Its Culture," in *Mass Culture Revisited*, New York, 1971, p. 67.

The most precise definition of kitsch was offered by sociologist Hermann Broch. In his view, kitsch is a system of imitation — no matter how skilful it may be.* The causes of the inevitable falsification of art in this case vary. Sometimes it is the result of the creative inadequacy of the imitators; sometimes it is intentional from the outset. But in both cases, concepts such as love, life and death lose all ethical depth and are replaced with false significance, cheap sentimentality and vulgar prettiness. The ethical is supplanted by the pseudo-aesthetic. What results is not a good work but a "pretty" one, full of fake exaltation. The technique of kitsch is the use of ready-made formulas — rational even when the outcome is irrational or simply absurd. The creators of kitsch, completely lacking in imagination and creative potential, rely on the most primitive expressive means.

Even from this brief description of kitsch, it is clear that this lowest-grade form of aesthetic art does not exhaust the full range of foreign "mass culture." Its artistic practice also includes examples that show talent, creative imagination and professional virtuosity. These would include films like *The Godfather*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *Ryan's Daughter*, some of Hitchcock's films and many others that achieved great commercial success. Based on their artistic merit, they clearly cannot be considered kitsch. So how should we classify them?

English critic Richard Hoggart, in his article *Culture: Dead and Alive*,** proposes introducing two categories: "reproducible" culture and "live" culture. By "reproducible" culture he means what falls under the concept of kitsch. Its char-

* Hermann Broch, "Notes on the Problem of Kitsch," in *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste*, New York, 1969, p. 63.

** Richard Hoggart, "Culture: Dead and Alive," in *Speaking to Each Other*, vol. 1, *About Society*, London, 1970, pp. 132-133.

acteristic traits, according to Hoggart, include: addressing the masses or entire social groups, targeting consumers and adapting material to their needs — which leads to uniformity.

"Live" culture, in Hoggart's view, differs in that even when enjoyed by many people at once, it always speaks to individuals — transcending age, class and status. What matters in it is the subject at hand, and it never allows professional virtuosity to triumph over moral integrity, or form over content.

Summarizing the difference between these two categories, Soviet critic V. Skorodenko, in his article "Richard Hoggart and the Framing of the Problem of Democratic and 'Mass' Culture in the Materialist Aesthetics of Contemporary England,"* concludes that the main distinction between "reproducible" and "live" culture lies in the fact that the former is commercial in nature, whereas the latter enters the sphere of commerce only due to the mass demand for it. This dialectical understanding of the term "mass" is valid. Indeed, the aesthetic merits of the works classified under each category are not equal — just as the nature of their success with audiences differs.

But if "reproducible" culture is kitsch, and "live" culture is democratic (as Skorodenko defines it both in the article's title and text), then how should we classify the talented, though by no means democratic, works mentioned above? After all, there is a significant difference in content and humanistic orientation between such artistically compelling examples as the films of Chaplin and Hitchcock, the novels of Hemingway and Henry Miller, the plays of Arthur Miller and Edward Albee, and the songs of the folk singers and the Beatles.

* V. Skorodenko, "Richard Hoggart and the Framing of the Problem of Democratic and 'Mass' Culture in the Materialist Aesthetics of Contemporary England," in *Progressive Aesthetic Thought Abroad*, Moscow, 1974.

The difference between them does not lie in aesthetics — all of them, to varying degrees, demonstrate both talent and artistic mastery. However, while the former are democratic, progressive and humane, the same cannot be said of the latter.

It is incorrect to classify both types as "mass culture" merely because they enjoy mass popularity. Doing so would obscure the essential difference between these artistic phenomena. It would make more sense, building on Lenin's assertion about the presence of two cultures within every national culture, to divide bourgeois culture into elite, "mass" and democratic — the latter being inherently popular and rooted in the people. Within the "mass" category, one could then distinguish between highly professional culture and kitsch — the latter more accurately described as consumer culture. These two final categories represent aesthetic gradations of a phenomenon that shares common social and ideological patterns. Both reflect real tendencies in contemporary bourgeois consciousness.

The entry of the bourgeoisie as a class into an era of crisis and decay in the 20th century led to the development of an official ideology aimed at concealing the underlying pessimism and loss of faith in former ideals. This ideology constructed an entire system of worldview principles, disseminated through the arts.

At the forefront is escapism — the attempt to distract readers, viewers and listeners from the contradictions of real life, to declare those contradictions non-existent or make people forget them. This principle characterizes all directions in modern bourgeois art. Closely tied to it is another — the cult of forced optimism, which masks the deep pessimism of a bourgeoisie that has become acutely aware of the inevitability of its decline. It's no coincidence that in a number of capitalist countries — especially in the United States — fierce cam-

paigns are waged to create optimistic works of literature and art. These usually result only in a flood of glossy portrayals of imaginary lives and thoughtless trivialities.

Having abandoned the elementary norms of morality and justice it once professed, the bourgeoisie has taken the path of amorality and anti-humanism — which in recent decades have become the official doctrines of its art. The cult of extreme individualism, the drive to turn people into accumulators, to awaken the basest passions and instincts — all have increasingly become defining traits of modern bourgeois culture, especially evident in "mass" culture.

Having lost its progressive potential, the bourgeoisie also lost faith in the power of human reason. It turned to irrationalism, choosing to appeal not to people's consciousness, but to their subconscious. In doing so, art lost one of its greatest strengths — its ability to express social ideas, serve as a means of understanding life and act as a tool for revealing its key social dynamics.

This system of shared principles for approaching artistic engagement with reality, typical of most bourgeois culture, has a certain philosophical foundation. Its basis from the outset was positivism. Saint-Simon and Comte, who stood at its origins, sincerely believed that philosophy, sociology and even politics could be just as empirical — "positive" — as the natural sciences, like physics or chemistry. Positivism insisted that any hypothesis or idea be tested in practice. As a school of thought opposed to all metaphysics, mysticism and theology, positivism even held some progressive meaning in its early days. But it soon became clear that its method — the empirical description of facts — led to mistaking surface appearances for essence. Typification and generalization disappeared, resulting in a world stripped of complexity, reduced to a photographic replica. A truly scientific method, however,

must look beyond surface appearances, grasp the essence of phenomena and examine facts in their interrelations and historical context.

In modern variations of positivism — pragmatism, operationalism and instrumentalism — the subjective-idealist, flatly empirical nature of the approach is even more evident. Description replaces explanation. Events and facts are presented without regard for their genesis, substance or causality. This is most apparent in the works of philosophers from the so-called naturalist school, whose most representative figure was the American thinker John Dewey. His writings mark a whole era in the development of modern bourgeois philosophy. In his seminal work *Art as Experience* (1934), he developed a coherent aesthetic theory, whose principles would later find expression in the practice of "mass culture" — though, of course, they were not its only influence.

Dewey, widely promoted in the United States as the creator of a "philosophy for ordinary people and common sense," based his theory on the idea that modern bourgeois art had become "museum art," detached from the lives of everyday people and from the conditions of human existence in which it was created and is perceived. The main task the philosopher set for himself was to "connect the elevated forms of experience embodied in works of art with everyday events, actions and emotions"* of people — to make art part of life. It was for this purpose that he constructed a theory to unify them.

According to Dewey, at the core of any work of art lies not the reflection of phenomena from objective reality, but a certain sensory, empirical experience, which he interprets in strictly biological terms — as "the result of the interaction between an organism and its environment." The philosopher proceeds not from the material of life but from personal emo-

* John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, New York, 1934, p. 3.

tions which, like a magnet, attract certain material and dictate its arrangement. "The depicted object in art always holds secondary significance,"* writes Dewey. What matters most to him is subjective emotion, which becomes aesthetic when directed at an object created through the expressive means of art.

Implicitly challenging the theory of reflection — which Dewey refers to as the "representational theory" — the American philosopher proceeds from the false impression that this theory assumes merely photographic copying of objects and phenomena of the external world without any creative engagement by the author. "The fatal flaw of the representational theory," he wrote, "is that it identifies the essence of a work of art exclusively with the objective. It overlooks the fact that the objective material becomes the essence of art only after it has been transformed through interaction with an individual possessing a unique temperament, a particular way of seeing and unique experience." Rejecting the dialectical interaction between the objective and the subjective — which lies at the core of Lenin's theory of knowledge — Dewey consistently seeks to assert the primacy of the subjective, emotional and sensory as the foundation of his own aesthetic theory. For him, a work of art exists in and of itself — not as a truthful, realistic reflection of life.

This inevitably leads the philosopher to declare the primacy of form over content. "The raw material of life experience becomes content through form,"** he asserts. For Dewey, form is the process by which experience is brought to completion. Thus, embodied experience becomes the only reality. The external world, in his view, exists only insofar as it provides the content for experience. But ordinary experience,

* John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 90.

** *Ibid*., p. 133, 287.

Dewey writes, is often apathetic, uncreative and standardized. Art, on the other hand, eliminates these characteristics of experience. "If the hardships and monotony of daily life didn't exist," he notes, "the realm of dreams and fantasy would not be so attractive. Prolonged and complete suppression of emotion is impossible. Repelled by the dullness and indifference of a poorly organized environment, emotion retreats from it and feeds on fantasy..."*

Thus, beginning with a denial of the real world as the foundation of art, and preaching subjectivity as its main driving force, Dewey arrives at the justification and necessity of escapist art — art that leads away from life. As previously noted, this has become a central doctrine of bourgeois ideology and now serves as the main platform of "mass culture." Dewey's empirical theory, which absolutizes sensory experience, leads to a rejection of rationality, of generalization and typification — qualities inherent to realist art and absent in naturalist art.

In developing his theory of art as experience, Dewey attempts to show that the aesthetic exists in any normal human experience, since "art unites the same relationship of incoming and outgoing energy as any other experience." But if one accepts this position, then where is the line between art and non-art? The philosopher explains it as follows: "There are works of art that merely stir emotion — where activity is aroused without the satisfaction provided by the expressive means of a given art form. The energy remains unorganized. Then drama becomes melodrama, the nude becomes pornography and novels bring no satisfaction with the world we live in. The simulation of life irritates us."**

The second half of this quote could easily serve as a description of kitsch — if Dewey had treated the "simulation of

* *Ibid*., p. 260.

** *Ibid*., 48, 178.

life" as the result of a distorted reflection through the medium of art, rather than as the "result of activity without the satisfaction of resolution," i.e. the same abstract "incoming and outgoing energy" that he sees as the basis of all sensory experience. This vague definition fails to draw the necessary boundary. As a result, the line between art and non-art is erased, the distinction between art as a specific form of social consciousness disappears and the significance of aesthetics as a science is denied. In this context, art becomes just another kind of activity rather than a form of cognition and artistic reflection of the real world.

Viewing art simply as one type of activity has another consequence — it eliminates consideration of the artistic significance of a work. Dewey, for example, urges readers to stop contemplating the Parthenon as a work of art and instead remember that it was originally erected simply as a building and is an expression of the collective experience of Athenian citizens. And according to the philosopher, anyone theorizing about the aesthetic experience embodied in the Parthenon must first understand what commonalities existed between the people whose lives it was part of and the people surrounding us today.

But that is precisely the point — we can only understand this not by "turning away from contemplation of the Parthenon," but through contemplating it. We understand the Athenians better because they wanted their public building to be truly beautiful. It is the artistic significance of the Parthenon that helps us understand everything else. An aesthetically unremarkable work tells us nothing about the time in which it was created, nor does it evoke any emotional response in the hearts of future generations. Works of "mass culture" often become short-lived precisely because they lack the truthfulness and generalization found in genuine works of art.

But artistic significance is not merely "the calm satisfaction

provided by the expressive means of art." It is also authenticity — the artistic truthfulness of the phenomena being portrayed. Dewey's theory avoids this point, replacing reality with highly subjective moral postulates. The philosopher writes about the unity of intellectual, moral and aesthetic experience, recalling that the Greeks considered virtuous behaviour to be beautiful. "Mass culture" has taken this idea as a guiding principle. In many of its works, standard moral formulas — modelled after the spirit of the Ten Commandments — are considered sufficient in and of themselves, without any artistic significance.

Dewey's absolutization of form and artistic technique leads him to praise professionalism, as though that alone is the essence of art. "What people lack in order to be creative beings," he theorizes, "is the ability to embody a vague idea or emotion in the forms and images of a particular type of art. If, for example, this act were simply a matter of pulling a rabbit out of a hole, then artistic expression would be easy."*

This view is shared by "consumer culture," which assumes that bare professionalism is enough to convey standard, banal content to audiences. Talent, in this framework, is a hindrance — it stands out from the rest and can be tolerated only in very limited cases, primarily when creating model templates for mass production. But if we are dealing with low-grade examples of kitsch, what aesthetic value — born of an artist's attitude towards the material — can we even speak of?

An untalented craftsman brings very little to what they create, and as a result, the work has no aesthetic value. So how is it that such works are still perceived as art? Only through the person receiving them — the viewer, who assigns them certain aesthetic qualities. This leads to the conclusion that there is no such thing as objective beauty — everything depends solely on the consumer and their subjective criteria.

* John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 75.

This position, held by Dewey, ends up validating the consumerist nature of "mass culture," which tailors its products to the level of a mass audience whose consciousness has been shaped accordingly. The development of this trend has gradually led to a situation in which consumers of "mass culture" view it only as a source of pleasure or stimulation, as a distraction from the burdens of life, as decorative background — not as something serious, capable of awakening civic or aesthetic awareness. Even in the most significant works, such individuals manage to see only what aligns with their tastes and desires. In historical novels, they are interested not in the author's reconstructed vision of the past or the struggle of people for justice or independence, but merely in the romantic subplot. Impressionist paintings attract their attention not as an outstanding phenomenon in painting, but simply as a colour accent that matches the wallpaper in their living room. In a film about a famous composer, his music becomes just background noise for the hero's melodramatic emotional turmoil. This is not only a lack of taste — it is the creation of an entire system of values, extending beyond the aesthetic to the moral and ethical.

Here lies one of the reasons why "mass culture" is fundamentally a new phenomenon, different from art of the past — a phenomenon that can only be understood not so much aesthetically as sociologically: by examining how it is produced, who its audience is, its manipulative nature and its intentional simplification of expressive means — all of which will be explored in detail later.

This book also aims to analyse the theoretical basis for how "mass culture" affects the individual in modern American bourgeois philosophy — a philosophy that no longer views the human being as a subject, a creative personality, but merely as an object of external influence. In doing so, it implicitly affirms that the 20th-century American is increas-

ingly becoming the opposite of the human being of the future — the kind of person Marx described as one who reproduces himself not in one narrow direction, but in his full totality.* The author seeks to identify the reasons that enabled the rise of a new aesthetic system — the system of "consumer culture" — and to show the specific forms and methods used by its various branches in the United States — television, cinema, the press, advertising — to influence the individual and cultivate the necessary thoughts and reactions.

The book draws not only on philosophical theories, sociological data and numerous examples from the practice of film, television, press and advertising, but also on Anglo-Saxon science fiction. This genre differs significantly in quality from its earlier forms. Engaged with futurist themes, modern science fiction increasingly draws on objective social reality and its philosophical and sociological interpretation. It tends to project into the future the phenomena and processes already well under way in the present. That is why the works of Bradbury, Sheckley, Vonnegut, Tenn, Pohl and others contribute not so much to our understanding of the future as to our awareness of what is happening now. In vivid, imaginative form, the stories and novellas of these writers help even an unprepared audience grasp things that would be lost in the dry, abstract language of philosophers and sociologists.

Although the subject of this work is the analysis of "mass" culture, this in no way implies that the author seeks to dismiss the cultural achievements of the United States as a whole. As already noted, the content of mass communication channels is not limited, of course, to "mass culture." The successes of American democratic culture are vast and significant. If the author does not examine them in detail, it is only because that is the subject of another book.

* See K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 46, part I, p. 476.

PHILOSOPHICAL JUSTIFICATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF "MASS CULTURE" ON THE INDIVIDUAL IN THE WORKS OF FROMM, RIESMAN AND MARCUSE

The inhabitants of Venus, arriving on Earth five thousand years after civilization had perished there, discovered a strange object — a metal box. Inside it lay a transparent plastic material, perforated along the edges and tightly wound into a spiral. When scientists finally figured out how to construct a device to project this film, a strange two-legged creature appeared before them, later drawn into a series of adventures.

From that moment until the end of time, it would represent the human race. But if the Venusians had been able to read the closing title "Walt Disney Production," they would have realized that what they were seeing was not a human being — but Mickey Mouse, the cartoon mouse and fantastical hero of an entire animated series...

This humorous story was invented by science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke. Despite its comic tone, it is far less improbable than it seems at first glance. After all, the same comparison between the American and Mickey Mouse is found in the works of bourgeois American philosopher and sociologist Erich Fromm. In his book *The Fear of Freedom* (also published as *Escape from Freedom*), he writes that Disney's character perfectly expresses a key pattern in modern American industrial society — the powerlessness and fear of the small individual in the face of overwhelming and threatening forces.

People would not keep watching endless variations of the same story, Fromm writes, if it didn't touch on something close and deeply personal for them... The viewer experiences their own fears and anxieties along with the protagonist and

the happy ending gives them a sense of satisfaction. But the hero's salvation lies mainly in his ability to escape — and in a chain of lucky coincidences that help him do so.*

So what exactly is it that constantly threatens the man — the "mouse"?

Fromm offers detailed explanations: large monopolistic capital, which crushes private initiative and individual entrepreneurship in the business world. Owners of small businesses have found themselves powerless against the might of giant corporations — something vividly illustrated by the 1929 crisis, which proved disastrous above all for thousands of small entrepreneurs. Those who managed to hold on to their businesses still feel the ever-present threat of being swallowed by big capital. The sense that they are no longer competing with equals, but rather with trusts, monopolies and conglomerates, breeds in Americans a feeling of insecurity about the future, helplessness and instability — all of which naturally affect their psychology.

Moreover, in the past, the owner of a small business needed knowledge of the trade, the ability to navigate the chaos of the market and an understanding of customer needs. Now, much of that has lost its relevance. No matter how talented, capable or personable the small businessman may be, he cannot withstand the pressure of monopoly forces if those forces decide to absorb his enterprise. He is merely a cog in the vast industrial machine. This, Fromm argues, applies not only to American entrepreneurs, but also to workers and office employees.

Fromm also observes the same tendency towards depersonalization in the sphere of consumption.

Previously, the average customer in a small shop felt that he was treated with respect — that the seller made an ef-

* See Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, London, 1966, p. 114.

fort to understand his tastes and please them. As a result, the very act of purchasing something elevated the customer in his own eyes. But now, in large department stores, the situation is entirely different: a massive building, countless salesmen — none of whom take any personal interest in the individual customer — all of this makes the person feel insignificant and unimportant. And if he happens to learn that every move he makes in the self-service aisles or changing rooms is being watched by surveillance cameras, which see him as a potential thief, his sense of dignity deteriorates further. The human being is seen only as an abstract consumer — no one is interested in him as an actual, specific person.

This is greatly facilitated by advertising. According to Fromm, it appeals not to reason, but to emotions and the subconscious. The methods used in American advertising — endlessly repeating the same formula, sexual symbolism, the imposition of illusions ("Your whole life will change if you buy this shirt or this soap") — have nothing to do with the quality of the products. They are entirely irrational and act like hypnosis, killing all critical faculties in the consumer. Creating an illusory world, advertising gives the person a certain satisfaction, but at the same time increases his sense of insignificance and helplessness.

Similar patterns are also at work in politics. The voter now deals with huge political parties, just as imposing as industrial giants. Political propaganda, like commercial advertising, uses the same irrational methods of influencing the human psyche. And all this is done covertly — under the guise of flattering the individual, appealing to his critical faculties and his ability to understand the situation. Nevertheless, it is not possible to fully put the person's suspicions to sleep. Everyday routine, entertainment and travel somewhat dull his bitter sense of insignificance, but loneliness, fear and confusion live

within him, hidden beneath the surface.

This confusion is further intensified by the mass media, which continuously bombard people with news. A report about the bombing of a city and the deaths of hundreds of people is interrupted by an advertisement for a new kind of soap. Footage of a torpedoed ship is followed by a demonstration of the season's new fashion models. Newspapers report with equal seriousness on events of scientific and artistic importance and on the tastes of a young movie star. Mixed in this way, the messages acquire equal weight. The criteria for distinguishing the important from the trivial are lost and petty sensations overshadow what is truly significant.

Fragments of life, chaotically shuffled by the mass media, do not form a coherent whole in people's minds. The individual is left with these fragments, like a child with a difficult mosaic — how to put it all together is unclear. The only difference is that the child knows, for example, what a house looks like and can recognize its parts in separate pieces. But the adult does not know what this "whole" looks like, the parts of which they hold in their hands. They have only a vague idea of what the modern world really is. Hence — confusion and fear. People flee from such freedom and one of the main paths of their escapism, Fromm believes, is conformity, which he calls "automaton conformity." It consists of renouncing one's own personality, of refusing to be oneself. To become like everyone else, to adopt the personality type offered by society. Then the contradiction between the individual and the surrounding world disappears, and with it the feeling of loneliness and helplessness. Deprived of individuality, a person can only console himself with the fact that millions of others are in the same position. The desire to dissolve among them gives the individual a sense of psychological balance. In this way, the feelings and thoughts suggested from outside are

perceived by such people as their own.

If you ask the average American who regularly reads newspapers what he thinks about a particular issue, he will present newspaper opinions as his own. In response to the question asked of a museum visitor — "So, what do you think of Rembrandt?" — you'll hear that he is magnificent, although in most cases people feel nothing when looking at his paintings and say "magnificent" only because everyone else says so. For most people, deprived of individuality, the mass media and "mass culture" provide models for imitation that allow them to live without themselves — without becoming mentally ill in the process.

If, for example, cinema, radio, television and newspapers were to stop functioning — even for a month — and people were left to themselves, it would lead to thousands of psychological disorders. Fromm conducted the following experiment with first-year students. Each of them was asked to imagine staying in their room for three days without radio, television, newspapers or escapist literature, but supplied with classical literary works, normal food and basic comfort. They were to imagine their reaction. About 90% of the group gave responses ranging from outright panic to a desire to somehow endure the three days by sleeping a lot, doing minor household chores and waiting for the period to end. Only a few said they would enjoy the time spent alone with themselves.*

Unlike the art of earlier eras, which sought to dramatize the major, fundamental problems of human existence, modern "mass culture" tries to dramatize petty, everyday sensations. People gather by the hundreds to watch a fire or a car crash. They read criminal and detective stories with undiminished attention. They go to the cinema with religious fervour, where the central themes are crime and sex. This is not merely

* Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*, London, 1955, p. 17.

a manifestation of bad taste and a passion for sensationalism, but a deep craving for the dramatization of human existence — a craving that has existed since time immemorial. But whereas, for example, Greek tragedy addressed this need on a high artistic and spiritual level, modern drama, offering neither one nor the other, does not give rise to catharsis — the purifying effect characteristic of all true art. The obsession with sex, crime and the cult of power merely reveals the spiritual poverty of readers and viewers. People become consumers of culture without active, creative participation in it — without shared experience, without common values.

This grim picture was drawn not by a fantasist or a dark utopian, but by a very serious person who arrived at these sobering conclusions based on real life in the United States. Erich Fromm — a leading representative of American neo-Freudianism, a branch of bourgeois philosophy that replaced Freud's "biopsychologism" with "social psychology." The main emphasis here is no longer on the theory of human instincts, but on recognizing the influence of culture and environment on the individual. Fromm's critical observations — he is the only neo-Freudian to develop a full system of social philosophy — are compelling. He reveals many of the roots of the modern crisis of personality in bourgeois society: the monopolization of capital, the total alienation of people, the role of mass media in fostering stereotypical thinking and "mass culture" in creating an illusory reality — one that dramatizes trivial sensations and lacks true humanism and spiritual depth.

Stating the existence of a serious conflict between the individual, his needs, and the modern monopolistic structure of capitalist society, Fromm speaks of universal alienation, "which permeates man's relationship to his work, to the things

he consumes, to the state, to other people and to himself."* He also subtly highlights the complete manipulability of this "alienated" person who lives not by reason but by instincts and emotions — which advertising and all other branches of "mass culture" have learned to skilfully exploit.

Diagnosing this condition as "social pathology," Fromm concludes that this pathology has become so widespread that it now constitutes a new norm of existence. However, the remedy he proposes for this social illness is the same as that used in treating individual psychoses — "humanistic psychoanalysis," which he sees not social forces, but psychoanalysis itself as the source of social transformation. In Fromm's view, it can eliminate alienation without affecting the foundations of capitalism. Thus, while the critical part of his theory is strong and persuasive, the constructive part is naive and vague. Even when Fromm does speak of "the necessity of major and decisive changes in the capitalist structure,"** he does not mean any fundamental change in the social structure of society, but merely the transformation of "bureaucratic industrialism" into "humanistic industrialism," which sounds at the very least utopian. Fromm puts forward the idea of some kind of "integral revolution in ideas and hearts." What he means by this remains unclear. What is clearer, however, is his idea of replacing social revolution with a petty-bourgeois "managerial revolution," which is supposed to transform the nature of work, change working conditions and establish universal participation in the management of production. This idea — of transferring control over production and consumption into the hands of technically competent, qualified, capable businessmen — is currently attractive to many U.S. intellectuals. It is shared, for example, by the well-known economist John

* Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 124.

** Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, New York, 1962, p. 132.

Galbraith, futurist Herman Kahn and a number of other theorists of the modern technologically developed society who are trying to find ways to preserve the capitalist system.

Fromm's theory of cultural renewal is no less utopian. As a counter to the stupefying influence of mass communication, he proposes collective, popular art — choral singing, folk festivals, ritual performances. He does note, however, that this would require changes to the entire production and political apparatus, but does not explain how these changes would lead to a radical transformation of the already established way of life and culture at this historical stage. His prescriptions prove to be unrelated to concrete historical reality.

Philosophers and sociologists who came after Fromm took many of his errors into account and tried to offer fewer constructive solutions, focusing instead on critical analysis of the behaviour, psychology and aesthetic views of people living in modern American society. Perhaps the most successful in this regard was sociologist David Riesman, who, without delving into large philosophical generalizations, thoroughly analysed the changes that took place in the 20th century in the social character of Americans. Since Riesman also touches on the evolution of aesthetic views, after briefly reviewing the general ideas expressed in his book *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), which became a philosophical bestseller, we will focus only on the first of them in detail.

Analysing the changed social character of 20th-century American society, Riesman arrives at the correct conclusion about the historically specific nature of these changes. He considers the turning point to be the shift to the era of mass production and consumption — that is, the development which shaped the uniqueness of modern bourgeois industrial society. At the dawn of its existence, Riesman claims, bourgeois society mainly produced people who were "inner-directed,"

guided by ideals instilled in childhood and oriented towards specific goals. These people had individual personalities.

The modern average American, however, differs sharply from their predecessors. Now, as a rule, they are "other-directed," shaped by external influences. And although Riesman essentially says nothing new here compared to Fromm — relying on the aforementioned theory of "automaton conformity" — he shows how this change in character led to the emergence of new aesthetic tastes and prepared the way for a mass audience of consumers of "mass culture."

Riesman acknowledges that even in the 19th century, Americans exhibited a certain degree of conformity — the desire to "keep up with the Joneses" — but in his view, this applied only to external matters: clothing, decor, manners, bank accounts and so on. People governed from the outside, however, are unoriginal at their core: they share the same ideals, ideas, views and aesthetic criteria with others. The upbringing of such a uniform army would have been impossible without the modern development of mass media.

Previously, according to Riesman, literature provided children with ideals that helped shape their character. The printed word told them about different types of work done by adults, about various types of heroes and great people, so that young readers could, in their imagination, try them on and choose the one that suited them best. The goal of their aspirations could be summed up by the Latin saying *per aspera ad astra* — "through hardships to the stars." The stars were far away, but they served as lifelong guiding lights for inner-directed individuals, and it didn't matter what form those "stars" took — fame, moral perfection, money or power. Children strove to cultivate in themselves the qualities necessary to achieve their cherished goal.

While admiring the individuality of Americans in the

past, Riesman does not mention that it often led not so much to integrity as to individualism. It was these very Americans — whose guiding stars were wealth, power and money — who marched from ocean to ocean with rifles in hand, conquering the Midwest and Far West and nearly annihilating the indigenous inhabitants who lived there. It was these Americans who for a long time blindly believed in the myth that "anyone can become president" in America, resulting in political struggles no less fierce than they are now, even if they lacked today's variety of technical tools. The best works of American literature of the 19th and early 20th centuries — the stories of Jack London, *The Gilded Age* by Mark Twain, *The Trilogy of Desire* by Theodore Dreiser, *The Octopus* by Frank Norris and many others — forever captured the extreme individualism of a forward-rushing America. That very same anarchistic individualism that V.I. Lenin called "inverted bourgeoisness."

But Riesman is right, at least in noting that individualism requires individuality. And many modern Americans lack it — it is replaced by what is called personality. This is the image of a likable, sociable, pleasant person — one that generally does not reflect their inner essence. Riesman describes the typical modern American as someone abnormally obsessed with this personal likability. Following the guidance of mass media, they shape their appearance, manner of communication, ideals, tastes and habits. Using ready-made templates, everyone creates the image of "a person who is pleasant in every way." A chasm emerges between one's true self and the created personality, a chasm that gradually widens and leads to neuroses, mental illness, alcoholism or drug addiction.

American writer Irwin Shaw has a beautiful, deeply tragic short story on this theme — *The Light Circle*. It tells of a wealthy, successful man who outwardly appears content and is the life of the party, but in reality is deeply unhappy. This

constant contradiction between appearance and essence becomes the source of his psychosis and obsession. At night, he peers into the windows of nearby homes, hoping to find at least one happy person or couple.

Unaware of the loss of their own "self," people do not develop as individuals, which leads to a society of indistinguishable persons. But they are generally powerless to act differently. In their world, personal likability truly determines too much. Thus emerges a life without purpose — a "rat race" where everyone runs forward trying not to fall behind, without knowing why or where.

The philosophical elaboration of this problem belongs to C.G. Jung, who developed the theory of the dual-layered nature of Western man. In his view, the individual possesses not only a true personality, but also a social persona — a mask. The formation of individuality is the removal of this mask (role theory). But in modern capitalist society, this persona replaces the individual's true self.

Riesman's contribution lies in the fact that he applied this concept concretely to modern American society and showed the social, political and aesthetic consequences of this phenomenon — one so widespread that American literature and art cannot help but address it.

A brilliant analysis of how the personality collapses when faced with real life was given by playwright Arthur Miller in his famous play *Death of a Salesman*. Its protagonist, Willy Loman, believed his whole life that appearance was everything. He thought that a smile and personal charm could easily bring success. One just had to please the boss, please acquaintances, please strangers — his customers. He raised his sons in this spirit.

"But does J.P. Morgan appeal to anyone?" his neighbour retorts. "Does he make a pleasant impression? In the bath-

house, you'd probably mistake him for a butcher. Yet when his pockets are full, everyone finds him so charming!" Thus, with utmost precision and realism, Miller gets to the core — stripping away the glittering layers of the personality cult and showing that it means nothing unless supported by material success.

Riesman convincingly shows how the mass media and "mass culture" begin, from early childhood, to instil conformity in children — orienting them towards others, glorifying collectivism and condemning solitude. As a telling example, he cites the very popular American children's story *Tuttle the Engine*.

The protagonist — a little engine — attends school, where he is taught two main things: stop at red lights, and never go off the rails. Tuttle obediently follows these rules until one day he accidentally discovers how pleasant it is to go off the rails and pick flowers in the fields. His misbehaviour is reported to the teacher, who sternly warns the young rule-breaker. When that doesn't help, the teacher complains to the mayor of Engineville. An urgent meeting is convened and a plan of action is developed. The next time Tuttle goes off the rails to head into the field, he encounters a red light and stops. He turns in another direction — another red light, and the same in every direction he tries. In despair, Tuttle returns to the tracks — the only place where the light is green. Once back on the rails, the little engine vows never to leave them again and everyone praises him for it.

As they grow up, American children firmly absorb the unshakable truth: one must not be different from others — one must be like everyone else. A twelve-year-old girl, a fan of Superman (a comic book character), said she didn't want to be like her hero because people would think she was strange. A brief dialogue between her and the interviewer is quite telling.

Girl: I like Superman more than the other heroes because they can't do all the things he can. Batman can't fly, and that's really important!

Interviewer: Would you like to be able to fly?

Girl: Only if everyone else could fly too, otherwise it would look weird.*

This short exchange reveals not only the conformity instilled in American children from a young age, but also another important trait of the modern American character — the lack of imagination and fantasy required to perceive any genuine work of art, which, incidentally, is typical of all modern "mass culture." No matter how fantastical the story may be, the action always unfolds against a thoroughly naturalistic background, with realistic details and specific signs of everyday life. Such are the comics with invented heroes — Superman, Batman, aliens — who operate in a completely realistic environment. Such are American "guignols" — horror films in which the most terrifying things occur in utterly mundane settings.

In the film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), the dead rise from their graves and begin eating the entrails of living people. Simultaneously, a realistic story unfolds about the relationship between a mother and her sweet five-year-old daughter — who, in the end, kills her mother not with the help of those monsters, but in a completely natural way — with a few strikes of a small toy shovel to the chest. It's no surprise that American critic Lester Asheim formulated one of the laws of modern escapist entertainment as: "the sensational and the unusual are emphasized against a background of the normal and the typical."**

* David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*, New York, 1950, p. 84.

** Gilbert Seldes, *The New Mass Media Challenge to a Free Society*,

The rational, pragmatic approach also finds expression in the stream of purely utilitarian, instructional literature such as *How to Win Friends and Influence People* or *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*. Magazines like *Your Life*, *Your Personality*, *Life Magazine* and others follow the same pattern. People look to these publications for advice and reassurance — down to the smallest details: how to look, dress, care for oneself. In this context, the short stories published in women's magazines are especially interesting.

As an example, Riesman cites the short story "The Revolt of Willy Temple," published in *Ladies' Home Journal*. A shy young man, Willy Temple, who has been working at a factory for a long time, is in love with a pretty female coworker but doesn't know how to approach her. The son of the factory owner — a polished young man — appears, taking the very places our hero had dreamed of — both in the factory and in the girl's heart. Willy, once so gentle, now becomes nervous and irritable, lashes out and speaks rudely. This is his "revolt." But his previously exemplary behaviour has earned him the respect of his coworkers and they try to understand what's going on with him. Upon learning the cause, they turn against the owner's son, who voluntarily gives up the position he had unjustly taken, deciding to start from the bottom. Willy receives the desired promotion and, with the help of advice from his former rival, finally gathers the courage to ask the girl out.

The story appears to collect a bouquet of familiar clichés: conformity, the preaching of "equal opportunity," advice for timid lovers — all combined with complete artistic failure.

But the point, as Riesman rightly observes, is that modern consumers of "mass culture" do not perceive this aesthetic poverty. They have already become accustomed to products where artistry simply is not among the components. Raised

Washington, 1968, p. 48.

on comics since childhood, many Americans come to perceive all culture in the same way. Comics condense into a few minutes of reading what once took many printed pages. This speed allows the hero to win effortlessly. For the readers, only the final result matters — psychological nuance is of no interest. They miss the subtext, the details and do not sense the atmosphere of the action. Character development is unnecessary — the mass reader wants to know no more about the characters than a stamp collector wants to know about the countries the stamps came from.

The good guy is immediately recognizable — he's tall, with clear eyes and a strong jawline. The villain is unshaven, with shifty eyes and a thin black moustache. (When the law of correspondence between appearance and morality is violated, readers and viewers are often displeased. One such viewer, puzzled by a film adaptation of *The Three Musketeers*, asked Riesman: "How could someone as beautiful as Milady de Winter turn out to be a villain?")

These readers and viewers typically have a superficial, thoughtless attitude towards art. Grasping only the plot twists and wanting to know how it ends, they pass by everything that constitutes the essence of a work of art. In essence, this is the development of advertising-style thinking — flashy, eye-catching, operating with image-symbols, but lacking real depth — without which there can be neither true art nor true perception of it.

* * *

The causes and forms of manifestation of this "one-dimensional" thinking are analysed by another bourgeois philosopher — Herbert Marcuse — in his book *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*

(1964). There, often from contradictory and ambiguous positions, he denounces modern American society, analysing its hidden mechanisms of control over people's minds. Following Fromm, Marcuse believes that in industrial society, individual freedom is suppressed everywhere. Private enterprises are absorbed into powerful corporations that eliminate free initiative and competition. In international conglomerates, the sovereignty and national independence of individual countries are infringed. The technological system implies control over the political and intellectual life of people.

Modern civilization, the philosopher argues, has reached a stage in which a "free society" can no longer be defined by the traditional categories of freedom of thought and speech. New forms of control have been introduced, corresponding to the organization of society. In particular, individual thought is replaced by doctrines and stereotypes propagated by the mass media, which shape public opinion.

Marcuse rightly asserts that ideology is not limited to concepts, ideas and myths. In modern bourgeois society, it permeates all spheres of production and consumption, appearing as a complex system of stereotypes, symbols and spiritual values that bind individuals to the existing social system. According to Marcuse, this includes, above all, false needs, which lie at the foundation of the functioning of mass consumer society. If people satisfied only their basic needs for food, clothing and decent housing, the vast stream of various products simply would not find a market. But the widespread system of conformity, which constantly urges people to keep up with others, drives them to buy more and more new things. This fosters in people a passion for consumption, tying them with invisible but strong threads to production and, thus, to society as a whole.

Products and goods dominate people, creating in them

a false consciousness without their realizing it — something like euphoria in misfortune. Most of the needs of the average American in the realm of leisure and entertainment are also consciously cultivated false needs. And no matter how personal these needs may seem to the individual, they remain products of the dominant society, whose interests require the suppression of individuality. "The very mechanism of tying the individual to society has changed," writes Marcuse, "and social control lies in those new needs that this society has created."*

Marcuse sees the main contradiction of modern, technologically advanced bourgeois society in the compatibility of its extreme rationalism with irrationalism. Scientific achievements in the conquest of nature are used for the scientific — and often covert — conquest of people. Its entire developed, carefully crafted ideological system is aimed at shaping the consciousness, behaviour,and lifestyle of people — without them noticing this manipulation — in order to create in them a false sense of happiness, allowing them to view their controlled life as comfortable and even good. In the past, people at least had inner freedom. Now society requires the whole individual. The technical apparatus of production and consumption acts together with the social and political effects it exerts on people. This apparatus seeks to influence not only the professional relationships society needs, but also the personal needs and aspirations of individuals, destroying the distinction between private and public life, between individual and social needs.

American critic and sociologist Leo Gurko writes in his book *Heroes, Intellectuals and Mass Consciousness*** about how

* Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, London, 1964, p. 9.

** Leo Gurko, *Heroes, Highbrows and the Popular Mind*, New York, 1962, p. 267, 269.

American companies control the private lives of their employees. Not only the employees themselves, but their families must conform to requirements for appearance, public behaviour and expressed opinions. They must wear clothes of a certain style and cut, live in respectable homes in reputable neighbourhoods and behave accordingly. Special attention is paid to their views. Whites are discouraged from supporting black people in their struggle for rights. Even the thought that a workers' strike might be justified is considered subversive. A Californian who allowed himself to say that a Japanese person living in the U.S. is just as good as any other American would face disapproval from his company's management. Employees who meet all corporate demands are assured career advancement. Those who do not comply are dismissed under various pretexts.

The transition of social needs into individual ones occurs imperceptibly. Can a clear line be drawn between mass media as instruments of information and entertainment and as tools of manipulation and mind control? These tendencies are closely intertwined and interconnected. As a result, human individuality is flattened and the inner life of people ceases to be fertile ground for the development of critical thinking. Marcuse believes that an idea becomes significant only when it contains its own negation. He calls this "the power of negative thinking." In its absence arises what Marcuse calls "one-dimensional" thinking — when all ideas and desires that go beyond the given way of life are either rejected or adapted to it.

He notes: "That the worker and his boss watch the same TV program, the secretary uses the same cosmetics as her boss's daughter and the black person drives a Cadillac does not mean the disappearance of class divisions, but rath-

er shows the level at which the satisfaction of needs serves the preservation of the establishment, supported by the entire population."* The result, Marcuse argues, is the loss by a significant part of the nation of any subjective need for the radical change whose objective necessity becomes increasingly urgent.

Thus, the philosopher arrives at the unjustified denial that the contradictions of capitalist society are intensifying — that not only new forms of these contradictions are emerging, but also new methods of class struggle, which Marcuse does not recognize, just as he does not acknowledge the revolutionary role of the working class. His critique of American society from such essentially anti-Marxist positions leads him to claim that in modern bourgeois society there are only manipulators and the manipulated — and that the system relies on a single ideology, on "one-dimensional" thinking. The impression is given that the manipulated are completely powerless before the system of spiritual and psychological repression. Marcuse does not connect the manipulation of needs and "one-dimensionality" of thinking with socio-economic factors — with capitalist ownership of the means of production. Therefore, the passive, consumer behaviour of the manipulated that he criticizes — their loss of creativity — appears only as a consequence of scientific and technological progress in general.

Yes, by creating a large quantity of material goods, assembly-line production and mass consumption, the scientific and technological revolution in the United States has indeed laid the foundations for a new, universal system of manipulation. But this by no means excludes — and according to the laws of dialectics, on the contrary, intensifies — the social contradictions rooted in the very nature of capitalist society and its relations of production.

* Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, p. 8.

Marcuse's critical theory turned out to be entirely negative. Unlike, for example, one of his earlier books, *Eros and Civilization* (1955), which ended quite optimistically (remove repression from society, and libido, overflowing its banks, would transform people into a creative social force), *One-Dimensional Man* concludes with nothing but pessimism and despair. Over the past ten years, Marcuse had lost much of his earlier optimism. His hopes now rest only on students, intellectuals, the marginalized and outsiders — whose very way of life demands the removal of intolerable relationships and socio-political institutions. This made Marcuse the ideologist of the modern rebellious student movement, which eagerly embraced his idea that for normal development, society must have not only positive but also negative, critical thinking. In 1968, students in the streets of Paris carried banners bearing Marcuse's name next to that of Mao Zedong, considering both men fighters against bourgeois conformity. Yet the philosopher himself was well aware that, for a technically advanced society, isolated revolts by small groups posed no serious threat.

From general theoretical propositions, Marcuse moves on to an analysis of how the emerging "one-dimensionality" of thinking manifests in science — in particular in linguistics (the disappearance of conceptual multidimensionality and its reduction to stereotypes), in philosophy (the dominance of positivism) and in culture (the absorption of high culture by "mass" culture).

Marcuse had previously addressed cultural issues philosophically. As early as 1937, he published an essay entitled *On the Affirmative Character of Culture*, where the main premise for developing a theory of the negative nature of bourgeois culture came from Marx's statement that "capitalist production is hostile to certain branches of spiritual production, for

example, art and poetry."*

In that article, Marcuse offers a number of insightful observations about the real, social roots of the part of bourgeois culture known as "mass culture." He shows its tendency to "emotionally" overcome capitalism's contradictions. In art, happiness, wealth and love are allowed to be realized because "what happens in art obliges no one to anything." "One of the decisive social functions of affirmative culture," writes Marcuse, "is based on the contradiction between the miserable transience of poor existence and the necessity of happiness, which makes this existence bearable."

It is through granting people this illusory happiness — the realization of their cherished desires and hopes, albeit in fictional reality — that the entire dreamworld of "mass culture" is built. In this way, it performs one of its most important ideological functions: masking the pressing problems of real life. "In affirmative culture, even happiness becomes a means of submission to the order and reconciliation with it,"** Marcuse notes.

However, despite sound starting points, the philosopher is already insufficiently dialectical here. He denies the entirety of bourgeois culture without exception and thereby rejects all classical heritage. As we know, the classics of Marxism-Leninism approached this issue differently. In his speech at the 3rd All-Russian Congress of the Komsomol, V.I. Lenin said: "Proletarian culture must be a natural development of the stock of knowledge mankind has amassed under the yoke of capitalist society..."*** This foresight — the ability to approach the problem from multiple sides — is precisely what Marcuse lacked. Later, however, he revised this position, and in his final work *An Essay on Liberation* wrote that "The Great Refusal does not mean the rejection of all bourgeois culture — we inevitably find ourselves in the position of heirs to that culture."*

Marcuse also makes valid observations in that early article regarding the stylistics of "mass culture." He says that because its task is to stupefy the masses, it must *be accessible* and use expressive means understandable to the public. But this correct premise unexpectedly leads him to the incorrect conclusion that depicting life in its own forms is always bad. Therefore, the critical content of the culture opposing it should be clothed in non-realist forms. As we will see further, Marcuse defends this same thesis today, opposing realistic art with various forms of abstract, non-realist expression.

Even in the essay *On the Affirmative Character of Culture* lies the seed of the concept of "two-dimensionality" from which Marcuse's theory in *One-Dimensional Man* would grow. He writes: "By affirmative culture we should understand that culture belonging to the bourgeois era, which, in the course of its own development, reaches such a stage that it separates the intellectual-spiritual world as an independent universal domain from civilization and elevates it above the latter."** But whereas here this "two-dimensionality" is treated by the philosopher as a trait of all bourgeois culture, in *One-Dimensional Man* it is considered only a feature of culture from the pre-imperialist stage.

In the book, the same basic premise is present as in the article: the rationalism of a technologically advanced society leaves no room for spirituality. Therefore, "high" culture dis-

* *K. Marx and F. Engels on Art*, vol. I. Moscow, 1967, p. 175.

** Herbert Marcuse, "On the Affirmative Character of Culture," in *Culture and Society,* vol. 1, Frankfurt am Main, 1965, pp. 82, 86, 89.

*** V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 41, p. 304.

* Herbert Marcuse, *Essay on Liberation*, Frankfurt am Main, 1969, p. 75.

** Herbert Marcuse, *On the Affirmative Character of Culture*, p. 63.

appears, while "mass" culture takes on a purely utilitarian, practical character. What is happening now is not a deterioration of "high" culture, but its destruction by reality. For its main themes — the vivid human personality, humanism, tragic and romantic love — were ideals of a bygone stage of societal development.

In our time, man is more powerful than heroes and demigods, having solved many previously insoluble problems. But along with this, he has lost the ideals that once underpinned pre-imperialist culture. "High" culture, according to Marcuse, always stood in opposition to reality, acting as a kind of second dimension. For its masters, detachment from social existence was always important. This antagonism between culture and life is now disappearing; the exalted dimension that constituted this additional level is being destroyed. (What exactly this "second" dimension is Marcuse never explains. He merely asserts that it is non-repressive, non-productive, not subject to the principle of productivity, etc. — a vague abstract negation.) The elimination of "high" culture, Marcuse claims, does not occur due to the rejection of cultural values per se, but because they are absorbed into the establishment, because they are disseminated and reproduced on a mass scale. He believes that elite culture was "high" not only because it was intended for a privileged minority, but also because it was consciously distanced from calculation, the pursuit of material goods and business-like enterprise.

Marcuse also sees significant differences in style. The world of "high" culture was not yet one in which nature and man were merely objects and tools. It expressed the rhythm and content of a life in which there were valleys and forests, noble men and villains — the rhythm of a society where people rode in carriages and had the time and desire to think, contemplate and feel. The artist's hand was then guided not

by logic, but by imagination.

Marcuse's theory constantly echoes the core ideas of idealist aesthetics — about God, the Absolute Idea, the World Spirit and so on — as sources of beauty. (It is no coincidence that Marcuse considers the main images of "high" culture to be Soul, Spirit, Heart and the search for absolute truth.)

Refusing to recognize culture and art as reflections of material reality, which influences the consciousness of both creators and consumers, the philosopher fails to see the closed loop — the individual elements of which he himself describes in his critical theory of bourgeois society. After all, the disappearance of certain themes or images in art stems from changes in real life and the processes taking place within it.

Marcuse writes extensively about the levelling of personality and the erasure of individuality in modern bourgeois society but refuses to acknowledge that this inevitably finds its reflection in literature and art. Marx and Engels, in discussing bourgeois culture, wrote:

"The 'culture' over whose decline Mr. Daumer laments... is the culture of the German petty-bourgeoisie, which perishes along with this petty-bourgeoisie. If the fall of previous classes — for example, the knighthood — could provide material for grand works of tragic art, then the petty-bourgeoisie, naturally, can offer nothing but impotent expressions of fanatical malice and a collection of sayings and proverbs worthy of Sancho Panza."*

Indeed, these words from the classics of Marxism reveal the philosophical and aesthetic roots of bourgeois "mass culture" — with its fear of tragedy and intense passion, its obsession with dramatizing trivialities, its sugary sentimentality and predictable happy endings. Hence the disappearance of vivid personalities and deep conflicts, about which Marcuse

* K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 7, p. 213.

laments and which indeed mark many works of contemporary American art.

It is beyond doubt that Herbert Marcuse, like many other Western philosophers and sociologists, was influenced by the ideas of the English writer and philosopher Aldous Huxley. However, Huxley built his concept of the future bourgeois society on a more realistic basis. In brilliant artistic form, he provided a deep analysis of the social roots of the decline of bourgeois culture.

In the satirical science fiction novel *Brave New World*, he described the technological state of the future, where people swear by Ford instead of God, where reading Shakespeare is forbidden and where the manipulation of human consciousness begins from early childhood. The novel contains a striking episode in which the director of a biological centre demonstrates how hatred for books and flowers is instilled in eight-month-old infants. Attracted by the bright covers and pretty petals, the babies reach out — only to be startled by loud sirens and subjected to electric shocks. After several such "procedures," hatred for such objects becomes firmly implanted in the children for life.

During sleep, specific thinking stereotypes are instilled in them, including racist prejudices. Sixty-two thousand four hundred repetitions — and the truth is hammered into the brain for life. Conditioned behavioural reflexes are developed for any situation, even on one's deathbed. From childhood, people are trained to love everything new, to develop buying reflexes. The motto of this world is: "Community, Identity, Stability." The absence of orthodoxy is seen not only as a threat to the individual but to society as a whole. Actions, feelings and thoughts must be uniform, and even the most private intentions must coincide with the desires of others.

Does this not resemble the picture of the "one-dimensional" society drawn by Marcuse?

As for the art of the future society, Huxley turned out to be far more insightful than Marcuse in identifying the reasons why "high" art was giving way to "mass culture" in an industrial society. One of the leaders of the utopian state, Mustapha Mond, explains why art equal in power to Shakespeare's tragedies is impossible in this world:

"Real tragedy is a result of conflict, of disharmony in the world. But this world is stable. People are happy; they get what they want and want nothing they can't have. They are materially secure, never get sick, fear neither death nor old age, know neither passion nor aging. They have no parents, wives, children or lovers. They are conditioned to behave exactly as they should."

And further: "We had to choose between happiness and what people used to call high art. We sacrificed the high art. In return, we have the feelies."*

Huxley also gives an example of this kind of cinema: the film *Three Weeks in a Helicopter* strikingly resembles Hollywood commercial productions. A black man crashes his helicopter and the shock knocks all his previously conditioned reflexes out of him. He forgets himself so much that he becomes infatuated with a blonde, whom he takes with him into the sky. After three weeks of passion, adventure and aerial acrobatics, she is rescued by three white young men. The black man is sent to a reflex-rehabilitation centre, while the blonde becomes the lover of all three of her saviours. The viewer sees every hair on the bearskin rug where the lovers settle, tastes their kisses and smells the gardenias in the room.

The writer said what Marcuse never quite dared to in his book, although he had written about it before. Huxley revealed the social conditioning behind certain artistic phe-

* Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, London, 1946, p. 219.

nomena. He noted that, under specific conditions, art too can become one of the strongest tools of human manipulation. Masquerading as harmless entertainment, art becomes a powerful instrument for hammering stereotypes into people's consciousness.

While lamenting the disappearance of "high" culture, Marcuse never clarifies that he means elite culture, simply presenting it as a culture in opposition to the "mass" one. This immediately raises the question of democratic culture, which, as Lenin stated, exists within every national culture — including that of the United States. Marcuse never mentions it. Yet it is precisely in this space that we find vivid human characters, humanism and intense passions — everything Marcuse claims is absent in modern culture. One only needs to recall the works of Hemingway, Steinbeck, Saroyan in literature; Lillian Hellman and Arthur Miller in drama; Chaplin, Stanley Kramer and William Wyler in film; Martin Ritt and Sidney Lumet on television — the list could go on. Their works are examples of high humanist art, preaching genuine spiritual values in a highly artistic form. This culture does not stand apart from reality, but deeply reflects its contradictions and conflicts.

As in his critical theory of society, Marcuse falls into the trap of a "one-dimensional" framework here as well. There, he divides everyone into manipulators and the manipulated, failing to recognize any differences among the latter. Here, an abstract "high" culture is presented as the sole historical counter to "mass" culture. This distorts the real state of affairs in bourgeois culture, making "mass" culture seem like the only existing and all-encompassing form — which is not true, even if it is widely spread.

Marcuse often replaces social patterns with aesthetic ones. For instance, he interprets the conflict between feudal

traditions and the emerging bourgeois content in culture as a conflict between "high" and "mass" cultures. He is right in observing the different rhythm and style of works created before the technological era. However, he omits the fact that this reflects a different rhythm of life of that time. The rejection of contemplation, the pursuit of money and the crude rationalism and pragmatism of the emerging bourgeois era seemed repulsive and appalling to the feudal aristocracy. This real, social — not purely aesthetic — conflict found brilliant reflection in one of the most popular American novels of the 20th century — Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*.

The characters — Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler — people of the new bourgeois mindset, who made the dollar their religion and, in the pursuit of it, abandoned all previous notions of honour, decency and nobility — are contrasted with people like Ashley, who embody the very contemplation, slow rhythm of life and intellectualism that Marcuse writes about. Mitchell convincingly showed how contagious the psychology of enrichment was, formed during the rise of capitalism. The pursuit of wealth consumed everyone, regardless of class, worldview or political beliefs — regardless of gender. The latter proved particularly disturbing and frightening — it was a sign that the disease had gone too far.

That is why Scarlett O'Hara from *Gone with the Wind* is not merely a sharply defined type of American woman of the new, capitalist formation. The meaning of her image runs much deeper. Inventiveness, cunning, perseverance in achieving her goals, coarse pragmatism and calculation — all these are traits of the bourgeois character, which has achieved material well-being but has failed to achieve the desired moral victory. This is vividly shown in the novel through Scarlett's hopeless love for Ashley, who seems to embody the incompatibility of old feudal and new bourgeois spiritual values. Thus,

unlike the philosopher, the writer succeeded in showing the vitality and social conditioning of this conflict, whose aesthetic consequences are already a secondary phenomenon.

Marcuse, speaking from the position of a defender of the culture of "the upper ten thousand," rejects the necessity of any mass participation in culture. For him, mass reproduction is not only a quantitative but also a qualitative alteration of the original cultural value. He argues with critics who rejoice that the classics have left their pantheons and gone to the masses. The philosopher believes that the entrance of the classics into modern life, in paperback editions, represents their appearance in a completely different quality. They supposedly lose their antagonistic force of estrangement, which was the main dimension of their truth. The content and function of these books, in his opinion, are radically transformed. And if they once stood in contradiction to the established order, now this contradiction is smoothed over.

Marcuse considers such assimilation historically premature. He argues that bourgeois society destroyed the prerogatives and privileges of former culture along with its content. And books in paper covers, long-playing records, the rejection of formal evening wear at theatres and concerts — all this means the materialization of culture, the transformation of spiritual values into commodities, the liquidation of the sanctified zone where true spiritual values could exist in abstract wholeness — far from the society that suppresses them. Now anyone can access art — just reach out your hand. But as a result, art and literature have become merely cogs in the cultural machine, which has radically changed their place in the world.

Is this really so? Let us turn to concrete practice and consider the mass reproduction of the classics — of books, musical works and paintings.

The publication of paperback books is rightly considered in the United States to be one of the most significant revolutions in publishing. Huge print runs — reaching up to 10 million copies — have made it possible to lower the price of each copy to nearly the cost of a magazine, making it accessible to the broadest audiences. When such editions include the works of Dante and Whitman, Tolstoy and Balzac, Dickens and Dostoevsky — true cultural treasures — this phenomenon is progressive. And Marcuse's arguments about the classics being stripped of their antagonistic force, about contradictions between literature and life being smoothed over in their works, do not deserve serious attention. Once again, these are the products of his speculative framework.

What we can talk about here is a different problem, highly significant for the development of literature. As soon as the publication of paperbacks became big business, questions arose that had never been so acute with traditional publishing and small print runs. The result was that paperback formats began to include both the best works of classical and established contemporary authors — and the worst works of beginner writers. Why? The answer is simple, and lies not so much in malicious intent on the part of publishers as in the economic laws of mass production. To agree to publish a cheap book, a publisher must be confident in advance that it will sell in large quantities. Otherwise, he will not make a profit. But what about debut writers? A publisher is often unable to determine whether an original and talented book will be successful. And perhaps no consultant can say with certainty either since the public generally prefers standard fare. A risk is necessary. But with massive print runs, such a risk could ruin the publisher. That is why they publish either authors who have already succeeded, or pulp fiction, which always has a large market — trashy romances and crime novels of

the lowest order. In Kurt Vonnegut Jr.'s novel *Player Piano* (*Utopia 14*), a young writer's book is rejected because it is too well written. Its "readability coefficient" was 26.3% — while the acceptable norm was no higher than 17. "To release an unpopular book," says one character in *Utopia 14*, "would be sheer disaster. The only way to keep culture at such a cheap level is to know in advance what and in what quantity the public wants."*

Previously, young authors could at least publish their first works in small print runs, at their own expense, hoping that if the book caught the public's attention, it would open the door to mass editions. Now even that path is difficult as all the printing houses are busy producing hugely profitable paperback books, and no one wants to bother with unprofitable small runs that barely cover the cost of production. Thus arises a trend inherent to all "mass culture": to make the famous even more famous, while simultaneously blocking the influx of fresh voices, which are essential for the healthy development of any form of literature and art. In the end, young writers — with few exceptions — abandon attempts to say something new, personal or original, and become suppliers of the same pulp fiction for mass consumption.

Marcuse has somewhat more grounds for his dissatisfaction with the mass reproduction of music and paintings. He is not alone in his indignation that "Bach has become kitchen background music." Many critics justly write about numerous cases of the profanation of music in "mass culture." For example, the Frenchman Étienne Gilson, in his book *Mass Society and Its Culture*, recounts how serious music is used by New York television: an advertisement for a new cleaning product was preceded by the first chords of Beethoven's

* Kurt Vonnegut, *Utopia 14*, in *Library of Modern Science Fiction*, vol. 12, Moscow, 1967, p. 291.

Ninth Symphony, and during a television broadcast from a pet cemetery, a python was buried to the sounds of Mozart's *Ave verum corpus*.

It is precisely such phenomena that gave American Lloyd Biggle Jr., author of the science fiction story *The Tunesmith*, reason to depict a terrifying 24th-century world where there are no more composers, only slick "tunesmiths" who write background music for advertisements. Their personal concerts begin with the "masterpieces" they composed in honour of temper cheese or foaming soap. As we can see, these dark forecasts have real roots in life.

But the issue is not just that. It's also that in the mass reproduction of music and paintings, one very important aspect of the perception of art disappears — and Marcuse is right here — the emotional mindset that arises from special preparation for the event, the possibility of shared experience. Music, along with poetry, belongs to the category of arts where the closest connection is established between performer and listeners. In a concert hall, a person senses the reaction of those sitting nearby, which greatly aids in the perception of music — and which he is completely deprived of at home. As a result of all this, reproduced music loses something in its impact on people. The solemnity of attending a concert is reflected not only in the desire to dress more elegantly, but also in the special mental readiness to receive art. Whereas at home, a person often absorbs it casually, lazily turning the dial on the radio during a conversation.

The same applies to works of visual art. The authenticity of the aesthetic experience is one of the most vulnerable aspects of "mass culture." A few years ago in the U.S., a subscription edition *Museums Without Walls* was released — 150 volumes containing 19,000 reproductions of all significant works of world painting, a complete library of global art. In a

literary supplement to *The New York Times*, this edition was described as follows: "These books, which André Malraux called 'museums without walls,' will surround you with the art of the ages. You can engage with it in a much more intimate setting than echoing museum halls — and all for the price of a book."* Without diminishing the usefulness of such publications, it must be noted that there is still a difference in the aesthetic experience one has when looking at Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* in the original versus flipping through an album of copies. In painting, more than in any other form of art, the pictorial texture plays a major role — that peculiar roughness of paint, the soft semi-tones, the barely perceptible shades that no reproduction can convey. In addition, art books often crop photographs, thereby violating proportion and composition. "If we cannot solve the mystery of the Mona Lisa's smile," the American art historian Roger Cosgrove once quipped, "then at least let us be told her exact position within the painting's space."** A reproduction is most often merely a commentary on a painting, not the painting itself.

But while correctly pointing out all these losses, Marcuse fails to mention the most important thing. If we place on one side of the scale what mass media has done to make art accessible to millions of people, and on the other — the shortcomings of reproduction and the lack of authenticity in aesthetic perception, which are significant mainly for narrow specialists and connoisseurs — the first will undoubtedly outweigh the second.

It is also somewhat unclear why the philosopher is so attached to these narrowly specific subtleties, since in both *One-Dimensional Man* and the essay *On the Affirmative Character of Culture*, he almost never focuses on the artistic

* "The New York Times Book Review," March 22, 1964, p. 19.

** Étienne Gilson, *The Mass Society and Its Culture*, Vrin, 1967, p. 37.

criteria of art, analysing only the transformation of themes and images. But outside such criteria, any discussion of art is meaningless. For it is precisely here that one of the main boundaries lies between "high" culture and "mass" culture. The question of artistic quality, of the low level of art in works of "mass culture," has now become one of the central issues and cannot be avoided.

Marcuse's insufficient knowledge of the concrete problems of literature and art, and his attempt to approach them with pre-made templates, is especially evident when he tries to find in certain phenomena "lifebuoys," sprouts of a future "post-technological" culture. The philosopher spends a long time discussing the alienation of literature and art from society in the "pre-technological era," interpreting this alienation from a Freudian standpoint. He believes that culture at that time embodied the "unhappy consciousness of a divided world, unrealized possibilities, unfulfilled hopes, unkept promises." It reflected that dimension in man and nature which was suppressed and denied by reality. Now this artistic alienation, along with other forms of negation, has surrendered its position to technological rationalism. But in Marcuse's view, there still exist phenomena in modern culture that could help it regain the lost second dimension.

Such is the "alienation effect" in Brecht's drama, when "things of everyday life cease to be self-evident" and "the natural becomes strange." Marcuse believes this is art's response to "the threat of total behaviourism, an attempt to save negation."*

But is this so?

The "alienation effect" in Brecht's theatre lies in the fact that the portrayal does not merge with the play's action but exists somewhat separately from it, above it. The actor does

* Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, p. 61, 67.

not fully become the character but demonstrates his attitude towards him; the text is spoken as if quoting; the sets are symbolic. All this, at first glance, does indeed seem to resemble Marcuse's theory of the two-dimensionality of art elevated above life. But as soon as one becomes more familiar with the basic principles of Brecht's dramaturgy, it becomes clear that at its core lies the same rationalism that Marcuse considers fatal to all true art. "Perhaps the most essential aspect of epic theatre," wrote Brecht in one of his essays, "is that it appeals not so much to the viewer's feelings as to his reason. The viewer must not empathize, but argue."*

Brecht opposed the so-called Aristotelian theatre with its system of eternal spiritual values — the very ones whose loss Marcuse mourns so deeply. Moreover, the "alienation effect" for Brecht was only an external device through which the playwright aimed to merge the emotional and the intellectual, to place image and concept side by side, to activate the imagination, thought and creative energy of the reader and viewer. Brecht advocated for an art that not only reflects life but forcefully intervenes in it, striving for its active social transformation — something Marcuse doesn't even consider, as he constantly seeks to elevate art above life, to make it float like some absolute spirit high above reality. And to hope that this kind of culture, "whose ideals continue to haunt human consciousness," could be revived in a "post-technological era" is, sad as it may be, unrealistic.

Marcuse continued his search for the "second dimension" of modern bourgeois culture in an article published in the collection *On the Future of Art*, based on lectures given by prominent American philosophers, sociologists and art historians at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1969. Marcuse's article is entitled "Art as a Form of Reality." But, lest the reader be misled by this title, the author immediately clarifies: "Art as a form of reality does not mean the aestheticization of the given, but the creation of a reality entirely different and opposed to the given." And further: "Even the most realistic work creates its own reality: its men and women, its objects, its landscape, its music reveal what remains unspoken, unseen, unheard in everyday life."

So how is this special, alienated world of art created? Marcuse offers an answer to this question as well, composing an enthusiastic hymn to the primacy of form over content. As previously mentioned, in his earlier studies in literature and art, the philosopher never focused on questions of form. Now, however, the problem of form has entirely captivated him.

He asserts that the main thing in art is not the reflected object, not the content, but the form — only form makes a work a work of art. "Through form and form alone, content acquires that uniqueness which makes it the content of a specific work of art and of no other." This form alienates the artwork from the given reality and introduces it into its own reality — the realm of form.

According to Marcuse, it is form that creates that very "second dimension" of reality, the loss of which he lamented in *One-Dimensional Man*, and which he tried to find in Brecht's "alienation effect." "This form," he writes, "corresponds to the new function of art in society: to create a 'festival,' to elevate, to break a hole in the dreadful routine of life — to represent something 'higher,' 'deeper,' perhaps 'truer,' and to better satisfy needs unmet by daily work and entertainment, and therefore to bring joy."*

The philosophical framing of this question is not new.

* Cited in: E. Etkind, "The Theatrical Theory of Bertolt Brecht," in *Bertolt Brecht on Theatre*, Moscow, 1960, pp. 12-13.

* Herbert Marcuse, "Art as a Form of Reality," in *On the Future of Art*, New York, 1970, p. 133.

The idea that only through form does art create a sphere of experience deeper and more complete than the real world was expressed 30 years earlier by John Dewey in his book *Art as Experience*. Standing on the ground of subjective idealism, he argued that experience in art is a form that fully absorbs the content and obliterates the distinction between subjective and objective.

Thus, from the critique of the illusory world of art — which, in his essay *On the Affirmative Character of Culture*, Marcuse denounced as a tool for obscuring and smoothing over real-life contradictions — the philosopher, a quarter-century later, arrives at the diametrically opposite position: affirming this imagined reality created by the expressive means of art, essentially a version of the concept of "art for art's sake." A type of art that alienates from reality and opposes to it its own "exalted and beautiful" world. A type of art in which form often contradicts content and triumphs over it, aestheticizing the horrific, the inhumane, the repulsive. A type of art that is, in and of itself, a "happy ending," because in it despair is sublimated, pain becomes beautiful and the real becomes illusory.

The path of preparing a person to perceive this new world of form — instead of accepting, sublimating or aestheticizing the existing objective reality — is seen by Marcuse in the development of non-objective and "living" art (happenings). The true avant-garde of contemporary art, according to the philosopher, is not those "who desperately strive for a lack of form and unity with real life," but those "who seek a new artistic form of comprehending reality."* But not objective reality — their own.

Having started from materialist premises in assessing the paths of bourgeois cultural development, acknowledging its

* Herbert Marcuse, "Art as a Form of Reality," p. 133.

class character and hostility to the broad popular masses, Herbert Marcuse gradually moved further and further towards an idealist interpretation of the role of art in human life until he fully adopted a position that denied the necessity for art to reflect objective reality, the dialectical unity of form and content, and instead glorified all non-realistic forms of art.

In essence, the philosopher is now engaged in the very myth-making that he once so passionately condemned. Like the creators of the "mass culture" he so despises, he feeds people with groundless illusions, evading real, serious problems facing Western culture. For to seek ways of saving art within itself, without correlating it with life and concrete social reality, is illusory and futile.

DIALOGUE WITH MARSHALL MCLUHAN: DOES TELEVISION IN THE U.S. PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDIVIDUAL?

However, it would be incorrect to limit ourselves only to presenting the pessimistic views on the future of bourgeois American society and its culture, as preached by Fromm, Riesman and Marcuse. There also exist theories of a different, more optimistic nature, whose most prominent representative is the Canadian Marshall McLuhan. For most of his life, this elderly man (he is now over 60) was a modest professor of English language and literature at the University of Toronto. In 1951, he published his first book, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*, in which he examined the mass media as tools for narrowing the sphere of the human personality. At the time, he sought to arm people with knowledge of the specific techniques used by the press and advertising to manipulate their consciousness. The author also showed a clear understanding of who stood behind these technical means — who benefited from manipulating people. He wrote directly about the concentration of control and power in the hands of a few, a trend seen across all mass communication platforms. In his exposure of the mythology of American "mass culture," McLuhan used such phrases as "controlling the mental processes of children locked in the mass dream," "tendencies towards the destruction of humanism" and so on. McLuhan compared the reader to the fisherman from Edgar Allan Poe's story *A Descent into the Maelstrom* — a man who survived only because he figured out the mechanics of the whirlpool. That, McLuhan believed, is why one must understand the workings of the mass media — to be able to resist

them — and that was the purpose of his writing.

But although *The Mechanical Bride* was a clever and satirical book, it went largely unnoticed. McLuhan then fell into more than a decade of silence. Only in 1962 was his next work, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, published. In its orientation, this book was already diametrically opposed to the previous one. Its central idea was that the invention of the alphabet and the printing press destroyed human wholeness — and that this rupture led to many modern woes.

Two years later, McLuhan published a third book — *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* — where he expanded on the theory laid out in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and went further, attempting not only to reinterpret the role and significance of mass communication in human life but to offer a new philosophy of historical development. This new theory amounted to a justification of "mass culture" as a practice. After sitting unnoticed on bookstore shelves for nearly a year, the book finally caught the attention of the owners of mass communication outlets, who realized that *Understanding Media* embodied their most cherished ideals. Soon, almost on cue, the book was championed by the press, radio and television — and promptly became a bestseller.

Such roaring fame came to McLuhan as is granted to very few. He was called "the most important thinker since Newton, Darwin, Freud and Einstein." He was offered a position at Fordham University (New York) — the chair vacated after the death of Albert Schweitzer — with a salary of $100,000 a year (the same as the President of the United States). He was constantly interviewed. Wealthy hosts competed to invite this "prophet of the electronic age" to formal dinners as the top sensation of the year. A special documentary film was dedicated to him. Even *The New Yorker* published a cartoon depicting a store with a sign in the window: "We speak Mc-

Luhanese here."

What exactly earned McLuhan such fame? First and foremost, his theory of the "electronic revolution," most fully outlined in *Understanding Media*. Expanding on the theory he had already expressed in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan argues that when humanity lived under tribal systems, all the senses were developed and interacted with one another. But the invention of the alphabet and the printing press shattered this wholeness. The senses began to drift apart and vision became dominant. Rational thinking emerged, logic triumphed over all else. This led to a pursuit of knowledge, loss of wholeness, the rise of nations, nationalism, wars, individualism and the development of the capacity to act instead of to react.*

This deliberately pessimistic picture serves the author only as a kind of backdrop to highlight the importance of new mass media. These very media, McLuhan claims, once again require the interaction of all the senses and are meant to bring about a "new revolution" — just like the invention of printing, but in reverse. People will again live in clans, the world will turn into a global village and everyone will be happy. Television, film, radio and advertising are creating a new environment that attacks and alters human perception. A change in perception leads to a change in people themselves, and this in turn will lead to a change in history. The new environment shapes a multidimensional person whose senses interact while watching — regardless of the content. Humanity is now entering the era of the "electronic revolution," which will lead to synesthesia of the senses and complete harmony.

There's no need to study anything, McLuhan claims, be-

* Kipling has a story called *The Eye of Allah* about a scholar who invented a microscope, only for a wise man to destroy the invention, claiming it would bring more harm than good to humanity. This kind of "position" is clearly close to McLuhan's heart.

cause logical thinking departed with the Gutenberg era — the era of books. And the new electronic media are more powerful than society itself and will reshape it. "The electronic changes associated with automation have nothing to do with ideology or social programs,"* he declares. Mass media are extensions of our nervous system and so the information they transmit penetrates into the human subconscious. From here there is a direct path to the "collective unconscious" dreamed of by Bergson and Jung, to collective harmony and a unified world.

People are powerless to change this established reality, McLuhan concludes. They are locked into the new "electronic" environment and the only thing they can do is adapt. Thus, media become active subjects, while people become passive objects. The slogan emerges: "The medium is the message," and later: "The medium is the mass message" (one of McLuhan's books bears this title**). In other words, it doesn't matter *what* is said or *how* — the only thing that matters is the medium itself. It creates a new environment, and this environment changes people's souls and senses. That change is the only substance worth considering. In McLuhan's view, postwar America became what it is solely because television was invented — it changed the psychology of Americans.

McLuhan also introduces new terminology to describe different types of mass communication. He divides them into "hot" and "cool." These terms were borrowed from jazz slang. "Hot" referred to the jazz of the 1930s-40s — dynamic and forceful. "Cool" described the low-key, subtle, lyrical jazz of the late 1940s-early 1950s, in which listeners had to perceive rhythm through subtext and pauses. According to McLuhan,

* Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, London, 1967, p. 375.

** Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*, New York, 1967.

"hot" media are full of data, while "cool" ones are not. But by "data" he doesn't mean information itself — he means the physical impact of the media on the senses. "Hot" media have a strong effect on the senses, while "cool" ones have a weak effect, requiring greater physical participation from the audience and more involvement in the action.

McLuhan doesn't stop at these narrow generalizations. He aims higher — to create his own philosophy of history. He freely reinterprets the famous thesis from *The Communist Manifesto* — that the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles — as the history of the struggle between media. McLuhan treats the historical process as a series of technical revolutions. The level of his reasoning is such that he claims: the invention of paper created the Roman Empire and its absence destroyed it; the appearance of the printing press in the 15th century marked the beginning of the age of rationalism.

A hatred of rational thinking unites McLuhan and Marcuse, although they approach this phenomenon from different angles. There's much that is sensible in Marcuse's reflections on how the rationalism of the technological era often negatively affects the development of literature and art. His observations on how rational thinkers deliberately cultivate irrationality — believing it to be the most favourable environment for all kinds of covert manipulation — are also insightful.

McLuhan, however, approaches this issue quite differently. Through his total rejection of rationalism — supposedly detrimental to the integrity of the human personality — he, first, supports and promotes irrationality, which is extremely beneficial to manipulators, and second, frees himself from the need to offer any rational argumentation for his ideas and assumptions.

The proven method of creating scholarly works — where each thesis is thoroughly argued (taking into account possible objections) — is unacceptable to him. The following examples illustrate the externally impressive but often illogical nature of his thinking. "Why do even the stingiest of the wealthy engage in charity?" McLuhan asks. And he immediately answers: "Because the telegraph was invented." "What is the main factor in the struggle of black people for their rights?" It turns out to be... "the internal combustion engine." "Why were six million Jews killed in the Second World War?" "Because radio came before television." In the latter case, McLuhan briefly explains the hidden — but "revealed" by him — causal link (Hitler would not have been successful on television),* but in most other instances he doesn't bother. (True, McLuhan — seemingly aware of the shakiness of his theoretical premises — writes at the beginning of his book that he is merely making assumptions and explains nothing, only exploring; however, this cannot serve as justification for his unscientific method.)

It must be said right away that McLuhan's central thesis — that the course of human history is determined by technological revolutions — is not original. More than 20 years earlier, the same idea was proposed by another researcher of mass communication, McLuhan's fellow Canadian, Harold Adams Innis (who died in 1952). Innis also believed that what words are written on matters more than the words themselves. But in Innis' view, mass media influence the social organization of society and its culture. McLuhan, on the other hand, substituted human senses in place of society. In doing so, he pulled the media out of their social context and ignored the real forces that gave rise to and control them.

When talking about technological revolutions — each of

* Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, pp. 318-319.

which creates a new "environment" that fully negates the previous one — McLuhan deliberately removes social categories, "forgets" those who control these media and dictate their will. He replaces all social, political and societal factors that have influenced historical development with nothing but technology.

McLuhan views mass media not as tools for studying and reflecting life, but as self-sufficient units that impact life itself. Hence his thesis that "the medium is the message." Taken to its logical conclusion, this implies that there is no difference, for instance, between Lev Tolstoy and Mickey Spillane — both authors' books would be reduced to mere objects printed in a typography. (Once, Hollywood actress Jean Harlow, when asked what she wanted for her birthday, replied: "Anything but a book. I already have a book." The reasoning of the Canadian professor here resonates with the words of the Hollywood sex symbol.)

It is precisely this assertion — that content doesn't matter — that allows McLuhan to avoid discussing the problems of "mass culture" that researchers have long been grappling with: its social, political and aesthetic effects on people. He says nothing about these, because why analyse something that "doesn't matter"? But by denying the power of ideas, the value of emotion, the allure of wisdom — all the things that enrich human life — McLuhan thereby hands people over to the dark forces of the subconscious, which the creators and masters of "mass culture" have already learned to manipulate. Thus, McLuhan's theory aligns with the views of those who see humans as nothing more than objects of manipulation.

This same logic underpins McLuhan's division of mass media into "hot" and "cool." He categorizes literature and art as "hot," and radio and television as "cool," because they are "involving" and require the recipient to fill in gaps. Thus, tele-

vision is considered "cool" not because of program content, but because of the effect the electronic tube has on viewers. The person, supposedly, internalizes the image deeply because it is a mosaic of dots that the viewer must assemble. "The television image," McLuhan writes, "offers the viewer three million dots every second. Of these, he perceives only a few dozen at a time, from which he constructs the image... The television image minute by minute demands that pauses be filled in through convulsive sensory participation, which is full of movement and tactility, because tactility is the interaction of the senses."*

Here, McLuhan correctly points out one feature of television — the magnetism of the screen. There are plenty of examples of people sitting for hours in front of a glowing screen, watching whatever is being shown. Academic literature even cites cases of television screens hypnotizing animals (most often, for some reason, Siamese cats, which can sit motionless for hours watching the flickering dots). But the key question is whether this constant watching contributes to the development of a harmoniously formed personality or, on the contrary, impoverishes and flattens human individuality. This is where the issue of content arises — the very issue that McLuhan carefully avoids.

Moreover, aren't the canvases of Rembrandt, Titian and other great painters of the past composed of individual brushstrokes and patches of colour, as rightly pointed out by one of the most consistent critics of McLuhan — the Marxist Sidney Finkelstein?** Yet McLuhan classifies them as "hot." And doesn't the ear fuse countless sound waves into a whole when listening to a symphony? Yet music, too, is considered "hot."

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* Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, pp. 334-335.

** Sidney Finkelstein, *Sense and Nonsense of McLuhan*, New York, 1968, p. 83.

And the printed word — the ultimate in "hotness" according to McLuhan — isn't it composed of individual letters? (Recall, for instance, Gogol's Petrushka from *Dead Souls*, who enjoyed reading most for how the letters formed into words.) Thus, in McLuhan's theory, everything that does not engage the intellect and thought, but exerts direct physiological impact, is deemed "cool."

And although McLuhan doesn't take this idea to its logical conclusion, in broader theoretical terms this amounts to an apology for naturalism, which denies abstraction, generalization and typification. An apology that is by no means accidental, since naturalism — with its superficial realism, lack of genuine analysis of phenomena, substitution of real life with such shallow attributes as sensuality, violence, exaggerated eventfulness, its petty-bourgeois worldview and vulgar, base ideals — has now become the main artistic direction of bourgeois mass culture. It is perfectly natural, then, that McLuhan seeks to theoretically justify it.

Projecting this tendency into the future, American science fiction writer Robert Sheckley made it the basis of his story *The Prize of Peril*, where television companies, in pursuit of delivering maximum thrills to viewers, broadcast not staged, but real manhunts. Viewers watch, glued to their screens. Some of them help the fugitive — a regular guy, like themselves. Others, on the contrary, inform the killers of his whereabouts, anticipating the pleasure of witnessing death. And just when death seems inevitable — the pursuer's gun aimed point-blank — the time limit for the chase expires...

It is precisely this kind of momentary, direct impact on the senses that leads McLuhan to proclaim television as the pinnacle of modern art. And this is exactly what the owners of mass communication in the U.S. want. They don't care whether a person assembles an image from dots or not —

they only care that he doesn't think about the meaning of what is being shown to him and accepts everything uncritically — especially advertising.

A characteristic example of McLuhan's orientation towards the tastes of television owners is his deliberate promotion of bad taste. The philosopher directly calls to "kill the gangrenous monster — good taste," and considers the very idea of aesthetic refinement in life and art to be absurd. This is nothing more than an attempt to theoretically justify the desire of media owners to cater to the lowest common denominator of the mass audience — the very same audience that is the primary consumer of both advertising and ideological stereotypes.

Vulgarity permeates most American television entertainment. Even genres that, by their very nature, seem least suited to vulgarization are filled with it. Consider the following documentary interview as an example. In 1969, during the *Variety Show* hosted by Merv Griffin, Jean-Claude Killy, the Olympic champion and famous skier, an intelligent young man with a quiet voice, appeared as a guest in the U.S. As soon as he came on camera, host John Barbour greeted him with the statement: "When I announced that you'd be on today's show, all the women screamed: 'Killy? What's his sexual image?'"

Killy tried to respond to this tactless question, but Barbour immediately shouted: "Why are you speaking so softly? Are you trying to confess your love to me?" Yet even that inappropriate innuendo wasn't enough for the host. "What scandal were you involved in during the last Olympics?" was his next question. "How did you manage to schedule dates with two actresses at the same time?" — and so on, right up to his final statement: "All Frenchmen are the same."*

* Harlan Ellison, *The Glass Teat*, New York, 1969, pp. 83-86.

This example characterizes not so much the host himself as it does the very style of American television programming, where such negative traits of the American (and indeed any) philistine — pretentiousness, emotional deafness, brazenness — often become the norm. Mark Twain had already mocked these long ago in *The Innocents Abroad*. The public is not being educated but is instead deliberately being instilled with examples of bad taste. And then along come scholars who provide a "scientific" foundation for all this.

Thus, as we've seen, every theoretical position McLuhan takes serves the interests of the owners of mass media. Everyone else says these media impoverish people, while McLuhan insists that, on the contrary, they enrich them. (When sharp-tongued critics asked him how this position could be reconciled with the one he had so thoroughly argued in his first book, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man** — where he exposed the techniques and methods of mass communication — McLuhan replied that that earlier work had been refuted by television.) "All the mechanical rigidity of American life was overturned by television," he claims. "Mass culture has become organic."** By denying content, intellect and logical thinking, McLuhan opens the door to manipulation through subconscious instincts. Offering a new classification of types of modern "mass culture," he promotes the "direct sensation of life" rather than comprehension of it.

How can one explain the fact that McLuhan's "theories" gained popularity in certain segments of Western society? Clearly, in no small part, it is due to the ideological confusion typical of these circles, their instability of views and their inability (and sometimes unwillingness) to grasp the complexity

* Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*, Toronto, 1951.

** *McLuhan: Hot and Cool*, New York, 1967, p. 267.

of the modern world. McLuhan assumes the role of a messiah, promising to save these people, claiming that the electronic environment will bring them bliss — and that they won't even have to lift a finger to get there. To those who worry that children can't read, he says: they've outpaced their parents and are entering a new world. To those frightened by the arms race and the threat of nuclear war, he offers reassurance: technological progress has always been born of war. ("...Militarism is the main path to technical education and accelerated progress for backwards regions."*) To those who fear automation will take away their jobs, he says: it's wonderful to live without working, spending one's leisure on entertainment.

In this way, McLuhan creates for himself the aura of a benevolent wizard, offering salvation to a despairing humanity. His academic title and the appearance of scholarly reasoning lend a certain weight to everything he writes. (It's long been known that the American public is quite gullible in this regard. Journalism textbooks still cite the early-20th-century story of how a series of articles called *Great Astronomical Discoveries Recently Made by Sir John Herschel at the Cape of Good Hope*, written by journalist Richard Locke, gained incredible popularity in the U.S. The mere reference to the material allegedly having been published in the *Edinburgh Scientific Journal* before appearing in the *New York Sun* was enough to convince millions of readers that bat-winged moon dwellers existed — and ladies from Springfield even began collecting money to send missionaries there.)

All such circumstances combined made McLuhan's publications "the most optimistic books of the century," as one of his opponents sarcastically described them.

* * *

* Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 113.

In rejecting McLuhan's false and often speculative philosophical positions, we should not overlook the rational elements present in his work. No one would argue with him when he emphasizes that mass communication media do, in many ways, help people. Radio does indeed deliver information at unprecedented speed. Film and television can bring the classical treasures of modern art to millions who never attend the theatre. Television has vastly expanded viewers' horizons, showing them far-off countries, museums, exhibitions and providing live reports from the scenes of events.

McLuhan is right when he writes that "the mass media... bring about changes... in their own environment as they interact with each other. Radio changed the form of the newspaper article and the nature of the image in sound films. Television strongly influenced radio programming and documentary storytelling."* Indeed, television, now the main medium of mass information and one of the largest domains of "mass" culture, has significantly pushed aside its older siblings — radio, cinema, the press — becoming the primary source of information, advertising and entertainment for many people. McLuhan rightly considers it the most important among modern means of communication.

McLuhan wholeheartedly welcomes television's ability to make people direct participants in events. Thanks to it, John Kennedy's funeral became an almost ritual event that involved not only Americans but residents of other countries as well. They were able to see the widow weeping by the coffin in a dress still stained with the slain president's blood, the farewell salute to the bewildered three-year-old John's father... And not long afterwards, the same America gasped in horror when Jack Ruby shot and killed Lee Oswald point-blank live on television.

* Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 63.

But the small screen showed people not only sad events. In 1969, America joyfully followed the landing of the first astronauts on the Moon. Huge television screens were set up right in city squares and crowds of spectators watched the tentative human steps on the lunar surface and listened to Neil Armstrong's words, now historic: "One small step for man — one giant leap for mankind."

But while speaking of this magic of the TV screen, which allows people to participate in current events, McLuhan never mentions the danger that many American authors point to — the possibility of staging a seemingly live broadcast, in which viewers are unaware that the technicians in control are capable of instilling specific, desired viewpoints and ideas. Back in 1952, sociologists Gladys and Kurt Lang proved that the enthusiastic reception of General Douglas MacArthur, commander of U.S. forces in Korea, shown on American television in Chicago, did not at all reflect the true state of affairs. These sociologists, with the help of their assistants mingling with the crowd, observed how television cameras deliberately avoided filming those who were not applauding, simply passing by such groups.* The Langs merely stated the fact without drawing conclusions, but the conclusions are obvious. In this case, television deliberately falsified reality to stir up war hysteria.

The same Langs analysed how three different television companies covered the 1952 Democratic National Convention. Even though the material was the same, each company presented and interpreted it differently.**

Journalist Henry Fairlie also writes about this in his

* William Bluem, "The Camera and the Event," in *The Progress of Television*, ed. by William Bluem and Roger Manvell, New York, 1967, pp. 114-115.

** Joseph Klapper, *The Effects of Mass Communication*, Glencoe, 1961, p. 56.

article "The Illusory World of TV News," published in the collection *Image, Sound, Society*. He gives two examples of how live television reports from events are distorted to give viewers a predetermined impression. In the summer of 1966, American TV showed, in the *Late News*, white residents of Cicero (a Chicago suburb) shouting insults at black marchers. The screen was filled with the hatred-twisted faces of whites, creating the impression of a massive group united by hatred. But eyewitnesses later said these people were only a small part of the crowd, which behaved in a variety of ways — and the crowd itself was just a small portion of Chicago's white population. The live broadcast had been rigged. And viewers at home had no idea they were perceiving the event not directly, but through the lens of a TV company's management interests, which had given the cameraman specific instructions.

Fairlie's second example comes from his own experience. He was present at the beginning of the famous march led by James Meredith when there were still only a few participants. The arrival of TV crews sparked a natural reaction: under the aimed cameras, the marchers straightened up and tightened their ranks. On the small screen, they suddenly looked like a powerful army, allowing the narrator to frighten the public with the threat of "black power," a phrase that later became widespread in the U.S. Here the falsification had a different motive, but the result was the same — distortion of reality where, it would seem, distortion shouldn't be possible.*

This is the most effective method of covert manipulation of viewers, precisely because it is so unobtrusive. And this technique is applied not only to live reports but also to dramatic content. Here is what writer Ray Bradbury had to say about it. In 1963, he wrote a science fiction story for the

* Henry Fairlie, "The Unreal World of Television News," in *Sight, Sound and Society*, Boston, 1968, pp. 131-132.

television series *The Twilight Zone* about an "electronic grandmother" of the future who replaces the children's deceased mother. The author intended this character to embody all the key principles of humanism. The grandmother herself tells the family that created her that she has been endowed with the best qualities of teachers and priests, but she is more convenient because she lacks flaws and is immortal.

When the filming of the TV movie was almost finished, Bradbury was called to the studio and told the script was too long and needed cuts. "What do you propose to cut?" he asked anxiously, and sure enough, they pointed to the very part he feared would be removed — someone in management apparently found it blasphemous to suggest that a cybernetic grandmother could replace living priests. Bradbury flatly refused to remove this part and proposed other cuts instead. He was assured that everything would go as he wanted. But on the day of the premiere, the writer was horrified to see that the studio executives had gone ahead with their own changes anyway, turning the whole thing into nonsense.*

It is hard to imagine that facts of this kind, widely reported in the American press, remain unknown to McLuhan, who specifically studied the hidden mechanisms of manipulating people.

The same one-sidedness is evident in another valid observation by McLuhan, who sees the power of television in its informality, intimacy and ability to speak to viewers almost face to face. In particular, he mentions a popular early 1960s U.S. television series, *The Jack Paar Show*. It was a live roundtable discussion involving not only actors but also writers, critics and political figures. Paar would introduce them, begin a conversation and conduct it in a very relaxed manner, not

* A Writers' Symposium (Ray Bradbury, David Chandler, Paul Monash, Barry Trivers), in *The Progress of Television*, pp. 60-61.

hesitating to shout at noisy audience members. A rather sharp person with strong opinions, Paar was not afraid to portray his guests in an unflattering light. Famous film actor Mickey Rooney even considered suing him for making him look like a complete fool.

However, the same Jack Paar, as McLuhan rightly notes, could, if he wished, also elevate a person significantly. For example, in one episode of his show, a potential presidential candidate appeared, and Paar introduced him to viewers from an entirely unexpected angle. Instead of a poorly telegenic political figure, the audience saw a humble composer and pianist performing several of his own pieces. McLuhan cites this example* to support his valid claim about the great power of television rooted in its informality. But he doesn't even mention that this was a campaign broadcast and that such emotional influence on viewers was a vivid example of manipulating their consciousness for political purposes.

In the years since then, television has become one of the main tools in political struggle. Even the American press now increasingly reports that "electronic politics" is gradually becoming the domain of only the wealthy, those who can afford to pay astronomical sums for airtime and hire expensive advertising agents to tell them how to look and behave in front of cameras. (In the case mentioned by McLuhan, Jack Paar himself acted, voluntarily or not, as such an agent.) *Time* magazine even published a cartoon: on a park bench, a vagrant, grinning, says to a respectable gentleman reading a newspaper article about election results: "If I had a million, I'd hire an ad man and make you vote for me!"** This same issue is covered in detail by Joe McGinniss in his book *The*

* Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 329.

** "Electronic Politics: The Image Game," *Time*, September 21, 1970, p. 41.

Selling of the President 1968. He describes how the election of Nixon was greatly aided by Harry Treleaven, a former employee of a major advertising firm, who made media strategy the central focus of the campaign.

(Since 1971, a satirical musical based on McGinniss' book — *The Selling of the President* — has been running to great success in theatres in New York and San Francisco. The play is set in a television studio during the 1976 election, where employees of an advertising agency are "selling" the presidential candidate George Mason to the voters. The songs in the musical are a series of political ads proclaiming the candidate's love for minorities, his homespun philosophy, religious zeal and sexual appeal.)

All of this testifies to the enormous role that television plays in winning over voters. That's why the advantages of TV noted by McLuhan often turn out to have quite a different side.

Marshall McLuhan also makes some valid points in the realm of stylistics specific to television — noting its aversion to dialogue, its preference for close-ups, the unique nature of TV dramaturgy and visual culture — and he draws the fair conclusion that the entire structure of a work brought in from another art form must be adapted. But he never discusses what has had the most decisive influence on the development of American television and the nature of its programming: its dependence on commerce and politics. Like Marcuse, he tries to substitute aesthetic criteria for social laws. Meanwhile, it is precisely these two factors that have largely shaped the creative fate of American TV — a fate that has been far from simple and is quite telling in its own way.

In recent years, there's been increasing discussion about the "golden age" of American television, with its boundaries precisely defined: the decade from 1947 to 1957. So what

characterized this "golden age," and why did it end?

American television inherited a great deal from radio, especially since it was founded by two of the largest radio corporations — Columbia and National. A key similarity between the two media is the way programs are funded. Large and small firms wishing to advertise their products purchase airtime and determine the nature of the programs shown during those hours. The main concern of these "sponsors" is the "cost per thousand" — how many dollars they must spend to reach 1,000 viewers. As the number of viewers increases, the "cost per thousand" decreases. How is this number calculated? A company called Nielsen has installed special "audimeters" in 1,200 American households. These devices record how many hours a particular television is on and which channel is being watched. At regular intervals, the owners of these test TVs send the tape from the device to Chicago where it is processed by computers. If it turns out that fewer than 17 per cent of TVs were tuned in, the program is canceled — even though 17 per cent amounts to 8 million households. Other factors are also ignored, such as how many local stations carried the program, what else was airing on other channels, the weather, etc. But this system, which immediately killed off a number of intellectual programs not meant for mass audiences, was only introduced in the mid-1950s. That's why the first 10 years of American television were much richer in original and interesting programming — and stage productions from television theatres held a prominent place among them, greatly contributing to the development of TV aesthetics.

The first of them (the Kraft Theatre) was created back in 1947; in total, over 300 original television plays were written and produced between 1950 and 1955. A new generation of playwrights emerged. The most talented among them was considered to be Paddy Chayefsky, who was called "the

Chekhov of the Bronx." His works *Marty*, *The Wedding Breakfast*, *The Bachelor Party*, *Mama* stood out not only for their close attention to the lives of "ordinary" people and a subtle understanding of their psychology and everyday life, but also for an awareness of television's specific requirements. (This last point is of no small importance, especially in the U.S.: a playwright must always keep in mind that the action must fit into 52 minutes, that eight minutes are taken up by advertisements, which interrupt the show at least twice, and that the viewer must be engaged from the very beginning or else they'll switch the channel.)

Gradually, television theatre began to expand its themes, more frequently addressing social and political issues. Reginald Rose wrote, and Sidney Lumet directed for television, *Twelve Angry Men* — a play about the moral strength of a man who, in his fight for justice, managed to overcome the indifference of the other eleven. (Lumet later made a film of the same name, which still holds up beautifully on both large and small screens.) Martin Ritt directed *Man with a 10-Foot Reach* (the film version was entitled *Edge of the City*), where a black man was portrayed as a positive character. For the mid-1950s, this was already extremely bold and unusual in itself. Playwright Abby Mann wrote the television play *Judgement at Nuremberg*, which later became the basis for the well-known film by Stanley Kramer. The classics were staged as well — *The Cherry Orchard*, *Medea*, *Don Juan*.

Over time, a whole generation of capable directors emerged on television — Delbert Mann, Arthur Penn, John Frankenheimer, Robert Mulligan, Sidney Lumet, Martin Ritt — all of whom, without exception, were later lured away by Hollywood. Their departure was not only because cinema offered them greater opportunities, fame and money, but also because, starting in the mid-1950s, television theatre clear-

ly began to decline. Here's what John Frankenheimer wrote about it: "I don't think anyone left television for financial reasons. The only thing we wanted was to make good shows... But we started being told: 'You're not needed — what we need are film comedies.' So everyone left, everyone who had any value — directors, writers, producers. While theatre lasted, we were very happy. But it was over."*

Frankenheimer accurately identified the cause: the lifting of the Hollywood boycott against television in 1955. Realizing they couldn't defeat their competitor, the major Hollywood studios sold television a large portion of films made before 1948 and offered their sound stages for shooting TV films. A wave of old films flooded the small screen, many of which found a second life there. Westerns from the 1930s were especially successful, as a new generation of TV viewers — children and teenagers — were seeing them for the first time. The *Hopalong Cassidy* series became extremely popular. New episodes were also filmed for this series. But they now had to meet specific requirements: each film had to be no longer than 26 minutes so that with advertising it would make up a half-hour program. "Punchy" scenes were arranged in such a way that, despite the ads, the film would continue to hold the viewer's attention.

As a result, in terms of quality, TV westerns were even worse than mass-produced cinematic westerns. They had a maximum of close-ups and a minimum of action. The shots were long and static, and the dialogue endless. Because of this, westerns began to resemble bad stage plays and lost their main advantage — dynamism. It became harder to use stunt doubles — actor substitutions became immediately noticeable, as did the painted backdrops and scenery. The aging

* John Martin, "Television USA," *The Saturday Evening Post*, October 21, 1961, p. 23.

faces of many "stars" also did not enhance such spectacles. But children and teens didn't care about such subtleties. They were captivated by the non-stop action, fights and shootouts. The number of viewers for these programs rose to 50–60 million. And naturally, advertisers — interested in such a huge audience — began supporting these shows, not the television theatre aimed at a smaller group of connoisseurs. The last of the latter — *The Ninety-Minute Theatre* — died quietly and unnoticed.

Commerce forcefully invaded the television screen not only through films. There were countless cases of direct interference from companies that believed certain programs were harming their business interests. For example, when in one drama a grieving widow said to her friends, "Please don't bring flowers to my husband's funeral," the association of flower shop owners immediately filed a protest. The American Gas Association, which was a sponsor of the *Ninety-Minute Theatre*, demanded that Abby Mann remove the mention of gas chambers from his play *Judgement at Nuremberg*. Since Mann refused, the operator was instructed to simply mute the sound during that part of the broadcast.

There were also cases where commercial interference led to even uglier outcomes. In the early second half of the 1950s, quiz shows — TV trivia contests awarding cash prizes — became wildly popular with audiences. Initially, the prize was $64, but as the popularity of such shows grew, three zeroes were added to that number. Everything went well until reports of dishonest manipulations by the organizers began to leak into the press — manipulations that helped certain individuals win, not without compensation. One stand-in actress found a lost notebook containing all the questions and answers for an upcoming broadcast. Another case involved a retired quiz show "star" who wrote a letter to a newspaper

editor, plainly stating that she had been given the questions and answers in advance and had shared her winnings with certain people. Finally, the scandal erupted in full when a court managed to prove fraud in the case of Van Doren — a man whose correct answers had previously raised no doubts. What compelled a Cambridge graduate, a music professor at Columbia University and author of four monographs to risk his impeccable reputation remains unclear to this day. But no other reason seems more likely than the desire to make easy money.

In various ways, commerce was literally suffocating everything on television that had any connection to art. And although many channels continued to occasionally offer viewers fresh and interesting programs, the earlier flourishing of creativity never returned. Only one more period of growth lay ahead — this time in the documentary genre, which was closely tied to the changing political climate in the U.S. in the early 1960s.

The liberalization of the overall national climate during the election period, and then after President Kennedy came to power, was immediately reflected on American television. CBS (Columbia Broadcasting System) aired a documentary entitled *Harvest of Shame* (1960) as part of its "Reports" series —a shocking exposé about the conditions of seasonal workers in the U.S. It was even broadcast on Thanksgiving Day as Americans enjoyed the fruits of these miserable people's labour. The reporters followed the seasonal workers on their long journey in search of new work, accurately showing the hardship and monotony of their labour. They interviewed mothers forced to leave their children in rat-infested slums and parents who could only afford to buy milk for their kids once a week. They highlighted the contrast between the homes of these workers and the clean, electrified barns for

livestock located nearby. They compared how vehicles transporting animals stopped every four hours to give water and rest to the animals, while human workers rode in overcrowded buses for ten hours straight. The authors' point of view (producer David Lowe, script by Ed Murrow) was stated directly and unequivocally: they opposed the social system that condemned people to a life worse than that of animals.

Several programs also appeared that were aimed against segregation and racial prejudice. The most interesting among them was *The Children Were Watching*, produced for ABC (American Broadcasting Company) by Richard Leacock and Robert Drew using the cinéma vérité method. Viewers were immersed in the lives of two ordinary families in New Orleans — one black, where they anxiously awaited the consequences of school desegregation, and one white, where the parents had decided to send their daughter to school with black children. Then the racist mob was shown, ultimately preventing the girl from attending school. The mob was shown in detail — the camera focused on a boy listening closely as adults hurled racial slurs and threats. Then the frightened white girl reappeared on screen, now watching the angry mob from her window with fear. The title questioned: "What are children learning?" — set against the backdrop of the raging racist crowd. The final scene displayed an official statement: "There were minor disturbances this week in New Orleans..."

Leacock and Drew also made the documentary *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* in 1963. They placed their camera directly in John F. Kennedy's office and filmed his entire discussion with Alabama Governor George Wallace, a racist who was refusing to admit black students to the university. Kennedy's firmness and determination to enforce his decision made a strong impression on viewers.

A year earlier, in 1962, the same American Broadcasting

Company received an Emmy Award — television's equivalent of the Oscar — for the program *Walk in My Shoes*, which portrayed the life of black Americans in the U.S. The show featured many dialogues and debates, with interviews conducted with black individuals from a wide variety of social backgrounds. Many other programs broadcast during this period were also interesting: *Thunder on the Right* — about the far-right wing of American political groups, *Story of a Bookie Joint* — about an illegal betting ring in Boston, *Yankee — No!* — about attitudes towards North Americans in Latin America.

Around the same time, the new chairman of the Federal Communications Commission appointed by Kennedy, Newton Minow, began a campaign to improve the content of commercial television programming. "I invite you to sit down in front of your television set," he said in one of his speeches, "from the beginning of the broadcast day until it goes off the air — without a book, magazine or newspaper to distract you. I can assure you that you will observe a vast wasteland. You will see a procession of violence, stereotypical family sitcoms that are hard to believe in, sadism, murders, good and bad cowboys, detectives, gangsters... And endless commercials that shout, insult and impose themselves. But above all — boredom."*

Minow wanted to take the most decisive measures, up to and including revoking the government licenses of those who refused to change their programming. (In the U.S., they say that obtaining a television broadcast license is like getting permission to print money, since television company profits are enormous.)

The shot that ended President Kennedy's life also brought

* John Martin, "Television USA," *The Saturday Evening Post*, November 11, 1961, p. 66.

an end to both the hard-hitting documentary programming and these well-meaning efforts. Topical, sharp documentary programs began appearing less and less frequently on the small screen, increasingly giving way to pure entertainment. Even montage films that had previously addressed serious themes — the U.S. Navy's victory in the Second World War (*Victory at Sea*), work in the field of nuclear energy (*Three, Two, One, Go!*), Mark Twain's literary legacy (*The America of Mark Twain*) and others — were replaced by programs such as *Laughter, U.S.A.*, *Rolling Along with Fun*, *Circus*, *Cops and Robbers*, *Women's Beauty*. Television producer David Wolper, known for such interesting and serious films as *The Making of the President* and *Four Days in November*, began producing films about Hollywood (*Hollywood: The Golden Years*, *Hollywood: The Fabulous Era*, *Hollywood: Great Stars*) and biographical films about cinema and jazz stars — Maurice Chevalier, Benny Goodman, Sophia Loren. The main portion of TV programming was taken over by a multitude of variety shows — something like stage performances centred around a host's personality. The sensation of 1966 was *Batman*, the man-bat. The screen was soon filled with "regular" spies and "space" spies.

Television journalism increasingly took on an official, propagandistic tone.

For example, consider the 1971 program *What If the Dream Comes True?*. It was designed to counter those who wrote about the collapse of the American dream. On screen, a well-off family from a Detroit suburb appeared, unanimously stating that realizing the dream meant keeping up with or outpacing the Joneses. The main thing was material wealth, real estate, a car, a television — and if they had all of that, then the dream had come true. Yet it is precisely this reduction of the "American dream" to a narrow idea of material

success that progressive thinkers in the U.S. oppose.

Another program — *The Man from the Middle* (1970) — aimed to explore the issue of the "silent majority," which was especially relevant in the U.S. at the time. Three Irish-American families were invited to the studio. They shared their views on the Vietnam War, their attitude towards black Americans and the issue of violence. But the families were selected with a clear bias; their views were steeped in conformism and taken directly from newspaper editorials. The program lacked any kind of social or philosophical analysis.

In the late 1960s, Fred Friendly — one of the most talented American television reporters and head of the news department at CBS — entered into a conflict with management over what should be shown to viewers. (He describes this in detail in his book *Due to Circumstances Beyond Our Control...**) The immediate cause of the clash was a three-day hearing by the Senate committee on U.S. policy in Vietnam. Friendly insisted that it be broadcast to the public. But the company's leadership refused, airing the commercial action-comedy *I Love Lucy* for the fifth time instead. Their refusal to cover an issue of great public importance was justified, first, by the claim that "housewives wouldn't be interested,"** and second, by the unwillingness to sacrifice the revenue the company would lose by not running advertisements during those days. Thus, commercial and political motives — which often go hand in hand — combined to block the broadcast.

What this has led to is shown in a survey conducted by sociologist Louis Harris at the request of *Life* magazine. A total of 2,500 Americans aged 18 and older were interviewed, representing 36 million adult viewers in the U.S. Most of the

* Fred Friendly, *Due to Circumstances Beyond Our Control...*, New York, 1967.

** *Ibid*., p. 250.

responses boiled down to the following: "We watch television, but we like the programs less and less. As a rule, they're aimed at the mass audience, which means not at anyone in particular. Many entertainment programs leave viewers indifferent. Only the news and sports broadcasts are interesting. The rest are almost always boring. We watch them when there's nothing else to do."*

The report then includes a breakdown of viewing preferences by genre (in percentages).

Harris called the picture that emerged from the survey "a crisis in entertainment programming." As shown in the table, crime dramas, westerns, situation comedies and formulaic advertising-driven shows are becoming less and less popular. Two out of every three respondents said that "television often insults their intelligence."**

All of this could have been presented to readers by Marshall McLuhan had he not consciously distanced himself from analysing the content of television programming and tracking its evolution.

McLuhan clings so persistently to his "position of detachment" that he doesn't even touch on the content of children's and youth programming — though, as an educator, this issue ought to concern him above all. He limits himself to a simple observation: "Young people who have watched television for the past ten years have developed such a craving for participation in the spectacle that the rest of culture seems to them unreal and insignificant — and not only insignificant, but anaemic."*** Other sociologists have reached the same conclusions. American researcher Wilbur Schramm, in his book

* "But Do We Like What We Watch?" *Life*, September 10, 1971, no. 11, vol. 71, p. 41.

** *Ibid*, p. 42.

*** M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 358.

Television in the Lives of Our Children, notes that a survey conducted in San Francisco revealed that 40 per cent of children read no books aside from school textbooks — television successfully replaces them and without requiring any effort.* But once again, the central question is: what kind of participation is this, and what influence does it have on the psyche of a child? The nature of this influence is a major concern not only for parents but also for many media researchers.

For example, Joseph Klapper offers two striking examples.

In Boston, a nine-year-old boy told his father that his classmates were planning to give their teacher a box of poisoned chocolates for Christmas. The idea came from a television show in which a husband gave his wife poisoned candy and she died without ever learning who her killer was.

In Los Angeles, a housemaid caught a seven-year-old boy just as he was pouring crushed glass into a pot of soup. There was no malicious intent in his actions. He simply wanted to see whether it would "work" the way it did on television.**

What both cases have in common is that the child attempts to apply something seen on television to real-life situations, often failing to distinguish between fiction and reality. This particular aspect of a child's psyche is what most alarms psychiatrists. One of them, Dr. Fredric Wertham — who first studied the effects of comic books and later television on children — directly states that the constant exposure to crime and violence on TV has a much deeper effect on children's minds than people generally assume. "...Because for children, the television screen becomes a second reality."***

* Wilbur Schramm, *Television in the Lives of Our Children*, Toronto, 1961, p. 246.

** Joseph Klapper, *The Effects of Mass Communication*, pp. 140-141.

*** Frederic Wertham, "School for Violence," in *Violence and the*

But not all researchers of this phenomenon are as categorical as Dr. Wertham. Most often, one hears responses such as: "some mass media, in certain cases, when seen by certain people under certain circumstances, may produce some effects."*

Let's set aside the excessive number of reservations, which may be understandable in this case, where the consequences are difficult to measure and often become apparent only much later. Let's turn instead to specific facts and sociological studies.

Here are statistics presented by the already mentioned Dr. Schramm. If we take 100 hours of "children's time" on American television, then 18% of it is taken up by cartoons, 5% — comedies, 10% — other fiction films, 13% — westerns, 11% — detective stories, 2% — travel films. That's almost 60% of all programming. Only 15% is connected to reality. Half of that — the news — children don't pay attention to. So, only 7% remains. Seven hours out of a hundred!

Almost half of these hundred hours are filled with programs saturated with violence. According to Wilbur Schramm's calculations, in these 100 hours there were: 12 murders, 16 armed fights, 21 shootouts, 37 fistfights, one stabbing in the back, 4 suicide attempts (3 of them successful), 4 intentional or accidental falls from cliffs, 2 cars driving off the road, 2 attempted hit-and-runs on sidewalks, 2 lynchings, 2 robberies, a woman falling off a train, a beheading by guillotine and much more.**

Another sociologist, Head, back in 1954 analysed 200 television programs and discovered that murders were shown

Mass Media, ed. by Otto Larsen, New York, 1968, p. 38.

* Joseph Klapper, *The Effects of Mass Communication*, p. 4.

** Wilbur Schramm, *Television in the Lives of Our Children*, p. 138, 139, 140.

22 times more often than they occurred in real life. The National Association of Educational Broadcasters used special counters to record every act or threat of violence on New York TV shows over a one-week period for three years. It turned out, for example, that in 1954 the number of such acts had nearly doubled compared to the previous year. "During all three of these years, the number of violent acts was higher during children's programming hours than at other times,"* concluded the association in its report.

Dr. Ralph Banay, a psychiatrist from Columbia University, presented the broadcast schedule for just one day of television. "At 9 a.m., Hopalong Cassidy wipes out a gang of bandits. On another channel at the same time, there's a show about Buffalo Bill, who is accused of murder. At 11 — a show about insurance fraud. At 1 p.m. — a story about a child's kidnapping. At 1:30 — a western with cattle theft and the sheriff getting shot in the back. At 2:15 — revenge by three pirates. At 3 p.m. — another western packed with violence. At 5 — two bandits blow up a train. At 5:30 — an orphan boy runs away from the authorities. At 6 — a cowboy detective. At 6:30 — *The Black Ghost*. At 7 — a western featuring vicious sabotage. At 8 — a western showing the hero's brutal methods of governing a cattle region. After that comes a safe-cracking story. At 10 p.m., international police appear on screen." Dr. Banay did not list the remaining shows of the day, since most children are already asleep by 10 p.m. Concluding his testimony at the Senate subcommittee on juvenile delinquency on April 6, 1955, he said: "If the saying is true that prison is a school of crime, then it seems to me that, for emotionally excitable teenagers, television is a school of crime preparation."**

* Joseph Klapper, *op. cit.*, pp. 136–137.

** McCann, "Television and Juvenile Delinquency," in *Film and Society*, ed. by Richard Dyer, New York, 1964, pp. 169-170.

Of course, it is not always possible to trace a direct causal link: film-TV-press -> child -> crime. There are also other, more hidden but no less serious consequences and effects that the endless depiction of violence has on the psyche of children. Among them is the development of aggressive tendencies, which may later surface in certain situations. Psychologist Albert Bandura describes in the article "What Television Violence Can Do to Your Child?"* an experiment he conducted together with colleagues at the psychology lab of Stanford University.

Children were divided into four groups. The first was shown a real-life situation: an adult attacked a large rubber doll shaped like a black child — hitting it on the head with a hammer, sitting on it, pinching its nose, tossing it into the air, saying things like: "Let's hit him!" "Let's smack his nose!" and so on. The second group saw the same scenario filmed. The third — on a TV screen. The fourth was a control group — they saw nothing.

Afterwards, each child, having first been mildly irritated, was placed in a room with "tools of aggression" — a hammer, the same rubber doll, toy guns and peaceful toys — dishes, pencils, dolls, animal figurines. Each child spent 20 minutes in this setting while psychiatrists observed their behaviour through a special hidden window in the wall. The results showed that exposure to violence increased aggressive tendencies in children. The first three groups displayed nearly double the aggression of the control group. Moreover, the viewing experience provided children with specific models of aggressive behaviour. This doesn't mean, of course, that the child will immediately run off to fight or kill after watching. But if the

* Albert Bandura, "What Television Violence Can Do to Your Child?" *Look*, October 22, 1963, pp. 46-52.

child is irritated — as was done in the experiment — their aggression will be higher and largely imitative.

The child's psyche is also negatively affected by the fear they experience when witnessing various forms of cruelty. As L. Vygotsky once wrote: "If a child is taught from an early age to believe in 'the boogeyman,' in the beggar with a sack, in a wizard, in a stork that brings babies... the child either becomes frightened or is drawn into this magical world, but never remains passive towards it. In dreams or desires, under the blanket or in a dark room, in sleep or in fear, he always reacts to these images, reacting in an extremely heightened manner, and because this system of reactions is fixed upon a completely fantastical and false foundation, the child is systematically raised in improper and false behaviour."*

What would that psychologist say if he had lived to see the time when children, instead of the "boogeyman," are shown someone slicing a pretty girl's face with a knife while threatening to cut out her tongue, or dragging two men face-down over a rocky road, or preparing to stab a woman's eye with a sharp icicle? Even back in 1958, three psychiatrists — Hilda Himmelweit, A.N. Oppenheim and Pamela Vance — conducted an experiment with 1,854 children aged 10-11 and 13-14 who watched television programs. Only 7 out of 1,000 children said they were afraid of westerns since they already knew the hero would come out safe and sound and that the ending would be happy. But almost all the children admitted they were scared of refined cruelty — memories of which haunted them at night.** Not only children, but even adults would probably have trouble sleeping after watching a "baseball game" in which the ball is a severed human head with an eyeball hanging from a string... No wonder the number of

* L.S. Vygotsky, *Educational Psychology*, Moscow, 1926, p. 267.

** Joseph Klapper, *The Effects of Mass Communication*, pp. 144-146.

nervous and emotionally unstable children in the U.S. is rising sharply. During a nationwide medical screening of American schoolchildren in 1955, it was found that such children made up 10 per cent — that is, 2 million.*

And finally, one last consideration. Two thousand years ago, Plato asked whether it was acceptable to let children listen to stories that distort reality and admire characters they would come to despise as adults. If that issue was relevant in ancient times, what can be said of today? On the American TV screen, the adult world is presented to children as cruel and unintellectual. Never is it shown how people actually earn a living; in most cases, the heroes are lawbreakers — and they're typically framed in a romantically appealing light. It's hardly surprising that crime and cruelty begin to seem to children like normal components of adult life. The basic understanding of what is acceptable and what is decent is lost. Values and ideals are formed that are very far removed from the laws of a civilized world. As a result, people are raised like those who did not come to the aid of a girl screaming desperately for help as she was stabbed to death on a central street in New York — fifteen stab wounds. Or like those who shouted at a would-be jumper on the Brooklyn Bridge: "Jump!", "What's the matter, coward?", "Chicken!" This is the outcome of a media-driven conviction that cruelty towards others is nothing more than entertainment.

The alarming development of these trends in television and comics even forced the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency to take up the issue. After three years of studying the available material, it reached the following conclusions:

"Violence, crime, brutality and other forms of anti-social

* Leo Bogart, *The Age of Television*, New York, 1956, p. 3.

behaviour continue to dominate the fictional programs appearing on the nation's television screens."

"These are shown primarily during hours when the majority of viewers are children."

"Testimony and compelling research findings reveal a direct link between the portrayal of violence and crime on television and anti-social behaviour among young viewers."

"It is clear that television — whose influence on viewers exceeds that of any other form of mass communication — is shaping the character, attitudes and behaviour of America's youth."*

It would be difficult to offer a more comprehensive conclusion to the "participation in the spectacle" that Marshall McLuhan describes with such epic calm.

* * *

Perhaps the most debated issue in American television today is advertising. Some say there's too much of it and it's overly loud and intrusive, while others argue that "commercial advertising is more interesting than many entertainment programs."**

McLuhan addresses this issue as well. He believes that television advertising clearly illustrates the validity of his core theoretical position — "the medium is the message." The lack of plot, the immediate emotional impact on viewers through a short scene, rapid editing, sharp angles and abrupt transitions — all of these, McLuhan claims, are defining features of television's stylistic approach. In his view, this style has already spread beyond television into literature (*In Cold Blood*

* "Crime Shows on TV — A Federal Crackdown Coming," in *Violence and the Mass Media*, pp. 210-211.

** "But Do We Like What We Watch?" p. 42.

by Truman Capote) and cinema (Richard Lester's films *The Knack* and *A Hard Day's Night*, among others).*

There are two significant inaccuracies that can be immediately identified in these statements.

First, in the case of such a truly exceptional phenomenon as Lester's films, the roots are entirely different from those of television. His use of comic absurdity, the illogical actions of characters — these are techniques long employed in literature and theatre to satirically turn reality inside out, thus making its true absurdities more apparent. One could speak of the traditions of Swift, Rabelais, Voltaire, medieval farce — but not television. As for *In Cold Blood*, this example is completely irrelevant here. That social-psychological study has nothing to do — either in form or content — with television style or television advertising.

Such arbitrary associations are, in fact, very typical of McLuhan. In *Understanding Media*, he name-drops everyone from Picasso, Joyce and Proust to Mallarmé and many others. This display of erudition is aimed at an audience that has never read these writers, never seen their paintings, and most importantly — never thinks deeply about the essence of literature or art. Because as soon as a knowledgeable person comes across these associations, the difference between actual artistic phenomena and McLuhan's interpretations becomes glaringly obvious.

Second, he attempts to pass off the style of advertising thinking — which forms the foundation of his books *Understanding Media*, *The Medium Is the Message* and *Culture Is Our Business* — as television's stylistic mode. These books are prime examples of this very type of thinking — vivid, surprising, completely unsubstantiated, where flashy form masks

* Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Massage*, pp. 126, 128.

the illogical and covertly manipulative nature of the content. This very content, which, no matter how you frame it, is at the core of all advertising — television advertising included — and fundamentally contradicts McLuhan's thesis that "the medium is the message." In reality, his thesis ends up serving as a theoretical justification for the primary method of modern advertising and propaganda — that is, to stealthily implant certain ideas and images into the minds of people who don't suspect they are being subtly manipulated.

To support this point, let's look at the actual practice of advertising on American television.

Since the funding of television programming in the U.S. lies in the hands of advertisers, it's natural that they have the final say in selecting which program will be interrupted by a given ad. As we've seen, motivated solely by their narrow commercial interests, they have killed off everything original and genuinely artistic. And following those same interests, they are constantly refining the quality of advertising, often making it quite engaging. (Sixty seconds of TV time costs $40,000-$60,000, so it must be used with maximum impact.)

Gone are the days when advertising was built like this: an actor playing a gas station attendant criticizes Shell gasoline. Another actor, portraying a car owner, passionately defends it. Or a well-known TV actor asks a woman carrying two enormous suitcases if she's going on a trip. "No," she replies, "my sons bring me their dirty laundry from college every week." The actor promptly shows her a box of the new laundry detergent "Whiz" and suggests she try it.

Today's TV advertising is livelier, more witty, more "televisual" (if there is a term like "cinematic," then "televisual" should surely also exist). For example, a goalkeeper from a famous football team that just won the national championship — a man of athletic build and striking appearance — is

placed next to the new Chevrolet Nova model. A voiceover humourously compares the strengths of the football player and the car, switching between the two on screen. The comedic effect immediately wins over the viewers' hearts to this new car.

Or, for a few seconds, the once-famous boxer Joe Louis appears on screen — a man known across America for his ability to burn through massive amounts of money. "Where were you when I needed you most?" he asks mournfully, addressing the agent from the advertised insurance company.

Nowadays, American commercial advertising often competes with entertainment programming. For instance, actress Jan Miner, who created the advertising persona of the manicurist Madge in the commercials for a cosmetics company, is now set to play that same character in full-length feature programs financed by the same company — Palmolive.

But whether good or bad, advertising — when it interrupts programming — primarily disrupts the emotional and aesthetic impact. There is a certain tactlessness in interrupting a news anchor reporting on a plane crash or the war in Vietnam with an ad for shampoo or a new deodorant. In artistic programming, especially televised drama where narrative continuity and atmosphere are crucial, such intrusions immediately kill the entire artistic effect. Secondly, alongside the promotion of consumer goods, various ideological messages are also propagated.

Take for example the sponsored TV film *Beyond Space* about the future use of outer space. It promotes not only space technology, but also the idea of the necessity of free enterprise in space. Or consider a commercial for the detergent "Biz," which unfolds as follows: an actor looks in astonishment at a huge pile of dirty laundry in front of a young woman. When asked where it all came from, she proudly points to

her eleven children and mentions that another is on the way. Congratulating the mother for her service to the country, the actor offers her a new box of detergent. So along with "Biz," the commercial sells the idea of increasing the population — a pressing issue in the U.S. where the birth rate is declining.

There are also frequent cases of consumer deception in advertising — particularly dangerous when it involves medication. For instance, a pharmaceutical company once advertised its drug "Excedrin" by showing a housewife burning laundry while ironing, her toddler spilling milk and her older child falling off a tricycle and getting hurt. "Fatigue! Fatigue! Fatigue!" proclaims the voiceover after each mishap, suggesting she take two Excedrin tablets, which supposedly act twice as fast and effectively as aspirin. She does — and everything is suddenly fine. But this isn't just a matter of clumsy storytelling. A federal commission determined the ad was false: Excedrin was not only no better than aspirin, but also came with harmful side effects.

There have been worse cases. *The New York Times* TV critic Jack Gould wrote an article condemning broadcasts promoting vitamins hosted for preschool children by Dr. Frances Horwich. She showed how pretty the red pills were, how easy they were to swallow and reminded children that the next time they were at the pharmacy, they should make sure their mum buys the right bottle. Gould noted that Dr. Horwich had gone too far, allowing commercial interests to outweigh her responsibility to the children whose trust she enjoyed. Children should be warned against all pills — not being able to read, they might accidentally ingest potent medication or their mother's sleeping pills. And whether a child even needs vitamins is a decision that must be made by a doctor, not television. This is where the moral and ethical aspect of the issue becomes apparent — particularly in political advertising.

As early as the 1930s, there was heated debate in the U.S. about whether it was appropriate to air dramatized political content during election campaigns. The concern was that voters' decisions should be based on reason — not stirred by passion, emotion or prejudice. Nonetheless, the practice quickly took root — first on radio and later on television.

By the 1952 presidential election, political ads were already using questionable emotional tactics. One such ad featured two American soldiers — Korean War veterans — lying on the ground, discussing the futility and senselessness of the conflict. A gunfight breaks out and one soldier is killed. The other, in despair, stands up and is shot down as well. A voiceover then declares: "Vote Republican!" (The Republicans opposed continuing the war.)

These early, clumsy and artistically weak attempts were soon replaced by professionally produced ads with powerful emotional pull. In 1964, during the race between Lyndon Johnson and Barry Goldwater, a ten-second television ad aired just once — but it had a massive impact across America. A sweet little girl plucks petals from a daisy, counting them aloud. Suddenly, a male voice cuts in, counting down: ...six, five, four, three... As he reaches zero, a massive hydrogen bomb explosion fills the screen, followed by a voice urging viewers to vote for the Democrats and their candidate, Johnson. Beyond its enormous emotional power, the ad also contained a degree of misinformation. For all his reactionary views, Goldwater never advocated using nuclear weapons — only opposed a ban on nuclear testing.

The Republicans responded with their own ad, *The Choice*, portraying life in America under Johnson: riots in the streets, moral collapse and the breakdown of societal norms. But the film lacked the artistry of its predecessor and went largely unnoticed.

In this way, the artistic merits and aesthetic power of television advertising became important tools in political warfare. By provoking emotional reactions — fear, anger, disgust — politicians attempt to sway the opinions of voters. The American press repeatedly pointed out that Johnson's victory was due in no small part to effective television advertising.

The true power of television advertising was demonstrated especially clearly during the 1966 campaign for the governorship of New York State. Nelson Rockefeller, running for a fourth term, had slim chances of re-election. Voters could not forgive his broken promise to lower local taxes. But with immense wealth at his disposal, Rockefeller brought television advertising to his side. A full program of ten-second commercials was developed, portraying the former governor as a benefactor who had used taxpayers' money for their own good. These short spots were crafted with notable inventiveness. Here are two examples.

Viewers, as if sitting in the front seat of a car, see an endless expanse of highway. A voiceover assures them that if all the roads built and repaired under Governor Rockefeller were laid end to end, they would reach all the way to Hawaii. The road ends, a beach appears, Hawaiian music plays. The car turns around and drives back. "To Hawaii and back," says the voice confidently.

In another ad, a toy fish appears. A hand labelled "Press" moves in with a microphone. The fish is "interviewed," revealing how much better it is to swim in water now cleaned thanks to Governor Rockefeller's initiative.

Then, as the campaign entered its final phase, a new set of similar ten-second spots targeted Rockefeller's opponent. For instance, one clip showed the sponsor of the ad saying: "Frank O'Connor is running for governor. He thinks New York's subway should be free. Guess who's going to pay for that?"

Or: "If you want crime to rise, vote for Frank O'Connor!"*

Despite the fact that the entire advertising campaign distorted reality — Rockefeller hadn't built 10,600 miles of roads (the distance from New York to Hawaii and back), hadn't reduced crime and the number of cleaned bodies of water was minimal — this well-crafted TV blitz worked. Rockefeller was re-elected as governor of New York. But it cost him $4.3 million, while his opponent had only $278,000. Once again, the power of money, media technology and talent — the foundation of the "style of our time" — was on full display.

McLuhan writes extensively about "the power of technology to create its own world," the very "imaginary life that has long been the unreachable dream of Western poets, artists and creative people in general."** He does not hide the fact that the new "environment" is not a real one, but an artificial one — fabricated by the mass media. So what is this environment and what effect does it have on people?

More than a decade before the "prophet of the electronic age," Austrian scholar Gunther Anders defined the essence of this "environment" brilliantly in his book *The Obsolescence of Man*. "When a reproduced event becomes more important than the real one, the line between being and appearance, between reality and its representation, is erased." And further: "If one's experience of the world is guided by such serial production... the world disappears and people's knowledge becomes idealistic, disconnected from any real foundation."*** This critical philosophical insight — drawn from the overall trajectory of television entertainment in the West — is a defining trait of bourgeois "mass" culture around the world.

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* Robert McNeil, *The People Machine*, New York, 1968, p. 217.

** M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 79, 336.

*** Günther Anders, "The World as Phantom and Matrix," in *Problems of Television and Radio*, no. 2, Moscow, 1971, p. 141.

What does this mean in practice?

The average viewer sitting in front of the screen (it is well known, for instance, that children and teenagers in the U.S. watch up to 24 hours of television a week) watches everything in sequence. Footage of the Vietnam War is followed by detective films, political ads use the same techniques as commercial ones, real clips of the first moon landing are followed by a science fiction action flick and political candidates behave like actors. Gradually, the viewer begins to feel like it's all just one endless spectacle. The boundary between what is real and what is fabricated starts to blur — and along with it, the viewer's capacity for genuine emotional response to actual tragedies.

In this context, it is worth examining Americans' attitudes towards the Vietnam War, which — due to constant television coverage — came to be known in the U.S. as the "living room war." Day after day, viewers were shown real footage of military operations. Here's a marine unit using lighters to set fire to Vietnamese huts. Here's a "body count" on a battlefield — a tally of dead enemies. Here's a line of American soldiers advancing, dropping one by one under enemy fire...

And despite the undeniable reality of what was shown, most viewers processed it as just another action movie — gunfire here, gunfire there. Moral judgement was absent — no guilt, no outrage, no revulsion. What was seen seemed merely uninteresting and viewers simply changed the channel — switching to a fictional world, more colourful and more entertaining than the real one.

Hence the widespread emphasis on entertainment value which permeates all American television programming. In and of itself, this is by no means a bad thing. When a science documentary about the search for the statue of Aphrodite by

Praxiteles is framed like a detective story under the intriguing title *In Search of the Goddess of Love,* there is nothing inherently wrong with that. Entertainment always plays a major role in attracting the masses to popular science and technology through art. This approach is widely used not only in the West but also in our own country — one need only recall the film *The Blues Attack the Planet* about the swamping of bodies of water, among others.

But that is not the issue here. What's at stake are phenomena such as the political advertising discussed earlier, which borrows all the aesthetic techniques of commercial advertising; politicians competing with comedians and show hosts on television; candidates being promoted for public office based on their photogenic appeal; and the tendency of audiences to prefer slickly presented fictional material over less flashy, uncontrollable real-life events.

This creates a desire to "tidy up," rehearse and pre-stage real events. Organizers of demonstrations, rallies and large public gatherings began to notify TV studios in advance so that the coverage could be made more entertaining with pre-filmed dynamic shots. These reports are often supplemented with staged scenes, subtly inserted into otherwise documentary material.

French playwright Claude Ollier reflected this dangerous trend in his television play *Murder,* in which the death of a head of state is pre-planned by a TV studio in pursuit of sensational content.

Even political debates — though appearing spontaneous — are now meticulously rehearsed in advance. For example, as mentioned by Joe McGinniss in *The Selling of the President 1968,* candidates prepared thoroughly for televised press conferences, rehearsing their answers multiple times and discussing every possible question with advisors beforehand. Like-

wise, Robert MacNeil recounts in *The People Manipulators* how Senator Robert Kennedy lost a televised debate on the Vietnam War to Ronald Reagan (then campaigning for governor of California) only because Reagan had his staff prepare a full script, carefully balancing serious and humorous moments, and rehearsed it using all his actor's tools.

All of this makes such broadcasts smooth and polished — but deprives them of what matters most: the feeling of a genuine conversation taking shape right before the viewer's eyes.

In the name of sensationalism and entertainment, ethical concerns are often sacrificed, and essential truths forgotten. In 1970, a program entitled *Hitler and His Henchmen* was aired on American television. It was based on an interview with Albert Speer, former nazi Minister of Armaments, who had come to the U.S. after serving 20 years in Spandau prison. On Speer's conscience are the lives of hundreds of thousands of Russians, Poles, Ukrainians, Jews and others who were deported to work in Germany.

The interviewer, Charles Collingwood, didn't even mention this fact. The conversation had the tone of two Second World War veterans reminiscing about old times. Speer offered only a brief regret about what happened in the concentration camps, saying, "I was advised not to look into them, so I didn't." He then launched into extended anecdotes about the nazi leadership — Hitler, Goring, Goebbels and others — and their cheerful, wild lifestyles. (Newsreel footage was shown for illustration.) This group of jolly Bavarians appeared not at all terrifying, and for younger viewers — unfamiliar with history — the takeaway might well have been: What exactly were these guys accused of, anyway?

At one point, when asked why he didn't join the generals' plot against Hitler, Speer replied, "It's against my principles to kill people!" (!!!) Even then, the interviewer failed to press further, never clarifying to viewers how, under Speer's authority, thousands died from forced labour.

Thus, instead of real historical events, viewers were presented with a fabricated world, completely detached from the truth. Instead of terrifying criminals responsible for the deaths of millions during the Second World War, the screen was filled with eccentric partygoers whose main concern seemed to be inventing new amusements.

The same manipulative tactics are used in covering major domestic issues in the U.S. After the government called for attention to the so-called "silent majority" — the claimed moral backbone of the nation — all American media, including television, began showcasing this phenomenon. However, the coverage was not analytical but framed from propagandistic, official positions.

For example, the program *The White Middle Class,* aired on October 3, 1969, by the American Broadcasting Company. For two hours, host David Susskind gave the floor to five typical Americans — not bigots, not religious fanatics, not prudes, but "ordinary" people. Their brief biographical data:

Mike Giordiano, 47 years old, factory mechanic, father of 9 children. Annual income about $8,500.

Frank Mrak, 44 years old, employee at an employment agency, annual income $10,000.

Paul Corbett, 40 years old, traveling salesman, 6 children, annual income $9,000.

Vincent de Tanphills, 37 years old, insurance agency employee, two children, $9,000–10,000 annual income.

Peter Brady, 30 years old, truck driver, 5 children, annual income between $8,000 and $9,000.

Brief excerpts from their statements.

On the Vietnam War and the arms race:

"$77 billion for weapons? I'm all for it because it's for our protection" (Corbett).

"I absolutely trust the Pentagon. Its employees are qualified enough to set their own budget. I don't care if it's $100 or $110 billion" (Mrak).

"We should drop the atomic bomb" (Corbett).

"I'm against the war in Vietnam, but I'm not a dove. I'm against it because I fought in the Second World War and realized that you have to fight to win. I'm against the fact that we're fighting half-heartedly" (Mrak).

And when the host asked whether they thought the US should have started the war at all, they all unanimously answered: "No!"*

The participants also spoke on the protest movement, on the question of Black Americans, racial prejudice and integration, on pensions for the disabled and elderly. And they took a negative stance on all these issues troubling modern America.

Mike Giordiano spoke somewhat hysterically: "All I want is to be left alone. I don't ask anyone for anything... Every time I turn on the TV, they're telling me how bad Black people have it, how little kids fight rats in the slums. I don't want to feel guilty. I just want to be left alone."

"It's all nonsense that for 200 or 300 years we, the whites, have been unfair to the blacks" (Giordiano).

"All federal money allocated for aid programs to the poor ends up in the pockets of corrupt politicians" (V. de Tanphills).

"Liberals have ruined decent black people. They were happy before all this noise began" (Corbett).

* Harlan Ellison, *The Glass Teat*, New York, 1969, pp. 248-251.

"Billy Graham says the student protest movement is the result of communist actions..." (Mrak).*

These reactionary philistines are who television presents as ordinary people. To understand the manipulation at play here, we need to briefly consider the myth of the "common man," which for a long time was a major positive force in American literature and art. Let's recall films like *A Face in the Crowd* or *The Senator*, where simple American guys expose the nefarious schemes of cunning politicians and achieve justice. Or *Boomerang*, where a similar simple guy — a prosecutor — achieves the acquittal of an innocent man. Many such examples could be cited. However naive or artistically unconvincing these portrayals may have been, they taught Americans to believe that "ordinary" guys are the backbone of democracy and that their opinions on various issues serve as a model to follow.

This TV program employs the currently popular myth in Western philosophy and sociology of a "unified middle class." The essence of this theory is that in modern bourgeois industrial society, the working class disappears as such, loses its class identity and becomes integrated with the bourgeois strata into a single "middle class," which has its own gradations — lower, middle and upper. The working class, supposedly at the lowest level, is said to focus only on climbing this ladder and has no interest in class struggle. Thus, a society of "social harmony" is created.

The fallacy of this theory has already been discussed in the critique of Marcuse's sociological views. What's important to note here is that this myth allowed the program's creators to portray well-off, reactionary-minded philistines as representatives of all segments of American society — including

* *Ibid*., pp. 254-255.

the working class. These specimens of the "silent majority" vote for the most reactionary candidates, believing in a politics of force as a cure-all. They have no compassion — not for the elderly, nor the disabled — believing that no one should ever receive social assistance under any circumstances. These are people who don't want to know anything that doesn't directly concern them. These are the kind of people Bertolt Yashensky spoke of when he said: "Beware the indifferent — they do not kill or betray, but only with their silent consent do betrayal and murder exist on Earth." It is with their tacit or overt approval that racial discrimination thrives and public morality declines.

But these people have nothing in common with the true, ordinary working people of America.

The portrayal of an imaginary world and fictional characters is present in all genres of American television and is particularly characteristic of dramatic programming. Women, in particular, have not fared well in this regard. In shows like *Skirt Junction*, *Mothers-in-Law*, *Family Affair*, *That Girl*, *Bewitched* and others, a stereotypical image is created of the happy little busybody — constantly giving birth to children and endlessly marvelling at the wonderful qualities of laundry detergent. The only thing the television housewife is capable of is tearing herself away from baking a pie to walk outside with a sign demanding that schoolchildren be allowed to put on the annual musical.

But where are the women who participate in protest movements and are beaten by police just like the men?

Where are those who marched in 40-degree heat through the roads of the Imperial Valley to protest the lowering of wages for grape pickers?

Where are the women who are doctors, lawyers, teachers? The television image of a woman is that of a consumer and

keeper of the domestic hearth — not a full-fledged human being, as modern women actually are.

In this sense, so-called "family shows," which have flooded American television, are telling. Their relation to real life is well conveyed by a cartoon published in *Life* magazine. Children sit in a car under the rain with a flat tire while their father, drenched in sweat, fixes it. In response to their complaints, he angrily says, "Don't you understand this is real life? We can't switch to another channel and escape the discomfort."

Shows like *Father Knows Best*, *All in the Family*, *My Three Sons*, *Portia Faces Life* and others have nothing in common with real American families. No one suffers, no one gets angry, no one gets spanked — everything is glowing and perfect. Or there's the other extreme: these "soap opera" families (the term "soap" is often used by Americans to mean fake, as such families usually appear in advertising shows) are injected with trendy themes — depravity, nymphomania, murder. And between these two poles, there is nothing. So where are the real American families — the ones who live differently, face financial difficulties, argue and make up? Families where the father is neither a fool nor a sage? And the mother has neither overly scrubbed floors nor a criminal record? These questions, raised by American critic Joan Barthel in an article for *Life* magazine,* remain unanswered.

From show to show, the same standard conflicts are repeated — ones close to the spiritual world of the average viewer. An illegitimate child who doesn't know their parents. An accident leading to blindness. A person with black ancestry pretending to be white. Marital infidelity and eventual reconciliation. Situations where people are on the verge of life and death. And so on and so forth.

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* Joan Barthel, "Notes in a Viewer's Album," *Life*, September 10, 1971, no. 11, p. 65.

For example, here are the misfortunes that befell the heroine of the series *General Hospital* — a nurse. The actress Emily McLaughlin, who played this role, describes it this way: "I lost two babies — one due to miscarriage, the other was stillborn. I carried the last one for 11 months and suffered through ten days of labour. I divorced my husband, Phil, and married Dr. Prentiss, who was in a wheelchair and died in it. A man named Tom and I were accused of his murder. I remarried my first husband, who was then accused of murdering my adopted daughter. Phil fled to South America and was presumed dead in a plane crash. But one viewer called the producers and said Phil wasn't dead — she saw him just the other day in an unemployment line in Hollywood. Thinking Phil was dead, I got married again, but he returned under a different name and I ended up with two husbands. Phil got involved with a student nurse and got her pregnant. Then he got into another accident and became mute."*

This piling on of melodramatic horrors can hardly be considered a depiction of real life.

Equally far from reality are the romantic stories which are also an integral part of American television programming. Even O. Henry, in his short story *An Hour of Perfection*, described the stirring romantic adventures of John Hopkins — a low-level office worker, bored in his spare time in his tiny apartment with a ficus plant, a flea-ridden terrier and a petty-bourgeois wife. His source of heroism was cheap novels. But already by the early 1920s, this function of escapism had passed to cinema, and since the 1950s — to television. Escapism — a term meaning retreat from reality — has now become a key prerogative of this medium, which has absorbed much of the old cinematic content and now produces similar

* Louis Botto, "That Family Sure Has Its Share of Problems," *Look*, September 7, 1971, no. 18, vol. 35, pp. 64-65.

material itself.

The content of escapist shows rarely goes beyond entertainment. Fictional heroes and heroines are shown against a backdrop of luxury and carefree living. They go through love affairs, travel, attend all sorts of parties — essentially, they live in a world where there's no room for routine or hardship. This pleases the audience, is easily digested by them, requires no thinking and gradually screen life becomes more real for many viewers than actual life itself.

In such works, everything banal, average and simplified is encouraged. Primitive distinctions between good and evil, one-dimensional character stereotypes, formulaic plots and random coincidences dominate the narrative structure. And in stylistic terms — the same simplifications, endless repetitions, rehashings, explanations. In serial television programs, key episodes are repeated several times.

These repetitions, uniformity and omnipresence of modern "mass culture" tend to trigger automatic reactions and weaken the power of individual resistance.

Moreover, escapist content has developed its own set of clichés and standards, which also instil false ideas about life and human relationships in viewers. Naturally, a show entitled *Love in a Goldfish Bowl* or *Love on the Run* can hardly claim to seriously explore the theme — most often, it is reduced to a banal melodrama or an equally banal comedy. Portraying love in isolation from the life context that surrounds it often helps divert viewers' attention from social issues and deliberately cultivates social apathy.

It was this transformation of any social problem into a personal one that American critic Lester Asheim identified as the first law of any escapist spectacle. The other three, according to him, are the following: evil is personified, the sensational and unusual are emphasized against a backdrop of the

normal and typical, and finally, there is the triumph of the happy ending — a purely automatic resolution, like a *deus ex machina* in ancient tragedy.*

It must be noted immediately that the personification of evil in the image of a villain is only one side of the issue. The other — or rather, the first and main one — is the hero who embodies all the positive qualities. The image of such a hero is both real and ideal — he seems to face real life, yet stands above it. Because if viewers do not find points of connection with him, there will be no identification between the person sitting in the audience and the character on screen, and the entire impact of the hero will be lost. Therefore, everything is shown "as in real life," only slightly exaggerated. Then such a hero becomes a kind of "alter ego" for the viewer, who seeks to imitate him in every way. This explains why the tragic hero, who is to be pitied, and the comic hero, who is to be laughed at, has been replaced by the sympathetic hero — one who evokes compassion and complete understanding from the audience, yet in essence is quite far removed from real Americans.

This imaginary escapist world is by no means as harmless as the apologists of "mass culture" try to portray it. It not only alienates people from culture but also from politics and public life. As if stuffing their ears with cotton, many American TV viewers manage to ignore both political crises and tense social situations by immersing themselves entirely in an illusory, fantastical world.

In the interesting realist film *Five Easy Pieces* (1971, directed by Bob Rafelson), there is a scene where the main character — an intelligent, ironic young man named George — comes to visit his colleague, whose wife is sitting on the

* Gilbert Seldes, *The New Mass Media Challenge to a Free Society*, Washington, 1968, p. 48.

couch, eyes glued to the television.

"Your mother died!" George says.

No response, only the rhythmic motion of jaws chewing gum.

"Your house is on fire!"

Still nothing.

"Your child was killed!"

Same result.

This hypnotic effect is especially frightening because it occurs on a massive, unprecedented scale. The consumers of such culture are not only millions of people sitting on couches at home but also those filling the many halls of movie theatres.

IDEOLOGICAL AND AESTHETIC STEREOTYPES OF COMMERCIAL FILM PRODUCTION

So who are the viewers watching television and going to the movies? Who constitutes the mass that consumes this mass cultural product? French scholar Edgar Morin, in his foundational work *The Spirit of the Times*, characterizes "mass culture" as the culture of a new social stratum that has emerged within the industrial society of the capitalist West. "This new stratum," writes Morin, "shares common values in the realm of consumer goods, particularly cultural ones. In this stratum with various cultural traditions, petty-bourgeois models clearly predominate — they give mass culture its final character."* In general, Morin asserts, "mass culture" is the culture of the new middle class — petty-bourgeois in character and increasingly setting the tone and colour of modern life.

However, Morin's framework is too narrow to encompass the whole picture.

By following the facts rather than a sociological schema, we come to the conclusion that the consumption of "mass culture" is by no means the exclusive prerogative of only the petty-bourgeois "middle class." That is why the conclusion reached by the Soviet researcher of this issue, Y. Levada, is much more accurate. He views "mass culture" "as a product and possession of the entire system of modern, highly developed, technically advanced capitalist society, and not of any particular part or group of it." It encompasses "not some specific group within society, but its undifferentiated mass of consumers." "The boundaries of the consumer mass... do not

* Edgar Morin, *The Spirit of the Times*, Paris, 1962, p. 50.

coincide... with the framework of socio-economic classes or with differences in income, education levels, etc."*

But how is it that such a diverse mass of people fits into one and the same standardized consumer mould? This is where the problem of the leveling of individuality arises — a problem that in recent years has become key to understanding the mechanisms of influence of "mass culture."

First and foremost — through the unification of taste. American sociologist Ernest van den Haag, in an article with the telling title "Dissent in a Decadent Society," rightly noted: "The mass media must conform to the average standards of taste. They do not serve individualization or the improvement of taste."**

The magical commercial formula "The customer is always right," when transferred to the realm of culture, has led to unfortunate consequences. Especially because the creators of "mass culture" not only cater to the public's tastes but also consciously shape them. This shaping begins in early childhood, where, as American writer Margaret St. Clair showed in her story *The Consumers*,*** children are taught to like what others like, to love the newest thing because it is considered the best. Then, as the child grows and learns to read, a flood of comics will descend on them — and together with television and children's magazines, they will train the child to enjoy only action, not reflection; superheroes, not intellectuals; decisiveness, not contemplation. Once they grow up, the rest of the well-developed arsenal of "mass culture" will fall upon them — culture that shapes taste through the con-

* Y. Levada, "The Strange World of Mass Culture," *Foreign Literature*, 1971, no. 11, pp. 246-247.

** Ernest van den Haag, "A Dissent from the Consensual Society," in *Culture for the Millions?*, ed. by Norman Jacobs, Princeton, 1961, p. 59.

*** See Margaret St. Clair, "The Consumers," in *Library of Modern Science Fiction*, vol. 10. Moscow, 1967, pp. 171-180.

stant standardization of content and form, training people into conformity not only in ideology and politics but in aesthetics as well. And once taste has been formed, it truly becomes difficult to make the audience watch something different, something unfamiliar. All books on "mass culture" still cite the example of how in 1959 British television broadcast Thornton Wilder's play *The Skin of Our Teeth*, which had won the top award and starred famous actress Vivien Leigh in her first TV appearance — and the entire audience switched the channel to watch the American musical-dance film *Follow the Fleet*, made twenty-five years earlier. Many such examples could be given, because consumers, not interested in serious problems, prefer light, seemingly thoughtless spectacles and entertainment.

"Mass culture" has replaced the functions of art: above all, entertainment, stimulation — not emotional experience. Any idea can be embedded in this entertaining shell. It will be swallowed along with sex and car chases, a trendy tune or some nerve-tickling Grand Guignol horror. People become accustomed to not having to think, feel or truly worry while sitting in a movie theatre or in front of a television, listening to the radio or reading newspapers. They only need to enjoy the attractive wrapper and absorb the promoted ideas. It creates a kind of closed loop where the creators of "mass culture" refer to the demands of the "average person," while that very person forms their consciousness, aspirations and aesthetic needs according to the same standards set by mass culture.

Moreover, it's not just the consumers whose individuality is erased, but also the creators. The producers of cultural content are just as alienated from the products of their labour as workers on a conveyor belt. The depersonalization of capitalist labour and consciousness is often evident in the anonymity of authorship. This was well illustrated by Englishman Vivian

Ogilvy in his biting and humorous pamphlet *The Invisibles at Work*. He portrayed an entire factory where literary ghostwriters mass-produce articles, stories and novels, exposing the technical apparatus capitalism has introduced into the manufacture of cultural goods. A special filing system contains an endless number of clichés and ready-made literary forms. Everyone who enters this factory quickly loses their individuality — because in this world of conveyor-belt literary production, it is not needed. Originality is required only when new models are being developed. These are created by established writers whose famous names are used to market them. But it is the literary proletariat who then mass-produce culture based on these templates. They have no rights — not even to their own name.

Individuality in "mass culture" is now encountered less and less frequently because psychologically and economically, it is quite costly. In the first case, because conformism and merging with the masses have become the only moral standard recognized by most people. In the second, because all products of "handcrafted labour" are expensive. And although in the U.S., for example, books like *How to Become an Individual* or *How to Become a Personality* are published in abundance — it doesn't help. The rhythm of individual life is lost, a person is drawn into a single flow, moving at a collective speed. As van den Haag wittily remarked, if a modern Faust, driving a car, wanted to exclaim: "Stay, moment, you are beautiful!" — it wouldn't cost him his life, of course, but it would cause a traffic jam.

Naturally, no one says individuality is not needed. All owners of film and TV companies are constantly searching for talent. But, first of all, talent is rare, and so the bulk of the massive output is supplied by skilled craftsmen. Secondly, most talented people are so incompatible with the Procrus-

tean bed of "mass culture" that they inevitably end up cast aside.

"I want to give you some advice, von," said the famous Griffith to his assistant on *Intolerance*, Erich von Stroheim, when the latter came to him with joyful news of receiving his own directing project. "Make films the way you think is right. Leave your own mark on them. That way, you'll make enemies, but you'll make good films."* Stroheim followed this advice. While working on his films, he didn't care about production schedules, costs or censorship considerations. He spared neither himself nor others in the name of realism and truth in life. And what was the result? His film *Greed* (still ranked among the greatest films of all time) was cut to pieces by the Hollywood studio executives to the point that Stroheim, who considered the work his favorite creation, wrote: "When I saw how my film *Greed*, into which I poured my whole soul, was butchered, I realized that I had to give up the idea of telling the truth and creating genuine works of art."** After working in Hollywood for ten years but never adjusting to its rules, Stroheim was ultimately cast out in disgrace.

If talented individuals create what pleases film and TV executives ideologically and matches the taste of the masses, they are placed in a privileged position and handsomely rewarded. In that same Hollywood, directors like Billy Wilder, Alfred Hitchcock, John Huston and others have worked for many years, proving flexible enough to adapt to the demands of businessmen, shifts in the political climate and so on. They became the "established masters" who create "models" for

* Dwight Macdonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture," in *Mass Culture*, ed. by B. Rosenberg and D. White, Toronto, 1965, p. 66.

** Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film*, New York, 1939, p. 351.

mass production.

This — fame, success, big money for those willing to fulfil all required conditions — is precisely what tempts talented people. Paul Mayersberg, an English critic, writes about this in his book *Hollywood: The Haunted House*: "They (the heads of major Hollywood studios — *E.K.*) destroy your scripts. Kill your ideas. Prostitute your art. Trample your pride. And what do you get in return? Wealth."*

This temptation turns out to be so strong that very few can resist it. The famous American composer Cole Porter once quipped:

Why be a great composer,
if you can't pay the rent?
Why be a famous writer and
still be in debt?
When crowds will pay insane amounts —
if you just wiggle your ears.**

So what usually happens to people who make a deal with their talent? This is exemplified by the tragic fate of the famous American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald, who in the 1930s became a full-time screenwriter in Hollywood. What he had to endure there, and why his name never once appeared in the credits of any films, was brilliantly told by screenwriter and novelist Budd Schulberg in his book *The Disenchanted*.

Manley Halliday — this is the name Fitzgerald gives himself in the novel — comes to a major Hollywood film studio. It's his last chance to survive, as he hasn't written anything in a long time, and he needs money to support his mentally

* Paul Mayersberg, *Hollywood, the Haunted House*, London, 1967, p. 116.

** Ernest van den Haag, "Of Happiness and Despair We Have No Measure," in *Mass Culture*, p. 521.

ill wife in a sanatorium, his son in college and himself. For $2,000 a week, he's ready to do anything. But even in his deepest despair, he couldn't imagine what really awaited him. He is assigned to work on the script *Love on Ice* — a musical-sports film about student life.

"The script only needs one problem," instructs the head of the studio, "— will the hero tame the unruly girl? Or will the good girl win back her lover from the seductress? If my writers would just stick to that, we wouldn't be wasting millions of dollars... I want this to be a commercial film. But the characters must be original and believable, the dialogue expressive..."*

And no matter how much Halliday tried to fulfil this seemingly simple requirement, he couldn't do it. On the eve of the deadline, when he reads his written scenes to his co-author, a young screenwriter, they have nothing to do with the script for *Love on Ice*. It was excellent prose, vivid characters, colourful dialogue — but all of it was too deep and too complex for the "average" viewer.

Manley Halliday, like Scott Fitzgerald, never saw his script on screen. Nor do hundreds of other authors, whose individuality proves too striking for standardized "mass culture." Only those flourish who, having given up any attempt at self-expression in their art, become suppliers of pulp for wide consumption, filled with a tried-and-true set of ideological and artistic clichés. It brings no fame, but it brings money.

* * *

Aldous Huxley wrote in *Brave New World* that all cosmetics are made with lanolin, but the merchants don't sell

* Budd Schulberg, *The Disenchanted*, London, 1951, pp. 77-78.

lanolin — they sell hope. This remark seems to capture the essence of "mass culture" in all its areas — whether film, television, or advertising. Its creators speculate on the deepest desires of people — the longing to partake in the ideal, in the dream, in the hope of getting what life denies them. They offer comfort to those in need, crime to respectable fathers of families, nobility to those who lack it, cruelty to those craving thrills, sensitivity to the insensitive.

The irony lies in the fact that the factory worker on the assembly line works more and more automatically, feeling less and less the meaning of his work in producing a finished product. Then he tries to find himself in the myths and fantasies of "mass culture," which also produces — by the same assembly-line method — a broad array of fakes imitating reality, a fictional escapist world. In this world, no one works — everyone is entertained. It offers a full menu of approved ways to escape reality. Into a world of luxury. Into a world of total social equality, where the heroes are just as simple and unreflective as those who watch them. Into a world of intense sensations.

When American movie star Grace Kelly married the Prince of Monaco in the late 1950s, more correspondents came to the wedding than had covered the Allied landing in Normandy during the Second World War. This was the realization of those myths of success, happiness and unlimited opportunity that "mass culture" had embodied in its artistic practice for so many years. The beautiful daughter of a stonemason who became a millionaire had achieved unimaginable success. Now she had fulfilled the traditional myth of personal happiness — marrying for love a handsome, wealthy, titled man. How many heroines of Hollywood films, magazine stories and TV shows had already walked that same path, and their success continues to sustain the hope of millions that

something similar could happen to them too.

For those who think that such sugary fairy tales about Cinderellas and princes have long since become relics of the past, here's a recent example. When the now-familiar film *The Sound of Music* premiered in 1965 in the U.S., it literally saved 20th Century Fox from impending bankruptcy, earning unprecedented box office revenue for the 1960s. Audiences flocked to the movie. What attracted them? The music? Hardly — there wasn't much of it in the film, and although it was written by the popular composers Rodgers and Hammerstein, it wasn't of the highest quality. The choreography? In the entire three-hour film, there is only one truly interesting sequence in this regard — the one where the heroine teaches the seven children music and dance. The acting? Julie Andrews merely repeated, and with less success, the image she had created in Disney's *Mary Poppins*. What remains is what viewers also liked in *Madame X*, in *Rhapsody*, in *The Naked Maja* and in many other films: the display of luxurious living, the absence of any — not only social, but even real-life — problems, the tearful melodrama, the lavish sets, costumes and decor.

The camera lingers on a vast garden, the luxury of the apartments, crystal chandeliers, balls, society ladies in their expensive gowns. But Cinderella Marie — a poor nun who arrives as a governess in the home of a wealthy aristocrat — with her pretty little face, tireless work ethic, talent with children and angelic singing voice wins the heart of the haughty master of all this splendour. Breaking off his engagement with the baroness he was about to marry, the rich man, without any lead-up or necessary motivation, proposes to the charming Marie. A lavish wedding, shown in all its traditional grandeur, could easily have been the finale — but then the authors suddenly introduce the theme of fighting fascism, reducing it

to a series of adventure scenes with a distinctly exploitative tone.

The same myths of success and happiness are present in the novel *Love Story*, which became a U.S. bestseller in 1970-71 and was immediately adapted for the screen. The author — Erich Segal, a professor of classical philology at Yale University — wrote the book in the tradition of the "good old days": the protagonists' love story is untouched by politics or sex, something nearly unheard of in any work today. And although the main characters are students, they show no interest in any of the issues that concern contemporary American youth — neither the black civil rights movement nor police crackdowns on demonstrators.

The love story of two young people just past the age of 20 is built on the classic mythology of "mass culture." He is rich, she is poor, they fall in love at first sight, marry against the will of his parents, endure a life full of hardships but filled with happiness, achieve financial stability — and then the heroine dies unexpectedly. Here again are the abstract myths of love, social equality, family bliss and luxurious living, just as we see in *The Sound of Music* and many other novels, films and television shows.

It is astounding that such sentimental fare can still be popular with today's audience, which is far more sceptical than in the past. But apparently, the longevity of such fairy tales lies precisely in the fact that they reflect the unchanging ideals of the average viewer — the kind that Anatoly Lunacharsky wrote about back in the late 1920s, noting that the hearts of the petty-bourgeois are drawn to "sentimental domestic plots, family dramas among modest people, emotional turmoil that sometimes escalates into tragedy or crime and tear-soaked reconciliations — the triumph of the so-called 'spark' that supposedly lies dormant in every person beneath

all kinds of unsightly dross."* These words remain relevant to this day.

There is another category of films and television shows that strive for accuracy in detail. Streets look like real streets, homes resemble the ones viewers live in, characters dress and speak like ordinary people. Naturally, viewers get the impression that these characters must also think the same way they do. So why not emulate them? Hence the desire to imitate, to treat "mass culture" works not just as entertainment but as a school of life, customs, habits and taste. In the 1940s, for example, American police issued an official request that actress Veronica Lake change her hairstyle — her long hair covered half her face. Police justified their demand by saying that young women who copied her style had significantly increased the number of road accidents since they couldn't see the left side of the road.

The imitation extends to far more serious things. Many researchers of "mass culture" have noted that it promotes a set of values and morals that reflect the mindset of the average person. For instance, it has been observed that its protagonists usually come from the middle class. Workers, the poor, members of minority groups and other social strata that make viewers uncomfortable are rarely featured — and if they do appear, they usually play negative roles. Bernard Berelson and Patricia Salter conducted an interesting sociological study:** they analysed 198 short stories published in eight major American magazines. The overwhelming majority (185) were set in contemporary America. Although national minorities make up 40 per cent of the U.S. population, only

* "Lunacharsky on Cinema," Moscow, 1965, pp. 116-117.

** Bernard Berelson and Patricia Salter, "Majority and Minority Americans: An Analysis of Magazine Fiction," in *Mass Culture*, pp. 235-248.

10 per cent of the characters in these stories belonged to such groups. Out of 900 characters, there were just 16 black individuals. Anglo-American characters were the heroes, while minorities were relegated to bit parts. Judging by the results, Anglo-Americans earn more, hold better jobs and live more comfortably. In short, the world belongs to them.

Why does this happen? the authors ask, presenting all this data — and they provide the right answer: it is a veiled form of conditioning readers, reinforcing stereotypes and national prejudices. Instead of offering any real analysis of the challenges facing minorities in the U.S., mass-market magazine content prefers to strengthen Americans' belief that black people, Jews, Latinos, Italians and Asians are second-class citizens, good only for serving the "pure-blooded" Americans.

In the years since that study, little has changed in the practices of "mass culture." Except now, perhaps, black people have started appearing in roles other than servants. But more on that below.

The exploitation of thrill and shock is most often associated in "mass culture" with the figure of the bandit. In the film *Shotgun*, for example, there is a scene where the villains tie a prisoner to a tree using wet ropes, which keep the victim at some distance from a branch where a venomous snake is also tied. As the ropes dry in the sun, they shrink, and the man, paralysed with fear, inevitably moves closer to his doom. In the film *Northwest Passage*, one of the rangers, obsessed with hatred for Indians, survives famine by secretly eating pieces of a severed Indian head he keeps hidden in his bag. In *The Kid from Hell*, a villain shoves an old woman's head directly into burning embers and holds it there until she stops moving. There's no need to even mention "minor" details such as slow stabbings (*Knight of Death*) or shooting five arrows into a person at intervals (*Garden of Evil*).

Particularly telling in this regard is the film *The Wild Bunch* by director Sam Peckinpah, made in 1969. Many believe it brought "modern trends" into mass cinema. *The Wild Bunch* are bandits who steal an American ammunition train and try to sell it to Mexicans. (The action takes place in 1910, during the Mexican Revolution.) But a former member of the gang — released from prison for this purpose — tracks and betrays them. The film is extremely violent. At the beginning and end, there are ten-minute scenes unlike anything seen before in American cinema. The first is a botched bank robbery followed by a literal bloodbath. The finale features an army of Mexicans attacking the four bandits. The bandits mow down their enemies with a machine gun, with arms, legs and heads flying in all directions, bodies writhing in agony. The deaths of each character are shown at length and in slow motion. And most of these horrifying scenes unfold in front of children. While playing, they ride atop mutilated bodies, a toddler picks up a rifle and shoots a Mexican in the back, and even a nursing infant lies atop bandoliers.

Even the director admitted that the violence in the film is unbearable. But the most frightening part is that it is entirely self-serving. The depiction of vice, evil and cruelty is, of course, nothing new in art. Many writers and painters have shown these phenomena to repel the viewer from them, thereby reinforcing social morality. For example, Picasso's *Guernica* is a terrifying painting, full of horror and what purist critics would call naturalistic, physiological detail. But all of that serves the artist's central purpose — it strengthens the painting's anti-fascist message. In Shakespeare's tragedies, blood doesn't just flow — it pours in rivers. He describes in detail every method of killing. Yet no one has ever called him inhumane. The difference lies not in the artist's genius, but in their perspective. The creators of mass entertainment embrace

violence only as a means of titillating the viewer and provoking a reaction.

Moreover, anti-humanism and cruelty are by no means exclusive to kitsch. They often permeate even artistically well-made films. Let us analyse from this angle one of the most popular American films of 1972 — *The Godfather*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola. The film, which portrays one of the mafia clans in the United States, is saturated with brutality. It's not just that there are dozens of murders — what is offered to the viewer is far worse. A Hollywood director, who refuses the mafia's demand to cast their chosen actor in his film, wakes up in the middle of the night drenched in blood. The camera pans down to reveal the severed head of his prized racehorse — his most cherished possession — lying at the foot of his bed. The son of the clan leader is riddled with 30 bullets. Another son's wife is blown up in a car. A man's hand is nailed to a bar counter. A daughter's husband is strangled with a belt in a car — as he thrashes, he shatters the windshield and his legs stick out far beyond it. A man who disobeys an order is shot directly in the eye through his dark sunglasses and so on.

Such violence might be justified if the director were presenting it to condemn the mafia. But that's precisely what's missing. The film endorses the law of the jungle — that only the strongest and most adaptable survive. The old mafia boss killed only when absolutely necessary. His sons, however, now embrace violence for its own sake. In the film's finale, the son who originally seemed the most intelligent and the least suited for the role becomes the new head of the clan. This man, with a university degree and no experience with violence, by the end has become a cold, cunning, inventive killer who eliminates all his enemies and is crowned the new "Godfather," feared by all and reverently kissed on the hand.

The film portrays his transformation into a murderer as completely natural. The creators revel in it and invite the viewer to do the same. The brutal world, they imply, demands brutality from those who want to succeed — this is the film's true message, hidden behind a mask of neutrality. The creators are unconcerned with moral or ethical implications. They don't care that by conforming to the world's brutal rules, the character loses his best human qualities.

In comparison to *The Godfather*, we recall another American film known to Soviet audiences — *The Chase* (1965, directed by Arthur Penn). This film also contains violence. One especially harrowing scene shows drunken townsfolk viciously beating a sheriff who refuses to tell them the location of an escaped prisoner. The beating is savage, near-lethal. As an intercut, the director shows a crowd of townspeople gathered outside the police station. They're drinking whiskey and Coca-Cola, chewing gum and — ignoring the screams of the sheriff and the pleas of his wife — eagerly awaiting what will happen next. It becomes immediately clear that the beating of the sheriff is not just some side attraction meant to spice up the plot, but is shown to expose the reaction of the bystanders. It is this reaction that reveals the film's true subject: the indifference of the average person, their complete lack of humanity and moral standards, which have become the breeding ground for the cruelty that has spread so widely in American society.

This general approach to reality — the path from content to form, the ability to show the essence of a phenomenon and its social relevance (many in the U.S. interpreted *The Chase* as an allegory of the Kennedy assassination) — makes this film a work of truly realistic, democratic art. Meanwhile, *The Godfather*, despite the formal mastery of its creators, the brilliant acting and inventive cinematography, does not go beyond

merely depicting a particular — perhaps even real — slice of life. It shows the evolution of its characters as biological creatures, without uncovering the social or political forces underlying their transformation. As a result, the film remains a product — though highly professional — of "mass culture."

V.I. Lenin noted that works filled with the horrors and deformities of life "crush" the reader, suppress the will to fight, foster a sense of hopelessness and despair, and instil distrust in humanity and doubt in one's own strength.* Although nearly 60 years have passed since these words were written, they remain relevant to this day.

The same can be said about sex. In the postwar period, it virtually flooded Western screens. Films of all genres are now stuffed not just with eroticism but openly pornographic scenes. In 1966, Hollywood even revised its Production Code, removing explicit bans on the depiction of sexual acts.** Now, the only requirement is that such films be marked "For adult audiences." As a result, films like *The Female* (1968) began to appear — a story about a woman who "doesn't know how to say no." Roughly every seven minutes of the film, she gives in to passion: first with two strangers, then with her own brother, followed by his black friend, and — for variety — with her female friend, and finally with that friend's husband. In the intervals, the heroine even manages to find time for her own husband. The audience is offered an explicit display of every possible kind of "love." It all ends somewhat unexpectedly: our passionate lady turns out to be a patriot. She thwarts the black man and a so-called "communist" who are trying to force her husband to fly them to Cuba. Thus, one kind of sensationalism is layered with another — political.

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* See V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 48, p. 295.

** "Magazine Commentary on New Movie Code," in *Violence and the Mass Media*, ed. by Otto Larsen, New York, 1968, p. 243.

This tendency to tag political and social issues onto love stories is generally characteristic of mass-market productions, which use this technique to quietly drain the significance from important issues. Consider the theme of the anti-fascist struggle in *The Sound of Music* or the film *Ryan's Daughter*, made in 1971 by British director David Lean for the major American studio MGM. The action of the film takes place in Ireland in the early 1920s, during a period of growing patriot movements that culminated in the famous Dublin uprising. Given the current political climate in that country, one might expect such an urgent issue to take centre stage. But that didn't happen. The Irish rebels — who are portrayed as people capable of killing without cause — appear on screen only twice. Their sole function is to falsely accuse the heroine, who is romantically involved with a British officer commanding the local garrison, of betrayal and subject her to public humiliation. Meanwhile, her husband is given the opportunity to reveal himself as a true gentleman during her trials. So, despite the director's craftsmanship — many scenes are visually compelling, with expressive cinematography and solid acting — the film ultimately turns out to be petty-bourgeois in its very essence.

A.V. Lunacharsky once wrote about this: "One can learn from the Americans how to promote ideas that are beneficial to the bourgeoisie... Instead of chewing over agitational slogans, Americans tell a heart-wrenching story that quietly seeps into the soul of the average petty-bourgeois so that he doesn't even notice how much his 'moral backbone' has been strengthened."*

Exploitation of current events and hot-button topics is a hallmark of "mass culture." Forty years ago, Ilf and Petrov wrote in *The Golden Calf* about two worlds — one large, one small (the latter representing the world of the petty-bourgeois): "Little people hurry after the big ones. They understand that they must be in sync with the times — only then will their trinkets sell."* This statement turned out to be especially true with regard to bourgeois mass culture, one of its defining traits being disposability and short shelf life. The lifespan of its works rarely exceeds a single season, but in that brief window they must be the most fashionable, the most topical.

How does this manifest in practice? Through the introduction of sensational topics, lifted straight from current newspaper headlines, into the fabric of films, TV shows or stories. For example, in 1969 the film *The Chairman* appeared — a mediocre detective story set against a backdrop of real documentary footage from the "Cultural Revolution" in China. Then, as heart transplants became a hot topic, we got *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* in 1971. Stevenson's novella is reimagined in an "up-to-date" way: Dr. Jekyll, in his alternate form, no longer kills in a fit of animal rage — he murders in the name of "science," needing fresh human hearts for transplantation.

The audience, already familiar with the issue via the press, radio and TV, rushes to see what the film has done with it. This utilitarian, exploitative approach to portraying life only creates the illusion of realism within a fictitious world.

"Mass culture" skilfully absorbs and adapts to its own needs the leading trends of the time — trends first identified by genuine artists in real works of art. It even adapts elements of spiritual and political life that might initially seem foreign to "mass society" and its cultural industry. By simplifying and repurposing them, it turns such elements into new clichés and stereotypes. A prime example is how commercial cinema has

* "Lunacharsky on Cinema," pp. 104-105.

* I. Ilf and E. Petrov, *The Golden Calf*, Moscow, 1956, p. 412.

successfully integrated many of the innovations of the New American Cinema Group — whose early works initially appeared to be complete opposites of Hollywood's commercial output.

In the manifesto published in 1961 by the then newly formed New American Cinema Group, they wrote: "We are tired of lies in life and art... Official cinema is dying. It is morally rotten, thematically superficial, aesthetically outdated and emotionally deficient. We have decided to unite in order to express our protest against the old, official and pretentious cinema..."*

The work of the members of this group turned out to be quite diverse. They primarily focused on exploring new means of artistic expression — largely as a reaction to the aesthetic crisis of Hollywood's commercial productions, with its grandiose, pretentious style saturated with clichés and formulaic conventions. However, especially in the late 1950s to mid-1960s, some films from this movement also attempted to reflect the crises and upheavals of contemporary American society. Among such works are the anti-racist films *Shadows* (1957), *Oh, Dem Watermelons* (1963), and *The Cool World* (1963); the anti-militarist and anti-war films *The Brig* (1964) and *Good Times, Wonderful Times* (1965); and films portraying life on America's margins, such as *On the Bowery* (1957), *The Connection* (1960) and others. But what interests us are not just films with a progressive slant — rather, we're focused on works by the New American Cinema Group that first identified significant social trends in American life, which were later picked up and absorbed by mainstream commercial cinema.

One such film is Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (1964).

* George Fenin, "The Skyscraper Experiment," *Films and Filming*, April 1961, vol. 7, no. 7, p. 12.

Here's how O. Tuganova describes it in her article *Protesting America* (*Novy Mir*, 1970, No. 6): "Mechanical parts lost from their machines, gears scattered in a void. Faceless people. They're strapped to roaring motorcycles. They die. Strange associations. Disconnected and alienated objects that have lost their links to one another. Modern chaos. Fragmented consciousness. Contemporary cruelty. Violence — both physical and spiritual... Iron crosses on the bikers' chests and little swastikas on the walls of their rooms."

For the first time in American cinema, this film presented a vivid image of a particular segment of U.S. youth in the mid-1960s — "one-dimensional," stereotypical products of bourgeois industrial society, poisoned by the toxin of neo-fascism, incapable of critical thinking, acknowledging only one form of freedom: the freedom to be cruel, violent and depraved. And although Kenneth Anger refrains from drawing clear moral conclusions, the picture he paints is surprisingly deep and resonant.

"Mass culture" immediately picked up on the potential of this theme — realizing that if packaged a certain way, it contained just the sort of sensationalism ("taboo thrills") that could captivate the average viewer. A fitting approach was found: standardization of life, the erasure of individuality, the social roots of the cult of violence — all these themes, so piercingly presented in *Scorpio Rising*, were now treated not as symptoms of contemporary American reality, but as isolated incidents. And, naturally, they were always resolved by the time-tested, exemplary American hero. What remained in these commercial imitations were the violent and depraved scenes — stripped of their context and depth.

This watered-down, superficial version of the theme appears in the commercial film *Born Losers* (1967). Though the swastikas on leather jackets are still there, the main interest

for the filmmakers in portraying the biker gang is simply their cruelty and immorality. Here they beat a guy — nearly to death — just because his car accidentally grazed one of the bikers. Blood pours, teeth fly, the victim loses consciousness, but the beating continues...

The gang lures young girls into their den, where one becomes the latest "mama" and is subjected to gang rape. They also target the film's heroine — a university student. The scenes where the entire gang chases her on motorcycles, and she, unable to find shelter in any of the nearby houses, becomes their prey, are the most disturbing in the film. The police are powerless. Civilians are terrorized. That's when the hero steps in — a former cowboy and freshly returned Green Beret from Vietnam — and takes matters into his own hands. Using the same brutal methods — fists and revolver — he kills the gang leader and hands the rest over to the police. His reward for this heroic act? The love of the heroine.

There are times when the adaptation of innovative ideas and techniques to serve the needs of "mass culture" is carried out by the very same individuals who originally proposed them. In this sense, the creative evolution of Andy Warhol — one of the most prolific and popular figures of the New American Cinema Group — is particularly noteworthy. Warhol entered the world of film in 1963. Formerly a pop art figure and one of the trendiest commercial artists, he made films like *Sleep* (1963), *Eat* (1963) and *Kiss* (1964), all devoid of plot and external action. The camera lingers endlessly as a person sleeps without changing position, eats or kisses. The film *Empire* consists of eight continuous hours showing the Empire State Building from a single angle. Unsurprisingly, such films had no public success — they were nearly impossible to sit through.

Warhol then changed direction and began to pursue the

public's attention. His films *Screen Test* (1965) and *Kitchen* (1965) were parodies of Hollywood and its methods. However, their formal complexity meant that hardly anyone watched them. So Warhol chose a third path — one that proved foolproof. In 1966, he released *Chelsea Girls*, which became the first New American Cinema Group film to achieve mainstream popularity. Though it ran for three and a half hours, and featured two non-synchronized images projected side by side on a wide screen (shot with two cameras from different angles), audiences remained glued to their seats. But, alas, it wasn't the innovative form or material that drew them in — it was the vulgarity. With a handheld camera, Warhol toured fifteen rooms of the Chelsea Hotel — known for its bohemian clientele — and filmed everything going on inside, most of which involved explicit scenes of sexual deviance.

The commercial success of *Chelsea Girls* determined the direction of Warhol's future work in cinema. His films now receive wide theatrical release and attract mass audiences. The reason for this interest lies in the unhealthy sensationalism of various forms of sex. In this regard, Warhol continually blazes "new" trails for commercial cinema. One of his later films, *Andy Warhol's Women* (1972), illustrates this.

The film is a comedy built on the premise of a wealthy young woman's hatred of men — she replaces them with women in her intimate life. The male lead — a young virgin who dreams of possessing both her and her wealth — is forced to dress in women's clothing and pose as a girl. This leads to a series of highly risky, endlessly recycled situations.

...In Per Wahlöö's satirical novel *The Death of the 31st Department*, a cunning plan is described involving a media conglomerate's approach to distributing "mass culture." The intellectual elite — "the strongest, most explosive, most dynamic of all cultural figures in the country" — are gathered in

the walls of the 31st Department. They're allowed to publish a provocative, sharply critical magazine, though its circulation is limited to just a few sample copies. The reader is eager to discover the bold ideas being generated by this elite — ideas the conglomerate is supposedly suppressing. At last, the magazine pages are revealed: "He (the protagonist) began studying the spread dedicated to the physiological question — why birth rates are declining and impotence is on the rise. On either side of the text were two large photographs of naked women."*

These biting lines inevitably come to mind when one reflects on the supposed "innovation" of intellectuals like Andy Warhol.

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The well-known American humorist James Thurber wrote a short story entitled *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*. Its protagonist — a modest office clerk, quiet, timid and shy, completely dominated by his wife — finds an outlet in going to the movies and living a double life: one real, the other imagined. In his dreams, Mitty sees himself as a heartthrob, a gangster, a cowboy — strong, brave, handsome — and these fantasies help him endure the dullness of his daily existence.

This identification of the viewer with the hero of a fictional work is what Western critics call identification. At its core lies a very understandable human longing for an ideal. Typically, a person lives in two dimensions — reality and imagination. The model of oneself created in the mind is theoretically possible. But this ideal remains unattainable because the realities of life force one to make decisions and take actions that are directly opposed to those imagined by the ideal self.

* Per Wahlöö, *The Death of the 31st Department*, in *Library of Modern Science Fiction*, vol. 20. Moscow, 1971, p. 343.

The repressed dream seeks release in myth; a person wants to see this dream fulfilled — even if only through art. Eric Barnouw, a U.S. researcher of mass culture, writes that people identify with others "as a way of bypassing taboos they themselves dare not break, to win battles they lost in the past... to relive dangers they once surrendered to."*

But to a great extent, this phenomenon is a result of the alienation of the individual in the age of technology. The estrangement of a person from their own individuality, their transformation into just another atom in a homogeneous mass, is largely caused by the influence of mass media and "mass culture." Having lost a true sense of identification with themselves, people are naturally drawn to false identification. No longer being the centre of their own world, they strive to become like those ideal heroes who are rarely encountered in real life but frequently appear on screen. Above all, they want to resemble someone who is tall, slim, handsome, masculine and confident. Hence the abundance of such characters in mass-market productions across various genres.

However, it's incorrect to think that idealized heroes are entirely detached from reality and exist in a vacuum. If such a character is too abstract or removed from the viewer's experience, the audience simply won't relate to them — they'll remain distant and inaccessible to the person sitting in the dark movie theatre. This would drastically reduce the hero's impact. And that is exactly what the creators of mass-market content try to avoid. Even a brief and schematic look at the evolution of popular film heroes over the past 50 years reveals how attentively their creators track the shifting tastes of the public. It's not just about fashion, which dictates what kind of faces are "in" during a given era — whether classically handsome, like Rudolph Valentino's, or strikingly masculine

* Erik Barnouw, *Mass Communication*, New York, 1956, pp. 70–71.

and rugged, like Jean-Paul Belmondo's. What really matters is capturing the key trends in public consciousness at a given time. That is when identification becomes most complete and the works featuring such heroes are most likely to succeed.

The most popular character type in American mass cinema has always been — and remains — the strong, masculine man who doesn't think too deeply about life. This character was already described at the end of the 19th century by historian Frederick Jackson Turner in his book *The Frontier in American History*: "...He didn't know where he was going, but he was always moving forward — energetic, always busy, full of optimism and boundless cheerfulness."* Beginning in American folklore — with figures like Paul Bunyan, the legendary lumberjack with superhuman strength; Kit Carson and Davy Crockett, famous trappers; Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill Hickok, celebrated cowboy heroes — this type quickly migrated to the screen, becoming synonymous with a vanished America. Gradually, this character turned into a standardized, simplified figure, reaching its most extreme and unrealistic forms in symbols like Tarzan and Superman. Such heroes were brilliantly parodied by American cartoonist Al Capp in his comic strip *Li'l Abner*. In this illustrated satire, the main character is nothing but muscles, which help him defeat everyone and everything. (It's no coincidence that during the Second World War, editorial offices received many letters from baffled readers asking: "Why doesn't Superman just fly to Berlin and deal with Hitler, and end the war right there?")

Now mass-market production continues striving to preserve such heroes — but in its best examples, it does so with an awareness of the times. If we take, for example, the infamous James Bond, we can see that although he performs

* F.J. Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, New York, 1931, p. 290.

the same feats as his predecessors, he is — perhaps thanks to the talent of actor Sean Connery — markedly different from them. He possesses elegance, wit, and most importantly, that ironic distance between the actor and the character, which seems to strip away the "reality" of the hero's actions, giving them a slightly parodic tone.

This adaptation to modern expectations is characteristic not only of the superman type, but also of the businessman — who, paradoxically, is often represented by the gangster, a staple figure in crime and detective dramas. (As American critic Leo Gurko rightly noted: just as for Clausewitz war was a continuation of diplomacy by other means, so for gangsters, murder is a type of business.)

The gangster — and often the not-so-distant private detective — has always been one of the most colourful figures in mass-market film production: an individualist who cuts through life by force and usually gets his way. But while in the 1930s American cinema made at least some effort, however primitive, to show the social and moral roots of such characters (consider *Jesse James*, *Angels with Dirty Faces* or *Boys Town*), today the most typical figure of this type is Mike Hammer — the hero of many film adaptations of Mickey Spillane's novels. He deals in "dirty work," as if by calling. He takes pleasure in watching a woman suffer after he shoots her in the stomach and he doesn't hesitate to smash his enemy's knuckles with a revolver butt right in front of the audience. The atmosphere of cruelty and violence, which as noted earlier permeates much of contemporary American mass-market cinema, finds its clearest expression in this character.

The essence of such characters is closely tied to the overall climate of the country in a given era. For example, Douglas Fairbanks in the early 1920s was a symbol of a prosperous, carefree America enriched by wartime contracts. James Cag-

ney and Humphrey Bogart in the 1930s were in many ways products of the anxiety in a country struggling to recover from the Great Depression. The sceptical 1960s introduced doubt into the image of the "symbol of strength," suggesting that not all of life's problems could be solved with fists and guns. This gave rise to the conflicted young hero so vividly portrayed on screen by James Dean and Marlon Brando.

In the late 1950s and mid-1960s, a completely new phenomenon emerged in American cinema — the image of the black man. The appearance of a black hero was one of the most important achievements of serious American filmmaking. And it would not have been possible without the growing civil rights movement in the U.S. In 1958, Stanley Kramer released the well-known film *The Defiant Ones*. In 1967, *In the Heat of the Night*, directed by Norman Jewison, featured actor Sidney Poitier not just as a black police detective named Tibbs, but as a black man fighting for the dignity of his people and against centuries-old prejudice. It was the depth of this character, paired with the equally complex role of his white counterpart — police chief Gillespie (played by Rod Steiger) — that earned the film its great success.

The film, which won five Academy Awards — the highest honours in American cinema — represents a new direction in the policies of Hollywood executives. It is a strategy that considers everything: the growing black liberation movement, the broader political situation (the Oscars were awarded just two days after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.), international reception and, not least, the fact that there were 5.5 million black moviegoers in the U.S. — whose dollars were particularly valuable in an era of declining box office revenue.

Now even mass-market productions can no longer ignore black characters. But in bringing them to the screen, they often strip these characters not only of any depth but also of

any sense of racial identity. In 1970, commercial director Gordon Douglas made the film *They Call Me Mister Tibbs*. Sidney Poitier seemed to reprise the familiar role — again playing a police detective named Tibbs. Yet this time, the racial issue was entirely absent. The hero investigating the murder of a high-class prostitute could just as easily have been white. The appearance of a black hero was mere illusion — in essence, he was just another fictional figure in a fictional world.

Starting in the 1970s, black heroes even began to appear in the most "national" genre of American film — the adventure stories about the conquest of the American West. Westerns — as this genre is called — are tied to real historical events: the colonization of the vast western frontier in the late 18th and first half of the 19th centuries. At that time, black people were still enslaved and, naturally, could not take part in that process. Even after slavery was abolished, very few black men dared to venture into that lawless and dangerous land.

However, as is well known, commercial mass-market productions have never been overly concerned with historical accuracy. And now, when it is safe to exploit the image of black heroes — thereby demonstrating their supposed progressiveness and attracting black audiences to movie theatres — "black Westerns" began pouring out as if from a cornucopia.

In 1972 alone, films such as *Man and Boy*, where a black man and his son settle in the American West; *The Legend of Nigger Charley*, in which a black hero gallops heroically on horseback with a Colt on his belt; and *Buck and the Preacher* were released. The last of these deserves closer attention, as it is quite representative of this type of film. It was directed by none other than Sidney Poitier, the well-known black actor, marking his directorial debut. He also played the lead role alongside another black "star," Harry Belafonte, who also financed the production. Under such circumstances, it could

have been a truthful, realistic film showing the difficult fate of the few black people who, after the Civil War, dared to head West in search of a homestead — that is, cheap land. However, that's not what happened, because Poitier and Belafonte consciously aimed to create a commercial action film with a spicy twist of black protagonists. Their role model was the highly popular Western *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), a romanticized story about two bandits, executed in a very unconventional style. But *Buck and the Preacher* never rose to the artistic heights of its predecessor, which had abundant humour, a beautiful score and excellent cinematography. Nor did it approach historical reality. The film became a clear example of the futility of trying to make films about black people by merely copying "white" commercial templates.

And so, while transforming itself and adapting to shifts in public consciousness, this form of identification continues to be one of the main channels through which cinema influences the formation of viewers' personalities — especially that of young people.

At the same time, another form of identification — one that once thrived in American cinema — has now notably weakened: the identification of the actor with a fixed, recurring character type. This was the foundation of the "star system," in which the viewer grew accustomed to a particular actor always appearing as the same character — once and forever. Aesthetically, this was damaging to many talented actors, confining them to a single type. In the 1930s and 1940s, various gifted performers suffered from this — just recall Spencer Tracy, Henry Fonda, Leslie Howard and many others. Even in the late 1950s, when Burt Lancaster, previously seen only in heroic roles, played a true villain in *Sweet Smell of Success*, the film flopped at the box office. Audiences simply didn't want to accept the actor in a morally different light.

Today, those days are mostly over. Creators of mass-market films now themselves ensure that actors create more diverse characters and do not chase mere external glamour, as that no longer guarantees profit. In 1968, the American film newspaper *Variety* ran a large headline: "Growing Scepticism towards the Stars: They're Too Expensive and Not Profitable Enough." Among other materials published on that page were the results of a special investigation conducted by reporter Lee Borum. He reviewed the profits of films featuring top stars and found that almost all of them had lost money. Among the actors whose films failed to turn a profit were well-known names such as Elizabeth Taylor, Yul Brynner, Tony Curtis, Natalie Wood and others.

Now American film stars, like their European counterparts, must work from role to role, constantly seeking new images and avoiding repetition, which is now perceived merely as cliché. In some cases, this shift has led to excellent results. It turned out, for example, that the typical mass-culture heroine Elizabeth Taylor could become a great dramatic actress in the film *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. The "handsome young man" Warren Beatty gave a brilliant character performance in *Bonnie and Clyde*. And Paul Newman, long a staple of commercial Westerns, successfully debuted as a director with the simple, modest and touching film *Rachel, Rachel*.

And if just ten years ago American film critic Richard Schickel wrote in his book *The Stars*: "The star lies at the very centre of film economics, and all movies, regardless of their artistic merits, are adjusted to fit their fixed persona,"* now both aesthetically and in terms of audience impact, the film as a whole plays an increasingly important role. This applies not only to true works of art but also to mass-market films,

* Hollis Alpert, "The Falling Stars," in *The Movies: An American Idiom*, ed. by Arthur McClure, New Jersey, 1971, p. 334.

where certain aesthetic patterns can be clearly traced.

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"...It was the last major magazine in the country not controlled by a media conglomerate. It had its own standards, including cultural ones... It stood for real art and poetry, published serious stories and so on... Of course, the conglomerate bosses hated it with a passion and struck back — in their own way... They ramped up production of bland mass-market series and entertainment magazines, and cleverly exploited the modern tendency of people to look at pictures instead of reading text. And if they read at all, it should at least be meaningless drivel — not the kind of articles that make people think, worry or take a stand... This phenomenon is called mental laziness, and is considered, they say, an inevitable side effect — a kind of age-related illness — of the television era."*

This excerpt, taken from the already mentioned novel *The Death of the 31st Department* by Swedish writer Per Wahlöö, conveys in a condensed satirical form the main aesthetic characteristics of "mass culture" in the present-day bourgeois industrial society of the West. Its serial nature — an inevitable feature of any conveyor-belt production. Its tendency towards simplification and vulgarization, both in terms of content and form. Its visual orientation — the substitution of word by image.

It is well known that the production of standardized goods based on templates is valuable and useful in many areas — but certainly not in the field of artistic creativity. However, this trivial truth constantly clashes with the desire of mass media owners to receive the greatest possible profit. How can

* Per Wahlöö, *The Death of the 31st Department*, pp. 288-289.

one be certain in advance that a given work will generate income? Original and unusual works always carry some risk for those who invest money in their production: the public may like them, or they may not. As for mass-market products, one can always measure the potential success by comparing with a prototype. If that one was popular, then the same — albeit to a lesser extent — can be expected of its copy.

This is how seriality arises — films produced with the same characters, or imitating previously existing situations, techniques and ideas. (This does not refer to adaptations of major literary works, where the material requires not one but several episodes for its full presentation.) But seriality itself is far from unambiguous and breaks down into several categories. First of all, one must distinguish imitation of truly artistic works — epigonal repetition of successful artistic solutions found in them.

How many times, for example, in over 30 years, have the best elements of John Ford's *Stagecoach* been repeated! In 1949, the western *Laramie* reproduced all the key moments of that film. In 1950, Ford himself quoted himself in *Rio Grande*. In 1961, Michael Curtiz in *The Comancheros* gave an almost exact copy of Ford's scene of Indians chasing a stagecoach, preserving even the same editing rhythm and the same ending. The situation became so cliché that in 1971, it was skilfully parodied by Arthur Penn in the film *Little Big Man*.

The same happened with Fred Zinnemann's notable film *High Noon*. Its plot — a man left alone to face danger without any help — was repeated in the films *At Gunpoint*, *Smoke Signal* and *The Net*, stripped of any novelty or originality.

There are also frequent cases of continuations, "extensions" of already successful works. For instance, in 1968, the film *Planet of the Apes* was released — an adaptation of the well-known novel by Pierre Boulle. Despite a number of short-

comings, it was a serious piece of work that demonstrated the director Franklin Schaffner's skill in thinking through visual images. Several pages of the novel about the escape of the humans and their return to Earth — where they are greeted by... a gorilla — were replaced with a single brilliant episode. As the heroes walk along a deserted beach on the planet of the apes, they come across the remains of the Statue of Liberty. Everything seems clear: the material is exhausted and there can be no sequel. However, three years later, *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* appeared, directed by Don Taylor, tediously and blandly depicting the very same escape of the characters, which had already been successfully resolved in the previous film.

There are many examples of such "sequels" to films based on well-known literary works. And this applies not only to works of art but also to successful mass-market films. Seven years after the appearance of *The Invisible Man*, notable for its effective cinematographic technique of rendering the character invisible, *The Return of the Invisible Man* was released, repeating that very technique exactly. *Frankenstein* was followed by *The Bride of Frankenstein* and *Son of Frankenstein*. *Dracula* gave rise to *Dracula's Daughter*. Often, such sequels are released even after significant time gaps, without making any adjustments for the passage of time. For example, in 1971, the film *The Saint's Return* was released, reviving the popular 1930s series about the adventures of detective Simon Templar, nicknamed "The Saint." The hero is once again tall, handsome and manly — and that's it. If it weren't for the colour and widescreen format, one could easily believe the film had been made in the 1930s.

The second type of seriality involves preconceived and planned series of films that depict the lives and adventures of the same characters. This practice is closely tied to an important feature of "mass culture" — its narcotic effect on consum-

ers. Into works of this kind are added — like a dash of opium in American cigarettes — components that "hook" people: outward beauty, "romantic" or fatal passions, an abundance of events. If the audience is captivated from the very first film, they will continue watching the series out of habit for many years. That's why the beginning of almost every series is artistically more interesting than its continuation.

Take, for example, the film familiar to Soviet viewers, *The Cisco Kid and the Lady* (*In Old Arizona*), which launched a string of films featuring this character. (From O. Henry, credited in the titles as the author, only the main character's name and the humour — which helps decorate the plot with comedic touches — were taken.) The noble hero and his loyal friend do everything they can to help a child left orphaned and prevent bandits from seizing a gold-rich plot discovered by the boy's father. The plot is brightened by charming child-related details. For example, the map of the gold vein is sewn into the baby's shirt. During negotiations with the bandits, everyone forgets about the child and he crawls into the road and nearly gets hit by a stagecoach. The hero's friend, upon entering a saloon, places the boy on the counter and hands him a loaded pistol as a toy. In a romantic moment, when the young schoolteacher who has taken care of the baby wants to confess her love to Cisco Kid, the little rascal smears himself with semolina porridge. In later films of the series — *Viva Cisco Kid* and *The Return of Cisco Kid* — there were no such details and they suffered greatly for it. And the films *Cisco Kid in Old and New Mexico*, *The Gay Cavalier* and *The Gay Amigo* were downright bad. The series had to be shut down.

This adherence to tried-and-true models is a distinctive feature not only of Hollywood filmmaking but of all "mass culture" in general. American radio devotes its entire daytime schedule to serialized broadcasts targeted at housewives. Tele-

vision has adopted the same practice, where "family series" — *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, *The Real McCoys*, *All My Children*, *Different Worlds*, *The Very Best* — enjoy immense success. These shows run for years, offering audiences the same stereotypes over and over again.

Ordinary viewers love to peek into their neighbours' windows to compare their lives with their own. In this case, the neighbours are people on the TV screen — average, ordinary folks living with mundane interests. Actress Lucille Ball, in the television series *I Love Lucy* and *Here's Lucy*, which lasted for more than a decade and a half, first played a model wife (her husband was the producer of the shows), then a devoted mother (her real-life pregnancies and the birth of two children were also included in the episodes). After Lucille divorced her husband, she reappeared on screen as a modest single woman who devoted her life to her children, and when the children grew up, they too began playing themselves, appearing with their mother in the series *Here's Lucy*. This had nothing to do with art; the seriality acted as a guarantee of success because the viewer already knew in advance what to expect and tuned in accordingly.

The unification of content and form — not only in serial productions but in "mass culture" as a whole — is entirely essential. Or rather, form is replaced by formula, which puts forward a number of specific requirements: a suspenseful plot full of action; a stark division of characters into good and bad — no subtle shades or nuances are allowed; a happy ending — the notorious happy end.

The constancy of form itself may not be such a great evil — ancient and classical tragedy was also bound by a number of rules, which didn't prevent the creation of many great works of art. The problem is that in modern "mass culture" any content is squeezed into this formula, no matter how damaging it

may be to it. The obligatory division of characters into good and bad leads to oversimplification, replacing the true complexity of life with a scheme, since in reality, good and evil don't appear in such perfectly refined forms. Here, the division even shows up in the characters' appearance. If someone is tall, manly, with an open and strong-willed face — he's the hero. If he's dark-haired, fidgety, with a moustache — he's the villain. In commercial westerns, it even got to the point where only good characters could wear white hats, while bad ones wore black. Audiences became accustomed to the stereotype: beautiful people are good, ugly ones are bad.

Unchanging happy endings in adaptations of well-known literary works often alter their meaning, stripping away the tragic tone the original author intended. A good example is the ending of the film *The Young Lions*. Everyone who has read the novel by Irwin Shaw remembers that one of the characters — Noah — is killed in the final moments of the war. His killer — a German — also dies from a bullet fired by another American. The deaths of these two opposing soldiers on the eve of peace carry a special tragedy. In the film, however, only the German dies, while Noah returns home alive and unharmed to New York, where he is joyfully greeted by his wife and little daughter.

Action for the sake of action results in entertaining but completely empty productions that leave nothing in the viewer's mind or heart. One clever Hollywood producer even devised a cost-saving method for shooting adventure films. He would shoot several movies with the same characters at once, changing only the tired horses. The same chase scene was filmed from different angles and then inserted into films with different titles. The entire batch was successfully sold to distributors and played in theatres, bringing in revenue. Audiences, accustomed to stereotypes, didn't even notice.

It's no coincidence that in contemporary Western studies of "mass culture," the term *vidiotism* has started to appear more frequently — a portmanteau of the Latin word *video* (to watch) and *idiot*, which sounds the same in both Russian and English. It describes the consequences for people who consume this culture of "pictures and images."

Visuality — the primacy of the image over the word — is a distinguishing feature of cinematography. However, paradoxically, it is precisely the visual culture that is one of the weakest aspects of both cinematic and television mass production. No one will deny that the best examples of cinematography, particularly American, provide viewers with images as the most expressive components of a film. Once seen, no one can forget the light reflections on the girl's face from the windows of the train that was supposed to carry her away to happiness in Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris*. Or the figure of Tom Joad in John Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath*, outlined in silhouette against the horizon as a symbol of a man walking towards a new life. Or the unusual tracking shots, low-angle framing, interplay of light and shadow, and incredible depth of field in *Citizen Kane* by Orson Welles. Or the overhead panoramic shot of the road, with the smoke from an exploded motorcycle dispersing above it — the last witness to the unfolding tragedy in Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider*.

But here we are not speaking of such films — we are talking about mass serial production, where not only themes, plots and characters are simplified, but also the visual component. The already familiar Ernest van den Haag wrote that "mass culture" has two characteristic traits: 1 — everything is clear, 2 — everything is fixable.* For example, in mass-market films the plot is always presented clearly and straightforwardly, without any attempt to make the viewer reflect. Sets, costumes, hairstyles are always utilitarianly realistic and ultra-fashionable (not without the hidden thought that the audience will imitate them). The cinematography is highly professional but uninteresting, since specific cinematic visual tools — camera angles, original shot composition, play of light and shadow — are rarely used and the cinematic metaphor is gone.

* Bernard Rosenberg, "Mass Culture in America," in *Mass Culture*, p. 5.

Such clarity often becomes synonymous with oversimplification, with the vulgarization of serious things. This is especially evident in Hollywood adaptations of well-known literary works or biographical films about great people. A prime example of the former is the well-known film *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*. In adapting one of Hemingway's most intimate stories, reflecting many of his personal experiences and bitter reflections, Hollywood employed the techniques of commercial cinema, which ultimately destroyed the essence of the literary source.

One watches the endless parade of attractions with bewilderment. First, Africa — wildlife footage filmed on location, well shot but not conveying the stirring atmosphere of the continent that Hemingway so loved. Then Parisian bistros, where the writer "burns through" life after the departure of his first, beloved wife. Then Spain with its colourful bullfighting shown in all its glory. And finally, the Spanish Civil War, which was not present in the story at all. And as the climax — an unexpected ending. In the story, Harry dies, casting off the fat of comfort that had suffocated his talent and spiritually soaring towards the unattainable snowy peaks of Kilimanjaro. In the film — he survives, gently kissing his wife. This ending is a vivid illustration of the idea that in "mass culture," everything is fixable — even death.

In biographical adaptations, a typical example is the film

The Naked Maja, which screened in Soviet cinemas. The plot centres on the touching love story between Francisco Goya and the Duchess of Alba — demonically beautiful and endlessly changing outfits, from luxurious noble dresses to the clothes of a maja — a working-class woman. At the same time, the film presents a full "gentleman's" set of standard entertainment attractions: Spanish dances, bone-crunching fights, lavish celebrations. What's wrong with that? — a defender of such spectacles might ask. If you say "vulgarity and bad taste," that won't be enough. The main issue is that it's unclear why, in this case, the lover-hero had to be Goya.

Maybe it was for the sake of popularizing — even if superficially — his work? But even that is absent in the film. Some episodes in *The Naked Maja* are simply incomprehensible for viewers unfamiliar with Goya's biography. For example, why does the bookstore owner quickly hide the just-published *Caprichos* album when the Duchess enters? Is he afraid of offending the modesty of the noble lady? Or did Goya portray Alba, his former lover, in these prints? The viewer is left guessing, as not a single etching is shown.

Nor are Goya's best, most democratic and folk-inspired paintings featured in the film — such as *The Festival of Saint Isidore*, *The Burial of the Sardine* or *The Majas on the Balcony*. Instead, the film is overflowing with imitations of Goya's work. And when we see a portrait in the film depicting the Hollywood star Ava Gardner — bearing no resemblance to Goya's *Duchess of Alba* — it comes across as sacrilege.

There is also one essential element missing from *The Naked Maja* — the portrayal of the creative process itself. There isn't even an attempt to render into the visible and tangible that elusive, inner essence that makes a person a creator. In the film, everything is depicted purely mechanically. The painter lines up the royal family — and out comes *The Family of King*

Carlos IV. He falls in love with the Duchess of Alba — and paints her portrait. He becomes disillusioned with society — and thus *Los Caprichos* appear...

So instead of showing the true dynamics of the artist's biography, the surrounding environment and daily life that often suggested subjects for his paintings, or analysing the social trends reflected in Goya's work, *The Naked Maja* follows the well-worn path of "mass culture" — it dresses the characters of a standard romantic melodrama in historical costumes, gives them historical names and substitutes genuine historical reality with a fictional one.

Such "adaptations" cannot serve to familiarize audiences with a writer's or painter's body of work, nor do they broaden horizons or raise cultural awareness. They belong in the same category as those examples of "consumer culture" like *Masterpieces of World Literature in Abridged Form* or *Masterpieces of World Philosophy in Summary Form*. Texts in which writers and philosophers carefully crafted the impact of every word are cut, slashed and mutilated by people who have only a distant relationship to creative labour. As a result, not only is the integrity of the work and its emotional impact diminished, but also the fullness of the aesthetic experience for readers and viewers is lost.

This primitivization and vulgarization of everything it touches — from the classics to contemporary works — is especially alarming. "There is no doubt," writes Bernard Rosenberg in the introductory article to the anthology *Mass Culture*, "that mass culture is the primary threat to human individuality... No form of art, no body of knowledge, no ethical system can withstand vulgarization."*

It is hard to disagree with that.

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* Bernard Rosenberg, "Mass Culture in America," in *Mass Culture*, p. 5.

THE PRESS AND THE MANIPULATION OF MASS CONSCIOUSNESS

In his short story *The Tunnel Under the World*, American science fiction writer Frederik Pohl imagines a scenario in which the protagonist suddenly realizes that he isn't living a real life at all, but is merely the subject of ongoing manipulations in a toy-like city built on a table. This fiction doesn't seem so far-fetched once one becomes familiar with the vast system of manipulation employed in the U.S. by cinema, television, radio and the press.

Manipulation as a new social phenomenon is widely discussed in the West today. Its roots go back to the dawn of "mass society," in the 1920s, having been outlined in the seminal work of Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*. He wrote: "Most people have no opinion. The masses have never had any ideas; they lack theoretical understanding of the nature of things. Their incapacity for theoretical thinking prevents them from making rational decisions or forming correct opinions. But without opinions, human society would be chaos — or worse, a historical nothing." Therefore, opinions "must be forced into people from the outside, like lubricant into a machine."* This imposition of public opinion is facilitated, in the philosopher's view, by the fact that the masses possess an innate tendency towards imitation, an instinct for obedience and a craving for role models.

Ortega y Gasset was fully aware that the imposition of public opinion constitutes a form of violence — a means by which dominance arises within human society. But he believed that without spiritual authority, without rulers, without manipulation of opinions and people, society would descend into anarchy and eventually fall apart. Manipulation becomes all the more necessary, in his view, in the modern era, when the masses claim the right to lead society while lacking, according to him, the appropriate capabilities to do so. The modern "mass man," Ortega y Gasset declares, "does not know how to think. He has no idea how pure the air is in which thoughts live. His thoughts are merely instincts wrapped in a logical shell." Therefore, he concludes, "the formation of public opinion is the universal law of political history."*

* J. Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, Berlin, 1929, p. 140.

However, the theories of the Spanish philosopher are far too openly disdainful of the masses to be widely used today, when covert, veiled methods of influencing people are preferred. For that reason, many Western theorists instead rely on more flexible methods, as recommended by French philosopher and sociologist Gustave Le Bon. "The knowledge of crowd psychology," he wrote, "is today the last means available to a statesman — not in order to govern the masses, as that is no longer possible, but in order to keep them from having too much power over him." Le Bon asserted that a crowd always represents "the disappearance of the conscious personality and the orientation of feelings and thoughts in a known direction."** Thus, to control the crowd, one must influence its emotions and imagination. And to do that, ideas must be presented in the form of images — because in this way they enter the subconscious and transform into feelings, which are the main driving force behind mass behaviour. It is precisely these methods of influencing social psychology that form the manipulative core of modern "mass culture."

* *Ibid*., p. 138.

** G. Le Bon, *The Psychology of Peoples and Crowds*, St. Petersburg, 1896, pp. 159, 163.

Le Bon's recommendations became especially widespread after the Second World War for certain social and political reasons. The move of several countries towards socialism, growing contradictions between labour and capital, the collapse of the colonial system — all this intensified the ideological struggle between the two global blocs and pushed bourgeois society into an active campaign for people's minds, mobilizing all available means of mass influence.

Among modern American philosophers and sociologists writing on manipulation, two groups stand out. One, which includes Daniel Bell, Dwight Macdonald and Edward Shils, attempts to philosophically justify the necessity of manipulating the consciousness of the masses. Their argument typically goes as follows: the average person is incapable of grasping rational judgements. The only option is to influence them in a way that changes their perceptions — and that can only be done on a psychological basis. This inability to comprehend reality is, in turn, explained by the increasing role of technology in the world, which dehumanizes the individual. As a result, a kind of spiritual void arises within people — and it is this void that becomes the fertile ground for the manipulation of consciousness and behaviour.

Another factor contributing to manipulation is the rise of mass consumption and the emergence of the generalized "consumer man" — because mass consumption standardizes not only material goods but also human needs and thinking.

But there is another group of philosophers — represented by the already familiar names of Erich Fromm, David Riesman, Herbert Marcuse and Charles Wright Mills — who see in all of the above traits typical only of bourgeois society. It is this system, they argue, that created the "mass man," who has lost his individuality and is vulnerable to all forms of influence through various types of "mass culture."

Here's what Charles Wright Mills writes about this in his book *The Power Elite*: "The mass media, especially television... undermine the foundations of human communication and the thoughtful, unhurried exchange of opinions. They largely destroy the secluded inner life of the individual. They do not serve as instruments of enlightenment or education, but rather as destructive forces: they do not help the viewer or listener to understand the deeper sources of their disconnection from reality, their personal anxieties, unspoken outrage or vague hopes. They offer no opportunity for the individual to rise above their narrow environment, nor do they explain the limited nature of that environment."

Mass media deliver a vast amount of messages and news about what is happening in the world, but they rarely give the listener or viewer a real opportunity to relate their own life to this broader reality. They fail to connect the social and political information they provide with the concerns of the individual. They do not deepen the understanding of the sources of anxiety that plague both the individual and society — anxieties that are often mirrored within the person. On the contrary, they distract people from what truly matters and make it harder for them to understand themselves and the world around them, focusing their attention on contrived emotional clashes and furious conflicts, resolved right there on screen — usually through violence or what passes for humour. In short, from the viewer's perspective, these conflicts remain unresolved. The central provocative conflict that mass entertainment media dwell on is the contradiction between the desire to possess and the impossibility of possessing — whether material wealth or beautiful women. These spectacles are filled with a general atmosphere of tension and suppressed excitement, but they ultimately lead nowhere and offer no resolution.

And further: "The political layman does not gain from the mass media a view of public life that is any deeper than his own; rather, these media squeeze his personal experiences and observations into rigid templates, making him even more ignorant. Such a person does not strive to become an independent individual. He only seeks to secure his share of the material goods around him, expending as little effort as possible and deriving as much pleasure as he can."

"The classical society of politically active citizens is now turning into a politically inert society. Understanding this transformation is one of the keys to understanding the social and psychological content of contemporary American life... Society appears merely as a mechanical collection of individuals, left at the mercy of mass communication media, unable to resist the flood of implanted ideas and representations and their ideological manipulation. The essence of the system of manipulating public opinion, carried out by centralized command structures, amounts, so to speak, to the expropriation of the former mass of small-scale producers and consumers of public opinion, who once operated in conditions of a free and balanced marketplace."*

The broad expansion of manipulation became possible as a result of the concentration of mass media ownership in the hands of a small group of individuals — representatives of big business and those in power. Naturally, all their efforts are directed at preserving the very system from which they benefit and which ensures their wealth. On most key political and ideological issues, they speak with one voice, making it virtually impossible for alternative views to be promoted. As studies conducted in the United States during the Second World War already demonstrated, presenting only one side of

* C. Mills, *The Power Elite*, Moscow, 1959, pp. 422-423, 430-431, 417.

an issue is highly effective when dealing with a broad audience.

However, it would be simplistic to claim that Western mass media do not report objective facts or evaluations at all. The strategy of media owners is far more sophisticated. They aim to preserve a veneer of objectivity and often present content that offers a sober assessment of certain events. For instance, for a long period, American radio aired the weekly commentary of Lyman Bryson, who critically reviewed the country's state of affairs and urgent social problems. When the link between smoking and lung cancer was confirmed, American television — despite the fact that tobacco companies are among its biggest advertisers — aired a sensational program called *Cigarettes and Lung Cancer*. Hollywood produced serious films that revealed flaws in American democracy, such as *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Boomerang*, *The Best Man* and others.

But such content, first of all, never touches the foundations of the system, and secondly, makes up only a tiny fraction of the overall output. It builds prestige and creates the illusion of objectivity, but its impact is drowned out by the flood of other material — unbalanced, biased and propagandistic.

The press has long held the leading role in shaping public opinion. As the famous American lawyer Clarence Darrow once wrote: "The deepest irony lies in the fact that... our independent American press, enjoying unlimited freedom to distort and rewrite the news — is one of the biggest barriers to the American people's freedom."*

So what are the main ways that "'public opinion' is shaped *in favour of the bourgeoisie*"?**

* Irwin Stone, *Clarence Darrow for the Defence*, New York, 1941, p. 48.

** V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 44, p. 79.

The volume of printed media published in the United States is enormous; there are nearly 10,000 newspapers, including 1,750 dailies and 8,150 weekly or less frequently published papers.*

However, out of the 1,500 cities in the United States, only 45 have competing newspapers owned by different proprietors. This fact greatly limits the diversity of viewpoints and leads to the standardization of news. The same commentators appear on the same day in newspapers from coast to coast: James Reston, Joseph Alsop, Jack Anderson, William F. Buckley Jr. and others. Articles that resemble each other, editorials produced in bulk by the same agencies, sports and book reviews, advice columns for lovers and housewives, standard comic strips — all follow a familiar pattern.

Professor of history at the University of California, Robert Cirino, discusses how such a press reflects the real picture of life in the United States and the world in his book *Don't Blame the People*, which analyses the various influences on the shaping of public opinion in the U.S. He reviewed the covers of major U.S. socio-political weekly magazines — *Time*, *Life*, *Newsweek* — and compiled a scale indicating how these magazines' covers portrayed the most important issues of American life. It turned out that the covers of these publications over the past seven and a half years were devoted to the following topics in the following proportions:**

In newspapers — the same story. Robert Cirino calculated that over a two-month period in 1960, the *Los Angeles Times* ran 120 stories about accidents on the front page, 17 stories about celebrities, 40 "human interest" items (love, death, crime) — and not a single piece about hunger, population growth or illiteracy.

* Roland Wolsely, *Understanding Magazines*, Iowa, 1965, p. 4.

** Robert Cirino, *Don't Blame the People*, Los Angeles, 1971, p. 169.

It's no surprise, then, that, as aptly noted by American journalist, writer and playwright Ben Hecht, "trying to find out what's happening in the world by reading an American newspaper is like guessing the time by looking only at the hour hand on a clock."*

According to a survey conducted by the International Press Institute, what interests the modern reader most is local news, followed by foreign and domestic politics, then articles with large-font headlines, and finally sports news. In essence, the reader looks to the paper to answer the following questions: 1) What's happening to people I know?; 2) What events in the world might affect my safety?; 3) What's the most important thing I need to know?; 4) and finally, what do others think about it?

It would be naive to assume that the power to influence readers' minds lies only in the answer to that last question. Far from it. As early as the turn of the century, William Randolph Hearst, one of the founders of modern American journalism, rephrased the old press motto "All the news that's fit to print" to say, "News is what a good editor decides to print." (In the 1960s, a survey asked American journalists if they considered themselves objective. One answered aptly: "I've been instructed to be objective, but I know what kind of stories my boss likes.")

The university journal *Columbia Journalism Review* provides a number of examples. A newspaper owned by a railway company avoided reporting on rail accidents. A paper affiliated with sports organizations ignored the successes of the unwelcome and overhyped the favoured. Newspapers linked to the DuPont clan consistently defended their interests and so on.

Cirino also cites the case of Walter Annenberg, owner of

* *Ibid*., p. 60, 134.

Triangle Publications (which includes newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations), using his media empire to serve personal financial and political goals. Wanting to sink a rival — *Holiday* magazine, which was then in financial trouble and looking for investment — Annenberg ordered an article to be prepared about the magazine's situation. When it was ready, he deliberately altered the figures to make *Holiday*'s financial position look far worse than it actually was.

These same interests led him to instruct all his outlets to oppose the Democratic candidate for governor in the 1966 election because the candidate was a partner in an electronics firm competing with Triangle. Meanwhile, Annenberg loyally supported the then-current administration and was rewarded with the post of ambassador to the UK.

Editors also widely use the tactic of suppressing unfavourable material — not only content that might harm the editor's own business, but anything they believe threatens the system that sustains their prosperity and status, the so-called "establishment." This practice is especially common among the agencies that supply news to a wide network of papers and magazines. One such agency — *Pottstown Mercury* — on September 5, 1968 deleted almost a full newspaper page of news items critical of U.S. government policy in Vietnam.

The UPI agency failed to distribute to newspapers an interview with a young American soldier who had just returned from Vietnam and told the reporter he hoped all American boys would be pulled out as soon as possible. The interview included the following Q&A:

Correspondent: Why do you think they need to be pulled out?

Gwin: Because it's not a war — it's a tragedy.

Correspondent: You think we shouldn't have gone in at all?

Gwin: That's right, sir.*

When CBS Radio aired the interview, it omitted the last question and answer. Only one newspaper — the *Louisville Courier-Journal* — printed the full text.

Chair of the Housing Finance Committee Wright Patman, in a speech at the National Press Club, accused banks of giving millions to large corporations while denying loans to middle-income families. Banks, he said, prefer to invest in business and industry, where they can expand their spheres of influence, rather than lend to individuals who provide nothing but interest in return. This statement was ignored by both *The New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*, even though their correspondents were present.**

Advertising clients also have a powerful influence over what appears in print. American journalist Otto Friedrich, in his book *Decline and Fall*, recounts the sad fate of one of the most popular U.S. magazines — *The Saturday Evening Post*, which shut down in 1969. Advertisers monitored not just the magazine's circulation but also its editorial content. An editorial attacking Barry Goldwater in 1964 cost *The Post* $10 million in withdrawn ads. Articles opposing the Vietnam War cost even more. One full-page ad cost $40,000 — and that ad revenue was the magazine's primary source of income.

Advertisers are guided not only by political but also by moral considerations. At the height of film star Elizabeth Taylor's fame — in the mid-1960s — *The Saturday Evening Post* decided to feature her portrait on the cover of an issue filled with automobile ads. A cover like that guaranteed a large circulation — what more could advertisers want? But they protested. Detroit's auto tycoons deemed Taylor "immoral"

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* Robert Cirino, *Don't Blame the People*, pp. 81, 143, 150-151.

** *Ibid*., p. 145.

(she had changed husbands four times) and did not want to appear in the same issue with her.

The magazine was constantly forced to manoeuvre. In an article about the automobile industry, the statistics on accidents and fatalities were downplayed to a minimum and buried deep in the text. A prepared piece on the dangers of excessive vitamin consumption never appeared at all, since profits from pharmaceutical advertising brought the *Post* three million dollars a year. When the magazine launched a campaign against water pollution, it immediately included a disclaimer noting that Detroit's factories were working on treatment systems. When an article exposed shady corporate ties of the corrupt senator Thomas Dodd, the names of companies that were advertisers were deliberately left out.

In its final years, *The Saturday Evening Post* even adopted the practice of featuring portraits of company heads on its covers to attract advertisers. One special issue, dedicated to the Ford Motor Company (September 7, 1968), was topped with a colour photo of its chairman. But this raised another problem: what about the readers? If Ford got a cover, then the heads of other car manufacturers would need to be featured too. But who would be enticed to buy a magazine with portraits of overweight, balding, middle-aged businessmen on the cover? The *Post* never found a way out of this contradiction.

Editorial decisions are also affected by the fact that many newspaper and magazine publishers are now part of conglomerates — associations that include companies of various industries. For example, the *Times Mirror Corporation*, which publishes the *Los Angeles Times* — the third-largest newspaper in the U.S. — also owns 20 smaller companies with combined revenues of 350 million dollars a year. Some conglomerates include chemical companies or arms manufacturers alongside

media outlets, which heavily influences editorial policy on questions of war and peace. Banks are particularly active in this, having secured influence in various sectors of business.

The U.S. government also has considerable influence over press policy. Although it lacks legal authority over newspapers and magazines, presidents and their staff use indirect methods to pressure the media.

It is enough to note that the White House spends 425 million dollars a year on "public information" — twice as much as the combined news-gathering budgets of the two major U.S. news agencies, the three main television networks and 10 major newspapers.*

The White House Public Affairs Office employs 6,858 staff. And as journalist and prominent political commentator James Reston aptly observed, "these employees serve not the public, but the people who appointed them."** They follow a sophisticated policy of creating a positive image of the president and his administration in the press, resorting — when necessary — to distortion and outright lies.

A striking example of this was the 1960 incident involving the American U-2 spy plane and its pilot, Francis Gary Powers. When the USSR announced that a U-2 had been shot down over Soviet territory, it made no mention of the pilot's fate. Official U.S. sources claimed the plane had accidentally crossed the border while gathering high-altitude weather data. The American press launched a coordinated attack on the USSR, accusing it of killing an innocent pilot engaged in scientific research. Just as the wave of press outrage peaked, the USSR revealed that the plane had been discovered and shot down deep inside Soviet territory — the pilot had sur-

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* "The New York Times," March 19, 1967, p. 29.

** William Rivers, *The Opinionmakers*, New York, 1965, pp. 143, 150-151.

vived and confessed to his reconnaissance mission for U.S. intelligence, photographing Soviet military sites.

Caught in a bind, the U.S. government had to walk back its claims. The State Department announced that "the aircraft may have had a reconnaissance mission" and the earlier statement had been "not entirely accurate" — but all this allegedly happened without the president's knowledge. The press quickly adapted. Some serious journalists initially attempted to raise questions "about the ambiguous position the government had gotten itself into," but they were soon drowned out by a wave of jingoism. Espionage and lies were now justified as matters of national necessity.

One can also recall the dark legacy of Senator McCarthy, who for five years publicly accused many Americans of communist sympathies in the press, rarely providing evidence. He lied, twisted facts and made baseless claims — but newspapers published his rants regularly simply because he was a member of the U.S. government.

When, in certain isolated cases, some American newspapers and magazines — driven by a love of sensationalism — publish materials unfavourable to the government, punishment in one form or another is not long in coming. Here we can mention the criminal charges brought against D. Ellsberg and A. Russo, who published the classified Pentagon Papers. Or the Senate inquiry (Can a soldier be prosecuted for murder like a common criminal?) that followed the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*'s exposé of the massacre of civilians in My Lai — an event which forced the military to put its leader, Lieutenant William Calley, on trial. Also relevant is the much-publicized 1969 speech by Vice President Spiro Agnew, who accused the press and television of failing to provide readers and viewers with a correct explanation of American policy in Vietnam.

Indeed, from time to time, a wave of dissatisfaction with

the continuation of the "dirty war" in Vietnam managed to break through into the pages of the American press. "On the Road to 1984"* was the title of an article published in *Saturday Review* by Amherst College professor Henry Steele Commager. "In George Orwell's Oceania," he wrote, "there was a huge information agency. It was called the Ministry of Truth and its purpose was to ensure that every citizen thought as required... Our own Department of Defense Information Agency has created an American Ministry of Truth, designed to impose on the people a perception of foreign policy events that it deems necessary. Take, for example, the film *Why Vietnam?*, produced by the Department of Defense with support from the State Department. This is a case of open government self-promotion and hidden propaganda. The film presents the official point of view on the Vietnam War without the slightest hint that any other perspective could exist."**

Commager went on to describe how the film repeats the same tired slogans: "The U.S. is fulfilling its sacred duty in Vietnam," "Appeasement invites aggression" and "The U.S. will not give in or retreat — although it is always ready for negotiations." The fact that this film was widely screened in schools and colleges was, in his view, just one episode in the broader campaign to shape public opinion in the U.S. Of course, this type of material was unlikely to please the Pentagon or the U.S. government, which was continuing its policy of military adventurism. But, as Commager rightly noted — and contrary to Spiro Agnew's polemical exaggerations — such critical publications were relatively rare.

At that very time, in 1968, the *Boston Globe* conducted a

* *1984* — a reactionary science fiction novel by George Orwell, which tells the story of a future state where control is imposed not only over people's actions but also over their thoughts.

** Henry Commager, "On the Way to 1984," *The Saturday Review*, April 15, 1967, p. 68.

survey of 39 leading American newspapers with a combined circulation of 22 million. The findings revealed that not a single one of them had questioned the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam — despite the fact that millions of Americans involved in the protest movement were demanding it.*

There is ample evidence that, thanks to editorial oversight — often following explicit instructions — the press did not always publish what had actually been submitted by reporters from Southeast Asia. Here are two examples.

Peter Arnett, a correspondent for the *Associated Press International* in Cambodia, submitted the following report: "American tanks captured the Cambodian town of Snoul on Wednesday morning after U.S. airstrikes destroyed 90 percent of it. American soldiers celebrated the victory by tearing down the Cambodian flag and looting the few shops that remained standing." He then gave a detailed account of the looting. When an officer ordered the soldiers to put the stolen goods back, they laughed and loaded them into their tanks. Only the first part of the report — ending with the removal of the flag — made it to the newspapers. In a special telegram addressed to the API bureau in Saigon, the foreign editor wrote that "in the extremely tense atmosphere in the U.S. regarding Southeast Asia, it's better not to report on such things."**

Here's another story similar to the first, which played out in the editorial office of the political weekly *Time*. The magazine's Vietnam correspondent, Charles Mohr, wrote truthful reports. But in New York, each of his reports was edited in a way that downplayed the losses of the puppet regime and magnified the successes of the Americans. Eventually, when

* James Aronson, *The Press and the Cold War*, New York, 1970, p. 21.

** William Rivers, "Who Shall Guard the Guards?" *The Progressive*, September 1971, p. 27.

Mohr simply wrote that the war was essentially lost, editor Otto Fuerbringer not only threw the report in the bin, but also assigned other staff on the ground to write a piece in the spirit of "the American soldiers fought better than ever." But even that wasn't enough for him. Fuerbringer then commissioned an article targeting American correspondents in Vietnam.

As soon as this piece appeared in *Time*, Mohr declared that he would immediately resign unless he was given the opportunity to publish a rebuttal. After lengthy meetings with the editor-in-chief, he was allowed to write an article — but it was "edited" in such a way that the offended American correspondents in Vietnam considered it merely a continuation of the previous piece. Mohr left the magazine.*

Naturally, facts like these — once they become known to readers — undermine public trust in the press. The coverage of one of the most pressing issues in American domestic politics — the black struggle for civil rights — is also biased. Of course, newspapers today pay incomparably more attention to this issue than in the past. Until 1954, when the U.S. Supreme Court issued its decision to end segregation, the press simply kept silent about black Americans, only publishing brief reports about crimes they allegedly committed. Over the past 10 years, reports about black unrest, protest marches and organized demonstrations have regularly made front-page news. Sometimes the coverage is positive, sometimes negative — but that's not the point. What matters is that sensationalism still dominates. Events are described, but the causes behind them are not analysed. The American press writes very little about the daily lives of black people — their views, tastes or interests — that is, the kinds of things that could help white Americans see them as people just like themselves.

* William Rivers, *The Opinionmakers*, p. 121.

Nor are there analytical articles about the harsh living conditions of black communities, unemployment among them or the appalling conditions in the ghettos. A story is considered "newsworthy" only when there's a government investigation, a mayoral statement or a court case...

Old traditions in covering black life — focusing only on the negative — have proven resilient. Even today, many news stories in the U.S. press begin like this: "John Smith, a Negro, robbed a bank." Or: "Four black youths attacked..." If a black person steals a chicken, newspapers describe it as if he robbed the entire contents of the First National Bank. The country is made up of many ethnic groups. Yet no one thinks to write: "Frank Sinatra, an Italian..." So why the emphasis on race when it comes to black people? After all, for example, in the list of Americans killed in Vietnam, this detail was never highlighted.

Even the simple placement of a news story often serves as an expression of a particular editorial policy pursued by the press. For instance, the *Los Angeles Times* reported on a flagrant incident: three drunken white men got into a car with rifles and drove into South Los Angeles with the specific intention of "hunting a black man." Seeing a black sailor on the street, they shot and killed him. This report, printed in small type, was buried somewhere in the middle of the newspaper. Now imagine for a moment that the people in the car had been black and had killed a white sailor. What massive, screaming headlines would have greeted readers from the front page! But in this case — the incident wasn't hidden, but it also wasn't brought to the public's proper attention.

Even the most "respectable" newspapers don't shy away from publishing sensational, though false, stories about black Americans. The prestigious *New York Times* ran a piece about the "Blood Brothers" — an alleged gang of 400 Harlem

youths supposedly preparing to kill white people. This story — which sent New York into a panic ("Can you believe it? The blacks are organizing to slaughter whites!") — turned out to be a complete fabrication. Nevertheless, it carried a powerful charge of racial propaganda and hatred.

Then the highly esteemed *New York Herald Tribune* published a story about the so-called "Five Percenters." These were supposedly black individuals who believed that 95 per cent of their race were either dumb cattle or Uncle Toms, and that only the remaining 5 per cent were strong and brave enough to kill all whites and black police officers. The effect and impact of this report were the same as in the previous case.

There are also frequent instances in which newspapers inject a racial angle into events that had no such component to begin with. For example, someone once called the editorial office of the *New York Post* to report that a fight had broken out on a ferry carrying 1,000 children on an excursion. The editor immediately shouted into the phone: "Find out how many niggers are on board and who started the fight!" Although there were only 10 black kids on the ferry, and the fight was started by two Italian boys, the headline that appeared read: "Race Riot on Excursion Ferry." For days afterwards, until the trip ended, parents were beside themselves with fear that their children would be harmed by black kids.

Manipulation and distortion of facts are especially common when newspapers report on statements by black leaders. Charles Evers — a prominent figure in the civil rights movement — said in a speech shortly after the murder of his brother Medgar Evers: "If whites don't stop treating us badly, burning our churches, killing our brothers and sisters, we will shoot back." The newspapers reported it as: "Evers says blacks will shoot whites."*

* *The Black American and the Press*, ed. by Jack Lyle, Los Angeles,

Malcolm X, one of the leading figures in the black movement, wrote: "My interviews were never printed the way I gave them. I learned how the press can twist words if it wants to. If I had said, 'Mary had a little lamb,' it probably would've been published as, 'Malcolm X mocks Mary.'"

In his autobiography, Malcolm X also recounted how the mass media created for him the image of a propagandist of terror, hate and fear. In 1959, he took part in a TV program called *Hate That Hate Produced*. "Every sentence was edited," he wrote, "to heighten the shock value. I think the producers intended the public reaction to be the same as during the *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast in 1938 when Orson Welles scared America with a fictional Martian invasion... Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers, both white and black, were exclaiming, 'Did you hear that? They're preaching hate against whites!' The press immediately jumped on it with headlines like: 'Preachers of Hate,' 'Champions of Violence,' 'Black Racists,' 'Black Fascists' and 'They're Probably Inspired by Communists...'"

All this led Professor Woody Klein, in his article "The New Revolution: Postscript,"* to draw the following grim conclusions:

Mass media do not fully or objectively reflect the civil rights movement in America.

Negative stories — violence, conflict — are covered far more than the positive achievements of black Americans.

The white press creates a negative image of black people.

The statements and events of the black struggle for rights are inadequately analysed and interpreted.

1969, p. 69.

*Woody Klein, "The New Revolution: A Postscript," in *Race and the News Media*, ed. by Paul Fisher and Ralph Lowenstein, New York, 1967, pp. 144-146.

The press tends to take the side of the police during controversial incidents involving police brutality or conflict with black citizens.

The black press, which serves as a protest press, is generally unknown to white readers and undervalued by them.

Press coverage of the black struggle for civil rights has made more white Americans aware of the existence of black people, but has not led to genuine interracial understanding.

There is little to add to this thorough conclusion — except, perhaps, that the U.S. press, which could have done so much to overcome racial hatred, has now become for black Americans as bitter an enemy as the police. In this context, the number of black newspapers is growing. Their number has already reached 145, with almost 4 million black readers. The owner of a bourgeois black newspaper in Baltimore, speaking on national public television, said he had been forced to start it because none of the city's major periodicals covered the life of black people adequately. Numerous sociological surveys conducted in the U.S. show that most readers consider newspapers' opinions not only on the "black issue" but in general to be biased and untrustworthy.

That's why journalists, like other workers in mass media, try to find ways of presenting material that, while preserving the appearance of objectivity and respect for readers' intelligence, carry hidden bias and subtly guide the public to the desired conclusions. Several proven techniques exist for this purpose. One of them is psychological influence on the audience through the way materials are presented. Here's what former *New York Times* staff member Cy Geron writes in his article "Whom Does the *New York Times* Serve?": "A lasting effect comes from the everyday subconscious absorption by the reader of the evaluations the paper gives to events — that is, from reading what is boldly presented and attracts more

attention rather than what is downplayed by the newspaper."*

The American reader is already accustomed to the fact that material placed deep in the back pages of a thick newspaper is considered insignificant. Therefore, whenever there's a need to diminish the importance of a particular event, the report is buried as deeply as possible. The aforementioned Robert Cirino provides several examples. The *Birmingham News* splashed massive headlines on its front page about unrest in Cyprus, but only mentioned — at the bottom of the fourth page — a brief note on local black citizens clashing with the police, who hosed them down and unleashed dogs on them.

In July 1969, newspapers ran front-page stories about a proposed increase in funding for a U.S. hunger relief program. But in December of the same year, Senator McGovern gave an interview to *The New York Times* accusing the government of creating artificial barriers to implementing the program. The interview was published... on page 26, even though it was part of the "Face the Nation" series, all other entries of which had been published on the first or second pages. The interview also had a paragraph removed — the one where the senator pointed out the real reasons behind the delays — and all of his comments on the My Lai massacre were cut as well.**

This technique is often used for the purpose of disinformation. Usually, it occurs when publishing retractions of sensational reports. On December 11, 1967, *The New York Times* and other newspapers across the country ran huge front-page headlines saying that "Vietnamese soldiers take heroin before battle."*** The claim was never confirmed: the white powder

*Sai Gereon, "Whom Does the *New York Times* Serve?" *Abroad*, 1969, no. 39, p. 21.

** Robert Cirino, *Don't Blame the People*, p. 142, 153.

*** "The New York Times," December 11, 1967, p. 1.

found on the dead Vietnamese turned out to be insect repellent. *The New York Times* published the retraction at the very bottom of page 11, while the *Los Angeles Times* didn't print it at all — leaving millions of readers convinced that Vietnamese soldiers were using drugs.

Another example: *The New York Times* placed a Pentagon statement on its front page reporting that during an anti-war demonstration in October 1967, tear gas had been used not by government troops but by the demonstrators themselves. When the falsehood of that report became obvious the very next day, the paper printed just two tiny lines on page 32: "Some correspondents reported today that they saw soldiers using tear gas against demonstrators."*

In general, when it comes to conveying information and its interpretation, a whole arsenal of techniques has been developed. For example, bias can be embedded in the very reporting of a fact. Here's how two American newspapers with different leanings reported the same strike. One entitled the piece "Paralysing Strike," while the other wrote "All Trade Unions Acted in United Front." The two different viewpoints are reflected already in the headlines themselves. The fact is not presented in isolation, but with an assessment stemming from the political orientation of each paper.

Placing interpretation in the headline is a very typical method used by the American press. And often, such a headline contradicts the content of the article itself. During the 1968 presidential elections, one of the Republican candidates, George Romney, stated that the Vietnam issue would be the number one issue of the upcoming campaign. The article was published under the headline: "Romney — The Only Candidate Who Puts Blacks Second." But the article itself contained not a single word about his position on the black question and

* Robert Cirino, *Don't Blame the People*, p. 154.

the word "black" was not even mentioned.

Senator James Pearson, concerned about the growing influence of the military in American society, said: "We need them, but we must control them... We must be vigilant and ensure that they are servants of peace and prosperity, not servants of war and destruction."* *The Los Angeles Times* made sure to ignore exactly those words and published the piece under the following heading: "Senator Calls U.S. Military a Real Force." The Pentagon is unlikely to object to such a headline.

An illustration of how interpretation is inserted into objective reporting can be seen in two short articles about the same event.

UPI agency report:

"Student March in the Capital

"Washington. A column of peace-advocating students marched to Arlington Cemetery on Saturday, demanding disarmament and an end to nuclear testing."

Robert Baskin, head of the Washington bureau of the *Morning News* (Dallas):

"Student March in Capital Organized by Bearded Beatniks

"Washington. Leftist students, mostly made up of bearded beatniks, marched through the streets of the capital on Saturday, heading to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington Cemetery."**

Baskin, it seems, knows the tastes and political sympathies of Texas readers very well and plays to them by inserting his personal attitude into the report.

* Robert Cirino, *Don't Blame the People*, p. 155, 158.

** William Rivers, *The Opinionmakers*, p. 180.

As a rule, all materials printed in the American press include conclusions so the reader doesn't have to make the effort — everything is delivered ready-made. In the 1950s, two scholars — Wallace Mandell and Carl Hovland — conducted a special experiment. They had two groups of students listen to recordings of broadcasts advocating currency devaluation. The content of both broadcasts was identical, except that one included conclusions and the other did not. As a result, 47.9 per cent of the first group expressed support, while only 19.3 per cent of the second group did.* Thus, the experiment confirmed what the press had long known and used — teaching readers stereotypical reactions.

There is even a "theory of stereotyping," once developed by American journalist Walter Lippmann, who argued that, since people find it increasingly difficult to navigate the growing flow of information, certain stereotypes should be developed to help them better orient themselves. Each such "stereotype," in simplified form, not only groups together a whole range of phenomena, but also assigns a certain value to them, conditioning people to automatic and standardized thinking.

The great scholar Albert Schweitzer wrote indignantly about such things in his book *My Life and Thought*: "Organized political, social and religious associations in our time strive to make the individual arrive at conclusions not by way of independent thought, but to adopt as their own the conclusions that have already been pre-prepared for them. Anyone who thinks for himself and is spiritually free is inconvenient and undesirable for such organizations. There is no guarantee that he will merge with these organizations to the extent they require."**

* Joseph Klapper, *The Effects of Mass Communication*, pp. 116-117.

** Albert Schweitzer, *Out of My Life and Thought*, New York, 1963,

The method of so-called "human interest," a sentimental and melodramatic treatment of any issue, is also widely used. At its origins stands William Randolph Hearst. He was the first to play on the public's attention to the "eternal" categories of human existence — love, death, sin, cruelty, money. To illustrate the sentimental tone of the material printed in his newspapers, it is enough to cite only their titles: "All for a Woman's Love," "A Bride, but Not a Wife," "Baptized in Blood," "A Victim of His Passion," and so on and so forth. Hearst instructed his staff never to write simply about crimes and scandals, but to treat them as life tragedies. In practice, it looked like this: suppose a man killed his wife. The newspaper reporting this should not be interested in the real-life, social or economic motives behind it. The reporter was to tell readers how a man, who loved a woman enough to marry her, came to the idea of killing her. That's how love stories, which ordinary readers are always drawn to, appear in the pages of newspapers. Each of them imagines himself in the place of the unfortunate criminal and thereby justifies him.

These same "personal" stories are also used for more serious purposes — to prepare for war, to inflame "patriotic" feelings in people, hatred for the enemy, and so on. On the eve of the Spanish-American War, a message was received that a seventeen-year-old girl, Evangelina Cisneros, had been arrested for political reasons and sentenced to 20 years in prison. Hearst, upon seeing this material, exclaimed: "We'll get all Americans on their feet!" And in his newspapers, the story was presented in such a way that millions of readers began to personally hate the Spanish for their cruelty and violence. Such a universal effect could not have been achieved by any speech.

The same thing happened during the Second World War.

p. 170.

The magazine *Modern Screen*, for example, published a photograph of the famous actress-dancer Betty Grable, pierced by a bullet. This photo was allegedly sent to her by a group of American soldiers from the Pacific theatre of war — they had found it on the chest of a fallen comrade. The bullet had passed through it and pierced his heart. No commentary was needed here. The fact, presented in the proper tone, as if in a confidential one-on-one conversation with the reader, was enough. (This tone is perfectly described by Georges Simenon in the novella *The Prison*. Its hero, the publisher of a popular magazine "*You*," says: "The texts must give the impression that these are letters from our readers... We play on the intimate, the personal... The slogan of the day is personality, individuality — precisely because everything else is standardized."*)

The same "personal" turn is applied not only to stories about specific people, but also to general topics. For example, if an article is entitled "On the Economic Situation in Canada," the editor will definitely change this headline to make it sound less abstract and immediately grab the reader's attention. Something like: "Why Is It So Hard to Get Rich in Canada?"

Worthy successors to Hearst's traditions in the modern era have become many American newspapers and magazines. But perhaps the most illustrative in this regard are the publications of the recently deceased Henry Luce. For 40 years he directed the editorial policy of the most widely circulated socio-political magazines in the U.S., such as *Time*, *Life*, *Fortune* and several others of a more specialized type, with a total circulation of 14 million copies. People say of the first two that *Life* is for those who can't read and *Time* is for those who

* Georges Simenon, "The Prison," *Foreign Literature*, 1968, no. 8, pp. 144, 150.

can't think. "I'm a fan of exciting banality,"* Luce himself said and skilfully ensured the implementation of this principle in practice, paying his staff high salaries. At various times, such prominent American writers, critics and philosophers as Stephen Vincent Benét, John O'Hara, John Galbraith, Theodore White, Daniel Bell, John Hersey, Dwight Macdonald and others worked at *Time*. If they did not find the willpower to leave in time (the ones listed above became famous only after leaving), they faced creative ruin. Luce was called one of the two greatest enemies of literary talent in our time (the first was Hollywood). For the spirit of general melodramatization that reigned in *Time* gradually entered the blood and flesh of those who worked there, and it was impossible to get rid of it.

"How can *Time* reflect reality," wrote critic Dwight Macdonald, "if every story had to be turned into a little melodrama with an exciting beginning, a climax, a surprising ending, and had to be written from a specific point of view. Just as mass-produced films distort human experience, deprive it of complexity and diversity, smoothing out the rough edges for an audience whose top priority is entertainment, so too does *Time*. It turns current events and real people into mass-produced movies."**

This is a very accurate observation. And it immediately places journalism of this kind alongside other similar phenomena of "mass culture." Based on real-life events and phenomena, a fictional reality is created, which the reader, unaware of this, accepts as genuine.

A typical example of such material can be found in the article "Of Time and the Stabber," published in *Time* on December 5, 1960. It was based on a real incident: the famous

* Joseph Epstein, "Henry Luce and His Time," *Commentary*, November 1967, no. 8, p. 43.

** *Ibid*., p. 46.

writer Norman Mailer stabbed his wife. Take a look at the gripping drama that the anonymous author crafted out of this event. First, the scene is described in detail — the evening in Mailer's apartment. The article tells who was present, what the guests were doing and saying. After this (again, in great detail, as though the author had been right there next to the protagonist the entire time), it recounts how Mailer walked into his wife's bedroom and, out of nowhere, stabbed her with a knife.

Then the author moves on to explaining the reasons. In his opinion, after *The Naked and the Dead* (Mailer's first novel that brought him international fame), his creative trajectory had sharply declined; he longed to regain attention, became obsessed with the theme of violence — and here, the article implies, is the practical result of all that. And finally, a very unexpected ending: Mailer allegedly asked not to be sent for a psychiatric evaluation, otherwise all his previous work — his books — would be called into question. But "in the interest of society," Mailer was sent for evaluation at Bellevue.

In this article, truth, half-truth and outright lies are artfully mixed. Exactly the kind of "distortion, omission and falsification that offends journalistic ethics" that long-time *Time* contributor T.S. Matthews once wrote about. The author here doesn't even attempt to delve into Mailer's personality as a writer or as a person. He reduces him to the level of a clerk who, having sat all day in an office, comes home in the evening and takes his frustration out on his wife. But what rich material for gossip among the public who once again get the opportunity to scorn the morals of these "intellectuals," and how many colourful details!

It is from such details that the style of nearly all materials in this magazine is built. A special guide for its staff reads: "It is far more important that you not only tell us the key

facts, but that we are able to see, feel, hear, even smell what happened. What colour and material was the dress? The exact words a junkie used to his drug dealer. What kind of wood was the doctor's desk made of? Etc., etc."*

This is how a respectable political magazine speaks to its readers. So what can we say about those American newspapers that are called "yellow" in the U.S.? The ones that completely ignore the reader's intellect and appeal only to their emotions. The ones whose readers "don't know how to read" (in the figurative sense) since they're mostly fed pictures.

The dominance of visual content in American mass journalism has long been a cause for concern among many serious people in the country. This, too, as we have already seen, is a hallmark of "mass culture" in general. Pictures are universally understood; they require no education or preparation. This is what the average reader wants — someone who doesn't want to strain themselves with reading, who loves, on the one hand, to be up to date with the news, and on the other — to be entertained. So it's no coincidence that the emergence of tabloids (newspapers mostly made up of images) in the U.S. coincided with the rise and establishment of "mass culture."

The first such newspaper — *Illustrated Daily News* — appeared in 1919. Within two years, its circulation exceeded that of any other newspaper in New York. And a few years later, it had the highest circulation in the U.S. (3.25 million on Sundays).** What was it like? Half the size of a standard newspaper page (so it could be easily read on the subway or bus, and the content of a page could be taken in at a glance), it avoided serious topics: ¾ of it was pictures, ¾ advertising, ¾ news, ¾ fiction. The main content of this tabloid was

* William Rivers, *The Opinionmakers*, p. 111, 119.

** Simon Bessie, *Jazz Journalism: The Story of the Tabloid Newspapers*, New York, 1969, p. 16.

beauty contests ("See the most beautiful girls in New York in *Illustrated Daily News!*"), photographs of attractive women (awaiting trial, caught with a forged check or marrying for the fifth time), intimate stories from the lives of celebrities, social gossip, high-profile crime stories, sports, advice for lovers and young housewives, comics, detective stories and melodramas. Other tabloids that emerged after *Illustrated Daily News* followed the same model.

Everywhere the same principle: every issue must have a "hook" — a piece about crime, sex or an heroic act. More photos of celebrities (famous for whatever reason). Simple, vivid language. Minimal commentary. Often, stories were told entirely through pictures. Ninety per cent entertainment, ten per cent un-boring information.

Contests of all kinds are very popular among tabloids. Contests for simply the prettiest girl. For the most beautiful secretary. A "Miss Courtesy" contest. (A cash prize was promised to men who gave up their seat in the subway to a girl specially sent by the newspaper. To spare readers the need to give up their seat to just any woman, a photo of "Miss Courtesy" was published... in a swimsuit.)

As for the "fiction" in these publications, the same themes and ideas dominate as in any mass-produced media — be it film, television or journalism. Endless stories about poor but beautiful girls who marry rich men. Stories about those who succeeded in life and what helped them do it. Exploitation of human passions.

The love of sensation, inherent in the American press in general, has reached enormous proportions here. For the sake of it, the staff of such newspapers stop at nothing. They bring readers into the inner workings of famous nightclubs. They sneak into the boudoirs of heirs to large fortunes and movie stars. They invite readers to peek through keyholes, thus initi-

ating them into the "glamorous life."

Gradually, other American newspapers began to adopt the tabloid experience. This was especially evident in the field of illustration. Comic strips — so-called "comics" — are now widely used not only in the U.S., but also in the European press.

"In the first drawing, a scene in a restaurant was depicted. A blonde, extremely full-chested lady in a shiny low-cut dress was sitting at a table. Across from her sat a man in a blue half-mask, a tight-fitting costume and a wide leather belt. A skull was embroidered on his chest. In the background, there was a bandstand, people in tuxedos and evening gowns, and on the table were a bottle of champagne and two flutes. The next drawing showed the same man in the unusual outfit. A halo glowed around his head and he had inserted his right hand into some strange structure resembling a primus stove. The third drawing again showed the restaurant, but now the man in the costume appeared to be floating above the table, and the blonde woman was gazing at him indifferently. Finally, the last illustration once again showed the same man, still levitating, with stars sparkling in the background. From the ring on his right index finger, a giant hand was emerging, and on the palm of this hand lay an orange.

"The illustrations were partially covered with white paint — along the upper edges or in the form of ovals pasted over the dazzling teeth of the characters. Over this paint, brief handwritten texts in ink were added, though still unfinished.

"That same evening, the Blue Leopard and wealthy Beatrice met in New York's most luxurious restaurant.

"'I feel... I have a strange feeling... I think I... I love you.'

"'What? I thought the moon just tilted.'

"The Blue Leopard quietly left the hall and put on his magic ring.

"'Forgive me, I must leave you for a moment. I think something's wrong with the moon.'

"And once again that evening, the Blue Leopard left the woman he loved, left her to save the universe from imminent doom. Those damned crismopumps were up to something..."*

This description is not even a satirical exaggeration. This is exactly what magazine and newspaper comics look like — a typical and most simplified manifestation of "picture culture." A comic is a series of drawings telling some kind of serialized story with recurring characters. A manifestation of that same seriality, only in its most simplified form.

This phenomenon was born in the U.S. at the very end of the 19th century. In 1896, the American newspaper *The World*, owned by Pulitzer, began publishing a series of drawings called *The Yellow Kid's Nightshirt*. The success was enormous, and the concept firmly took root in the newspaper and magazine practices of many countries in Europe and America.

At first, these drawings, mainly intended for children, were fairly harmless: they anthropomorphized the animal world (*Crazy Cat*, *Felix the Cat*), depicted everyday life (*Polly and Her Pals*, *Bring Up Father* and others). Especially good were the comics depicting Walt Disney's screen characters — Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Pluto the dog. The wonderful drawings skilfully conveyed the psychology of animals, the sequence of images had its own rhythm and the dialogues were often expressive and funny.

Since the late 1930s, comics began to include death and violence, robbery and murder, crime and espionage, supermen and bandits. In terms of content, they went far beyond a child's perception, becoming propaganda for vulgarity, bad taste, ideas of racial inequality, violence and cruelty. Things

* Per Wahlöö, *The Death of the 31st Department*, pp. 255-256.

reached the point that in France, the communist faction of the National Assembly introduced a bill demanding a ban on publishing comics such as *Tarzan* in the children's press, as it "promotes the superiority of the white man," *Superman* with its incredible violence, and also called for limiting the depiction in general press comics of horror scenes (crimes, torture), eroticism and the triumph of force over intellect, etc. The law was adopted on July 16, 1949.*

In the United States, the comic book craze continues. Specific studies have shown that 37 per cent of American children read nothing but works in this genre. Sociologist T.F. Hoult tried to determine experimentally how they affect children. He studied 235 boys and girls aged 10 to 17 who had been arrested for various crimes and compared them with children of the same gender, age, socio-economic status and class based on how many comics they had read. It turned out that the juvenile offenders had read significantly more comics about crime and violence than the other group, though they differed in no other respect. And although Hoult was very cautious in his conclusions, the results speak for themselves.**

The success of comics is mainly explained by the fact that they are the most accessible form of "mass culture" to understand. Their simplified content presents the same myths already discussed above. The same escape from everyday life into luxury and romantic love (recall the restaurant scene!), exoticism, adventure or, on the contrary, a glorified version of that everyday life. Depictions of hard-working capitalists who supposedly earn profits only to fulfil their civic duty — to give to the poor. The same preaching of petty-bourgeois values. Exploitation of sex and violence. Aesthetically, the over-

* Claude Frère and Nicole Phelouzat, *Comics,* in *Mass Media: The Press of Today*, Paris, 1966, p. 78.

** See Joseph Klapper, *The Effects of Mass Communication*, p. 153.

whelming majority of modern comics fall outside the realm of art. The drawings have no artistic value, the dialogue is poor, simplistic and serves only an explanatory function. The number of characters is kept to a minimum and their actions lack any psychological motivation. Al Capp, creator of the popular comic *Li'l Abner*, said: "I just involve my characters in the consequences of their own stupidity and then take away their brains so they can't do anything about it."*

Comics increasingly expanded their reach, gradually moving on to adaptations of well-known literary works (*Manon Lescaut* and others), until in 1947, so-called photo-novels appeared — the next step in the development of visuality in "mass culture." Their predecessor was the film novel, which appeared back in the 1930s. Frames from films were arranged in plot sequence, accompanied by short text "bubbles," like in comics. (Hence the name "*fumetti*" — smoke shops — given in Italy to both comics and film novels.) For those who hadn't seen the film, these formats helped visualize what it was about; for those who had, they served as a reminder, a kind of replay. These film novels, which had a rather short life, inspired enterprising publishers to create photo-novels. The only difference was that these were no longer based on a well-known film, but were original stories, with key plot points captured in photographs and accompanied by minimal text. One of the first creators of the new genre was the now-famous Italian film director Damiano Damiani, whose photo-novel *Bolero* sold 600,000 copies in the late 1940s. When creating such works, cinematic techniques were widely used — close-ups, backlighting, fades, depth of field. The rhythm of the photo layout was largely borrowed from magazine and book illustration. On a two-page spread, there was usually a large photo introducing readers to the atmosphere of the novel (replacing

* M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 177.

the descriptive passages so essential to real novels). Around it, smaller photographs showed the characters' actions along with necessary commentary. The size of the photos was extremely important since tests showed that readers can take in with one glance only those that don't exceed 4x4 in size. Larger ones require more detailed viewing.

So, through experimentation, by combining cinematic and graphic design techniques, the authors of photo-novels try to avoid monotony, though with limited success. Works of this kind — without exception — are melodramatic. Their very titles attest to this: *A Book for Two*, *Heart's Notebook*, *Desire*, *Fates*, *Eva*, *Secrets of the Heart*, *You and Me*, etc. Perhaps that is why they are so beloved by the women's press where they originated. There are no comic characters in them. Just a few slightly spicy lines brighten this gloomy world of tears, suffering and sacrifice. Here rule Fate and Morality, led by the myth of Penelope — the myth of female faithfulness.

The distribution figures for photo-novels are enormous. The reason for their success is ease of comprehension. An experiment was even conducted, in which one group of people was given a photo-novel to read, and another group — a typed version of the same story, without pictures but with detailed descriptions of all scenes and characters. The first group not only read the photo-novel two to five times faster than the second, but also remembered it much better. In addition, it evoked far stronger emotions in them.*

This blatant vulgarization of literature and art serves only to satisfy lowbrow tastes. The use of stereotypical characters, personalities and plotlines conditions readers — both men and women — to think in equally stereotypical ways. Illustrations and photographs are worthwhile only when they invite reflection, not when they serve as a form of hypnosis. This kind of superficial browsing eliminates the need for thought and concentration, fostering a primitive attitude toward life and art.

* Evelyne Sullerot, *Photo-Novels,* in *Mass Media: The Press of Today*, Paris, 1966, p. 88.

In recent years, sexually explicit photo-novels masquerading as science fiction have become especially widespread. In these stories, bizarre cosmic monsters — whose arrival on Earth is never explained — rape women. Works of this kind have already been given a name: *pornokitsch*. It is thoroughly hypocritical, aiming to "appear decent" by veiling blatantly indecent content in a thin layer of "moral" pretence. *Pornokitsch* caters to the hypocrisy of the average reader — one who refuses to acknowledge sex either as a real part of life or as something inherently bad, and so hides it beneath various "instructive" or mythological covers.

Unlike ordinary pornography, which makes no attempt to disguise itself, *pornokitsch* constantly tries to create the illusion that it belongs to the realm of art — the illusion of philosophical or aesthetic depth. To achieve this, it makes liberal use of mythology, refined language, poetic comparisons and metaphors. Women are portrayed as "woodland nymphs" or "goddess Venuses," set against the most exotic backdrops. Words like "fantasy," "dream," "imagination" and "fairy tale" are scattered throughout the text of these photo-novels, though they do nothing to conceal the banality and obscenity of the content.

Here, for example, is the kind of textual framing used to accompany a photograph of a lovely young woman with bare breasts: "This beautiful blonde, whose dress is straight out of the *1001 Nights*, is neither Swedish nor Sicilian. In her elegant outfit — missing its upper half — she appeared from a wisp of translucent smoke that fluttered out of the neck of an amphora, where she had hidden like Cinderella when the

clock struck midnight."*

In this short and essentially completely meaningless text, there are as many as three fairytale comparisons: here are the *1001 Nights*, a genie trapped in a bottle and Cinderella. All of this is presented in a highly pretentious and, presumably, in the author's view, very poetic language with one utilitarian goal — to show a bare female breast and to display a new, fashionable, albeit somewhat indecent, dress design. Was it really necessary to cloak it in such "lofty" form? The creators of such opuses answer this question in the affirmative, as they are convinced that in this way *pornokitsch* is ennobled.

The same goal is pursued by the numerous series of "living" sculptures — a cheap variant of the now widespread Western "body art" — which are published in special men's magazines. The most typical of these is *Rodin Reanimated*, a cycle of photographs in which nude men and women strike poses of Rodin's sculptures. Neither the pictures nor their captions show the slightest respect for the high aesthetic value of the originals.

Brazen parasitism on the achievements of genuine art is, in general, characteristic of "mass culture." What else, if not profanation, can one call such examples, abundantly supplied by American magazine advertising? A respectable businessman looks at a Cézanne painting he is holding in his hands. But in the foreground — his blue shirt, about the fashionable details of which the accompanying text speaks. The question arises: why is Cézanne here? As a colour spot? Or to emphasize that Hathaway shirts are worn by intelligent people not alien to true art? It's difficult to answer these questions, but one thing is clear: a Cézanne painting does not belong in this context.

* Ugo Volli, "Pornography and Pornokitsch," in *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste*, p. 232.

And what can be said about Beethoven, frantically conducting while standing tall on a speeding car? What associations arise for the viewer? Only the caption can clarify the intent of the authors, who attempted to link the fast tempo of this composer's music with the advertisement for a new car model's speed.

Sometimes the paradoxical nature of this kind of thing takes on a tragicomic character. Here's a photo of the famous actress Sophia Loren with her arms raised behind her head, emphasizing her deeply plunging neckline. The "star" appears here as a symbol of beauty, fame, wealth. And at the bottom, in small print, is a list of... seven signs of cancer and a call to immediately consult a doctor if they are detected. This is not just a display of bad taste and an insult to a great actress, but a complete disregard for elementary ethical standards that should never be forgotten.

...In Ray Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451*, the author, through one of his characters, explains the reasons that brought the future world to the brink of catastrophe: "...The 20th century. The pace speeds up. Books shrink in size. Condensed editions. Summaries. Extracts. Don't spread it out! Hurry to the climax!... The classics are cut down to 15-minute radio broadcasts. Then even shorter: a single column of text you can skim through in two minutes... At last, you can read all the classics! Don't fall behind your neighbours. Understand? From the nursery straight to college, and then back to the nursery. That's the intellectual standard that has prevailed for the last five or more centuries...

"Spin the human mind in a mad whirlwind, faster, faster! — by the hands of publishers, businessmen, broadcasters — so that centrifugal force throws out all extraneous, unnecessary, useless thoughts!...

"More sports, games, entertainments — let man always

be in a crowd, then he won't have to think. Organize, organize ever new kinds of sports, super-organize super-sports! More picture books. More films. And less and less food for the mind."*

This grim warning, as we have seen, is based on very real facts.

* Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, in *Library of Modern Science Fiction*, vol. 3, Moscow, 1965, pp. 67-69.

NEW METHODS OF AESTHETIC AND IDEOLOGICAL INFLUENCE IN ADVERTISING

Hollywood, Broadway, Madison Avenue — these concepts long ago outgrew their geographical limits and became symbols: Hollywood for cinema, Broadway for theatre, Madison Avenue for advertising. When the last is mentioned, Americans envision a long street in New York lined with numerous advertising agencies in its central part. Here are the administrative offices of the two largest radio and television companies, around 50 agencies supplying ads to regional broadcasting stations, and 60 agencies selling advertising space to thousands of provincial American newspapers. The advertising departments of almost all the major U.S. magazines — such as *Time*, *Fortune*, *Vogue*, *Esquire*, *The New Yorker* — are also located here. These institutions handle capital of up to $5 billion annually (one-third of all funds spent on advertising in the U.S.). The remaining two-thirds ($10 billion) fall to local agencies. As a rule, they too are controlled from Madison Avenue. In total, there are about 3,500 advertising firms in the U.S., employing 45,000 people.*

These statistics give an idea of how enormous a role advertising plays in American life. It is no wonder that in the U.S. people say, paraphrasing the famous saying: "When the gods want to punish us, they make us believe in advertising." It ambushes a person at every turn: shouting from posters on buildings, winking with thousands of neon lights from rooftops and facades, abruptly breaking into television broadcasts and cluttering the pages of newspapers and magazines. Advertising keeps people under constant siege. Almost every-

* "Advertising," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 1, 1970, p. 182

thing they see, hear and taste is being sold to them. To penetrate the buyer's consciousness, advertising must constantly tease, excite, irritate. It cannot stand still; it must always move forward, searching for new ways to attract consumers.

As the American economist John Galbraith aptly noted, "Advertising and the methods associated with it help form a person who meets the needs of the industrial system, that is, a person who can be relied upon to spend income and work more because he always feels he needs more."

And further: "Advertising performs a significant social function in this society: from managing demand — a necessary complement to price control — to shaping a social psychology necessary for the operation and prestige of the industrial system."*

In light of all this, it becomes clear why no other branch of "mass culture" in the U.S., not even cinema, receives such fabulous financial investment as advertising. Thus, alongside business people who understand what consumers want, many top-class professionals from various fields of science and art also work here. However, the days when an advertisement was simply a product of a designer's creative imagination are passing. In the postwar period, large American advertising agencies increasingly turn to science, employing cybernetics, sociology, psychology. Surveys of buyers to determine their likes and dislikes in relation to various goods have long been practised there, but only with the advent of electronic computing machines could this be implemented on a large scale. Mass interviewing and questionnaires with subsequent cybernetic processing began to be conducted on a large scale. But soon they encountered an unforeseen problem: people did not always tell the truth.

* John Galbraith, *The New Industrial State*, Moscow, 1969, pp. 258, 281.

So, an American advertising institute conducted a survey to find out which magazines are most widely read. It turned out that all respondents claimed to read intellectual publications such as *The Atlantic Monthly* and others, while no one admitted to reading tabloid press. In reality, however, the exact opposite was true. The same institute asked a group of people whether they borrowed money from banks. Everyone confidently responded: no. Yet this group had been selected specifically from the list of local bank debtors. In both cases, people consciously distorted the truth, driven by a quite understandable desire to appear better than they actually were. But this kind of "scissors effect" cost the companies involved millions in losses, which led to a decline in confidence in surveys and interviews.

It was then — in the late 1940s and early 1950s — that a new science came to the aid of advertising: psychological motivation. If direct surveys don't yield reliable results, the founders of this field reasoned, one must turn to the unconscious sphere of the human mind and, through lengthy conversations that closely resemble psychoanalytic sessions — by decoding certain words, images, slips of the tongue, jokes and associations — try to identify people's true tastes and preferences. This is how Freudianism became the foundation of an elaborate system of covert manipulation.

Let's look more closely at the principles of Freudianism that became the basis for psychological motivation. The main starting point was the theory of the motivations behind human behaviour, located in the unconscious and subconscious realms of mental activity, developed by Freud in his books *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *The Ego and the Id*. As is well known, Freud believed that the unconscious is a specific domain within the

mental apparatus consisting of two types of processes: first, representations arising from stimuli from the sensory organs, combined with repressed impulses, desires and thoughts based on instincts; and second, thoughts, impulses and desires that are sometimes unconscious but can relatively easily become conscious. Freud argued that all the repressed and discarded stages an instinct goes through from childhood to adulthood exist in the unconscious, retaining their charges of psychic energy and seeking to break into consciousness to find motor expression. According to Freud, unconscious processes can only be observed in neuroses and in dreams.

From Freud's work, psychomotivators also borrowed the term "image" — a concept that has now become the foundation of semiotic systems in advertising, politics and public life, where it is spread through mass communication. Expanding on one of the main tenets of his theory — the Oedipus complex — Freud examined the period in a boy's life when the image of the father becomes an ideal, someone the boy admires and wants to emulate. "However resilient man's character may later become," Freud wrote, "...the impact of the earliest identifications, which occurred in the very first stages of life, will still be broad and enduring. This consideration leads us back to the origin of the ego ideal, for behind it lies the first and most important identification... with the father, in the very early period of the individual's personal history."*

Freud further explored this ideal ego, contrasting it with the ordinary ego — the non-idealized image of the self. "While the ego is predominantly a representative of the external world, of reality, the superego stands in contrast as an advocate of the internal world — the id." "...Conflicts between the ego and the ego ideal ultimately reflect contradictions between the real and the psychic, the external and the internal

* S. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, Leningrad, 1924, pp. 28-29.

worlds. Everything that biology and the human condition have built into the id — all of this is accepted by the ego in the form of the ideal and is re-experienced on an individual level.

"...That which, in an individual's inner life, belonged to its deepest layers becomes, through the formation of the ego ideal, the highest possession of the human soul in terms of our values."

"The extensive link between this ideal and unconscious drives explains the paradox of why the ideal itself can remain largely unconscious and inaccessible to the ego."*

Thus, the image is considered not only as the representation of a person or object (the ego, in Freud's terms) but primarily as an idealized image (the superego), often significantly different from reality. This is what enabled it to be so widely used in advertising (and beyond) for manipulative purposes.

But Freudianism was not the only influence. Behaviourism was also brought in — a modern bourgeois philosophical movement that eclectically combines Freud's theory with a mechanistic interpretation of Pavlov's concept of conditioned reflexes. Pavlov himself once warned against such methods of applying his theory. He wrote that they drastically narrow the function of the cerebral cortex, reducing it to the most basic scheme from a physiology textbook, which indicates only a necessary connection between stimulus and effect — and nothing more.**

The observable and stable outward signs of human behaviour — which the great physiologist needed in order to analyse the deep processes of human activity — became an end in themselves for behaviourists. Moreover, like Freud,

* *Ibid*., pp. 35, 38.

** See I.P. Pavlov, "A Physiologist's Response to Psychologists," in *Selected Works*, Moscow, 1949, p. 383.

they sought the roots of this behaviour not in consciousness, perception or will, but in the psychology of the unconscious.

Here is how one of the modern representatives of this school — Professor Kenneth Boulding — formulates the basic principles of behaviourist theory in his book *The Image*. The image, which the author treats simply as a mental representation, is a picture of the world formed through the entirety of man's life experience. It is constructed from messages received through the senses. These messages can alter the image, though it resists change and rejects anything that threatens to destroy it. Still, under the influence of such input, doubts begin to form and the possibility of revising the image arises.

According to Boulding, the structure of subjective reasoning consists not only of factual images but also of evaluative ones. These are tied to man's judgement of various elements of their image of the world. This personal value scale is crucial in determining how messages influence man's worldview. The art of persuasion lies precisely in identifying weaknesses in someone else's images and shaking them with well-selected arguments.

Human behaviour is based on the image — the sum of what we know and believe. Here, Boulding, following Freud's theory, argues that the image is divided into conscious and unconscious parts. The latter often influences behaviour in such a way that people act without being able to consciously understand or explain their actions. Therefore, the primary technique of psychological motivation — as in psychotherapy — is to make the unconscious conscious, or at least bring it into the subconscious from where it can be accessed through an act of will.

The combination of Freudianism with behaviourism and, as we'll see later, with pragmatism forms the basis of what is

called neo-Freudianism. And indeed, its influence on psychological motivation is clearly felt. Still, the foundation of this approach lies much more in Freud's biological determinism than in the social and cultural determinism of the neo-Freudians.

Viewing Freudianism and behaviourism from a pragmatic standpoint, motivational psychologists drew two highly significant practical conclusions. First, by uncovering people's hidden tastes and inclinations, it is possible to consciously direct and manipulate their behaviour. Second, through carefully designed advertising, one can implant ideal — not real — images of objects and people into the unconscious part of the human mind in hopes that they will surface at the right moment.

Let's take a closer look at the concept of image, since it became the main tool for shaping consumer consciousness — and later, that of voters. American philosophers identify six key characteristics of an image. (It's important to remember that they usually treat the philosophical concept of an image as an idealized one.)

1. An image exists independently of the product it publicly represents. It is a broader and more capacious concept than the item itself. This means it can be changed or improved, even if the product remains the same. Quite often, when a company is facing difficulties, its leadership doesn't think about improving the actual product, but rather about changing its image to make a better impression on the public. In this way, the image becomes an aesthetic pseudo-ideal — not the artistic ideal of what the product ought to be, but a deliberately idealized representation.

2. But the image is a kind of ideal that only becomes real when made public, as it is not a fact of the real world but a representation of that fact. Therefore, if it is not communicat-

ed to consumers, it simply does not exist. To implant images in human consciousness, broad campaigns are conducted in the press, on radio and on television. For example, Standard Oil funded a number of entertaining shows on New York television in an attempt to smooth over the company's negative image — one of profiting from war contracts — and to create an image of a corporation serving society and cultural development. The chemical corporation DuPont does something similar by disguising its true identity with the image of "better things for better living through chemistry." There are many such examples.

3. Nevertheless, the image must at least somewhat correspond to the product it advertises — it must appear credible. Otherwise, no one will believe in it and it will lose all value. Thus, exaggerations must stay within reasonable limits. The best method of desirable exaggeration is false understatement. For example: "Ivory soap is 99.44% pure fat." Or: "The University of Chicago — not a great university, but the best in this city." And so on.

4. An image, whether verbal or visual, must be vivid and concrete, appealing to the senses. For example: "skin you'll love to touch," or the image of a well-dressed, noble-looking man holding a glass — an ad for a brand of whiskey. Or a pen decorated with stars and stripes — an invitation to invest in a U.S. government bond.

5. An image is always simplified in comparison to the object it represents. This principle of structural simplification is now used in all mass media since presenting the public with a simplified version of a subject or phenomenon forces people, first, not to think for themselves and, second, prevents multiple interpretations while fostering stereotyped reactions. The most common simplified images are headlines in newspapers and magazines. In general, the most effective image is

one that is simple yet unusual enough to be memorable.

6. Finally, the last trait of an image is its ambiguity — its incompleteness — as it exists somewhere between imagination and emotion, expectation and reality. That's why many images avoid precision and are depicted vaguely.

This is especially common in advertising posters that present images of products from the future. In order not to disappoint consumers' expectations, they must complete the vague image themselves, shaping it with their imagination in the desired direction.

Ernest Dichter, director of the Institute for Motivational Research in the United States, presents three intriguing examples in his book *The Strategy of Desire*.

Several people with strong loyalty to particular cigarette brands — so committed they were willing to search the whole city to find them — were given cigarettes of different but similar varieties and asked to identify their brand by taste. They couldn't do it. This revealed that what mattered to them was not so much the cigarettes themselves, but their image — their brand image. As such, the determining factor was no longer product quality, but the success of its conceptualized and executed image. The competition between products became a competition between advertisements.

Dichter also conducted a study with the poetic title "The Wife versus the Mistress," commissioned by an automobile company. Car showroom owners had noticed that men always gathered around sleek, modern vehicles, almost never paying attention to large, roomy and clumsy sedans. Based on these observations, the company drastically increased production of small, stylish cars — and failed.

After interviewing a number of male customers, Dichter concluded that men are naturally drawn to attractive, elegant, flashy women, but usually marry modest, hard-working and

domestic women — those they see as good wives and mothers. However, romantic fantasies about a different kind of woman — one unlike their wives — stay with them throughout their lives. Dichter proposed creating a new type of car image that would combine the reliability and spaciousness of a sedan with the elegance of modern models. The concept was brought to life and the resulting car became a major success with buyers.*

Another of Dichter's successful experiments involved mink fur. He demonstrated a strong link between mink purchases and sex. Where early humans once brought animal pelts to their women as proof of their bravery, the modern man offers expensive fur to demonstrate his social status, earning power — and the depth of his feelings towards a particular woman. On Dichter's advice, future advertising campaigns featured a stunning, "sexy" blonde with a man in a modern business suit kneeling before her, wearing a "trapper's" fur hat and holding out a fashionable mink coat in outstretched hands.

This marked the emergence of yet another component of image, also borrowed from Freudianism — sexual symbolism.

Advertisers quickly realized the enormous potential this new approach held. The mass recruitment of psychologists into advertising began under the slogan: "The social sciences are helping business generate extra profit." The scientists themselves didn't go unrewarded — their services were valued highly. They were paid up to $500 for a single consultation. The number of psychomotivators in the United States alone soon reached 7,000. (This figure comes from the *Directory of Scientists Interested in Motivational Research*, published in the U.S. in the late 1950s.) The *Directory of Organizations Engaged in Motivational Research* listed over 82 such organizations.

* Ernest Dichter, *The Strategy of Desire*, New York, 1960, pp. 35-36.

Research was carried out in a wide variety of areas. Psychomotivators tried to understand why people fear banks, why they like large cars, why men dislike cigarette holders — even why children love to eat crunchy food. One Chicago advertising agency even began studying the menstrual cycles of housewives and how this affected their purchasing behaviour.

It soon became clear that the main motivating factor behind most American purchases (the tests were conducted mostly in the U.S.) was an unconscious pull towards conformity, which had become a symbol of stability and security. This discovery wasn't exactly new — advertisers had long suspected Americans tended towards conformity. That's why they always positioned the potential buyer among others. For example: "Two out of every three Americans use a pink toothbrush" or "Only one man in seven shaves daily" (followed by an ad for shaving cream that promises to make the process easy and painless). After all, it was in the U.S. that the famous psychological experiment was conducted where a group of people were asked which of two sticks was longer. Everyone except one person had been instructed to give the wrong answer — and that one person, seeing their unanimous response, also gave the wrong answer. He trusted the group more than his own eyes.

American mass media train people to conform — to look to others in everything. As a result, an American buys a new car not because the old one is broken, but because he doesn't want to seem worse off than his friends, neighbours or coworkers who've already upgraded to newer, trendier models. Hence the advertising slogan: "You're not buying a car — you're buying prestige." The same goes for houses, TVs, refrigerators, clothing and all sorts of other goods. That's how false needs are formed — one of the essential conditions for

the existence of a mass-consumption society.

Joining a group, which gives a person a sense of stability and security, is achieved first in the material realm — and then in the spiritual. The item being purchased must create the impression that its owner is doing well in life — this has always been the first commandment of advertising. But now that simple truth has acquired complex psychological refinements. What's being sold is no longer just a new suitcase — but a sense of self-worth; not a boxed cake mix — but the opportunity to express creative energy; not a refrigerator or furniture set — but a feeling of emotional security; not an insurance policy — but a sense of immortality.

Psychomotivators teach how to use Freudian complexes in advertising — such as guilt, fear, loneliness and so on. Here are a few examples. It was found that unemployed housewives were reluctant to buy dishwashers, dryers, kitchen appliances — things that made household tasks easier. The psychomotivator explained that the problem lay in the messaging. The ad said that those who bought these devices would have more time to play bridge. But these women supposedly already felt guilty for doing less work than their mothers. The ad should instead say: "If you buy this appliance, you'll have more time to raise your children — and become an even better mother."

The feeling of loneliness is also widely exploited. A company that produced greeting cards initially used very optimistic images. They couldn't understand why sales were poor. The only card that sold well featured a bleak image: a bare tree swaying in the wind, standing alone on a snowy hill. A hired psychomotivator explained that holiday cards are most often sent by lonely people trying to remind others of their existence. For them, the image of the tree symbolized their own lives.

Here's another example of how Ernest Dichter proposed

overcoming people's fear of taking out bank loans — the fear of being poorly received, of having their financial troubles exposed, of being rejected. The poster should show a smiling person stepping through the door of a bank, with a bold caption: "And I was so afraid to open the door!" The accompanying text should tell how well the bank welcomed this person.

There are also many examples of how psychomotivators uncovered the roots of people's prejudices against certain products. For example, cigarette holders were considered appropriate only for women, never for men. Prunes were seen solely as a laxative, and tea — as a drink for the elderly and the sick. Skilfully designed advertising helped change consumer attitudes towards these products.

Psychologists' advice often helps avoid failed advertising. A company selling refrigerators created a poster showing its new model full of food, with the door left open to display the improved interior design. But the refrigerators didn't sell well. A consulted psychologist explained that most women who saw the ad first thought of a careless housewife who left the fridge open, wasting electricity and spoiling the food. They had to modify the poster by adding a woman's hand resting on the open fridge door, giving the impression that it had only been opened for a moment.

Or take an ad for a suitcase so strong it could fall from a plane during a crash and not break. People refused to buy it because the very idea of an object surviving them was unpleasant. The ad had to be changed.

Based on these examples, it may seem that psychological motivation in advertising can be quite useful. It makes it possible to design ads with a more accurate understanding of consumer psychology. But there are several important factors to consider.

First, psychological motivation often goes beyond pure

advertising and takes on a distinctly propagandistic character. Here's how Ernest Dichter defined its goal: "The true purpose of motivational research and the strategy of desire, in the ideal case, is that we should advertise only those products which help people better express themselves. Of course, we're far from that ideal stage. But when the motivator advises the seller to show the new horizons opened up by a product, he not only helps sell the product more effectively but also reorients the value system of our society."*

In an era of widespread crisis of ideals and moral values — as modern bourgeois society is currently experiencing — this is an attempt to make the same material household goods, which are part of the cause of the crisis, into a lifeline. So when Dichter writes that the goal is not so much to sell a car, but to sell a positive life philosophy, the statement sounds paradoxical. After all, this very chase after cars, refrigerators and clothing has largely overshadowed higher values for Americans, leaving many of them spiritually empty. That's why Dichter's long arguments about how owning a car gives a person a sense of importance seem laughable to us — although for Americans, material things often play a decisive role in judging people. It is precisely against this "automobile civilization," against smug bourgeois comfort, against the emptiness and meaninglessness of life of the "average American" — consumed mostly with material concerns — that the best works of American literature and art are directed.

Moreover, it is by no means only products that "help a person better express themselves" that are being advertised. Dichter himself admits that Americans are "far from that ideal stage."

There are many examples of how advertising built on precise psychological calculation misleads consumers, in-

* Ernest Dichter, *The Strategy of Desire*, p. 110.

fluencing their impulses to make them buy worse products disguised as better ones or more goods than they originally intended or could afford. Vance Packard cites the example of how bright packaging in self-service stores makes women pick up more items than they planned. In addition, clever store owners place special small carts for children who come with their parents, allowing them to put in whatever they want. When a child arrives at the checkout with a full cart, it's almost impossible for the parent to make them put anything back.

The issue of child consumers is one of the most vulnerable points in the new advertising system. Through special promotions, children are encouraged to bring their parents into stores displaying new products. Behaviourist-style purchasing reflexes are being developed in children. Professor Clyde Miller, founder of the Institute of Propaganda in the U.S., wrote in his book *The Process of Persuasion*: "It takes time, but if you're in business for the long run, think what it will mean for your company's profits when you've trained a million or ten million children who, as adults, will buy your products like soldiers jumping at the command 'Forward, march!'"*

The very choice of comparison in this quote shows that the effect of such conditioned reflexes can be extremely far-reaching. But it's not just that. What's offensive is Miller's approach to children — viewing them purely as training subjects, no different from animals.

Using children to pressure their parents into buying certain products is dishonest, and in the case of goods that may cause harm, it is criminal.

This brings us to the second point of our objections — the moral aspect of uncovering people's hidden tastes and desires and then influencing their psyche in a predetermined

* Clyde Miller, *The Process of Persuasion*, New York, 1946, p. 217.

direction.

Is it humane to exploit people's hidden weaknesses — fear of standing out, fear itself, aggression, guilt, loneliness and so on — in order to sell goods?

Is it humane to search for ways to make housewives buy irrationally and impulsively?

Is it humane to manipulate the minds of small children?

And is it humane at all to secretly invade people's inner lives and covertly control their consciousness? After all, people are also being deceived. Through numerous mass media channels, they are convinced they are intelligent, thoughtful, perceptive — in short, excellent products of progress and education. But in fact, psychomotivators manipulate them like puppets. This is inhumane because it leads people — who, through centuries of development, have become rational beings — backwards.

Furthermore, what guarantee is there that this manipulation, now widespread in the U.S., will remain limited to commerce? As we will see later, it has already spread into political and public life, where it is also carried out through mass media, allowing manipulators to communicate with and influence millions of people at once — on a scale previously unimaginable.

* * *

In 1956, the book *The Golden Kazoo* was published by John Schneider, a former senior employee at a major American advertising agency. It described a future U.S. presidential election. Campaign speeches were cancelled. When one candidate wanted to speak to voters about foreign policy during a nuclear crisis, he was convinced that people simply weren't interested. What mattered was the appearance of political figures. In essence, elections turned into a battle between two advertising firms, conducting a campaign according to the same principles used to sell cars.

As in many other works of progressive American science fiction, there is little fantasy here and much reality. It's telling that the book was written in 1956, as it was during that year's presidential elections in the U.S. that, for the first time in politics, the full range of psychological techniques previously used in advertising was applied. Since the core concept remained the same — treating the individual as a viewer and consumer, not in commerce but in politics — the same methods were used to "sell" candidates for high office as were used to sell refrigerators, bath salts and lawnmowers.

First and foremost, with the help of "depth" interviews and cybernetics, voter opinions, tastes and preferences began to be identified. American professor Max Lerner described how this is done in his article "Beware the Television Monster Voter."* A major American radio company, based on a "model" — a survey of voters at 42 out of 32,861 polling stations in California — predicted Goldwater's victory over Rockefeller in the 1964 primaries.

A bit earlier, the power of this technology to uncover voter opinions was described in the novel *The 480* by American philosopher Eugene Burdick. He portrayed a fantastic scenario of what could happen at a political convention if all these techniques of advance analysis were put into action. True, in the end — following the long-standing tradition of American literature and art — Burdick delivers a happy ending in which the manipulators' schemes fall apart. Still, the novel clearly expresses admiration for computers, the 480 voter categories (from which the book gets its name) and the results

* Max Lerner, "Beware of TV's Election Monster!" in *Sight, Sound and Society*, p. 310.

that can be achieved through their use.

Indeed, the technical tools themselves don't raise objections. It's not too troubling when candidates commission private mood tests from sociologists to define the main directions of their campaigns. The real danger lies in how the results of such tests are widely disseminated and influence public thinking.

It is now practically possible — by selecting key precincts in all electoral districts and entering into computers the relevant geographic, ethnic, social and political data, along with the results of past elections — to obtain fairly accurate figures for the entire United States. Once the mass media deliver these findings to all voters — even before the elections begin — they exert pressure on people's minds. Given the spirit of conformity that permeates American society, people will unconsciously lean towards the "winning" side — regardless of that side's platform. In this way, the voter is deprived of the chance to express an independent opinion and unknowingly becomes part of a faceless majority.

But the main tool of influence in politics still remains the image. As in advertising, it is used here only in the form of an idealized version of the candidate.

There are four key techniques used for this.

The first is known in the U.S. as the "virtue device." Based on Pavlov's theory of conditioned reflexes — more precisely, the part that establishes a link between command words and animal behaviour — some American philosophers claim that people also respond automatically to certain words. Words like friendship, community, independence, integrity, truth, loyalty, democracy, national sovereignty, freedom, social justice and so on immediately evoke emotions. They stir up pleasant memories and put people in a softened emotional state.

For example, an ad shows a peaceful rural landscape, a cottage with a stork on the roof, and an old, kind-looking man riding in a buggy towards it. The text says: this was your first real friend — the country doctor who helped bring you into the world. Later, you had other friends — your father, your schoolteacher, your childhood pals and adult mentors. Each one taught you something good and kind. Now, your next friend will be the person you vote for — someone who will look after your interests. (Just as easily, the image could be used to sell an insurance company or anything else.) In this way, the same "virtue" words are used to sell furniture and political candidates, televisions and ideas.

The virtue device always relies on the humanity and simplicity of the political figure's image. If these words are spoken by someone with a cold, official face, they're unlikely to reach the voters' hearts or have the desired impact. So the first rule in building a political image is that candidates must appear in speeches and photographs as "ordinary people among neighbours." This means not just tailoring their speeches, but all of their behaviour: attending services at small country churches, shaking countless hands while trying to remember as many names as possible, talking to reporters without wearing a jacket, listening to the radio, eating popcorn and peanuts — in short, behaving in the spirit of the advice offered in Dale Carnegie's popular book *How to Win Friends and Influence People.*

The power of this "common man" technique lies in the fact that everyone likes kind, polite, friendly people — especially when they behave this way while holding high office. And the fact that "important people" don't disdain the small and trivial things in life is especially appealing to voters and has therefore become a required element of the political image.

The purpose of the "virtue device" and the "common man" technique is not limited to the external aspects mentioned above. A candidate must think — or at least appear to think — the same way as the average voter. Conformism, already discussed and serving as the foundation of psychological motivation, is an inseparable part of a candidate's image. The English science fiction writer William Tenn, in his famous story *The Null-P*, painted a vivid picture of this cult of the "average" man — or, more plainly, mediocrity.

"...George Abnego embodies the great national myth that for a century lay hidden at the heart of the culture and then spread with a roar thanks to the mass media.

"...This myth gave rise to such seemingly unrelated customs as the ritual of kissing babies during political campaigns, the obsession with 'keeping up with the Joneses,' or fleeting, shallow mass crazes that sweep over the population with the regularity of a windshield wiper's stroke. This myth dictated the laws of fashion and shaped the spirit of college fraternities. It was the myth of the 'regular guy.'"*

Tenn goes on to show how the dominance of this "embodied mediocrity" leads civilization to collapse.

The second essential component of a political image is the "poison device." In meaning, it is the opposite of the previous one. Here, negative and harmful words or symbols are used to stir fear, resentment or disapproval towards a person or phenomenon. "Poison" words are directed at political opponents. Recall Mark Twain's famous story *Running for Governor*, which ends with the honest, upstanding main character withdrawing his candidacy in frustration after being bombarded with slander and insults, signing his statement bitterly

* William Tenn, *The Null-P*, in *Library of Modern Science Fiction*, vol. 10, Moscow, 1967, p. 162.

as: "Yours respectfully, once an honest man, now Mark Twain — perjurer, Montana thief, corpse desecrator, alcoholic, dirty bribe-taker, vile blackmailer."*

But more commonly, this technique is not so straightforward. Usually, damaging information is spread behind the back of a rival candidate in hopes that some portion of the electorate will believe it. For example, during the 1936 U.S. election, a rumour circulated that Roosevelt's paralysis had progressed to the point of affecting his brain and that the president was slowly going insane. In the 1940 election, as Roosevelt ran for a third term, anonymous flyers were secretly distributed using a style borrowed from Christmas ads: "Only 20 days left, only 19 days left, only 18 days left — to save the American way of life."

The third method — the "testimonial device" — is used by candidates to reinforce their statements by referencing authority figures. It is standard for every candidate's speech — and therefore their image — to include appeals to national democratic traditions, and to support parts of their platform with statements from prominent political figures.

Finally, the last method — the "together device" — incorporates all three of the previous techniques but is applied to large masses of people. It is especially common today in an era of such powerful mass media. When used effectively, it can result in mass hypnosis or mobilize people towards grand causes. But the effect is only achievable when the audience already has standardized responses to a particular race, religion, policy or idea. For example, in the southern U.S., where anti-black sentiment remained strong, candidates won approval by promising to end the growing civil rights movement. In the North, such statements were not well received. If a candidate's goals are obviously disconnected from people's real-life

* *Foreign Literature: A Reader*, Moscow, 1954, p. 620.

conditions, the "together" technique also fails. This is what happened to Goldwater, whose platform of anti-communism and continued involvement in the Vietnam War failed to resonate with the public.

Although persuasion has always been part of political campaigning in Anglo-Saxon countries, it was once just a matter of practice — now it's been given a "scientific" foundation. Political images are built upon existing beliefs identified through depth interviews, surveys and questionnaires. Undesirable traits are removed, the desirable ones are brought forward, new elements are added, and the resulting image — delivered to millions through mass media — becomes a real force. Especially when those psychological elements are reinforced by a candidate's appealing appearance, ability to behave naturally on camera, and talent for seeming friendly and likeable. Special advertising agents teach political figures how to apply makeup, how to smile, when to show a photo of their lovely wife and adorable children. But such agents often complain that "selling" candidates is far harder than selling cars — because a car keeps quiet, while a candidate might blurt out something that ruins all the carefully prepared work.

When candidates appear on radio or television, everything is taken into account — even which program aired just before. It was found that the final five minutes of major entertainment programs are the most effective for campaign messaging. At that point, viewers are in a softened emotional state, calmly accepting whatever is said to them. And what they hear are the same standard, familiar messages. Even the scripts for the shortest public appearances are built around a tried-and-true conflict, one that's traditional in nearly all Western mass culture: the good guy (our candidate) versus the bad guy (their candidate). Such broadcasts are usually dramatized, which adds an extra emotional impact. The following example illustrates this clearly.

On the eve of the 1936 U.S. presidential election, the Republican Party leadership, concerned that only a small number of people were tuning in to their broadcasts, notified the radio network that they would no longer simply deliver candidate speeches but instead present dramatized performances. The Columbia Broadcasting System, after consulting with the National Broadcasting Company, responded that it would not allow dramatization — arguing that voter opinion should be shaped rationally, not based on passion, emotion or prejudice. Furthermore, dramatization by its very nature would tend to highlight trivial matters, simply because of their dramatic value. As a result, the outcome of national elections could end up depending more on the skills of scriptwriters than the content of the debates.

As we can see, concerns about the negative aspects of this trend were raised 20 years before political campaigns began turning into grand theatrical productions. Incidentally, local radio stations did not support the civic stance taken by the major networks and campaign speeches gradually became dramatized — a process that only intensified over time.

Now, political campaigning in the West increasingly resembles standard film production, where candidates, like actors, create stable idealized personas, where appearance matters more than content, and where the same dramatic conflicts are reused. It's no coincidence that the concept of "image" existed in American cinema long before the emergence of psychological motivation. (Although at the time, no one linked it to Freud, behaviourism or other philosophical concepts.)

The cult of consistently idealized characters created by actors was the foundation of Hollywood's famous "star system." Everyone knew, for example, that the shy and timid James

Stewart would turn out to be incredibly resilient in a crisis; that the courageous Gregory Peck would always be a pillar of strength and hope; and that the charming daredevil Errol Flynn, after a series of dizzying adventures, would always escape danger. Audiences accepted the actor as the version they constantly saw on screen. They didn't care whether the actor's real personality matched their on-screen one.

These cinematic techniques are now being transferred to other areas of life — including politics. It's telling that never before have so many professional actors participated in U.S. political life as now. Having mastered the creation of images on film, they can do the same on television and from the podium without difficulty. Hollywood actor George Murphy was elected to the U.S. Senate. (Incidentally, he directed the Republican Party convention in San Francisco in 1956 — directed in the literal sense, as there was a written script that Murphy brought to life.) In 1967, the Republican Party attempted — albeit unsuccessfully — to run Shirley Temple, the beloved child star of the 1930s and a symbol of one of America's most optimistic myths, for the Senate.

But perhaps the most representative figure in this respect is Ronald Reagan — a former television and film actor who, with support from the military-industrial complex, became governor of California and even ran for the White House. Reagan is the most striking example of how an actor's image becomes a political one.

Having entered the film industry in 1937, former athlete and sports commentator Ronald Reagan quickly found his permanent character type. In all his movies (of which he made more than 50), he played the "real American guy" — tall, well-built, capable of embracing a girl tightly and knocking out a villain with a single punch. His characters were portrayed as descendants of the pioneers — conquerors of no

man's land and others' land — who journeyed from ocean to ocean, never letting go of their rifles. The legacy they left behind was not just a subdued West, but also a deep reverence for muscular strength — the cult of physical power.

When Reagan decided to enter politics in 1964, he brought with him, in addition to his father-in-law's financial backing, his one true asset — a carefully cultivated, long-standing public image, now enhanced by a reputation for liberalism and erudition. Voters, believing that this "image" was the real Reagan, turned out to vote for him in large numbers. In the 1966 California gubernatorial election, the former actor defeated his opponent by over a million votes.

But once Reagan sat in the governor's chair, the image — discarded as no longer useful — gave way to his real face: that of a harsh reactionary and champion of war. His first action in office was to crack down on California students protesting the Vietnam War. He then forced university president Clark Kerr to resign, reshuffled the academic council and appointed himself to its ranks. Soon after, he significantly cut funding for higher education in the state budget. And when 500 starving poor people came to the governor in a march to ask for help, he called them "a bunch of lazy bums" and refused to speak with them.

Reagan's reactionary nature has now become obvious to everyone. American journalist Bill Boyarsky published a book entitled *Ronald Reagan's Path to Power*, in which, according to the California communist newspaper *People's World*, he presents a series of facts that completely debunk the "good guy" image. The reporter visited the college where Reagan studied in the 1930s, spoke with his former professors and found out that Reagan was a dropout who never completed his coursework and had no right to a seat on the Board of Regents of the University of California. Boyarsky also investigated Rea-

gan's past activities. It turned out that he had never participated in any progressive movements and had testified as a "friendly witness" before the House Un-American Activities Committee, later supporting the blacklist policy introduced in the American film industry. On foreign policy issues, Reagan expressed views just as reactionary as those of Goldwater, whom he supported.

The book includes a firsthand account from Clark Kerr himself of how Reagan removed him from leadership at the university. Kerr, who had remained silent for a long time, decided to share the story for the first time because Reagan was planning to run for president of the United States and Kerr believed all Americans should know how this man lied and twisted the truth in his dealings with him. Reagan publicly claimed that Kerr had been dismissed by the Board of Regents, which had refused him a vote of confidence. But Kerr, citing specific facts, showed that the entire plan had been orchestrated and executed by Reagan, with the regents merely acting as his obedient tools.

So, at the first real clash with reality, the ideal image with which Reagan had misled voters collapsed, revealing his true face. In real life, this kind of discrepancy turned out to be far more dangerous than in film.

The use of an actor's or popular singer's public image for political purposes has now become such a serious issue in the West that art — particularly cinema — keeps returning to it. This problem is addressed in the American films *A Face in the Crowd* and *Wild in the Streets*, the British film *Privilege* and many others. The first, directed in 1957 by Elia Kazan and written by author Budd Schulberg, was released shortly after the "television elections" of 1956. It portrays the meteoric rise of the ignorant and hypocritical "idol" Lonesome Rhodes, using artistic means to demonstrate all the techniques previ-

ously discussed. Only a stroke of luck prevents Rhodes from being appointed as the new government's "Secretary of National Morale."

Wild in the Streets is social science fiction. Max Frost — a pop singer — uses his influence over youth to help an ambitious politician get elected to the Senate. In return, he demands that the voting age be lowered to fourteen. With the help of his many young fans, who are newly enfranchised, Frost soon becomes president. His reforms completely transform the country's way of life, but do not bring happiness.

This film, which in some sense reflects a lack of faith in the ability of modern American society to solve the problems of its youth, serves as a warning against electing popular idols to high government office based solely on their image.

As American political figure Adlai Stevenson rightly noted: "The very idea that candidates can be sold like breakfast cereal... is the ultimate insult to the democratic process."*

* * *

In recent years, there has been increasing discussion in the United States about the collapse of the "American Dream." This issue, which troubles all thinking Americans, is reflected in American literature and art. Playwright Edward Albee wrote a play entitled *The American Dream*, in which he shows how the "middle" class adapted the dream to its own purposes, reducing its content to a stunted notion of material success. A novel entitled *An American Dream* was also written by one of America's most prominent contemporary writers, Norman Mailer. This work serves as a kind of conclusion to the search for the elusive dream — a search that began with the Founding Fathers and ended so dismally with their des-

* Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders*, New York, 1961, p. 172.

cendants.

The collapse of former ideals is now acknowledged in the United States by almost everyone, even those officially tasked with defending them. But there are sharp differences in how the causes of this crisis are interpreted. While progressive thinkers trace them to the socio-historical development of nations, apologists for the current system see them in the supposedly eternal theory of the inevitable breakdown of ideals — a theory that traces back to the same Freudian concept of the ideal image. Here is how it is interpreted by American researcher of the philosophical foundations of "mass culture" Erik Barnouw in his book *Mass Communications*.

To an infant, who is helpless, the father appears all-powerful. For the child, this means that he too will one day be as omnipotent as his father. He tries to imitate him, to resemble the image (the ideal) of the father, who is his role model. Years pass, the child grows up and he begins to realize that the father is far from the all-powerful figure he once seemed. He no longer resembles the image that still exists in the boy's soul (or more accurately, in the unconscious part of his mind). The father no longer matches the ideal. So the son, unconsciously disillusioned, begins to feel contempt. Eventually, the boy becomes a man, a husband and father himself, and once again appears omnipotent in the eyes of his own child. But even that image will collapse when the time comes. Thus begins an endless life cycle of helplessness and omnipotence. In this way, the specific historical causes of the collapse of certain social ideals are replaced by biological theories of the inevitable collapse of all ideals.

But human consciousness does not tolerate a vacuum — and so, having stripped people of ideals, bourgeois society deliberately cultivates not only false needs but also false values. The resulting vacuum is gradually filled with pseudo-ideals,

played once again by these same images. But in public life, their Freudian foundation has been firmly reinforced by the entire tradition of American pragmatism. Even Benjamin Franklin insisted that it didn't matter whether a particular doctrine was true so long as its supporters sincerely believed in it. And William James studied the effects of the will to believe, showing how what people believed — or wanted to believe — could overshadow the events of the real world.

Indeed, if an image can help sell a car or elect a president, why shouldn't it help "sell" the country itself and its way of life to the whole world — including its own citizens? That's why any book on motivational psychology published today in the U.S. will include a section on the necessity of creating a favourable national image. Ernest Dichter writes about this in *The Strategy of Desire*, already cited above. He admits that the U.S. image abroad has fallen very low and offers recommendations for improving it. This is also a major focus of sociologist Daniel Boorstin in his book *The Image: Or What Happened to the American Dream*.

That book is about the art of self-deception — about how Americans hide reality from themselves. "The manufacture of illusions has flooded our lives," Boorstin writes in the preface, "and has become the most essential and most respected business in America — not only in advertising and politics, but in all areas of information, education and comfort."* To create a favourable national image, all the familiar tools of mass media are used. For example, major American socio-political magazines — *Time*, *Fortune*, *Newsweek* and others — present their material in such a way that it is neither a story, nor a viewpoint, nor an explanation, nor a commentary. It is a deep corporate image of society that demands the reader's max-

* Daniel Boorstin, *The Image or What Happened to the American Dream*, London, 1961, p. 5.

imum involvement in the social process.

Standard Hollywood productions constantly try to present a favourable image of the U.S., starting with the visible side of life — homes, furnishings, clothing — and ending with moral standards. And only the best works of American cinema reveal not the image, but the true face of the country.

Besides the image — the pseudo-ideal — there are two other categories of pseudo-reality created by the mass media. In the realm of facts, this is the pseudo-event: an event that is deliberately planned and organized specifically to be reflected in the press, on the radio or on television. For example, a hotel wants to strengthen its reputation and attract visitors. What would they have done in the good old days? They would have improved service, installed plumbing and hung a crystal chandelier in the lobby. But this primitive technique is unsuitable for the electronic age so hotel management chooses a different tactic. It is announced in the press that the hotel will soon celebrate its 30th anniversary. An authoritative preparatory committee is formed from the "founding fathers" of the city and a lavish banquet is held. Reports of all this appear in newspapers, the reader thinks: "This hotel must be really good if there's so much written about it," — and next time chooses to stay there. The desired goal is achieved, even though no real event actually occurred. There was only its image, a pseudo-event, successfully created through mass communication. In the West, countless such pseudo-events happen every day, as they are the main sustenance of the insatiable Moloch — the press, radio and television.

Pseudo-events are just as frequent in literature and the arts. A typical example is the bestseller system, widely practised in the film and publishing industries. The English word bestseller literally means "best-selling" (book), but this translation does not fully convey the meaning of the term.

A bestseller is not simply a novel or film that is popular with readers or viewers. It is an entire system for achieving popularity, regardless of the actual value of the work, the result of numerous combined advertising methods. Let us consider, as an example, how a cinematic bestseller — usually called an action blockbuster — is created.

Even when planning the film schedule for the upcoming year, studio executives decide which movie will be the lead blockbuster. Large budgets are allocated for the production of such a film, allowing them to acquire a literary source that has already been tested with audiences (often a previous book bestseller), order expensive sets, hire a famous director and cast top-tier "star" actors in leading roles. Around these upcoming blockbusters, a broad advertising campaign unfolds. Newspapers, magazines, radio and television constantly keep the public informed about the progress of filming, paying special attention to creating "publicity" for the director and actors. Sensational, and often quite salacious, details about the personal lives of the creative team are also reported.

Before the film's release, movie newspapers, film magazines and the general press print extensive reviews. From their placement and the number of lines devoted to them, it is easy to guess which film is intended to become a blockbuster. Large promotional brochures are also devoted to such a film, containing everything — annotations, biographical and other information about the director, screenwriter and actors; advice on how to decorate the theatre for the film's showing; even crosswords and puzzles related to the movie, designed to entertain viewers while they wait for the screening to begin.

The person hypnotized by all this loud advertising, even out of simple curiosity, goes to see the film that everyone is talking about, and as a result it really does become a bestseller, a film with the highest box office receipts. But this does

not at all mean that the film is a major work of cinema. As a rule (exceptions, of course, exist), most bestsellers are of low quality and, having no intrinsic real value, become typical pseudo-events created by advertising.

Similar phenomena can be observed in literature and journalism.

One of the most widely circulated magazines in the United States, *Reader's Digest*, has a print run of 28 million copies and is published in 13 languages. It is read by 32 million adult Americans, practically one in four people. When the magazine was founded, its task was to attract readers' attention to interesting articles in various publications — a sort of guide to the press. But gradually, seeking to ensure that the magazine's "interest," and therefore its circulation, did not depend on whether or not an interesting article appeared in a given publication, the management of *Reader's Digest* began commissioning and paying for major articles in other magazines, only to later summarize them in their own edition and thus provide interesting material. This is how literary pseudo-events are deliberately created, which are important not in themselves, but for the reflected image they produce.

The second category of pseudo-reality is celebrities, who in modern Western society have replaced heroes. The main difference between them is that a hero becomes known and famous for his actions, for heroic deeds, whereas a celebrity is merely a successfully constructed image. A hero and his reputation are shaped by time; a celebrity is shaped by the mass media. A hero was a striking individual, while a celebrity is usually just a name raised on a pedestal. It is no accident that heroes endure for centuries, while celebrities fade quickly. In the U.S., it is said that a woman reveals her age by the celebrities she remembers.

An example of a celebrity who was later swept up in a

stream of pseudo-events for America in the 1920s-30s was Charles Lindbergh. On May 21, 1927, he made a nonstop flight across the Atlantic from New York to Paris in the plane *Spirit of St. Louis*. This was a surge of personal heroism in a dull decade and the newspapers initially rightfully celebrated him. It has been estimated that on May 22 alone, 25,000 tons of paper were used just for reports about Lindbergh and his flight, even though there was essentially little to write about. This 25-year-old young man was an ordinary person, distinguished by nothing except his passion for aviation. Then the press began reporting not on the flight itself, but on how Lindbergh was received by various people, presidents and kings; how he reacted to his own "publicity"; how skilfully he conducted himself in the role of a celebrity; and so on.

Two years later, Lindbergh married the pretty daughter of a wealthy businessman and the stream of newspaper articles about him filled up once more. In 1932, gangsters kidnapped the couple's young son and the press turned this into one of the biggest events of the time, playing a tragic role in the child's fate. Only around 1940 did people start to forget about Lindbergh. Deprived of press support, he tried to regain his former popularity on his own, entered politics, but unsuccessfully. From 1942, Lindbergh's name almost disappeared from the press. Only in the late 1950s did interest in him reemerge. Kenneth Davis wrote the book *Hero: Charles Lindbergh and the American Dream*. In 1957, a film about him, *The Spirit of St. Louis*, was released — and it failed with audiences. A survey showed that very few Americans under 30 had even heard of Lindbergh. The *New Yorker* even published a cartoon: a father and teenage son are leaving a movie theatre where they just watched the film. "If everyone thought Lindbergh performed a heroic deed, why didn't he become famous?" asks the boy.

Thus, celebrities disappear without a trace.

But if the foundation of Lindbergh's disproportionately large, newspaper-inflated fame was still an original heroic act, modern times give us examples of celebrities entirely created by the mass media from start to finish, raised to the pinnacle of fame literally from nothing, without any actions or efforts on their part. The most typical example of such a celebrity, who has become a social image, is Twiggy — a girl from a London suburb. The American magazine *Newsweek*,* in the issue featuring her on the cover (an honour reserved only for the most famous people of the year), calls her "the magical child of mass communication," "the brightest image of the year, the image of youth" and "the mini-girl of the mini-era." Professor Marshall McLuhan seriously analysed the power of her image, arguing that it resides in incompleteness and that each person completes this image in their own imagination.

How and why did this image arise? Thomas Whiteside recounts the story in the pages of the London newspaper *Observer*.**

Leslie Hornby — the youngest of three children in a working-class London family — had a father who worked as a carpenter at a television studio. Leaving a school she did not like, Leslie at fifteen began working in a hair salon. There she met Justine Villeneuve, who played a significant role in her future. Justine, who by the age of 25 had tried many different professions, was skeptical of the girl's desire to become a model. She was very thin, with twig-like arms and legs (he gave her the nickname Twiggy, from the English word "twig"). Only her eyes — large, grey, with long glued-on lashes — and her expression of innocence and purity were attractive.

* "Twiggy! Glick! Click!" *Newsweek*, April 10, 1967, pp. 34-37.

** Thomas Whiteside, "Twiggy," *The Observer*, December 17 and 24, 1967, pp. 15, 17.

Nevertheless, Justine decided to try to make the girl's dream come true. He cut her hair short "boy-style," dyed it a lighter colour and, photographing Twiggy with a photographer friend, displayed the picture in the women's area of the hair salon.

One of the customers — the fashion editor of the English newspaper *Daily Express*, which had a circulation of 4.5 million — saw the photo and became interested in the girl. Shortly thereafter, a photograph appeared in the newspaper with the caption: "Twiggy, the face of 1966."

Thus, the external part of the image emerged. Overnight, the girl from the hair salon became a celebrity. The press, radio and television actively popularized her as a model to emulate. Twiggy's face appeared on the covers of fashion magazines. Thousands of teenage girls began starving themselves, cutting their hair "boy-style" and applying triple rows of false eyelashes to resemble their idol. Her fame spread beyond England, especially when Villeneuve took Twiggy to France and Italy, where she was paid enormous sums to demonstrate new fashions and pose for photographers. Even Madame Tussauds in London, where wax figures of major world figures like Napoleon and Churchill stand, displayed a wax figure of the model.

Merchants, quickly realizing they could profit from the new idol, began selling dresses, handbags and trinket boxes "sanctified" by her name. A significant (and substantial) portion of the profits went to Twiggy Enterprises, which she founded together with Villeneuve. The latter became not only her manager but also part of her image. Admirers believed that if they could look like Twiggy, they could find their own Justine — a handsome young man with velvet eyes.

The pinnacle of Twiggy's triumph came with her trip to the United States in the spring of 1967. At the airfield, the

girl, together with Justine and a special bodyguard, was nearly crushed by a crowd of ecstatic admirers. Major American magazines such as *Life*, *Look*, *Newsweek*, *Saturday Evening Post* and *The New Yorker* devoted lengthy articles to her. Radio and television shouted about her. Interviewers were explicitly warned not to ask Twiggy to stand up and show her dress under any circumstances. She was no longer a model; she was a celebrity. Yet everywhere, the coverage focused mainly on how Twiggy looked and what she was doing in America. The celebrity refused to answer the numerous questions from reporters, referring everyone to her manager. Only *The Saturday Evening Post* managed to publish an interview with her.* It is quite revealing.

"Twiggy, do you know what happened in Hiroshima?"
"Where is that?"
"In Japan."
"No, I've never heard of it. What happened there?"
"Over 20 years ago, an atomic bomb was dropped there."
"Who dropped it?"
"The Americans."
"Well, so what?"
"One hundred thousand people died on the spot. All at once."
"Oh, my God! When, did you say, did this happen? Where? In Hiroshima? That's terrible!"

Thus, the content of Twiggy's image became not only her angelic face and skinny figure but also a complete lack of interest in public life. This is exactly the way someone might want English, American or French youth to be seen — and this is what an image is created for: a model for millions, already carrying a clear social colouring.

* Oriana Fallaci, "My Name Is Twiggy," *The Saturday Evening Post*, August 12, 1967, p. 60.

Such images are often also those of film stars, in cases where either the stars themselves or the characters they portray concentrate the characteristic traits of a generation, a lifestyle or the mindset of large social groups. Examples include Brigitte Bardot, with her image of the modern girl fully liberated in matters of sex; and James Dean, embodying the rebellious youth challenging the material comfort and emotional calm of the older generation. It is difficult, without a detailed analysis of each such image, to say definitively what arises spontaneously, based on the deep desires of certain social layers (most often youth) and what is deliberately introduced from outside. But one thing is clear: the bearer of such an image gains power over the souls of many people — a power that can be used for good or evil purposes.

What are the origins of people's, especially youth's, attraction to such popular images? Freudian theory answers this question with its concept of identification, which is still based on the same desire of the helpless child to identify with the ideal father. Over time, this desire moves into the unconscious part of the human mind and identification becomes the mechanism through which repressed emotions in the subconscious find an outlet.

This explanation ignores specific historical circumstances and does not account for the heightened drive for identification in the 20th century. Rather, this phenomenon is a result of the alienation of the individual that occurs in bourgeois society in the age of technology. Man's alienation from his own individuality, his transformation into a part of a homogeneous mass, is largely a consequence of the influence of mass media on people. And this has a certain class significance. Marx, for example, argued that alienation arises from the existence of private property and the exploitation of man

by man. "In direct proportion to *the growth of the value* of the world of things grows the devaluation of the human world,"* he wrote.

Having lost genuine identification with himself, man inevitably embarks on the path of false identification. No longer being the centre of his own world, he unconsciously strives to become like everyone else — a faceless copy of a single original, which, in this case, is the social image.

* K. Marx and F. Engels, *From Early Works*, Moscow, 1956, p. 66.

CONCLUSION

Jules Verne predicted the advent of television... in the 29th century. The printed word took 500 years to spread knowledge, whereas television accomplished this in just about 25 years. In 1948, when the aspiring writer Arthur C. Clarke published the science-fiction novel *Interplanetary Relay Communications*, this problem seemed like an unattainable utopia to everyone. Today, however, its realization has already taken the form of a convention. Scientific and technological progress, advancing at a rapid pace, catches up with and even surpasses the boldest human dreams and fantasies. But there is another side to it, which a century ago Henry Thoreau already warned about, lamenting that "men become the tools of their tools."

With the latest technology used by the mass media in the United States, people grow distant from each other, from the sources of knowledge and power, from the past and from real life. Yet the root of the problem lies not in the technology itself, but in the people who control it — in the social, political and economic factors that guide them.

"Mass culture" — itself to some degree a product of modern bourgeois society, which, having made mass production possible, also created the necessity of mass consumption — now successfully fills the vacuum created by the leveling of individuality. Born of the capitalist system, it develops according to its laws, constantly discovering new, often very striking and successful forms for the further destruction of individuality, for fostering certain reactions that make it easier to control human consciousness. It is bitter to realize that people who for centuries fought for more free time now devote it not to Columbia University, but to the Columbia Broadcasting System.

The example of "mass culture" allows us to clearly observe how the leading aesthetic principles inherent in any culture are here employed for ideological and political purposes, to preserve and reinforce the existing social order.

Thus, the reflection of true reality, inherent in any genuine art, is replaced in it by a system of myths and ideological stereotypes whose main goal is to distract people from the contradictions of real capitalist life, to lead them into a fabricated world where all their cherished desires and dreams are effortlessly fulfilled. In our atheist age, "mass culture," as it is often contemptuously called in the West, has essentially replaced religion. Both serve the same ideological function, providing an image of another world, different from the one in which their followers live. Almost any theme of "mass culture," be it luxurious living, social equality, "beautiful" love or a romanticized past, is a deliberately cultivated myth, a "daydream with open eyes" (as Antonio Gramsci called cheap novels).

This acceptance of capitalist reality, its apologia, is most often clothed in the aesthetic form of naturalism — a creative method oriented towards the external plausibility of characters and phenomena without conveying their inner essence, abandoning typification and generalization, substituting societal laws with biological ones. American Marxist critic Sidney Finkelstein, in his book *Realism in Art*, analysing 5th-century B.C. Greek culture, where classical realism had already yielded to naturalism, notes that the Roman Empire in its period of decline went even further along this path: its art often merely displayed "nature" — erotic scenes or real bloody battles between gladiators and lions.*

An immediate historical parallel emerges, as contemporary American art largely follows this path: from the naturalism of "mass culture" to the real immediacy of "happenings" and the directness of televised spectacles. It is no coincidence that in works devoted to various aspects of life in the United States, including culture, the country is increasingly compared to the declining Roman Empire.

* See Sidney Finkelstein, *Realism In Art*, New York, 1954, pp. 40-41.

By reproducing an illusory world in numerous variations of the same common myths, "mass culture" creates in its consumers a habit of assimilating fabricated experiences, thereby depriving them of spiritual growth and intellectual enrichment. As a result, life becomes even more boring for them. Moreover, people's existence in this invented world leads to petty-bourgeoisification. It rocks people in a cradle of illusions, instilling the belief that they have their own world — charming, pleasant and familiar — unlike the real world, full of labour, anxieties and worries. Consequently, the world of "mass culture" often becomes more real to many viewers than the one in which they actually live. Such viewers perceive the characters in these works as living people, a perception greatly reinforced by identification, which plays one of the primary roles in the influence of "mass culture."

The passion for myth-making, closely tied to the escapist orientation of "mass culture," also manifests in the fact that mythological values are applied to events, situations and human images that have no inherent connection to them and cannot bear their weight. In this way, myth becomes kitsch, an imitation of myth. This phenomenon currently attracts the attention of many foreign scholars. French structuralists — Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes and Gilbert Durand — attempted to explain how myth-making, which once produced the greatest works of world art, has now become dominant only in "consumer" culture. They did not provide a definitive answer to this question, though they acknowledged the close connection between this phenomenon and the contemporary

level of bourgeois consciousness. Myth-making is simply escapism — an evasion of reality, the imposition of norms and values whose ideological underpinning is undeniable.

"Mass culture" endlessly creates myths not only in the content of its works but also surrounds film stars, pop singers and famous athletes with a mythical aura, temporarily elevating them to the pedestal of "idols" who become almost mythological heroes. This phenomenon is characteristic specifically of our time, because without the modern development of mass communication, the influence of deliberately fabricated myths on the public could never have reached such a broad audience.

Also mythical is the infamous apolitical nature of "mass culture," which many of its foreign apologists love to praise. In reality, it is a powerful tool for ideological manipulation of the masses, shaping public consciousness and opinion. However, given Americans' aversion to overt "propaganda," newspaper, radio, television and film owners try to present it in a subtle, disguised form, constantly inventing new ways to do so. Yet during political crises and acute international situations, active ideological influence on the masses becomes overt, as evidenced by the examples cited in this work. In such cases, the aesthetic form of presentation loses all significance, leaving only bare journalism, slightly masked by the semblance of artistic packaging.

In general, "mass culture" has a clearly defined set of aesthetic canons. These include: Seriality — the production of artworks according to assembly-line principles, the repeated reproduction of a model or template. Unification of form — uniformity of plots, characters and resolutions. Visuality — the predominance of image over word, reducing the complexity of genuine art to superficial presentation in pictures, often devoid of any artistic value. This substitution of life's diversity

with a system of rigid rules is also a characteristic feature of naturalism.

These aesthetic features of cultural products are often linked with manipulation, as seen, for example, in advertising, mass-produced films, television and the press. Deliberate deception of audiences through the aesthetic specificity of cinema, television, advertising and the press, as evidenced by numerous examples, is becoming increasingly extensive and comprehensive.

Even the category of aesthetic ideals begins to serve a manipulative function in "mass culture," appearing here as a pseudo-ideal — the image. The widespread promotion of images is only one part of the combined assault on human minds carried out in recent years by advertising and propaganda specialists in the United States. It aligns with the broader efforts of bourgeois philosophers and sociologists to replace the contradictions of true reality with the problem of its psychological perception, which is far easier to correct and manipulate than life itself.

One theorist of "psychological economics," the American George Katona, argued in his seminal work *The Mass-Consumption Society* that "it is not changes in prices, taxes, orders, etc., but the character of the perception of these changes that influences the decisions of both businessmen and consumers."* Considering not only the economic but also the socio-psychological aspects of consumption gave rise to psychological motivation, where data from the social sciences and psychiatry are used to find more effective ways to "sell not only consumer products but also ideas, beliefs, political candidates, goals and mental states."**

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* George Katona, *The Mass Consumption Society*, New York, 1964, p. 36.

** Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders*, p. 1.

The long path that the image has travelled in a very short time — from a purely advertising phenomenon to an important ideological one — testifies to the significant role it plays in the propaganda system of modern capitalist society. And this is not surprising. It is no secret that the problems of the purpose and meaning of people's lives, their social ideals, are now at the very centre of intense ideological struggle. Bourgeois society, no longer possessing true positive ideals and understanding their necessity in the struggle for human souls, consciously fabricates false values, pseudo-ideals, which are meant to become the life guide for millions of people.

For this purpose, a new concept — the image — is successfully applied, acting as both an aesthetic and socio-public pseudo-ideal. Its use in various fields most clearly demonstrates the connection of art, economy, politics and ideology, which is always present in "mass culture," though not always expressed so openly.

As seen in the example of the image, "mass culture" seeks to appeal not to reason, but to emotions and subconscious instincts. Plato already noted that dramatic action engages the viewer emotionally much more, making them empathize, than anything else. This point of view was repeatedly confirmed later in the almost hypnotic power of spectacles over people. All escapist art is built on the full involvement of the reader or viewer, who forgets the real world and accepts the invented reality as true. It gives people not a genuine image of the world, but its image, eliminating all dark sides and showing only the bright, joyful, exciting and thrilling aspects. It is therefore characteristic that the percentage of works of this kind sharply increases during a crisis in the country and, conversely, decreases when normalization occurs.

Gradually, a person becomes accustomed to life in this invented world and no longer realizes the alienation of his

own "self," the standard nature of his feelings, actions and thoughts. This is how armies of similar "tin soldiers" are formed, so successfully satirized in his novel of the same name by the English science fiction writer Michael Frayn.

However, it would be wrong, as many bourgeois philosophers do, to consider "mass culture" in the USA as the only and all-encompassing one. As already noted, the country also possesses genuine literature and art, even if they have fewer means of mass influence on readers and viewers, but they undeniably affect not only the minds of people but also the development processes of American literature and art as a whole. Their humanizing and aesthetic influence is unquestionable.

Herbert Wells, as early as the 1920s, said that we all participate in leaps between education and catastrophe. He urged supporters of education to unite in order to stop the forces pushing the world towards the catastrophe of a new war.

Paraphrasing Wells, one can say that Americans now all participate in leaps between independent thinking and conformity, between free action and apathetic acceptance of the fictional reality that "mass culture" tries to impose on them. For the problem of human individuality becomes more and more relevant as scientific and technological progress in the USA advances, along with the associated mass media.

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