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PROPAGANDA OF INDIVIDUALISM AND ALIENATION IN MODERN MASS CULTURE

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Abstract

The article considers the phenomenon of alienation of a person on the basis of the individualistic nature of mass culture. The conceptual, symbolic and other semantic contents transmitted to the masses within the framework of popular artistic creativity and mass media products are studied. As examples from the sphere of mass art, the genres of superheroics and heroic science fiction and fantasy are given, through which the idea of individual "being chosen" is transmitted and the value of social and national feats is belittled. Such important concepts for mass culture as "freedom", "rights", "democracy", "success" and "competition" are highlighted and interpreted. The key ideologies that are semantic sources for the promotion of individualism and alienation are identified. Such are the propaganda practices of the liberal, neoliberal and capitalist types. The historical, economic and political roots of social development and culture in the studied directions are determined, such as: the transition of human civilization to a global industrial and market economy; the formation of a post-industrial, information and postmodern society. All the analyzed cultural products are combined into a generalized picture of a value-semantic phenomenon that is based on the principles of mythological and religious thinking, on various ideological sources, but is not an ideology in itself, does not form a complex worldview and, due to its characteristics, leads to negative consequences for society.

Keywords: Individualism, mass culture, propaganda, societal alienation

1. Introduction

Every culture, as we know ("Cultura comes from the verb colere that means "to cultivate, to grow" (Komkov, 2017, p.141)), cultivates a person as a personality and a member of society. Before the post-industrial period, many cultures were similar in terms of having a collectivist character, i.e. they united people in the implementation of some social mission. And this happened not only as a generalization in economic activity, in the regulatory field or in the military craft. Collectivity was not just a formality, but was embedded in the subcortex of a person as an important part of the ideology of the people.

People united on the basis of duty to the state, faith in some divine purpose, on the basis of class considerations, etc. The masses, as the labor and military force of any civilization, were driven by a sense of unity with their socio-cultural environment. However, in the XX century, progress has gone towards what in scientific theories is called a post-industrial society (Sidorina, 2017), an information society (Zenenko & Bocharova, 2018), a postmodern society (Safronov, 2021).

The culture that is being formed in this regard has been called "mass" (Pes'yakov, 2020). Since then, this phenomenon has been actively studied, within which many problematic issues are highlighted. One of them is the transition of the education of the masses from a collectivist to an individualistic ideology, which is associated with such important problems as egoism, infantilism, alienation and loneliness of the individual, who is also called a mass person (Valantinaite et al., 2020). This research is devoted to individualism and alienation in mass society and culture.

2. Problem Statement

The article presents the problem of extremely individualistic education of people in modern mass culture, which results in the alienation of people from society and the world and radical transformations of their spiritual and intellectual state. The research is based on a multidisciplinary set of scientific publications of international status. The theoretical problem of the work is the gap between the studies of alienation and individualism in the artistic genres of mass culture and (neo)liberal and capitalist propaganda. It is necessary to study these phenomena as a single system, from the semiotic, structural-functional and socio-philosophical viewpoints, focusing directly on propaganda practices.

3. Research Questions

The paper raises the following questions:

1. What is the reason for the individualistic and alienating nature of mass culture in the context of historical changes in socio-cultural formations?

2. What are the social, political and economic foundations of these phenomena?

3. What forms of culture are becoming the main platforms for propaganda that contributes to the development of these qualities of society?

4. What is the conceptual and semantic content of this propaganda?

5. What ideologies do such practices appeal to in order to borrow meanings?

6. What functions does such propaganda perform and what consequences does it entail?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to identify common axiological, semantic and social contents in modern popular art, media content and current capitalist / (neo)liberal propaganda, which together set the course of social development and the place of an individual in it, forming one of the pillars of mass culture**.**

5. Research Methods

In order to identify and explain the main semantic elements in the individualistic and alienating processes of mass culture, a theoretical interpretation of such concepts as "being chosen" (Moyzhes, 2019), "freedom" (Shmelev, 2018), "rights", "democracy" (Gromyko, 2020), "competition" and "success" (Markozova, 2015) was carried out.

The prognostic method was also used to formulate assumptions about the negative consequences of raising a person in the designated socio-cultural conditions (Goncharov, 2020; Horn, 2020; Krokinskaya, 2019; Zhabskiy & Tarasov, 2018).

6. Findings

The first works of culture in a person's life that broadcast a certain morality and behavior models are fairy tales. The fairy tale teaches what is "good" and "bad", how the world works, what kind of people there are and how to behave in society. Today, the role of fairy tales is performed by films, animation, comics, video games – in short, products of mass culture. And if a fairy tale is either a work of folk art, or an author's work that has become the property of the people on a non-commercial basis, the mass culture products are market commodities produced primarily for earnings. However, in addition to creating demand, supply and involving other commercial interests in the creative process (for example, advertising), mass culture works also contain an ideological element.

The most popular youth genres today are varieties of heroic fiction: superheroics, science fiction and fantasy stories about saving the world, etc. The plot is centered around a hero character whose distinctive feature is being chosen (Moyzhes, 2019), when a magical force, a certain deity, a royal figure, a wise mentor who came from somewhere or just the will of chance endows the protagonist with special abilities or resources. With the consumption of an artistic product, the idea is laid that becoming a hero requires a successful combination of circumstances or the attention of influential patrons. The public in such stories plays the role of secondary support or extras. So, in the absence of luck, a person is destined for a place in a homogeneous mass, which is important as an auxiliary tool for exceptional people. The hero is a person who is separate from society, standing above it. Similarly, within the framework of the concept of heroism, separateness and alienation are justified. And as a result, collective merits in history are devalued. For example, labor and military exploits of different peoples. This also allows the masses to ignore the need for public initiative against the background of waiting for the arrival of a hero-savior.

With age, a person begins to be interested in politics, economics, and social life. The Internet, television, radio, institutions of education and enlightenment, etc. contribute to the process of forming a

worldview. All of them also draw a picture of the world in people's imagination, transmit values and affirm the meaning of life. All these contents are determined by current world events. Tulisova (2017) writes: "Media reach large audiences, but their opportunities are limited by economic, political and technological circumstances" (p. 231).

Today, people are surrounded by industries and markets. In all aspects of their life, civilization builds a system of production and sale of goods and services. Global industrialization is deprived of the need for a collective world-creating ideology and mission. The main thing that is required of a modern person is to produce and sell. Nominally, the goal of this is to improve the quality of people's lives. In fact, it is the financial and material provision of individuals and companies.

The person him / herself becomes, in a certain sense, a "commodity". From a young age, they are taught that their aim is to become a required labor force in the job market, but not a worthy member of society and a creator of culture. Therefore, education is given to an individual not for the sake of becoming a harmoniously developed socially-oriented person, but so that s/he can sell him / herself at the most expensive price to the employer, outstripping others in this competitive race (Krokinskaya, 2019). In this worldview paradigm, there are several key concepts around which propaganda practices are built (attributed to the ideology of capitalism (Orekhovskiy, 2017), various trends of liberalism (Cescon & Frizzo, 2021), libertarianism (Lowe, 2020), anarchism (Reamer, 2020), etc.) that justify and support the existing order of things. As examples of such semantic sources in the media space, we can consider the popular Russian-language channels of the YouTube site: "Vdud", "Caution: Sobchak", "Alexey Navalny", "Editorial Office", "varlamov", "Maxim Katz", the program "Posner" on "Channel One", "SVTV", etc.

The most sacred concept for liberal and capitalist propaganda is "freedom" (Shmelev, 2018). For the masses, this semantic element is embedded in the phrases "freedom of speech", "freedom of choice", "freedom of entrepreneurship", etc. Freedom, not being part of any clear elaborated concept, is a kind of magic spell associated with everything good and progressive, while any, even hypothetical, attempts on it, in the form of prohibitions and restrictions, are considered as manifestations of totalitarian evil. Because liberal, capitalist and anarchist populists, following the principles of mythical thinking, divide the world into "good and evil", creating enemies for themselves (in the person of leftists, statesmen, etc.) to justify their activities and motivate the masses involved.

Two other important concepts in the studied discourse are "rights" and "democracy" (Gromyko, 2020). Here, liberal, capitalist and similar propaganda "flirts" more closely with politics. This is necessary, first of all, to create the illusion of the interest of opinion leaders and propaganda customers in achieving benefits for society, the illusion of the seriousness of their intentions and the existence of real plans for their implementation. Trying to please the majority, mass culture is interested in the population as a mechanism that ensures the economic and structural-hierarchical system that gave rise to this culture.

The "right" in this semantic field is a continuation of the vague idea of freedom, of the desire to have as many opportunities as possible, but not to think about duties and responsibilities. The concept of democracy acts as a sweet pill, having swallowed which, the masses consider themselves a power capable of changing something through elections, votes, rallies, etc. In fact, this is a phantom of freedom and democracy, supported by the mass culture, while the masses may not perceive themselves as the nation,

due to the lack of a clear understanding of what this notion means. This is how the alienation of the individual occurs in the process of atomization of society as a national integrity.

Finally, the concepts of "success" and "competition" should be noted. Success is a symbolic value, one of the main motivations of an individual to work and consume. The meaning of success is revealed in becoming better than others. But not by intellectual and creative abilities and contribution to society, but by popularity and the benefits derived from it. It becomes completely unimportant what success is built on and how a person affects others - positively or negatively. Quantitative indicators of success are the main ones, and qualitative ones are insignificant.

The market economy is non-stop production and consumption (Goncharov, 2020). It requires the constant involvement of a huge number of people. Their participation needs to be stimulated, and therefore a cult of success is emerging in society (Markozova, 2015) as one of the engines of the process. The word "cult" here has an almost literal meaning, because it is based on mythical-religious thinking and includes the exaltation of iconic personalities: Elon Musk, Steve Jobs, Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, etc. They become cult characters and, as such, acquire mythical stories about the ascent "from zero to hero", publicly perform and teach the crowd that idolizes them life and "correct" thinking. They write books about these people (a kind of "life of the saints"), make films and perpetuate them in other forms. The simplicity of this perception and the ability to easily impose it on people make the cult of success natural for culture, as well as a useful element of modern liberal-capitalist propaganda.

The main condition for achieving success is competition: for jobs, for a salary increase, for the means of production and territory in any economic undertaking, for public attention and status. Therefore, mass culture often instills the value of aggressiveness, hostility, superiority, cunning, meanness – as the most popular qualities of a person. In this regard, in the artistic sphere (in films, video games, etc.), there is an aestheticization of violence and cruelty (Zhabskiy & Tarasov, 2018). Not even because the creators of these genres are specifically trying to transform people into something hostile to each other, but because today this is a mass aesthetic demand, a cultural order (Horn, 2020). In the course of such transformations, individuals become not only alienated from each other, but also openly antagonistic to their environment, which increases the level of tension in society.

On the basis of the concepts revealed in this research, the masses form an idea in which people are free from each other in a socially destructive sense. A person is alienated from others, from society, from the world. All this is perceived by him / her as a means of satisfying one's egoistic, hedonistic and base desires. One can also doubt that such a way of life and thinking leads a person to happiness. On the contrary, at a certain moment an individual risks finding him / herself in a state of hopelessness, depression and not seeing the meaning of one's own existence. Devoting him / herself to the banal survival and struggle for a place in the Sun, he / she will sooner or later realize that, like others, no one needs him / her.

Thus, total loneliness, hostility and fear of each other will become an unchangeable and permanent state of mind of the masses. From a global ideological point of view, discussions about freedom, rights and democracy ignore the formulation of many social and political problems, such as "liberal fascism" (Cadello, 1993), slavery and forced labor in third World countries (Dean, 2019), which, together with many military conflicts of the XXI century, are often associated with the interests of private ("free")

capital. Freedom, therefore, turns out to be a value only when it means the separation of people and peoples and is associated with the formation of their indifferent attitude to each other.

7. Conclusion

Using certain ideological motives, mass culture is not an ideology in itself, because it does not have a clear worldview and does not seek to form it. On the contrary, it unfolds and functions better when an individual does not have a complete picture of the world, does not distinguish between positive and negative, when their thinking is based on principles composed of abstract, loosely related (or even contradictory) concepts, under which there is an emotional and mytho-religious ground, but not epistemological. In other words, the "logos" is blurred in ideology in the context of mass culture. Knowledge and teaching become abrupt and unstructured, which do not allow a person to see beyond one's nose.

Mass culture also appears as a rather primitive value-semantic system that educates people in a utilitarian and functionalist way. A person in this environment is of interest not as a creator of the universe, but as a resource and tool, whose productive abilities and consumer role are things more important than the spiritual principle, reason and evolutionary potential for civilization. Therefore, it may turn out that the development of humanity as such in mass culture will cease to have value, and this is a problem of anthropological significance.

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